**CHARLES SIMEON'S DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARUES**

**The Gospel of MATTHEW**

#1278

***~~The Import of The Names Given to Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 1:21–23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21â23)~~***

"You shall call his name *Jesus*; for He shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name *Emmanuel*, which being interpreted is, God with us."

THE dispensations of Providence are extremely dark and intricate; the things which appear most afflictive often prove to be the richest mercies that could have been given to us. This was remarkably verified in the history before us. Joseph was espoused to a virgin of consummate piety; but, before their nuptials, she proved to be in a state which gave him reason to suspect her fidelity. Desiring to exercise all the lenity which the case would admit of, he determined to put her away secretly. How distressing must such an event have been to this holy man! But God sent an angel to unfold to him the mystery, to declare the *ends*for which the child would be born, and to impose on the infant a *name*, that should mark his office in the world.

**I. The appointment of the name.** "You shall call his name *Jesus*."

God had often condescended to assign names to men. Sometimes he had made an alteration in their names; and sometimes totally changed them. Sometimes he had assigned a name before the child was conceived. In these things he always acted with unerring wisdom. When *men*have attempted to give significant names to their offspring, they have only manifested how ignorant they were of futurity. But God sees all things from the beginning to the end. And *his designation of Christ's name was a prognostic of his character*.

The appellation given to the Virgin's son was peculiarly suitable.

"**Jesus**" simply means a Savior; and was a common name among the Jews. It was sometimes assigned to those who were great deliverers. It had been given in a peculiar manner to *Joshua*the son of Nun. He was eminently a Savior, as leading the Israelites into the promised land, which Moses was not permitted to do. But Christ, whom he typified, is a far greater deliverer. He "does that for us which the law could not do." *He leads the true Israel of God into the heavenly Canaan.*

So remarkable an event may justly lead us to inquire into,

***~~II. The reason of that appointment.~~***

Waving all other reasons, we notice two before us:

***~~1. To fulfill a prophecy.~~***

Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah would be called *Emmanuel*. From the outcome it appears that God did not intend this prophecy to have a literal accomplishment. We may expect however that the spirit of it should be accomplished. Now the name "Jesus" was in fact equivalent to Emmanuel. "Jesus" means "Divine Savior;" and Emmanuel, God with us. And the Evangelist himself tells us, that the imposition of that name was in order to the fulfillment of this prophecy.

***~~2. To declare the infant's office and character.~~***

"He shall save his people from their sins." The virgin's child was to be the Savior of the world. He was to save *his people*by price, and by power. They were under sentence of eternal condemnation. His life was the ransom to be paid for their souls. Hence they are called his purchased possession. They were also in *bondage*to sin and Satan. And he was to make them a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Yes, he was ultimately to place them beyond the reach of all the penalties and pollutions of sin. It was of importance that this great work should he represented in his very name. And the text informs us that the name was given him for this very purpose.

***~~III. The interest we should take in it.~~***

Surely most precious should the name of Jesus be to all his followers. What benefit can be bestowed like salvation from sin? A deliverance from its *dominion*is an unspeakable blessing. The godly desire it no less than deliverance from Hell itself. Deliverance too from its *penalties*is an inconceivable mercy. O, how delightful is pardon to a burdened conscience. How sweet is a sense of God's favor in a dying hour! What joy must the glorified soul possess in the day of judgment! Yet Jesus has bought it all for us with his own most precious blood, and has bestowed it freely on all his faithful followers. He will impart it liberally to all who will believe on him. Is there not reason then for that divine anathema? Will not the very stones cry out against those who refuse to praise him? Let Jesus then be precious to us all. Let us adopt the grateful strains of that sweet Psalmist of Israel.

***~~I cannot CONCLUDE without a short address to those who make this a season of carnal mirth.~~***

The great majority of professing Christians seem to think that the incarnation of Christ gives them a greater license to commit sin. And this impious thought greatly aggravates their guilt. But what madness is it to imagine that they can ever be saved in such a state. If they could, the angel should have assigned a very different reason for the appointment of Jesus' name. In that case, Christ would have been a minister of sin. But who must not, with the Apostle, express his abhorrence of such a thought? Our Lord has plainly told us what shall before long be his address to self-deceiving sinners. Let us then improve the incarnation of Christ for the ends for which he came; and tremble lest we provoke the Savior himself to become our inexorable destroyer.

#1279

***~~The Wise Men Seeking Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.1), [2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 2.2)~~***

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him."

THE humiliation of our blessed Lord was attended with many circumstances tending to counteract its influence on the minds of men. To see him born in a stable, and laid in a manger, was doubtless a stumbling-block in the way of many; but the birth by the voice of angels—the restoration of a spirit of prophecy after an interval of four hundred years—and the pointing him out to the Eastern Magi by a new-created star—were abundantly sufficient to remove the offence which his apparent baseness might occasion. This last event, the visit of the Magi to him, will occupy our attention at this time. We shall,

***~~I. Make some general observations upon the visit.~~***

That we may not go forward without some kind of order, we shall notice,

***~~1. Who they were.~~***

The term by which they are designated, means *magicians*. But we are not to understand by this, that they were people practicing enchantments; we are rather to conceive of them as *philosophers*, who were attentive observers of nature, and 'probably' *proficients in astronomy*. They came from the East; but whether from Persia or Arabia, we cannot say. All that is affirmed of them more than this, is vain conjecture, or foolish superstition.

***~~2. How they came to think of the Lord Jesus Christ.~~***

God, who is sovereign in the distribution of his favors, chose them, as he did the shepherds, to be the objects of his peculiar favor. He sent a star, or meteor, to attract their attention; and then revealed to them, that the star was intended to announce to them the birth of Him who was to be the King of the Jews. Whether they had heard of *Balaam's prophecy*, 'that a star should come out of Jacob, and a scepter rise out of Israel,' we do not know. The expectation of a ruler to spring out of Israel was certainly far extended through the world: but, however the first conjecture might arise in the minds of the Wise Men, they could have known nothing certain but from revelation.

***~~3. What means they used in order to find him out.~~***

Being informed of the design of the star, they proceeded to visit this new-born King, and to pay him their profoundest homage. They pursued their journey to Jerusalem, and began to inquire, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews?" But they could hear nothing respecting him; their inquiries tended only to spread consternation through the whole city. *Herod*was alarmed, lest his throne should be endangered; and the *Jews*were terrified, lest that suspicious and cruel tyrant should make this report an occasion of inflicting on them some heavy calamities.

To get some light into the matter, Herod summoned a council of all the chief priests and scribes; and inquired of them where Christ should be born. They readily informed him, from the prophecies, that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honor. This information being given to the Wise Men, they instantly proceeded thither; and, as soon as they went forth, the star, which had at first appeared to them in the East, became visible to them again, and went and "stood over the very house where the young child was." God withheld the miraculous appearance of the star when it was not necessary; and renewed it only when it was needed to confirm the faith of the Wise Men, (which the indifference of the Jews might have caused to waver,) and to point out infallibly the house where the child abode.

***~~4. How they conducted themselves towards him when they had found him.~~***

Filled with holy awe and reverence, they no sooner beheld him, than they prostrated themselves before him; and presented to him the offerings which they had brought with them for that purpose. It is possible, that their worship was only such as it was customary to pay to kings; and that their presents were only such as were the produce of their own country, without anything mysterious in their import. Still, however, we read not of their paying any such regard to Herod; and therefore we may conclude, that at least they considered Jesus as excelling all other kings in dignity and glory.

We shall now,

**II. Call your particular attention to the Wise Men**.

They may be regarded by us in a three-fold view:

***~~1. As witnesses to confirm our faith.~~***

Does the indifference of the Jews respecting their new-born King appear to weaken the evidence of his birth? Let us hear the testimony of the Magi respecting him: 'We beheld a new-formed star, and were instructed by Jehovah in the reason of its formation. We went to see the child whose birth it announced, and we saw him with our eyes, and paid to him the homage which was due from us. We know that we found the very child that was referred to, because that miraculous star pointed him out to us; and when we had honored him to the best of our ability, Jehovah appeared to us again, revealed to us the purpose which Herod had conceived, and directed us to return to our own country without informing Herod, so that the parents of the child might have time to remove him to a land of safety.'

Must we not in all this acknowledge the hand of God? and would God thus set his seal to a falsehood, and thus countenance an impostor?

***~~2. As types to animate our hope.~~***

We are taught to believe that the day shall come, when all nations of the earth shall be converted to God, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought into the Church of Christ. The conversion of these Wise Men was, as it were, the first fruits, which assure to us the complete harvest. Does the event appear incredible? It was no difficulty to God to convince, and encourage them: nor will it be difficult with him to effect the universal change, whenever his time has come. The same thing shall then take place on an extended scale; and "the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ."

***~~3. As patterns to direct our conduct.~~***

Much may we learn from those heathen philosophers.

First, let us learn to improve our studies or pursuits, whatever they may be, for our spiritual advantage. Do we behold strange phenomena in nature? Let them lead us to the God of nature: and whatever light we obtain from him, let us use it as the means of obtaining more light.

Next, let us not regard any scoffs, or difficulties, or dangers that we may have to encounter in the way of our duty. Doubtless, the sages found many obstacles in their way; but they persisted to the end; and never ceased from their labor, until they had found Him whom they sought.

Thus, let us resolutely seek the Lord Jesus, until we have found him. He is pointed out to us, not by a star, but by "the more sure word of the Gospel." True enough, we may inquire after him of many who might well be expected to give us all needful information; and, after all, find them even more ignorant than ourselves. Our very solicitude about him may even provoke their enmity; but we must go on without weariness, and without fear; and still prosecute our inquiries after him, until we can say, "I have found Him whom my soul loves."

Lastly, having found Jesus, let us present to him all that we are, and all that we have. Let our body, soul, and spirit be consecrated to him. Let us confess him as "King of kings, and Lord of lords;" let us devote to him our silver and our gold: and let us glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his. This is our reasonable service: and if we be backward to render it unto him, surely these heathen converts will rise up in judgment against us: for, if they so honored him, when they saw him only as a babe, enrapt in swaddling-clothes, much more should we, who view him seated on his throne of glory!

#1280

***~~The Joy of the Magi~~***

***~~[Matthew 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.10)~~***

"And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

IN so concise a history as that of our blessed Lord, the events of whose life and death were so numerous, that, if circumstantially related, they would occupy too many volumes to be read by the world at large, it must of necessity be found, that there is much omitted which we would have been glad to know. But *the Scriptures were not written to gratify a vain curiosity:*the inspired writers had a far higher object in view: they were content to record so much only as was necessary for our instruction, and to give us such brief hints as would set before our eyes one continuous and comprehensive whole.

In the account of the wise men, who came from the East to worship the new-born Jesus, there is much left to mere conjecture. We know not *who*they were, nor *whence*they came, except that it was to the eastward of Judea; nor how long it was after the birth of Christ; whether a few weeks, or several months.

What the *star*was, we know not. It could not be a common star; but only a meteor, resembling one. How they came to regard it as intimating the birth of anyone, and especially of one who would be the King of the Jews, we know not. It is probable that they were astronomers; and that, seeing this new star over the land of Judea, they concluded it to be ominous of some great event: and, having heard of the general report, that there was expected to arise, about that time, in Judea, one who would govern the whole earth, they might suppose the star to be an indication of his birth.

Yet, on the whole, I think it more probable, that the same Almighty and gracious God, who sent this star to guide them to Judea, revealed to them the occasion of its appearance, and the wonderful event of which they themselves were to be the favored witnesses.

The *inquiry*which they make on reaching Jerusalem seems indeed to place this matter beyond a doubt: for they do not ask whether some great personage were born: they express no doubt whatever respecting the fact; but only inquire where the new-born infant was; "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star, and are come to worship him." The Jews themselves, it seems, were unconscious of any remarkable occurrence, until the confident inquiry of these strangers drew their attention to it: and then both Herod the king, and all the people at Jerusalem, were filled with consternation. Herod, a remarkably jealous king, summoned the chiefs of the Jewish nation, that he might learn from them where their Messiah, according to the Scriptures, would be born. They, from a well-known prophecy, informed him, that Bethlehem was the highly-favored city for which this honor was reserved: and he, on receiving this information, directed the Magi thither, with an express command, that, when they would have found him, they would come back to him, and communicate all that they would have learned respecting him.

Thither the Magi now directed their steps. But no sooner had they re-commenced their journey, than the star, which they had seen in the East, and which had for some time disappeared, came again; and guided them, not to the city only, but to the house where Jesus was; thus pointing out, with infallible precision, the very child whom they desired to find. On this occasion it is said, *"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."*

Now, the terms in which their *joy*is here spoken of are so strong, as to be incapable of being translated literally into our language. Their general import, however, is sufficiently conveyed in the words before us: "They rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

In speaking of this their joy, we shall find it profitable to inquire, What it indicated in relation to them.

From this interesting portion of divine history we may learn,

***~~I. The magnitude of the object which they pursued.~~***

They sought to behold and to honor the new-born King. This was an object worthy of pursuit:

As viewed by them, it was of great importance.

Supposing them only to conceive of him as born to a kingdom, yet, taking into consideration the miracle with which his birth was announced, and the prophetic declarations relative to the place of his birth—they might well regard him as worthy to be served and honored. And in proportion as we suppose their views of his character and office to have been enlarged, the importance of their object must, of course, have been magnified in their minds.

With the additional light which we enjoy, it was an object the most important that any creature could pursue.

We know that infant to have been "Emmanuel, God with us." Yes, he was "God manifest in human flesh," and not a king of one nation only, but of the whole earth, even "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

To behold him in this his humbled state; to worship him, and glorify him—what could the highest archangel desire more? This was an object worthy of ambition to every man: nor could any labor, any privation, any suffering, be too great to be encountered willingly, and sustained cheerfully, in the pursuit of it.

In their labors, we behold also,

***~~II. The ardor of mind with which it should be pursued.~~***

Their journey, whether from Arabia or any other country, was long and arduous.

Their setting out from their own country, and prosecuting their journey to Judea, argued no little zeal: but to persevere when the star had disappeared, and when so much difficulty and uncertainty must, in all probability, attend their future exertions, required a zeal more than ordinarily intense and ardent: and we admire their steady perseverance in so great a work.

What, then, should ever damp *our*ardor in the service of our Lord?

Methinks, this is a labor in which our whole lives should be occupied. We need not, indeed, leave our homes in order to behold his face, since he is here in the midst of us: but we must be ready to part with all, if called to it. And, whatever difficulties may obstruct our way, we should determine, with God's help, to surmount them all. Nor should we take with us a portion only of our property; but go and offer to him all that we are, and all that we have. *Our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, must be consecrated to his service*, that he may be glorified in all.

In them we may yet further see,

***~~III. The blessedness that shall crown our labors.~~***

"They rejoiced with exceeding great joy".

They, even before they had fully attained their object, rejoiced: what joy, then, must have filled their souls, when they were introduced into the very presence of this infant, and had the honor of presenting to him their gifts of gold, and frankincense and myrrh!

*But the believer's joy at finding the Savior, is incomparably more exalted.* It is truly said to be a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." *O how richly are the labors of a whole life repaid by one glimpse of the Savior's glory!*And what prospects does it open to him in the eternal world! Truly*, no language can express the joy that he feels, nor any heart conceive the blessedness that awaits him.*

***~~I wish to Address:~~***

***~~1. The nominal Christian.~~***

Though not truly interested in the Savior, you are highly privileged: because you have an infinitely better guide than ever the Magi had, even the word of God, which will be a light to your feet, and a lantern to your paths. The word will infallibly, if duly followed, lead you to the Savior's presence. Improve, then, your privileges; and let them remind you of your obligations also: for if your light be more clear than theirs, so should your surrender of yourselves to Christ be more entire.

***~~2. The sincere inquirer.~~***

You, like the Magi, may feel discouragement in your journey heavenward; and, through the withdrawment of light from your soul, be ready to doubt whether you shall ever attain the object of your desires. But hold on in the midst of all discouragements; and doubt not but that your labor shall be crowned with success at last: for God's promise to you is, "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord. His goings forth are prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto you as the rain, as the former and as the latter rain upon the earth."

***~~3. The assured Christian.~~***

You have found the Savior, and presented yourselves to him. Now, then, show yourselves worthy of this high privilege. A sad indifference exists in relation to him, even among those who from their office and their general information ought to be most forward in calling the attention of others to him. And, from the reports which we have of his reception in heathen lands, even among the most barbarous Africans and Hottentots, we may all blush for our coldness and ingratitude. However, if you have been led to the Savior, take care to *honor him in the midst of an ungodly world*, and labor to make him known to all around you.

#1281

***~~The Slaughter of the Infants~~***

***~~[Matthew 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.16-18)~~***

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

WHILE ungodly men are perpetrating every species of wickedness, the language of their hearts, as interpreted by God himself, is this: "The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land!"

A similar thought is apt to arise in the heart, when our trials are multiplied, and relief is not speedily afforded us. It was in this way that the Israelites at Massah, when destitute of water, vented their murmurs: this was their atheistic inquiry; "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Even godly people, under violent temptation, are sometimes ready to ask, "Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

But a diligent attention to the Scriptures will fortify us against any such absurd conclusions. From them we shall learn, that however inattentive God may *appear*to be to the concerns of men—he directs, limits, and overrules all their actions, for the promotion of his own glory.

Scarcely on any occasion would we have expected his interposition, more than for the prevention of that murderous edict, whereby all the infants of Bethlehem and the adjacent country were destroyed. Yet God saw fit to permit it; and interfered no further than was necessary for the fulfilling of his own word, and the accomplishing of his own eternal purpose.

Let us contemplate,

***~~I. The fact recorded.~~***

A more heinous occurrence can scarcely be conceived. We wonder that any human being should be invested with such power, as to cause, by his own arbitrary mandate, the slaughter of so many innocent people. We wonder still more, that, supposing this authority to be delegated to anyone, there should be found agents to carry such an inhuman edict into execution. But most of all do we wonder, that a creature endued with reason should be capable of issuing such an order as Herod did on this occasion. But let us trace this action to its source: let us inquire into *the principle*from which this unparalleled barbarity proceeded.

The murderous purpose originated in *jealousy*. Herod possibly had heard of the birth of Jesus previous to the arrival of the Wise Men: but that was the circumstance which put him upon making inquiries into the pretensions of this newborn infant. From them he learned, that a star or meteor had appeared to them in the East, and that they, either from revelation or from the traditionary prophecy of Balaam, had been led to interpret the appearance of that star as an intimation, that He who was to reign over the Jews was now born into the world. He was also informed by them, that they had come on purpose to pay him the homage which was due to such an exalted character. Upon this, Herod summoned all the chief priests and scribes, that he might learn from them what the prophets had declared respecting the place of their Messiah's nativity: and on understanding that Bethlehem was the place destined to that honor, he sent the Wise Men thither, and ordered them, when they had found the child, to come and give him information respecting him. This order he grounded upon a pretended desire to *honor*Christ; but with a secret determination to *destroy*him: for he concluded, that Christ was to have a temporal dominion; and that, if allowed to live, he would wrest the kingdom out of his hands. But such a rival he could not endure: and hence arose the secret purpose to destroy him.

But though jealousy first prompted him to form the murderous purpose, with respect to his supposed rival, it was *offended pride*that caused it to be extended to all the children around Bethlehem. The Wise Men, being warned by God of Herod's purpose, returned no more to him: at this Herod was indignant: he conceived himself slighted and despised; but he was determined not to be disappointed of his desire; and therefore, to secure his object, he gave order's that all the boys near the age of Jesus, and within the neighborhood of the place where he was born, should be massacred without distinction.

What an amazing ascendant must these principles have over the heart of man! Well may it be said, that "jealousy is cruel as the grave," nor indeed is pride less cruel, when its wounded feelings have scope for exercise. This we see in the two sons of Jacob, who, on account of their sister having been defiled by the Prince of Shechem, slew every male in the city: and, when reproved for their cruelty, they showed, in their vindication of themselves, from whence that cruelty had proceeded: "Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?"

Happy would it have been for the world, if such dispositions and conduct had been altogether banished by the Gospel of Christ. But the human heart is the same in every age and place. We still see that the *love of power*is a predominant principle in the mind of man; that where it is allowed to gain an ascendency, it will leave no means untried for the accomplishment of its ends; and that, if the more lenient methods of deceit and treachery will not succeed, it will wade through seas of blood to the attainment of its object. The cries of thousands and tens of thousands will not divert it from its purpose: nor will anything but the utter extinction of a rival satisfy its blood-thirsty appetite.

We must not however forget that the same evil principles are in our own hearts: and, if we will only call to mind the irritation which we have felt on some particular occasions, we shall see reason to be thankful to God, who has kept us from carrying into execution all that our offended pride might have prompted us to effect.

Before we proceed to make any practical remarks upon this fact, it will be proper to notice,

***~~II. The prophecy accomplished by it.~~***

The New Testament writers sometimes appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament as direct proofs of what they assert, and sometimes in a more lax way of accommodation only. It is in this latter way, we apprehend, that the prophecy before us is adduced. In its primary meaning, it represented the Jews as collected at Rama, for the purpose of being carried into captivity to Babylon; and Rachel (who had about eleven hundred years before been buried near that place) as weeping over the disconsolate state of her posterity. The Evangelist beautifully applies the same figure to the slaughter of the children which took place at Bethlehem, which also was near to Rachel's tomb; and, in this view, he speaks of the prophecy as again accomplished. This he might well do: for who can conceive the distress which that event occasioned?

The murderous bands could not stop to see, whether, in every instance, the wounds they had inflicted had actually destroyed life: they must proceed rapidly in their work, lest any of the children should be carried off or concealed: and what anguish must the cries of so many children, (probably some thousands,) writhing in the agonies of death, in agonies protracted by the kind solicitude of their parents, have produced in the bosoms of their bereaved mothers! *No language can paint, no imagination conceive, the horrors of that day*. We may use the terms, "lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning;" but we cannot affix to them any adequate ideas, or realize, in any just degree, that awful scene.

***~~We cannot but see from hence,~~***

***~~1. How early our Lord's sufferings began.~~***

Scarcely was he born, before his life was sought, and he was forced to be carried an exile to the country which of all others had been most hostile to his progenitors. And, after the death of Herod, he was forced, for his security, to take up his abode in a town which fixed a stigma upon him to his last hour. These were, indeed, only "the beginnings of his sorrows," but they may well *reconcile his followers to any privations or reproaches which they may be called to endure for his sake*. If for us he became "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," let us cheerfully bear our cross for him, and willingly "suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together with him".

***~~2. How vain are any attempts of man to counteract the designs of God.~~***

Herod foolishly thought to defeat the purposes of Heaven; but "God held him in derision, and laughed him to scorn." God knew his murderous plans, and warned the parents of our Lord to escape his fury; yes, and provided too for their journey and support in Egypt, by the offerings which the Wise Men had just before presented to the new-born King.

Herod, to secure his purpose, ordered, not the children of Bethlehem only, but of all the neighboring country; and not of one year old only, but all under two years old, to be massacred: but his attempts were vain; and instead of frustrating the designs of Heaven, he unwittingly fulfilled them; occasioning, by this very act, no less than three prophecies to be accomplished.

Thus it is with all who set themselves against God: *they may show their malignity, but they cannot counteract his gracious designs*. "Many are the devices in men's hearts; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." "The wrath of man (as far as God permits it to be exercised) shall praise him; and the remainder of that wrath shall he restrain."

We never need, therefore, to be afraid of man; for, if we commit our way unto the Lord, "he will be our shield and buckler;" and, "if He is for us," we may triumphantly ask, "Then who can be against us?"

***~~3. How certainly will there be a day of future retribution.~~***

Can it be, that such an inhuman monster should never meet with any just recompense for his deeds? The mind revolts at the idea. If there is a God that governs the world, there must be a period when the present inequalities of his government shall be done away, and the equity of his dispensations be made apparent. Hence the day of judgment is in Scripture called, "The day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God," and we are told, that "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble us: and to us who are troubled, rest."

Let us then live in light of that day. Whether exalted and at ease, or depressed and persecuted—let us look to that day, when our happiness or misery shall be forever fixed!

Let us *dread prosperity*, if it divert our attention from a future state! Let us *welcome adversity*, if it be the means of bringing us nearer unto God. The infants now have no cause to regret that they were called to such early martyrdom: and it is highly probable, that many of their parents have since found reason to give thanks to God for the weight of sorrow that then oppressed them. But the proud oppressor—who can reflect on his state without shuddering? how will he feel, when he shall stand at the tribunal of that very Jesus, whom, with such hypocrisy and cruelty, he labored to destroy? O that, whenever tempted to sin, we may think of the *account*which we must one day give; and, whenever called to suffer, may we "look with Moses to the recompense of the reward!"

#1282

***~~John's Address to Those Who Came to Be Baptized by Him~~***

***~~[Matthew 3:7–10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.7â10)~~***

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits fit for repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire!"

WHEN a profession of religion is become fashionable, as it were, and common, it is necessary for ministers to be doubly careful that they do not sanction, much less promote, the delusions of hypocrites or impostors. At such seasons, peculiar faithfulness and discrimination will be wanted, that the upright may not be discountenanced, nor the vain pretenders to piety be encouraged.

The Baptist was signally successful in his ministrations, insomuch that Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went to be baptized by him. Among this great multitude came many Pharisees and Sadducees, desiring to be numbered among his disciples. At this he was utterly astonished; because the Pharisees were so conceited of their own goodness as to think that they needed no better religion; and the Sadducees, the free-thinkers of the day, despised religion altogether.

John would not immediately reject them, but, in a most faithful and energetic address, declared what they must be, if they would obtain happiness in the future world. He called them "a generation of vipers," because of the poisonous and infectious nature of their principles, and the manifest relation which, both in sentiment and conduct, they bore to the old serpent the devil. Such an address befit him as a prophet; but it would not be suited to us who bear an inferior commission. Nevertheless the same fidelity should be found in all: and what he spoke to them, we must declare to you; namely, that,

***~~I. True religion must be judged of by its fruits.~~***

As 'fruits' are the only criterion whereby the excellence of a tree can be known, so they are the only true test of religion. There are "fruits fit for repentance;" fruits that manifest its existence, and denote its power. Let us inquire what they are: and, as they will be found in every part of our conduct, let us examine them in reference to,

***~~1. God.~~***

Fruits fit for repentance will certainly show itself . . .  
in high thoughts of God's unbounded goodness and mercy;  
in deep humiliation of our souls before him;  
in a joyful acceptance of his offered salvation; and  
in love, ardent love, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us;  
together with a simple reliance on his atoning sacrifice.

Fruit fit for repentance will stimulate the soul to fervent prayer for the continued influences of God's Holy Spirit; and to a surrender of the soul, with all its faculties and powers, to his service. It will make the pleasing of God to be henceforth the great object of our lives; and will moderate all our regards to the creature, insomuch that, though we are in the world, we shall not be of it; and, though "we use it, we shall not abuse it."

***~~2. Our neighbor.~~***

Repentance extends not to the sins of the first table only, but to those of the second table also. It will give a new principle to us in all our dealings with mankind. We shall be strictly just and honest in all our transactions, doing to others precisely as, in a change of circumstances, we would think it right for them to do to us.

If a man is our superior, we shall be ready to pay him, for God's sake, all that respect and obedience which the laws of God or man enjoin. If he is our inferior, we shall act towards him with all kindness and condescension, all tenderness and love. Whatever his state and condition are, we shall be cautious of grieving him by word or deed; we shall applaud his virtues, conceal his faults, and exercise towards him that forbearance and forgiveness which we ourselves desire to meet with at the hands of God. It will be the joy of our hearts to alleviate his troubles, to supply his necessities, and to seek his welfare, not only as well as, but even in preference to, our own.

***~~3. Ourselves.~~***

The office of repentance in regulating the secret dispositions of our hearts, is by no means sufficiently considered: but, if it extends not to these, it is not genuine, nor will it ever prove "a repentance unto salvation." In the natural and unrenewed heart, pride, envy, malice, wrath, discontent, impurity, lust, and many other hateful evils, are harbored, even where the external and visible exercise of them is restrained. But the true penitent "puts away all these," and cultivates a spirit of meekness and gentleness, of love and kindness, of patience and thankfulness; and endeavors to guard against an impure thought or desire, no less than against the most criminal indulgence.

I do not say that a penitent so attains all these graces as never to betray his weakness; but this I say, that *these are the fruits of the Spirit which every penitent will produce*; that they necessarily arise out of godly sorrow; and that every sincere penitent will advance in these attainments, so that those who are most conversant with him shall be constrained to bear testimony to the progressive amelioration of all his tempers.

O that there might be in all of us such an heart; and that all who profess repentance might thus make their profiting to appear!

It is of infinite importance to ascertain in this way whether our religion is genuine or not; for,

***~~II. Without genuine repentance, all hopes of salvation are delusive.~~***

***~~The Jews were apt to found their hopes of mercy on their relation to Abraham.~~***

Many of them had a strange conceit that no child of Abraham could be damned: and it is probable that they built that notion on the promise of God never to cast off the seed of Abraham. They had no idea that there was such a thing as a *spiritual*seed; and therefore they limited the promise to his descendants according to the flesh, and included all of them without any regard to their moral character.

Against this erroneous notion the Baptist cautioned those whom he now addressed; and told them, that God would rather raise up a posterity to Abraham out of the very stones, (or perhaps from among the Gentile soldiers, many of whom might be present with them on that occasion,) than either allow his promise to fail, or admit impenitent sinners to Heaven.

***~~Similar to this, are the delusions which obtain among us.~~***

Because men have been born of Christian parents, and educated in a Christian land, and have never formally renounced Christianity, they imagine that they are Christians, notwithstanding they have never cordially embraced the doctrines of Christianity, nor obeyed its precepts. They have the same reason for being Christians that Muhammadans have for being Muhammadans, and no better. They have never seen the suitableness of Christianity to their needs, nor the sufficiency of it for their necessities: nor have they been concerned about it, any further than just to observe its outward forms. Yet on this flimsy foundation, the generality of professors have founded their hopes of Heaven. Whether they will express it in words or not—it is that which they "think within themselves."

But we must remind all such people of the declaration of Paul, "that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

It is not any external profession that will avail us in the day of judgment: we may have the sublimest knowledge, the strongest faith, the most ardent zeal, and the most unbounded liberality—and yet perish at last for lack of that principle of sincere love to Jesus, which is the source and summit of all vital godliness. O that we may never deceive our own souls, nor rest in anything short of "pure, practical, and holy religion!"

Such indifference about true religion would not long exist, if men would but reflect, that,

***~~III. There is a time shortly coming, when the lack of true repentance will be attended with the most bitter consequences.~~***

***~~God had determined to punish the Jewish nation for their unfruitfulness.~~***

Long had he waited to see whether the vines he had cultivated with so much care, would bring forth fruit: but they brought forth none but wild grapes. Therefore, though he had spared them long at the intercession of the vine-dresser, he determined speedily to cut them down, that they might cumber the ground no longer. Of this the Baptist warned his audience. He assured them, that God was ready to execute his purpose; that "the axe was even now lying at their roots;" and that nothing but immediate and true repentance could avert their doom.

***~~The same awful judgment awaits every unfruitful soul.~~***

An unfruitful tree stands unconscious of the destiny that awaits it: but they who see the preparations made for cutting it down, anticipate its fate. Thus, if impenitent transgressors had eyes to see, they might see the axe lying at their root, and God giving his orders to him that is to use it. *Disease*or *accident*are just tarrying awhile, but coming at the appointed moment, to execute their commission.

And here let it be remembered, that it is not a mere negative goodness that will obtain a respite. It is not said, that every tree which brings forth peculiarly bad fruit, shall be cut down; but every tree which brings not forth good fruit. There must be such fruits as we have before spoken of, such as characterize a converted state; such as are "fit for" and "worthy of" true repentance. As the "unprofitable servant" is numbered with those who are positively "wicked," so the unfruitful tree will receive the same doom as that which is laden with the most pernicious fruits. And happy would it be for such professors of religion, if they had only temporal judgments to expect: but there remains for them a fire, after they are cut down—a fire into which they will be cast, and which, though incessantly consuming them, will never be extinguished.

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. Guard against delusive expectations.~~***

Every person, whatever may have been his life, hopes to be happy in a future world. The vanity of such hopes is in many cases so manifest, that we cannot but pity the self-deluding people who cherish them. Yet, though we can see the delusions of others, we cannot see our own: we all hope that our own state is safe: "a deceived heart turns us aside, so that we cannot deliver our souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

The *Pharisees*had a high conceit of their own comparative sanctity, as the Sadducees had of their superior wisdom: and though each condemned the other, neither would condemn themselves. But John saw that neither the one nor the other would ultimately attain salvation, unless they experienced a radical change both of heart and life. They however would not believe him, and therefore rejected the counsel of God, which the more humble publicans thankfully embraced.

Let me guard you then against their mistakes; and entreat you all, however wise or good you may conceive yourselves to be, to entertain a godly jealousy respecting your state: and be fearful, lest by building your hopes upon the sand, you then begin to learn your error when it is beyond a remedy.

***~~2. Be thankful to those who will show you your true character.~~***

Those ministers who commend themselves most faithfully to your consciences, deserve your thanks. Many are the reproaches which they bear on account of their fidelity; but a hope of benefitting your souls emboldens them to proceed; and they account themselves richly recompensed, when they see you bringing forth fruits fit for repentance. Do not then be angry with them for speaking plainly and pointedly, as the Pharisees were when they saw that our Lord had spoken a parable against them; but rather take occasion, from what they say, to search and examine your own hearts with sincerity and diligence, desiring and determining, with God's help, to know the worst of yourselves.

You will do well also to encourage your friends to communicate to you freely what they see amiss in you. You cannot but know, that if a skillful lawyer were to point out to you a flaw in the title of an estate which you were about to purchase, you would feel greatly indebted to him—and why? Because you would save your money. And will you not be thankful to one who by his counsel, endeavors to save your soul? Alas! alas! to flatterers we can listen without weariness; but to a faithful admonisher we can scarcely for a few minutes lend an ear. What the one says is received gladly, even though we have every reason to believe that he goes beyond the truth; but what the other says, calls forth all our ingenuity to weaken its force, though we know every syllable of it to be true. Beloved, be on your guard against this self-love: you may easily deceive yourselves, but you cannot deceive your God.

***~~3. Let nothing retard you in fleeing from the wrath to come.~~***

There is no room to ask, "Who has warned you?" for *I* have warned you; and *God*has warned you; and, I hope, your own *consciences*have warned you. If none of these have spoken yet so as to attract your attention, I now warn you, with all plainness and faithfulness, to "flee from the wrath to come."

Consider *whose*wrath it is: it is the wrath of Almighty God.

Consider the *description*given of it: it is, and ever will be, the wrath to come! Yes, many millions of years hence, it will be no nearer its termination than at this moment; to all eternity it will be the same: The wrath *to come!*

Can you reflect on the greatness and duration of this wrath, and not be diligent in fleeing from it? What other work can you have to do that is of the least importance when compared with this? Would the man-slayer loiter, when he saw the pursuer of blood just ready to overtake him? You must then use all diligence: leave nothing until tomorrow that can be done today. I would lay hold of your hand, as the angels did of Lot and his daughters, and hasten your steps. Do not even stop to look behind you; but "what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." The Savior is ready to receive you—he will cast out none that come unto him. The express promise of God is this, "Repent and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin!"

#1283

***~~The Baptism of the Spirit~~***

***~~[Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11)~~***

"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire!"

IT is ignorantly imagined, that those who are most enlightened with the knowledge of Christ, and are most zealous in bringing others to an acquaintance with him, must of necessity be puffed up with pride, and be filled with a high conceit of their superiority to others. But none ever surpassed the Apostle Paul either in zeal or knowledge; yet none ever manifested more deep humility, since language could not even afford him words whereby sufficiently to express the low sense he had of himself before God: he calls himself "less than the least of all saints."

Another eminent example of humility is exhibited in the conduct of John the Baptist, who, though faithful in the highest degree as a preacher of righteousness, never sought his own glory, but invariably directed the eyes of his followers to Christ, in comparison of whom he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest regard. His expressions before us lead us to consider,

***~~I. The transcendent dignity of Christ.~~***

Christ, in a civil view, was not at all superior to John, yes, perhaps inferior, inasmuch as the son of a carpenter might be reckoned inferior in rank to the son of a priest: nevertheless Jesus was, in other points of view, infinitely superior:

***~~1. In his person.~~***

The person of *John*might well be considered as dignified in no common degree. He was the subject of prophecy many hundred years before he came into the world: his formation in the womb was announced by an angel from Heaven, and that too at a period when his parents, according to the common course of nature, could entertain no hope of having any progeny. He was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his very birth; and was ushered into the world with the restoration of prophecy, after that gift had been withdrawn from the church almost four hundred years.

But in all these respects Christ was far greater than John: Christ had been the subject of prophecy from the very foundation of the world: his work and offices had been exhibited to the world in numberless types and prophecies during the space of four thousand years. His body was formed, not merely in an unusual way—but in a supernatural way, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, who created it in the womb of a virgin; by which means he was not merely holy, but spotless, without the smallest taint of that corruption which every child of Adam inherits.

Without noticing the songs with which the heavenly choir celebrated the tidings of his birth, or any of those miraculous circumstances which pointed him out to the Eastern Magi, we see already how far superior he was to John, even in those things wherein John surpassed all other men.

But what must we say, when to this we add, that *he was God*, "God manifest in the flesh," "God over all, blessed forever!" Then all comparison must cease: and the expressions used by John, instead of appearing exaggerated, will be acknowledged to be infinitely below the truth: though the loosing and carrying of the sandals, was deemed too base an employment for a Hebrew servant, or for any but a slave, yet John accounted it far too high an honor for him to render such a service to that glorious person, whose advent he announced.

***~~2. In his office.~~***

John was a prophet of the most high God, yes, "more than a prophet." He had the distinguished honor of being the forerunner of the Messiah, who would prepare his way, and point him out to the people, being himself divinely instructed how to distinguish him from all others who would attend his ministrations. Hence our Lord himself declares respecting him, that there "never had been a greater person born of woman than John the Baptist." But as glorious as John was—Jesus far excelled him in glory. Jesus was the *great prophet*, to whom Moses and all the prophets gave testimony, and to whose directions all were commanded to submit. He was the *Messiah*himself, the very "Lamb of God that was to take away the sins of the world," of whom "John himself needed to be baptized," and by whom alone John himself could be saved.

Surely then the words of John respecting him were not an unmeaning hyperbole, the offspring of affectation and the footstool of vanity—but they were the words of truth and soberness; for though John was like the morning star, yet he was altogether eclipsed as soon as ever the Sun of Righteousness arose!

The superiority of Jesus will still further appear while we consider,

***~~II. The baptism he administered.~~***

Jesus never administered the baptism of water to any: but to him was committed the work of baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

Though the Church had from the beginning received, in some measure, the communications of God's Spirit, yet, "until Christ was glorified, the Holy Spirit was not given" in a very general or abundant manner: it was reserved for Christ to send him down, in order that, through the Spirit's testimony, his own divine mission might be established beyond a possibility of doubt.

Accordingly, a few days after his ascension, he fulfilled his promise, and sent down the Spirit upon his waiting disciples, causing him to rest upon them visibly in the shape of cloven tongues of fire. And when, on another occasion, he poured out the Spirit upon Cornelius and his company, Peter particularly called to mind this declaration, which John the Baptist had made to the infant Church, and acknowledged it to be a glorious completion of his prophecy.

***~~This baptism infinitely surpassed that of John.~~***

John baptized with water those who were penitent, testifying to them that they should believe on him who was to come after him: but Jesus, by the baptism which he administers, makes men both penitent and believing.

John, in applying water to the body, even if he had immersed his followers ten thousand times, could do no more than cleanse the outward body; he could not reach the *heart*; he could not affect the *soul*; he could not in any degree change the character of his disciples. But the Spirit, with which Jesus baptized, acted with the powerful energy of "fire." This was no sooner poured out than it penetrated the inmost recesses of the soul, and, like a furnace, purged away the dross which was there concealed.

What a change it effected in the characters of men may be seen by its operations on the day of Pentecost: how was the lion instantly transformed into a lamb! and how did the noxious qualities, which had so lately rendered men like incarnate fiends, immediately subside and disappear! And such are the effects which it invariably produces wherever it is bestowed.

***~~Inferences.~~***

***~~1. How awfully are they mistaken, who rest in the outward form of baptism!~~***

I would on no account depreciate baptism, or detract in the least from its importance. It is necessary for all who embrace the faith of Christ: and is replete with blessings to all who receive it aright. Even the outward ministration of it gives us a title to the blessings of the Christian covenant, exactly as circumcision gave to the Jews a title to "the adoption" of sons, and to "the promises" which God had made to his people.

But if we receive it not aright, we are still, like Simon Magus, "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." To receive any saving benefit (for, if it be rightly received, "baptism does save us") we must have not only the sign, but the *thing signified*—a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; or, in other words, we must be "baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

For the truth of this, I will even appeal to the consciences of the ungodly themselves. Who does not feel at times that he needs somewhat more than he has ever yet received, in order to fit him for death and judgment? There is in every man at times, I say, this conviction: and this which is so wanted, is the very gift which Christ alone can bestow, namely, the baptism of the Spirit, as contrasted with, and superadded to, the baptism of water. It is "the renewing of the Holy Spirit" superadded to "the washing of regeneration."*If we have received this spiritual baptism, it will infallibly discover itself by its effects upon our heart and life*. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," seeking daily to be clothed with his righteousness, and to be transformed into his image. So also, if we have been "baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body," with the holy Apostles and the primitive saints, we shall have been "made to drink of one spirit with them." Now it is easy to see whether such a change have been wrought upon our heart and life, by our being altogether like-minded with them: and I wish you all to judge yourselves, that you may not be judged of the Lord.

It is easy to put this off with a sneer: but we cannot change that declaration of God, that, "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" and "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," and, if we will brave those explicit declarations, we shall find before long, "whose word shall stand, whether ours or God's."

***~~2. What rich encouragement does the Gospel afford to drooping contrite souls!~~***

It is by the Gospel that Christ communicates this blessing to mankind. See this exemplified in the instance of Cornelius. Peter, in preaching to him, said, "To Christ give all the prophets witness, that whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins." Then we are told, "While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word."

Now to you also do I make the same blessed declaration, that "all who believe in Christ shall be justified from all things." O that God might bear the same testimony to it at this time, by sending to you the Holy Spirit in rich abundance! What joy that event would occasion, you may see in the effect produced on all the college of Apostles at Jerusalem, at the recital of it in reference to Cornelius: "They glorified God, saying, Then has God unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life unto the Gentiles."

Yes, my dear brethren, "Repentance," "repentance unto life," would infallibly accompany the gift of the Holy Spirit to your souls. And is not that worth seeking? You are sure to repent sooner or later: and how much better is it to repent on earth, than to repent in Hell; to have "repentance unto life," than "repentance that shall be eternally to be repented of!" Go then to the Lord Jesus for this heavenly baptism. The baptism of water you are to receive but once: but the baptism (filling) of the Spirit you are to be receiving every day and hour. Paul speaks of "supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," which you are to be continually receiving: and it is the very office of Christ to impart them to you.

May the Lord grant, that you may all now "be filled with the Spirit," and that, having him poured out abundantly upon you, you may possess also, in the richest abundance, all his attendant blessings both of grace and glory!

#1284

***~~The Outcome of the Final Judgment~~***

***~~[Matthew 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.12)~~***

"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!"

THE great duty of a Christian Minister is to set forth the Lord Jesus Christ in all his characters, and to impress on the minds of all the necessity of believing in him for the salvation of their souls. But the view which we give of the Savior should be altogether such as is exhibited in the Holy Scriptures. If, at one time, we represent him as an atoning sacrifice for sin, saying, with the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world;" or, at another time, exalt him as the Head of his Church, ready to "baptize men with the Holy Spirit and with fire;" we must not fail to proclaim him also as the Judge of the living and dead; and to declare, with the Baptist, that "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire!"

This is a subject to which we cannot too often call your attention, seeing how deeply we are interested in,

***~~I. The discriminating judgement which will be made at the last day.~~***

***~~All men are here divided into two classes, under the images of "wheat and chaff".~~***

These images are just: for though all men spring from one common root, yet there is a great difference between them: some, as righteous, resembling wheat; and others, as wicked, answering rather to the chaff.

The *righteous*may fitly be considered as wheat: for they are solid in the whole of their experience: their repentance is deep and genuine: their faith is lively and operative: their self-dedication to God is uniform and entire. They have in themselves a real and intrinsic worth.

The *wicked*, on the contrary, whether they are merely nominal Christians or hypocritical professors, may well be compared to chaff: for they are light, unsubstantial, worthless. They may, to a superficial observer, appear like solid grain: but they will not bear a scrutiny.

Examine their *repentance*: it has no depth in it: they have never known what a broken and contrite spirit means.

Examine their *faith*: it has nothing beyond a bare assent to certain truths: they have never fled to Christ, as the manslayer to a city of refuge: they have never been cut off from their old stock, and been grafted into Christ, as scions; and been made to live by him, as branches of the living vine: such "a life of faith in the Son of God" is altogether unknown to them.

Examine their *obedience*also: it goes to externals only; while the heart, instead of being given to him, is set upon the things of time and sense.

In a word, they may "have the *form*of godliness; but they have not the power," they may "have a name to live; but they are really dead!"

In this world, however, they lie in one commingled mass.

After the corn is threshed, it lies on the floor, mixed together in one indiscriminate heap. Thus, in the house of God, people of every character are assembled: nor is any man such a discerner of spirits, as that he can separate the evil from the good. The two are united in the same works of charity and beneficence; yes, and compose the members of the same family: they even join frequently in the same religious society; and sit down together, like Judas with the eleven, at the same supper of the Lord. This we are taught by the Lord Jesus Christ to expect, as long as we continue in the world: "the tares and the wheat grow together in the field;" nor is it in the power of man to separate them.

***~~But the Lord Jesus Christ, in the day of judgment, will discriminate infallibly between them.~~***

The gardener, by the simple process of winnowing the corn, makes the wished-for separation. Thus, at the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ will "purge his floor;" yes, already is the winnowing fan in his hand, prepared for the work: and so perfect will the operation be, that not a single grain of wheat will be found among the chaff; nor the smallest atom of chaff be left among the wheat. The least and weakest of God's people are infallibly distinguished by him here; as it is said, "I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted with a sieve—yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." And shall not the same care be taken by the Judge of the living and dead hereafter?

On the other hand, "nothing that is unclean, or that defiles, shall enter into the mansions of bliss; and therefore we are sure that no hypocrite can find admittance there. The distinction between the wheat and the chaff will be unerring and complete.

Let us proceed to contemplate,

***~~II. The final outcome of it to the souls of men.~~***

***~~"The wheat will be treasured up in his barn".~~***

The gardener regards the wheat as the object for which he has labored, and as the recompense of all his toils; and he considers it as a treasure whereby he is enriched. It is in this light that the Lord Jesus Christ regards his faithful and obedient people. When the separation of them shall be made, and he shall behold them all assembled in one vast body, with what delight will he view them! How will he call to mind his own labors and sufferings in their behalf! and how will "he be satisfied, when he sees in them the travail of his soul." It was with a view to this, that "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," when he was in this lower world. It was with a view to "this joy" he had then respect: and no feeling of regret will occupy his mind, when he shall see their number, their safety, their felicity.

And shall not the saints themselves rejoice, when they shall find themselves thus approved of their Lord, and have no more wintry blasts to menace them, or noxious blights to endanger, their security? O, blessed day! The Lord prepare us for it, and grant us all to behold that day in peace!

***~~But "the chaff will be burned up with unquenchable fire!"~~***

The chaff, as being altogether worthless, was burned. And what other end can the wicked hope for in that day? Can they suppose, that, after all the labor that has been bestowed upon them, and bestowed in vain, they shall meet with the same favor as the grain by which the laborer's toil has been repaid? Can it be hoped that there shall be no "difference put between those who have served their God, and those who serve him not?"

No, for them is a fire prepared; and happy would it be for them if they might be consumed by it speedily, like chaff! But though ever burning, they will never be consumed: they themselves will be as imperishable, as "the fire is unquenchable;" and to all eternity will they endure the justly-merited wrath of an avenging God. Then shall be fulfilled in them the prediction of the Prophet Malachi, "Behold, the day comes that shall burn as an oven: and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord Almighty, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." "The worm," that is in their consciences, "shall never die; and the fire that shall torment them shall never be quenched."

***~~See, then, brethren,~~***

***~~1. What need there is to examine the real state of your souls.~~***

Nothing would be more easy than to ascertain this, if you would listen to the voice of conscience: but *what a fearful thing will it be to dream of Heaven, when you awake in Hell!*

***~~2. What need there is to live in a preparation for the eternal world.~~***

While you are here, your character may be changed, and your bliss secured: but in the grave there is no work," etc. *As you are found in death, you will exist forever!*

#1285

***~~Fulfilling All Righteousness~~***

***~~[Matthew 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.15)~~***

"Thus it befits us to fulfill all righteousness."

TO consult, in difficult circumstances, the judgment of wise and good men, is doubtless very advisable: but to place implicit confidence in any is not expedient; since *even the best of men may err*. We have a very remarkable instance of the *fallacy of human judgment*, in the case of the Apostle Peter; who would have dissuaded the Lord Jesus from subjecting himself to those sufferings which were about to come upon him; and who, on account of the carnality of his sentiments, incurred the marked displeasure of his Lord.

We do not impute any measure of such blame to John the Baptist, for the unwillingness he expressed to comply with the wishes of our Lord: for he was evidently under the influence of a most befitting spirit, and had good grounds for the advice he offered: but still he erred; and our blessed Lord overruled his objections, declaring, that the administration of baptism to him at that time was a measure not only expedient, but necessary: for that "thus it befit him to fulfill all righteousness."

The precise force of our Lord's assertion not being perfectly clear, I shall,

***~~I. Confirm it as a truth, in relation to our Lord.~~***

John, feeling his own utter unworthiness to administer baptism to our blessed Lord, and having in his mind a persuasion that, however needful baptism was for others, it could not be so for Jesus—declined to execute the office that was assigned him. And, so far as Jesus alone was concerned, the judgment of John was right: for the rite of baptism imported, that the person receiving that ordinance needed to be washed from sin, and to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and to be saved by the Messiah who should come. But Jesus had no sin to wash away, nor any need to be either regenerated or saved; and, consequently, he could have no need of this ordinance, which was intended to shadow forth, and to impart, those blessings unto men.

Yet did our Lord say what was strictly true, when, in reference to this very ordinance, he spoke of the observance of it by himself as a necessary part of that righteousness which he had come to fulfill. It was so,

***~~1. Because he stood in the place of sinners.~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ having undertaken the great work of our redemption, had the iniquities of the whole world laid upon him; and therefore, as the representative of sinners, he needed all which was needed by those whom he undertook to save. Hence he had in his infancy submitted to circumcision, which was of precisely the same import as baptism. So, at the close of his ministry, he endured the full penalties of the broken law, suffering all that we deserved to suffer at the hands of a righteous and offended God. He needed not on his own account to drink this bitter cup: but, when he was found in the place of sinners, those sufferings could not be dispensed with. "Seeing, therefore, that the cup could not pass away from him," he drank it to the very dregs. *Every part of his humiliation, from the first to the last, was necessary, for the full attainment of his end:*and therefore baptism, as an essential part of that humiliation, was required by him, in order to the completion of that righteousness which he had undertaken to fulfill.

***~~2. Because it befit him to give his public attestation to the divine mission of John.~~***

John had been sent into the world as his forerunner, to announce his advent, and to call men's attention to him as the true Messiah. Moreover, John had been informed that the person who was to sustain that high office should be made known to him by a visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him: and this descent was to be at the time of our Savior's baptism.

Now, if Jesus had not submitted to the ordinance of baptism, the ends of John's mission would have been defeated. For Jesus was not personally known to John: and it was only by this miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit upon him that he was to be distinguished: and, consequently, the plan which Jehovah had adopted for the manifestation of his Son would, so far as the Baptist's testimony was concerned, have been altogether frustrated. In order, therefore, that the mission of John might produce the effects proposed, Jesus overruled the objections of John, and received at his hands the ordinance which he was commissioned to administer.

***~~3. Because it was the appointed means of his own solemn consecration to God.~~***

There were two ways in which the Lord Jesus was to be consecrated to his office: the one was by an effusion of the Holy Spirit upon him (as the *typical*high priests were by a holy unction); and the other was by an audible voice from Heaven, bearing testimony to him as the person sent of God to be the Savior of the world. Now these two attestations from above were of vast importance, not only for the satisfaction of John, but also for the satisfaction of the whole world. Besides, this effusion of "the Spirit, which was given to him without measure," was given in order to qualify him, as it were, for the discharge of his high office.

It had been said by the prophet, that God would "anoint him" to his office: and that there "should rest upon him a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and of might, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and that God would make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." Now though, as *God*, he possessed "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," yet, as *man*, and as Mediator, he needed to be thus qualified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore on this account, as well as for the reasons before mentioned, it was necessary he should comply with the ordinance that had been enjoined, and not be diverted from his purpose by the well-meant, but mistaken, scruples of the Baptist. In truth, from the administration of this ordinance to him, and the consequent testimony borne to him by the Father and the Holy Spirit, we have an evidence of his Messiahship, which ought to carry conviction to every mind of man.

Having explained our Lord's assertion, as referring personally to him, I shall,

***~~II. Enforce it as a duty, in reference to ourselves.~~***

When our Lord says, "It befits us to fulfill all righteousness," we must consider the obligation as extending, of course, to every child of man. And certainly this obligation does attach to us,

***~~1. As creatures of God.~~***

The whole intelligent creation are under obligation to serve and obey the Lord. Whether the command given them is moral, and necessarily arising from their relation to him; or merely positive, arising from the arbitrary appointment of Heaven; it makes no difference: they are equally bound to fulfill whatever they know to be his will. Adam was as much bound to abstain from eating the forbidden fruit, as he was to love his God.

Just so it is with us: we must fulfill all righteousness: however humiliating the command be, or whatever our obedience may expose us to, we have no alternative: we must yield a cheerful and determined obedience to it. It was beyond measure humiliating to the Lord Jesus Christ to submit to a rite which made him appear to be a sinner like unto us, and gave reason to all around him to suppose that he needed a Savior like us. Yet he regarded not what men might say or think respecting him: he determined to submit to the ordinance, and would not be dissuaded from his purpose. Thus men may think and say of us, that we are weak, enthusiastic, absurd: but we must know no authority but God's, and have no standard for our actions but his revealed will: and our determination, through grace, must be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

***~~2. As followers of Christ.~~***

Though the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us the remission of our sins, and we have been "baptized into his name for the remission of sins;" yet we are in no respect absolved from our obedience to God, nor is any one duty we owe to him in any measure relaxed. On the contrary, our obligations to holiness are, if possible, increased; since the very end of Christ's mediation was "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Besides, he came to "set an example for us, that we should follow his steps." Was "he then without sin; and was he without deceit?" We should, as far as possible, resemble him; and neither do anything, nor forbear anything, but in perfect accordance with the commands of God. If we profess to belong to him, we must "walk in all things as he walked."

***~~3. As hoping for a testimony from God in the last day.~~***

We all expect a future judgment, wherein "the inmost counsels of our hearts will be made manifest," and "every man will be dealt with according to his works." Then will God bear witness to his faithful and obedient servants, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter into the joy of your Lord."

But how can we hope for such a testimony from him, if we have any reserves in our obedience to him? How can he say, "This is a beloved son of mine, in whom I am well pleased," if he has seen in us any willful departure from his ways? How can he acknowledge us as "Israelites indeed, if we have not been without deceit?"

Know then, my brethren, what your duty is, and how it must be performed, if ever you would be approved of your God in that day. Truly, "it befits every one of us to fulfill all righteousness," and if there be any reserve whatever in our minds, instead of being approved of God as his children, we shall be condemned by him as hypocrites. "A right hand or a right eye" that is retained contrary to his command will inevitably subject us to his everlasting displeasure. It will be to no purpose to say, that, while following our superiors in rank and learning, we concluded we were acting right: for "the rulers of the Jewish nation rejected the counsel of God against themselves, by refusing the baptism of John;" while the publicans and harlots availed themselves thankfully of the offered benefit.

If Christ himself thus withstood the current of public example in his day; and sanctioned, by his conduct, the more duteous deportment of the lower classes; so should we, unawed and uninfluenced by the whole world, determine, with God's help, to "follow the Lord fully," and to sanction nothing which God himself will not approve. We should prefer entering Heaven with publicans and harlots, to the being excluded from it with the great and mighty of the earth. To the approbation of God alone should we look; and with the prospect of that we should be content.

#1286

***~~Christ's Temptation~~***

***~~[Matthew 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.1)~~***

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

THE agency of Satan in the affairs of man cannot be doubted by any one who really believes the representations given us in the inspired volume. *His great employment from the very first has been to seduce men to sin*. And from the success which he obtained over our first parents in Paradise, he is said by our Lord to have been "a murderer from the beginning." Even our blessed Lord himself did he assault, in the hope of prevailing against him, and of thereby defeating the great ends and purposes for which he was sent into the world.

This, in the counsels of the Most High, was permitted, in order that that great adversary of God and man, who had been the means of introducing sin into the world, might be himself confounded; and man, his wretched victim, be rescued from his dominion. I say, this conflict was permitted by God himself: for we are told in my text, that "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

To unfold to you this mysterious transaction, I shall,

***~~I. Consider it in all its leading circumstances.~~***

II. Show what interest we have in it.

***~~The first thing to be noticed is the season which Satan chose for making his assaults on our blessed Lord.~~***

It was, in part, a season of peculiar elation, and, in part a season of more than ordinary depression.

Our Lord's Messiahship had just before been audibly attested by a voice from Heaven; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Now this would appear to us the most unfit season that could be imagined, since by such a testimony as had been given him, our Lord's mind, so to speak, would be doubly fortified against every temptation. But Satan knew, that exalted enjoyments are apt to put us off our guard; as David had evinced; "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved: Lord, by your favor you have made my mountain to stand strong."

Accordingly he is accustomed to embrace all such opportunities of assaulting man. It was when Paul had been caught up into the third heavens, that Satan buffeted him with more than ordinary forced. And he actually vanquished Peter immediately after the highest honor had been conferred upon him. It would seem that Satan particularly availed himself of the occasion now afforded him, because he founded his temptations upon the testimony itself: "If you are the Son of God," do so and so.

To counterbalance this testimony, our Lord had now been left forty days without food: and consequently, it seemed as if he were neglected by his heavenly Father. Satan therefore took advantage of this circumstance to urge upon our Lord yet more strongly the expediency of dissipating without delay the doubt which the occasion suggested, and the expediency of giving to the world some satisfactory proof of his Messiahship. It was in the absence of her husband that he had prevailed against Eve; and he hoped to prevail against Jesus also, now that his heavenly Father had in appearance withdrawn himself from him.

Thus, whether our Lord was in a state of light and joy, or of darkness and distress, Satan hoped to make his condition the means of forwarding the object which he had in view.

***~~The particular suggestions whereby Satan tempted our Lord must next be distinctly stated.~~***

The period allotted for this conflict being now come nearly to a close, Satan renewed with still greater energy the assaults which had more or less been made on our Lord during all the days of his temptation.

He tempted our Lord to a distrustful questioning of his Father's care. Both Moses and Elijah, the one the giver, and the other the restorer, of the law, had fasted forty days: and it seemed good to Almighty God, that Jesus, when introducing a new dispensation, should fast in like manner, and for the same period of time. But Satan strove to impress our Lord with the thought, that he was forsaken by his heavenly Father, and that it was therefore expedient for him to relieve his own needs by "commanding the stones to be made bread." This, however, as casting a reflection on his heavenly Father, Jesus would on no account do. Indeed, without the Father's blessing, no such supply would be of any avail. This our Lord showed from the Scriptures of truth, wherein it is said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," who alone can render anything available for our real good.

Having failed in this, Satan urged him to an opposite extreme, even to a presumptuous tempting of the Father's power. He took our Lord, doubtless with his own concurrence, as one man would take another, to a pinnacle or battlement of the temple, and urged him, in proof of his Messiahship, to cast himself down from thence, which he told him he might safely do, because God, on whom he seemed so confidently to rely, had promised to "give his angels charge over him, that he should not dash his foot against a stone." But in citing this Scripture, Satan withheld that part which restricted the promise to people walking in the path of duty. For any person to expose himself to danger without necessity, in order to see whether God would preserve him from injury, would be the highest act of presumption. It would be, in fact, to tempt the Lord. And therefore our Lord repelled the temptation by adducing another passage of Scripture, more appositely and justly quoted, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

What Satan could not do by deceit, he now endeavored to effect by the greatness of his offers, whereby he would induce our Lord to an idolatrous rejection of his Father's authority. He took our Lord to an exceeding high mountain, and "showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," most probably the kingdoms in and around Canaan, from whence the glory of all other kingdoms might be inferred; and promised to "give him all, if only he would fall down and worship him."

This would have been, in fact, to renounce his heavenly Father, and to give to Satan the honor due to God alone. How offensive such a proposal must be to our blessed Lord, we may well conceive. But, though filled with indignation, our Lord still had recourse only to the written word for the repelling of this impious proposal, and, bidding him to depart, he gave him this as the rule to which every creature must adhere, "You shall worship the Lord your God; and him only shall you serve."

The outcome of these temptations comes now in the last place to be mentioned. Satan, foiled, was obliged to leave the field. He could not withstand the authoritative command of Jesus. Abashed and confounded, he, for the present, desisted from his enterprise. True, he departed only for a season, as the Evangelist informs us, and as the subsequent history of our Lord attests. But on the present occasion the victory was gained by our blessed Lord; and, as I shall show under my next head, immense advantage was obtained for the followers of Christ in all ages.

Now too, that evil spirit being vanquished, other spirits came down from Heaven to support and congratulate our victorious Lord. Whether they administered to his bodily wants, we are not informed: but they doubtless were God's messengers to him to console his fainting spirit, and to animate him to all future conflicts.

We may now proceed to consider,

***~~II. What interest we have in this mysterious occurrence.~~***

The account here given us is of far greater importance than we in general are apt to imagine.

***~~1. It is a record of what the Lord Jesus Christ has effected for us.~~***

Satan, by overcoming the first Adam, had caused him and all his posterity to be excluded from Paradise, and to be consigned over to the curse due to sin. But Christ, the second Adam, by vanquishing for us that great adversary, has reopened for us the gate of Paradise, and caused his holy angels not only to abstain from prohibiting our entrance with a sword of fire, but to aid us, and encourage us in our endeavors to regain the blessedness we have lost. From that time they have been "sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation, to uphold them under any difficulties to which they may be exposed in life, and to attend them in the hour of death for the purpose of bearing their departing spirits to the realms of bliss.

We before mentioned that Satan left him but for a season. At a subsequent period, he returned again to the charge, attended with innumerable hosts, even with all "the powers of darkness." Yes, and he prevailed to "bruise the heel" of our most adorable Lord. But our Lord "bruised his head," and even "by death overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devils," yes, he then "spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly on his very cross," and in his ascension, "led captivity itself captive;" thus "judging and condemning the Prince of this world," and leaving us nothing but a vanquished enemy to contend with.

To appreciate this mercy aright, we should look all around us, and see what evil that wicked fiend has occasioned to the whole human race from the very beginning of the world; and then look down to the regions of the damned, to see what misery he has entailed on millions of immortal souls, and will entail on us also, if the Savior makes not his victories available for us. Surely in the contemplation of these things we cannot but feel thankful to our blessed Lord for having thus undertaken our cause, and by his victorious conflicts obtained for us a restoration, to our forfeited inheritance.

***~~2. A pledge of what he will effect in us.~~***

There is a striking correspondence between the assaults which Satan made upon our Lord, and those which we also, each of us in our measure, have to contend with. For so says the Scripture; "In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren," and "in all points he was tempted, even as we are." In fact, the reason of his submitting to these trials was, that by means of them he might acquire a sympathy with us in our conflicts, and "being touched with the feeling of our infirmities," attain both a disposition and ability to afford us the support which we stand in need of.

In our conflicts with the world, he bids us look to his victories over it as a pledge of what he will grant to us: "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." So, in like manner, he tells us that "the prince of this world is cast out;" and that, provided only we "resist him, he shall flee from us" also, and in due season "be bruised under our feet" forever.

Let us not then be discouraged at the thought that "we have to wrestle, not with flesh and blood only, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places," for there is armor provided for us, even the very same that Jesus himself made use of. From the Holy Scriptures we may take, as it were, "the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit: and, fighting in the strength of the Lord Jesus, we shall be enabled to withstand all the powers of darkness, and stand victors over all. Yes, we shall rise superior to them all, even as Jesus Christ himself did, and, as assessors with him in judgment, shall unite with him in pronouncing the sentence which shall doom them all to that lake of fire into which they have in vain labored to plunge our souls.

Are any of you then under circumstances of temptation to distrust, as people forsaken by the Lord? Know that "your God will never leave you nor forsake you." If the vision tarry ever so long, wait for it: for it shall surely come, and not tarry one moment beyond the fittest time.

If, on the other hand, you are tempted to presumption, and to run uncalled into scenes of bodily or moral danger, remember that, whatever stress you may lay on garbled extracts from God's word, you cannot hope to be preserved, except in the ways that God himself has prescribed. If, like Israel of old, you go against your enemies unsent, you shall, like them, assuredly, meet with a repulse.

Finally, if, like Demas, you are tempted to apostatize from God, and to prefer the things of this world as your portion—then reject the proposal with abhorrence, and, instead of yielding, like him, determine, through grace, to live only for Him, who lived and died for you.

#1287

***~~The Call of Four Apostles~~***

***~~[Matthew 4:18–22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.18â22)~~***

"And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him."

IT has pleased God on many occasions to give marks of his special approbation to people while they were employed in their worldly callings. *David*was taken from his father's sheep-folds, when he was appointed to feed and govern the kingdom of Israel. The *shepherds*were watching over their flocks by night, when a choir of angels announced to them the Messiah's birth. And *four of the Apostles*were occupied in spreading, or in mending their nets, when the Lord Jesus selected them for his stated and most intimate attendants.

We do not mean to say that a discharge of earthly duties can merit anything at the hand of God, or that he will have respect to it in that view: but certainly, to fulfill the duties of our respective stations is a service highly pleasing and acceptable unto God; nor are we ever more likely to receive blessings from God, than when we are occupied in performing the offices which he himself has assigned us.

But it is not so much to the season when these Apostles were called, as to *the call itself*, that we now propose to direct your attention. For this end let us inquire,

***~~I. How far the call given to them is applicable to us.~~***

We must consider our Lord's address to them as relating, in part, to the high office to which he had destined them as his *Apostles*. The world at large were not called to renounce their worldly occupations, and become itinerant ministers of the word: on the contrary, the great body of Christians were repeatedly bidden to "abide in the calling wherein they were called," yes, "to abide therein with God." Thus far, therefore, the command given to them is not properly applicable to us. But, in part, the command referred to their general duty as Christians: and in that sense it is given to everyone to whom the Gospel itself is sent. We may consider our Lord as at this moment addressing us, and requiring us,

***~~1. To embrace his religion.~~***

We cannot follow Christ one single step, without first coming to him as the Savior of the world. We must regard him as the true Messiah; we must view him as invested with all power in Heaven and in earth, that he might redeem us to God by his blood, and deliver us by his almighty grace. We must consider him as having all fullness treasured up in him for us, that we may receive out of it, according to our respective necessities, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

It is not merely to give an intellectual assent to certain truths that we are called, but to realize them, and to live upon them. We must not merely acknowledge that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that "he has reconciled us to God by his blood," but we must determine, with the Apostle:  
to know nothing but Christ crucified,  
to trust in nothing but his righteousness,  
and to glory in nothing but his cross.

***~~2. To walk in his steps.~~***

Next to our believing in him is that *obedience*which we are to render to his commandments. If *faith*in him is the root, *obedience*to him is the fruit, which must immediately and with increasing abundance, proceed from it. Our blessed Lord came, not only to save us by his meritorious passion and death, but, to "set us an example that we should follow his steps." To follow him, therefore, we must "walk as he walked."

Behold his zeal for the glory of his God and Father; it even "consumed him," so ardently did it burn within him. Such should be our zeal also: it should be "our food and drink to do our Father's will."

Behold his humility, his self-denial, his meekness, his patience, his compassion, his love. In all of these we are to resemble him; and to be progressively "changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God" O that all who profess themselves his followers were more like Him in the whole of his spirit and temper! It is this that marks the Christian: all without this is hypocrisy and delusion.

***~~3. To devote ourselves openly to his service.~~***

It is well to be Christians in our secret chamber: but we must remember, that "our light is also to shine before men." We must confess Christ before men: and if we are ashamed or afraid to do so, we cannot be his disciples. "With the heart man believes unto righteousness; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." His name, his cause, his people are despised by an ungodly world—and we must share in their contempt: we must "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach."

There is no occasion to *affect singularity*in trivial matters; (that should rather be avoided,) there are points enough of importance in which we must be singular; we cannot resemble him without being singular; because the ungodly world are as opposite to him as darkness is to light. Of course, therefore, we must be "as lights in a dark place, as cities set upon a hill." Nay, we are not to be contented with "abstaining from fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; we are actively and boldly to reprove them;" and must show ourselves on the Lord's side; endeavoring to maintain his honor, and to advance his interests in the world.

These are points of universal and unalterable importance: and we are required to follow Christ in these respects, no less than the Apostles themselves. This call, I say, is given equally to us; and it befits us all to inquire,

***~~II. In what manner we should obey it.~~***

We need only notice the conduct of these holy Apostles, and we shall be at no loss how to regulate our own. The command itself is plain; and we must obey it,

***~~1. Instantly, without delay.~~***

We see not the smallest hesitation in any one of those whom Jesus called, in our text. Elsewhere we find that one expressed a wish "to go first and bid farewell" to his friends; and another desired to "go first and bury his father." But there is no time for compliment on an occasion like this. The call of God is of paramount obligation: nothing is for a moment to interfere with our obedience to it. We know not but that it may be the last call we ever shall receive.

The people invited to the marriage supper wished to excuse themselves for that time; but they were never invited again: on the contrary, the founder of the feast resolved, that "not one of them should ever taste of his supper." A similar resolution may at this very moment be formed by the Lord Jesus Christ, if we now refuse to become his followers. "His Spirit will not always strive with man." There is "a day when the things which belong to our peace may be forever hidden from our eyes;" and our "God may swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest."

O that that day may never come with respect to us! O that we may not foolishly dream of "a more convenient season," which shall never arrive! But let us "today, while it is called today," comply with this divine call. Let us imitate the man after God's own heart, whose experience is recorded in those memorable words, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep your commandments."

***~~2. Fully, without reserve.~~***

While some are wishing to defer their compliance with this command, others make exceptions against it in some particulars, and would gladly have it lowered to their taste and convenience. Thus it was with the Rich Youth, who, when required to "sell all and give it to the poor, and to look for his treasure in Heaven," accounted it a hard saying, and parted with Christ and Heaven, rather than with his wealth. "One thing he lacked;" and that one thing as effectually ruined him, as ten thousand would have done. O that we may learn from his fate, not to make any *exceptions*or *reserves*; but to "follow the Lord fully," even as Caleb and as Joshua did!

It was a great trial to Peter and Andrew to leave their nets; and to James and John to leave their father also: but the grace of Christ was sufficient for them, and they willingly forsook all for him.

Thus must we do: we must give a preference, a strong and decisive preference, to Christ, above all earthly relatives, or worldly possessions. We cannot now be called to act as Levi did; but the zeal of Levi must be in us, and all things, not excepting parents or life itself, must be hated in comparison of Christ. We are plainly warned respecting the *terms*on which alone our Lord will consider us as his; and we must "count the cost," gladly parting with everything, that we may obtain "the pearl of great price!"

***~~3. Perseveringly, without end.~~***

Religion is not for a day or a year, but for the whole of our lives. "Our hands being once put to the plough, we must look back no more." God warns us, that, "if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us." "It is he who endures to the end, and he alone, who shall be saved" at last. As for a temporary obedience to this command, it would be worse than a continued opposition to it: "It were better not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to depart from it." "The latter end of an apostate is worse than his beginning."

We are particularly told to "remember Lot's wife," who was made an everlasting monument of his vengeance, not for *going*back to Sodom, but for *looking*back, and thereby showing that her heart was yet cleaving to the things which she had left behind. Happy will it be for us if we bear her in mind, and consider the danger of departing even in heart from the Lord.

If our trials be multiplied, we must cry the more earnestly to God for help, that through his all-sufficient grace we may say with David, "All this has come upon us; yet our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from your way."

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. Those who think that such obedience is impractical.~~***

See how powerfully the word of Christ wrought on them. It is no less powerful now. Pray that it may come to your hearts in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

***~~2. Those who are hesitating whether to obey or not.~~***

If it appears formidable to you to *follow*Christ now, think what it will be to be bidden to *depart*from him hereafter. That you will meet with trials is certain: but your losses shall be repaid a hundredfold in this life, besides a proportionable weight of glory in the world to come. Thousands can attest the truth of this. O choose the better part, which shall never be taken away from you!

***~~3. Those who are engaged in following the Lord.~~***

Though you may not be called, as preachers, to be "fishers of men," yet in your several stations God will make you instrumental to the salvation of men. *A holy life will operate on many who would never have been wrought upon by the preached word.*None prove such stumbling-blocks as you, if your lives be unsuitable to your profession, and none such blessings, if you walk worthy of your high calling. "Seek therefore more and more to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

#1288

***~~The Blessedness of the Humble~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:1–4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.1â4)~~***

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

THERE is no portion of the Holy Scriptures for which mankind at large express so great a reverence, as that which is called the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Some exalt it above the rest of the sacred volume, and affirm that we need not attend to any other part. This is certainly wrong, since every part of that blessed book is given by inspiration from God.

On the other hand, there are some who would get rid of it altogether, by supposing that it was addressed to the Apostles only, and that common Christians have nothing to do with it. But these also do greatly err: for not to mention that the Apostles were not yet chosen from among the disciples; the very declaration of Matthew, at the end of this discourse, shows that it was spoken to all the people. The multitudes being too numerous to be accommodated in any house or synagogue, our Lord went up into a mountain, and sat down after the custom of the Jewish teachers, in order to instruct them. Those disciples who were most eager for instruction, drew near unto him; while those who were more indifferent about it, contented themselves with remoter situations: but, for the benefit of all, "he opened his mouth" with peculiar solemnity, and taught them.

His *design*in this sermon was to open to them the nature of that kingdom which he had before announced as about to be established, and to rescue the moral law from those false glosses which the Pharisees had put upon it.

The people in general had an idea that their Messiah should establish a *temporal*kingdom, under which they were to enjoy the highest privileges and blessings. To counteract this vain expectation, he tells them, that his subjects would be indeed most blessed; but that their character and blessedness were widely different from anything that they supposed. *They dreamed of riches and mirth; but the people whom he pronounced blessed, were the poor and mournful.*

To illustrate and confirm the declarations of our Lord, we shall inquire,

***~~I. Who are depicted under these characters.~~***

**Poverty of spirit**, if viewed in all its extent, will include a variety of dispositions and feelings which will more properly fall under our consideration in other parts of the Sermon on the Mount. On this account, we shall confine ourselves to one view of it, which, however, we consider as most appropriate and most important.

It is thought by many, to import a disregard of riches and honors: but we consider it as designating a far more peculiar state of mind, not specified in any other part of this discourse. What poverty is, we need not be told. That man is poor who is destitute of all things needful for the body. From hence we may collect what poverty of spirit is: it is *a sense of utter lack and helplessness in relation to the soul.*

All men by nature are poor, because they are destitute of everything that is good. But many who are in this state, are far enough from poverty of spirit; they think they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing". When they are become poor in spirit they are of a very different mind; they know that "they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They feel themselves altogether destitute of wisdom, goodness, strength—and every good thing.

Nearly allied to these are "**those who mourn**." As poverty of spirit implies a sense of want and helplessness, so "mourning" implies a sense of guilt and corruption.

All men are guilty, and all corrupt—but, as in the former case, so in this, many are insensible of their state, and "think more highly of themselves than they ought to think." Not so "the mourners in Zion," they know their real character: they look back through their whole lives, and see that they have been altogether "alienated from God," and have "lived without him in the world." They see that their transgressions have been multiplied beyond the sands upon the seashore. They behold their iniquities set, as it were, in array against them:  
their rebellions against their God and Father,  
their contempt of Christ and his salvation,  
their resistance to all the motions of the Holy Spirit,  
the particular evils to which they have been more especially addicted,  
the evils that yet cleave to them, in spite of their better judgment, and repeated endeavors to cast them off,  
the *mixture*that there is in all their principles,  
the defect in all their duties,  
and the iniquity even of their holiest actions;  
  
and, in the view of all these things:  
"they groan, being burdened;"  
they "blush and are confounded;"  
they "abhor themselves in dust and ashes;"  
they cry day and night, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

It appears to them a miracle of mercy, that they are out of Hell; and that too, not only for the transgressions of their former lives, but for the opposition which their flesh, or corrupt nature, is daily and hourly making to "the spirit," or heavenly principle, which has been imparted to them.

These two characters, "the poor in spirit," and "the mourners," though distinguished in the text, are so nearly allied, that they are united by the prophet Isaiah, and therefore are united by us. In fact, they are never separate: they always participate in each other's feelings, and always are subjects of the same blessedness.

Let us, in the next place, inquire,

***~~II. In what their blessedness consists.~~***

Doubtless, to carnal eyes, there is little in such characters that can render them objects of envy. To a superficial observer, they appear rather to be in a most melancholy and pitiable condition. But they are truly blessed:

***~~1. Their privileges are great.~~***

"The kingdom of Heaven is theirs!" even that kingdom which Christ has established in the world, and maintains in the hearts of men. The blessings of that kingdom are precisely such as they need; and they are in the very state to which all those blessings are promised. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world, in order to seek and save those who were *lost*. In him is treasured up all that they can desire.

He is "wisdom" to the ignorant,  
He is "righteousness" to the guilty,  
He is "sanctification" to the polluted,  
He is "redemption" to the enslaved.

He addresses himself to the very people who are thus mourning over their blind, naked, destitute condition; and bids them accept at his hands:

"gold, that they may be enriched;  
clothing, that they may be clothed;  
and eye-salve, that they may see."

To feel and to lament their need of these things, is all the qualification that he requires for the reception of them. To those who are insensible of their need, he will impart nothing; but to the humble and contrite, he will give more than they can either ask or think! Indeed the "kingdom of Heaven" is theirs! They have not only a title to all its blessings, but a pledge of them already in their souls. Their spiritual poverty and contrition are evidences that the throne of Christ is already established in their hearts: and as certainly as they are made partakers of the kingdom of *grace*, so shall they in due time inherit the kingdom of *glory*.

And are not these people justly called "happy?" Who are "happy, but those who have their unrighteousness forgiven, and their sin covered!" Who are happy, but those who have Christ for their friend, and Heaven for their everlasting inheritance!

***~~2. Their comforts are great also.~~***

Strange as it may appear, there is a comfort, an exceeding great comfort, in mourning for sin; insomuch that the true Christian reckons the seasons of his deepest humiliation among the happiest hours of his life. But view the penitent when applying to his soul the great and precious promises of the Gospel: feels he no comfort in this exercise? View him when he obtains a glimpse of his Lord and Savior, and a taste of his pardoning love: with what "unspeakable, and even glorified joy" is he filled! The admiration, the love, the gratitude which he feels on such occasions, sometimes overwhelms him; and he is silent, not for want of will, but for want of power, to declare what God has done for his soul. What views has he at times of that *priceless inheritance*which is reserved for him!

With what adoring thoughts does he contemplate it!

With what ardent longings does he desire it!

With what assured confidence does he expect it!

Yes, beloved; his poverty and mourning, so far from robbing him of these joys, are the means of obtaining, enhancing, and perpetuating them!

Tell me, then, whether these are not comforts far beyond all that the world can give? Yet these are but the beginnings of the Christian's joy: for the cup which he but *tastes*of upon earth, he shall *drink*of to the full in Heaven, where there are rivers of pleasure at God's right hand for evermore.

***~~There are two descriptions of people to whom we wish in few words to address this subject:~~***

***~~1. To those who seek after happiness, but are not pious.~~***

How long shall it be before you shall be convinced of your error? Have you not had ample proof that *Solomon's verdict*respecting all worldly enjoyments is true? Have you not found them to be "vanity and vexation of spirit?" Is there one among you that has found the creature to be anything better than "a broken cistern?" We appeal to the aged, who have had leisure to reflect upon their past experience: we appeal even to the young in the midst of all their gaieties; have you found in earthly things any solid and permanent satisfaction? Have you found a portion suited to the desires and capacities of your immortal souls? Go, ask the rich, the great, the mirthful: Are you happy? They must all tell you, that "in the fullness of their sufficiency they are in straits."

Know then, that "God is the only fountain of living water," in Christ only can you "find rest for your souls." If you continue to seek happiness in the world—and you will only treasure up sorrow and disappointment. Begin to seek happiness in the exercises of piety, and you will soon find that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

***~~2. To those who seek after piety, but are not happy.~~***

Why is this? Has our blessed Lord deceived us? Has he talked so much about the blessedness of being poor in spirit, and of mourning for sin—and is it all a delusion? Surely not. If you find not happiness in these exercises, it is because you do not engage in them aright. You either do not think so meanly of yourselves as you ought—or you are making your own vileness a reason for distrusting the tender mercy of your God. The reverse of this must be your conduct. You must endeavor to get the most humiliating views of your own guilt and helplessness; and must make that a reason not for staying away from the Savior, but for going to him. The more you feel your need of a physician, the more earnest you should be in your application to him; and the more will he be glorified in your salvation. Only follow his direction in going to him weary and heavy laden, and you shall soon experience the truth of his promise in finding rest unto your souls.

Perhaps there is *some hidden abomination*that you do not see—or will not part with. If so, it is no wonder that you are not happy: you may as well expect to be at ease while thorns are festering in your flesh, as to be happy while sin is harbored in your souls. But if it be indeed so, that you are upright before God, and are seeking the Savior with true humility of mind, and yet, through the present clouds that encompass you, you are not happy—God directs you to "stay yourself on him," and gives you this word for your encouragement, that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," it is sown, though at present it be under the clouds; and in due time it shall assuredly spring up in your souls: your "heaviness may endure for a night; but joy shall come in the morning."

#1289

***~~Christian Meekness~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.5)~~***

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

WHILE it is acknowledged on all hands, that Christianity far surpasses all other religions in the *sublimity of its doctrines*, few are aware how much it excels them also in the *purity of its precepts*. But we need go no further than to the words before us, to illustrate the superiority of the Christian code above all others.

Whatever might assimilate us to ferocious beasts, has been a subject of praise among the heathen world. To contend with enemies, to revenge affronts, to be foremost in deeds of heroism—this has exalted men to deities: but to be of a meek and yielding spirit has been deemed rather an indication of weakness, and a reason for contempt. Yet this is the spirit which our blessed Lord particularly commands, and declares to be intimately connected with true happiness.

In vindication of his assertions, we propose to set before you,

***~~I. The character here specified.~~***

The disposition which distinguishes the people here spoken of, is not that *natural*mildness and gentleness with which some are favored even from the womb—people of this description may be as far from true Christian meekness, as others who are of a more violent temper; but a meekness founded "in poverty of spirit," and in "mourning for sin," a fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul. To view the Christian in the exercise of this grace of meekness, let us look at him,

***~~1. In his conduct towards God.~~***

He no longer, like others, disputes against the word of God, or murmurs on account of the dealings of his Providence. Whatever God requires, appears, in his eyes, to be right: and whatever he does, though for the present it may be dark and inexplicable, is considered as wise and good. He dares not on any account to murmur against God. Instead of objecting to any divine declaration, command, or threatening, as "a hard saying," he "trembles at it;" and receives it with meekness as an engrafted word, "able to save his soul." He may have many and great trials; but instead of "fretting against the Lord," he bows with humble submission, saying, "Not my will, but may your will be done." "He is silent, and opens not his mouth," from the consideration that all is done by his loving and gracious Father.

***~~2. In his conduct towards men.~~***

He is **courteous**. If in his unconverted state he has been rough, severe, and harsh—the operation of divine grace will be more conspicuous in him, by reason of the greatness of the change that has been produced. He has become a new man: all around him discern and feel the difference:  
as a husband, he is more tender;  
as a father, he is more kind;  
as a master, he is more gentle;  
as a member of society, he is more engaging.

He is modest, affable, easy of access, and amiable in the whole of his deportment. There is nothing of an overbearing disposition in him, but a willingness that others should think and act for themselves as well as he. This is his character, as described by the pen of an inspired writer: he is "no brawler, but gentle, showing all meekness to all men."

He is **patient**. Many in their natural state are so irritable, that it is impossible to please them long together: they are like the sea, tossed and agitated by every breath of wind. Not so the person who has attained the character in the text.

We do not say that he never speaks unadvisedly with his lips; for even Moses, the meekest of the human race, transgressed in this particular; and, if a man so bridled his tongue, as never in any instance to offend in word, he would be altogether perfect. But the Christian has attained such a measure of self-government, as "not to be easily provoked." He is "slow to anger, knowing that the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." He accounts it "his glory to pass over a transgression." Where the offence committed is of such a nature as to require an expression of his displeasure, he endeavors so to guard his anger, so to temper it with love and pity; and so to restrain it both in measure and duration, that he may fulfill the precept, "Be angry, and sin not."

He is particularly on his guard in relation to religious controversy. If his sentiments are represented as erroneous and absurd, instead of yielding immediately to vehemence and invective, he will "give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear;" and will "instruct in meekness those who oppose him, if God perhaps may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

If, on the other hand, it falls to his lot to reprove a fallen brother, he will endeavor to "restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering himself, lest he also be tempted."

He is **forgiving**. He will receive injuries like other men: but he will not resent them as others do. He knows that he is "not to recompense evil for evil unto any man," but rather to "heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies," if by any means he may at last melt them into love: "instead of being overcome by evil, he strives with all his might to overcome evil with good." The rule to which he endeavors to conform, is that which is laid down by our blessed Lord; (and who might so well require it of us, seeing that he himself exemplifies it so wonderfully towards all his people) it is that of forgiving, not once, or seven times merely, but seventy times seven.

In this indeed he labors to resemble Christ himself, "forbearing and forgiving others, even as Christ has forgiven him." He does not, it is true, receive to his bosom a person who is so constantly offending; nor is it necessary that he should, until the person himself be renewed in the spirit of his mind. But he will so far forgive, as to bear not the smallest ill-will towards him, but to be really glad of any opportunity to do him good.

Such, though in different degrees, is the true Christian. All do not attain the same eminence in these virtues; but all are distinguished for them in proportion to the grace they have received; nor can any man be accounted a true Christian, unless he has "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

If such a man is distinguished in the *character*he sustains, he is no less so in,

***~~II. The blessedness he enjoys.~~***

The New Testament encourages us principally by a hope of spiritual blessings: yet it sometimes gives us reason to expect also such as are temporal. That the promise here given to the meek is temporal, appears from the passage in the Psalms, from whence it is quoted: and it is indeed fulfilled to everyone who answers to the character in the text.

***~~1. He has fewer occasions of disquietude than others.~~***

Others, in addition to the common calamities of life, create trouble to themselves by their ungoverned tempers. When all would be peaceable and tranquil, they by their "grievous words stir up anger." As, to a man in a fever, every posture is uneasy, every food is insipid, every office is troublesome; so, to an impatient fretful man, everything becomes a source of trouble and vexation. Both the one and the other are ready to think that people are in league, as it were, against them—but the disease is within themselves! It is the soreness of their own flesh, not the hardness of the touch, that is in reality the source of their pain.

But the man that is truly meek, cuts off, instead of multiplying, occasions of pain. By kindness and courtesy he disarms his adversary; and "by his soft words, he turns away wrath." If he has himself inadvertently done wrong, he freely acknowledges his fault. And thus, by yielding, pacifies even great offences. If he has received an injury, the same disposition leads him to accept an acknowledgment, and not to insist on all the reparation which perhaps he might be justified in requiring. In many cases, he turns away his eyes from the evil that is done, and lets it pass unnoticed. In this manner he is kept from a thousand disputes which agitate others, and passes through life with half the troubles that vex and harass the world around him.

***~~2. He is less affected by those troubles which do occur.~~***

The *sturdy oak*has often its branches broken off by a storm, or perhaps is torn up by the roots, while the *supple reed*sustains no injury at all. Thus the meek submissive Christian bears up under those trials which the stoutest of ungodly men would be unable to endure. He receives them as from the hand of God, and says, "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him."

Even when men are the immediate causes of his troubles, he still looks, through the second causes, unto God the first cause of all; and says with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed is the name of the Lord!"

How different is the state of such a man from one, who, "like a wild bull in a net," foams and bellows with unavailing rage! The world is not like the same place to the two characters: to the one it is as the confines of Hell; to the other, the portico of Heaven.

***~~3. He is more tranquil in his own mind.~~***

This necessarily arises from the two preceding considerations: but it is true in another point of view: the meek person has the testimony of a good conscience, and enjoys the presence of his God; while those who are destitute of that holy disposition, are of necessity unacquainted with these sources of heavenly consolation. As it is not possible for an impenitent unbelieving soul to taste that peace which passes all understanding; so neither can one who is morose, or irritable, or vindictive. His sins will hide good things from him, and will separate between him and his God.

The promise in the text is supposed by many to refer to the land of Canaan; and to that as typical of Heaven. And certainly in this sense also it is fulfilled to those who are truly meek. Often do they, (and never more than when suffering for righteousness' sake,) obtain *Pisgah views*of that promised land; and often are refreshed with the grapes of Eschol, even when most destitute of earthly comforts. In a word, they have a joy with which the stranger does not understand, and which is a pledge and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance.

***~~Address.~~***

Let Peter be heard in confirmation of all that has been said: "Good days" are "a blessing" which God designs us "to inherit," and a meek demeanor is the means by which we are to obtain it.

Let us not, however, put any Christian grace in the place of Christ: it is He, and he alone, that can give us either peace with God, or peace in our own consciences. Nevertheless, meekness, as a means, is conducive to happiness: and it is in vain to expect happiness, either in this world or in the next, if we do not attain it. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom."

#1290

***~~Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.6)~~***

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

MEN naturally desire happiness: but they know not in what it is to be found. The philosophers of old wearied themselves in vain to find out what was man's chief good was. But our blessed Lord has informed us wherein it consists: *happiness is found in holiness alone*; which, when embodied, as it were, and exercised in all its branches, renders us completely blessed. In this sense we understand the words of our text; wherein are set forth:

***~~I. The distinctive character of a Christian.~~***

It is a gross perversion of Scripture to interpret this passage as relating to the righteousness of Christ: for though it is true that every Christian desires to be clothed in that righteousness, and shall, in consequence of that desire, obtain his wishes—yet it is not the truth contained in the words before us: they certainly relate to *that inward righteousness which every Christian must possess, and to that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*." Now the character of every Christian is, that he desires holiness.

***~~1. The true Christian desires holiness SUPREMELY.~~***

Other desires are not eradicated from the human heart: the natural appetites remain after our conversion the same as before—except as they are restrained and governed by a higher principle. In proportion, indeed, as religion gains an ascendant in the soul, those words will be verified, "He who eats and drinks of the water that Christ will give him, shall never thirst." But from the very commencement of the divine life, all earthly things sink in the Christian's estimation, and are accounted as dung and dross in comparison of the Divine image. In this sense "Christ is all" to him: and he can say, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with you."

***~~2. The true Christian desires holiness CONTINUALLY.~~***

While other desires remain in the heart, they will of course occasionally rise in opposition to the better principle: but *the prevailing desire of the soul is after holiness*. "The flesh may lust against the Spirit," and seem for a moment to triumph over it: but "the Spirit will lust and strive against the flesh," until it has vanquished its rebellious motions. The compass needle may be driven by force from its accustomed position: but its attractions are ever towards the pole; and it will never rest until it has resumed its usual place. Its momentary diversion serves but to prove its fixed habitual inclination. In like manner, temptation itself, in rousing up the soul to action—calls forth its heavenly tendencies, and displays the holy energies with which it is endued.

***~~3. The true Christian desires holiness INSATIABLY.~~***

Every other desire may be satiated; but *the more of spiritual nourishment we receive, the more will our hunger and thirst after it be increased*. Paul himself could not sit down contented; but forgetting what he had attained, he reached forth for higher degrees of holiness. It is only "when we awake up after the perfect likeness of our God, that we shall be satisfied with it."

Truly enviable will this state appear, if we consider,

***~~II. The blessedness annexed to it.~~***

To be filled with good and nutritious food is the utmost that the bodily appetite can desire. It is in this sense that we are to understand the promise in the text.

***~~1. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made TRULY righteous.~~***

There is a negative kind of holiness, which is neither pleasing to God nor profitable to man: it consists merely in an abstinence from open sin, and a discharge of external duties. But *real holiness pervades the whole man:*it comprehends the whole circle of divine graces: it reaches to the thoughts and desires of the heart; and assimilates us to God in all his communicable perfections. Now this is that with which the true Christian shall be filled. In all his dispositions towards God and man, he shall be changed: he shall not only be delivered from all that would injure his character among men, but shall be "transformed into the very image of his God in righteousness and true holiness."

***~~2. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made PROGRESSIVELY righteous.~~***

That degree of maturity to which Christians may attain, is not gained at once. All the members of the new man, as well as of the material body, do indeed exist at the moment of our birth: but they are then in a state of infantile weakness: and their arrival at a state of maturity is a gradual work.

Just so, this work shall be advanced in the souls of those who earnestly desire it: "they shall hold on their way, growing stronger and stronger;" and, like the risen sun, "shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day." "The Lord will perfect that which concerns them," and "carry on his work until the day of Christ!"

***~~3. The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, shall be made PERFECTLY righteous.~~***

Though absolute perfection is not to be attained in this life, yet every righteous person may expect it as the completion of his wishes, and the consummation of his bliss. The moment that his soul is released from this frail tabernacle, it shall bid an everlasting farewell to sin and sorrow. The hunger and thirst which characterize him in this world, will then cease forever: there will remain to him no heights unattained, no wishes unaccomplished. His soul will be "filled" with the desired good, yes, filled to the utmost extent of its capacity!

***~~Application.~~***

**Are there those who, instead of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, *despise*it?** Tell me, will you despise it in the day of judgment? Will you despise it, when you shall see the difference that is put between the godly and the ungodly?

And what is that which you prefer to it? Can you say of your pleasures, your riches, or your honors—what our Lord says of righteousness? Shall you certainly be filled with those things? or if you were, would they ever render you truly blessed? Go, ask of Solomon, or ask of any who have made the experiment; and see whether, in their sober moments, they will not confess those things to be "vanity and vexation of spirit?" O "spend not your money any more for that which is not bread, nor labor for that which satisfies not; but eat that which is good, and let your soul be satisfied with fatness."

**Are there those who rest in a *form*of religion?** Know that it is not the *form*, but the *power*, of godliness that God requires. The Pharisees of old abounded in outward duties; but "unless your righteousness exceeds theirs, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven." That which you must desire, that which you must attain, is a universal change both of heart and life: you must become new creatures: old things must pass away, and all things become new."

**Are there any discouraged because of the small proficiency they have made in holiness?** Doubtless this is a matter of lamentation to the best of men. If indeed we are excusing ourselves, and pacifying our consciences from the idea that in this frail state we cannot but commit sin, we are deceiving our own souls. For "he who is born of God, sins not;" that is, he allows not himself in any sin, whether of excess or defect; whether of commission or of omission.

But if "our souls are really athirst for God, and we are panting after him, as the deer after the water-brooks," we need not fear. God will before long "fill the hungry with good things;" "he will satisfy the longing soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul." The very idea of hunger is a painful sensation of want; and if holiness be the object of that appetite-then all shall be well, yes, and all is well: "that soul is blessed, and shall be filled."

#1291

***~~The Reward of Mercifulness~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.7)~~***

"Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

THERE can be no doubt but that every Minister should set forth the peculiar *doctrines*of the Gospel with frequency and firmness. If he lays not the foundation well, he can never hope to have his labors crowned with success.

On the other hand, it befits him very earnestly to inculcate the necessity of a Christian *character*: and, if he is not attentive to this, he must expect, that, while his people are filled with head-knowledge, they will dishonor their profession both by their spirit and conduct.

Our blessed Lord, throughout this whole discourse, shows us the importance of cultivating holy and heavenly dispositions: and, at the same time that he corrects the false notions which were entertained respecting the nature of his kingdom, declares unequivocally, that it is *the practical Christian*, and he alone, who is truly blessed.

In considering the declaration before us, let us inquire,

***~~I. Who are they that answer to the character in the text.~~***

Love has respect to men universally, whatever their condition be; but *mercifulness has respect to them as objects of pity and compassion*. Now "the merciful" man sympathizes with people in affliction, and desires to relieve them. He looks with an eye of pity,

***~~1. The merciful Christian will look with an eye of pity upon those who are bowed down under their troubles.~~***

If their trials be of a *temporal*nature, he longs to render them such service as their necessities require.

Are they laboring under *bodily*diseases? he will rejoice to procure for them all necessary aid.

Are they oppressed with *poverty*, or in embarrassed circumstances? he will deny himself in order to impart to them.

Are they distressed on account of painful *bereavements*? he will labor to assuage the anguish of their minds by tender assiduities and suitable consolations.

If their trials are of a *spiritual*nature, he will labor to bring them to that heavenly Physician, who will apply "the balm of Gilead" to their souls.

If a sense of *guilt*appals them, he will lead them to "the fountain opened for sin," and encourage them with assurances that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse them from all sin."

If they be sorely *tempted*by Satan, he will endeavor to counteract the wiles and devices of their great adversary, and to direct them to that adorable Savior, whose "grace shall be sufficient for them."

If they are dejected on account of the *hidings*of God's face, he will "strengthen their weak hands, and confirm their feeble knees, and say unto their fearful hearts, Your God will come and save you!"

***~~2. The merciful Christian will look with an eye of pity upon those who, though unconscious of their state, are really in a pitiable condition.~~***

Does he behold a poor drunken man staggering in the streets? he cannot laugh at his frantic gestures, but is ready to weep over him, as he would over a maniac or an idiot that was lacerating his own flesh, or beating his head against a wall. The scoffing infidel, the proud Pharisee, the profane sensualist, the self-deceiving professor, and the bitter persecutor—all in their turn call forth his compassionate regards. He mourns over them, well knowing the misery which they are bringing on themselves: and, instead of despising them on account of the superiority of his own character—he longs, if possible, to "turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." If he sees any hopeful signs in them, "he travails in birth with them, until Christ be formed in them." Even if they are incorrigibly obstinate, he will not presently give up all hope, but will still watch for opportunities of doing them good. Filled with compassion towards them, he will, if possible, "save them with fear, pulling them out of the fire." If he himself is treated evil by them, he is affected with pity rather than with anger; and laments, not so much the injury which he suffers from them, as the injury they do unto their own souls.

Such is the merciful man. O that there were in all of us such a heart!

To prove that all such characters are "blessed," we shall proceed to inquire,

***~~II. What is the reward promised to them.~~***

"They shall obtain mercy," says our blessed Lord. But from whom? from man? yes, from man. Good men universally will account it the joy of their hearts to minister unto them, whenever occasion shall require it. And even bad men have within themselves such a conviction of the excellence of such characters, that they must do violence to themselves, before they can withhold that assistance which their necessities may require. Thus Job found it, and so shall we.

But supposing that men are ungrateful and unmerciful, still such characters shall be blessed; for God will be merciful unto them:

***~~1. Here.~~***

He will rather feed them by the ministry of ravens, than allow them to lack. "The lions may lack and suffer hunger; but they shall not lack any good thing." "God will supply all their needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," and "will bless them in all that they put their hand unto."

But it is in their *souls*that they shall experience the richest blessings. Who can express the joy and delight which merciful men often experience in the exercise of their benevolence. It is no little joy that they diffuse; but infinitely more that they receive: they find the truth of that favorite saying of our Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This, indeed, is promised to them—and that God who cannot lie, will not fail to fulfill his word. In the time of their own greatest need, they shall find God's mercy to them most abundant.

We make our appeal to all who have exerted themselves much in doing good, whether they have not found it incomparably "better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting."

***~~2. Hereafter.~~***

Though no dispositions or actions of ours can *merit*anything at the hands of God, he will give unto them "a reward of grace." He would even account himself "unjust," if he did not do so. He considers himself as our debtor for everything that we do, provided we do it from a sense of gratitude to him, and with zeal for his glory; and "he will repay us." Not even "a cup of cold water, given for his sake," shall pass without a recompense.

Our exertions in acts of mercy will be the peculiar subjects of his inquiry in the day of judgment, and will be considered as evidences either of our being fit for glory, or ripe for vengeance. And if we be found to have fulfilled his will in relation to them, our harvest shall be proportioned to the seed that we have sown.

Certainly it befits us to be jealous of ourselves, that we do not found our hopes of salvation upon our deeds of mercy: for Jesus Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope. But if we look for happiness to arise from the employment of "the unrighteous mammon," we must look for it, not in the hoarding of riches, nor in making them subservient to carnal gratifications, but in doing good with them: and in that view, we do lay up a good foundation against the time to come, a foundation that shall stand forever.

***~~We will subjoin for your use some beneficial cautions:~~***

***~~1. Be careful to distinguish between mercy and piety.~~***

It is possible for people to be of a merciful disposition, while they are utter strangers to real piety. Natural constitution has made some more tender than others; and education has formed some to better habits. But it often happens that people of benevolent minds imagine *all*religion to consist in acts of kindness to their fellow-creatures. They found this notion even on the word of God itself: but they sadly misinterpret that passage, and entirely overlook the duty of "walking humbly with God." But this is no less necessary than acts of justice and of mercy: yes, without it all our virtues will he no better than *splendid sins*.

***~~2. Be careful at the same time to combine mercy with piety.~~***

Piety cannot exist without mercy. "The wisdom that is from above is full of mercy and good fruits." "The tree that brings forth not good fruit is fit only to be hewn down and cast into the fire." It is by "bearing one another's burdens that we fulfill the law of Christ."

We may talk of love to God, but we cannot possess it, if we delight not in every act and exercise of love. We may give good words to our poverty-stricken neighbor; but, if we do not administer relief at the same time, he will be no better for us.*As our pretenses to love will be of no benefit to him, so neither will our pretenses to faith be of any benefit to ourselves.* If we have not learned to "weep with those who weep," it is to no purpose to call ourselves Christians: we only deceive our own souls."

But it may be said, We have not a capacity to instruct our fellow-creatures; nor have we ability to relieve them: must we therefore be excluded from the number of true Christians? No, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not." But let us be sure that there is in us that willing mind, and that God sees "the yearning of our affections" in secret prayer for the relief of those, whom, in other respects, we are unable to assist.

***~~3. Be on your guard against any declension in the exercise of this duty.~~***

We are changeable creatures; and they who "have run well" for a season, are sometimes "hindered" in a more advanced stage of their course. But let us be on our guard, that we "be not weary in well-doing." If we have learned how "to walk and to please God, we should then endeavor to abound more and more." There is no limit at which we should stop. God himself is the pattern we should keep in view; and we should seek to "be merciful as our Father who is in Heaven is merciful."

If we want *motives*to exertion, let us reflect on the mercy shown to us by our adorable Lord and Savior, "who gave his own life a ransom for us," or let us consider what compassion he yet daily exercises towards us, "being touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and, as he has so loved us as to die for us, let us remember, that life itself is not too great a sacrifice for us to make, to promote the welfare of our fellow-creatures.

#1292

***~~Purity of Heart~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.8)~~***

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

THERE is nothing in which mankind more generally imagine happiness to consist than in the uncontrolled indulgence of their selfish passions. It is probable that among those who looked for the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom, many pleased themselves with the idea, that his victories would open to them a way for multiplying captives to any extent, and consequently for the unlimited gratification of their corrupt appetites. To counteract such absurd notions, and to evince the spiritual nature of his kingdom, our blessed Lord declared, that happiness was to be found, not "in assimilating" ourselves to the brute creation, but in purity of heart and life: "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

***~~I. The character here mentioned, is that which first claims our attention.~~***

**Purity of heart may be considered as*opposed to hypocrisy***. In that sense it denotes a freedom from base and selfish ends in the whole of our transactions, both with God and man.

*As strange as it may seem, the duties of religion itself may be performed from very unworthy motives. Pride, ostentation, self-righteousness, self-delight, may lie at the foundation of those very services whereby we pretend to honor God; and may render them, not only worthless, but hateful in his sight.*

Our conduct also towards *man*may appear to be very favorable, and yet be full of dissimulation and deceit. It is no uncommon thing, as all who are conversant with the world know, to see men, under the guise of *friendship*, aiming only at the advancement of their own interests. Such *duplicity*is hateful to a true Christian. He who is "an Israelite indeed, is without deceit."

Purity of heart, in this sense, is beautifully exemplified in the Apostle Paul, whose ministrations had no other object than to advance the glory of God in the salvation of men. O that all of us possessed the same integrity; and could, like him, appeal both to God and man for *the purity of our intentions, and the simplicity of our minds!*

**But purity may also be understood in opposition to impurity:** and, if we suppose that our Lord designed to condemn the sensuality of those who expected the Messiah as a temporal Prince, we must of course annex that meaning to his words. Perhaps the more enlarged sense of the text, as comprehending both ideas, is the more just: but as the latter idea is of singular importance, we shall consider the character chiefly in reference to that.

We observe, then, that the person who is pure in heart,

***~~1. Abstains from all acts of impurity.~~***

Others may make light of fornication and adultery: but he knows them to be ruinous and damning sins: and he abstains from them, not merely from the fear of detection and disgrace, but *from a dread of displeasing Almighty God, and of plunging his soul into everlasting misery*. He is well convinced, that "the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." He considers "his body as a member of Christ himself," and, if tempted to "take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot," he exclaims with horror, "God forbid!"

***~~2. Harbors no evil desires in his heart.~~***

Being of like passions with others, he cannot but feel as others on some occasions: but he has learned through grace to counteract the propensities of nature, and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." He knows that "fleshly lusts war against the soul;" and that, if not vigorously opposed in the first instance, they will soon gain the ascendant, and lead him captive. He sees how others are enslaved, "having eyes full of adultery, and cannot cease from sin." He has heard of that confession in the book of Proverbs, "I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly," and he dreads lest he in like manner should become a prey to his evil passions.

*If evil thoughts or desires arise*, he regards them as fire, which, if not extinguished speedily, will inflame and consume his soul. Hence he prays day and night, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." He is not contented with being "like a whited sepulcher, beautiful without, but full of all impurity within," he is as attentive to "the *inside*of the cup and platter," as he is to its *exterior*appearance.

***~~3. Avoids the occasions of evil.~~***

Many who have a regard for their character, will yet make no scruple of reading books, or hearing songs, or attending scenes, which tend to vitiate the mind. They will even court occasions of evil, delighting in that company and conversation which they know by experience to produce sinful impressions on their hearts.

Not so the person that is pure in heart: he stands at a distance from every polluting object. Like Joseph, he flies from those who would corrupt him. Like Job, he "makes a covenant with his eyes" and with his heart—that he will neither look, nor think, upon an object that will ensnare him. He knows that "the very thought of foolishness is sin;" and he is determined through grace, that "vain thoughts shall not lodge with him." He hates them: he loathes himself for his propensity to indulge them; and he longs to be "holy as God himself is holy."

***~~II. The blessedness of those who have attained this character, is the next point to be considered:~~***

***~~1. They shall enjoy a sight of God in this world.~~***

It is true, that "God dwells in the light which no man can approach unto," and that, in strictness of speech, "no man has seen him, or can see him." But there were manifestations of him given to his people of old, sometimes through the medium of the human or angelic form, and sometimes by a bright effulgence of his glory.

There are also other manifestations which God still makes of himself to the souls of men; and which he will grant to the pure in heart. It must not, however, be expected that, in speaking of these things, we can bring them down to the apprehension of the ungodly: they have no *eyes*to see them, no *ears*to hear them, no *understandings*to understand them: and it is as vain to speak of these things to them, as it would be to speak of colors to the blind, or sounds to the deaf, or tastes to those who had no palate.

Nevertheless we must affirm, on the authority of God himself, that "the pure in heart shall see God." They shall see him in his ordinances, while others are altogether unconscious of his presence. They shall see him in their secret chamber, where he will draw near unto them, and "say, Here I am." They shall see him in all the works of creation, and in all the dispensations of his providence. They shall see him in every *comfort*and in every *cross*. His wisdom, his goodness, his love, his mercy, his faithfulness, are ever before their eyes. They have such views of him and his perfections as words cannot describe; and such fellowship with him as a carnal man has no idea of.

The impure may mourn, and even "howl upon their beds;" but the pure, like Moses of old, have near access to God, and see "him who is invisible;" and by this sight are strengthened, supported, comforted, and sanctified.

***~~2. They shall behold the beatific vision in Heaven.~~***

Thither the unclean can never be admitted. As well might "light have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial," as they participate the blessedness of Heaven.

If it be asked, "*Who*shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place?" the answer is, "He who has clean hands, and a pure heart." To him a glorious inheritance is promised: for him a place in the heavenly mansions is prepared: a seat upon the very throne of God himself is reserved for him. There shall his organs of vision be strengthened to behold all the glory of the Godhead. At present he "sees God only as through a glass, darkly; but then he will behold him face to face. Now he knows God only in part; but then he will know him, even as he himself is known."

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. The mirthful and dissipated.~~***

Perhaps you refrain from gross iniquity; and therefore "imagine yourselves pure, though you are not washed from your inward filthiness." In this notion you are countenanced by the world at large—but "let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of inward impurity, as well as outward impurity, the wrath of God comes upon all the children of disobedience." "Your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit; and if any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy." Nevertheless, if you sincerely repent of your past sins, you shall be forgiven; and if you believe in Christ, you shall be both sanctified and saved.

***~~2. The mere professors of religion.~~***

How many who have run well for a season have been hindered and turned aside through the prevalence of their own evil passions! How many professors afford lamentable proof of the influence of *unsubdued lusts*.

A religious person first conceives a thought; and that *thought*is allowed to dwell upon his mind.

The mind inflamed, yields to the impulse of desire so far as to court familiarity with the alluring object.

Conscience reproves; but the deceitful heart suggests that, as no positive act of sin is intended, no evil will arise.

Corruption now begins to work more strongly; and every renewed familiarity with temptation increases its power over us; so that we scarcely know how to keep from the place or person whom we ought to shun.

Conscience remonstrates, but in vain; until at last the devil takes us in his snare, and we bring disgrace on our holy profession, and cause the name of God to be blasphemed.

This is the history of many a religious person.

Would we avoid this melancholy *end?*Then let us avoid the *means*. Let us "keep our hearts with all diligence," let us live near to God, and beg of him to keep us. Let us beware how we "grieve his Spirit," by tampering with sin, or parleying with temptation. Let us "walk in the Spirit; and then we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." Let us often ask ourselves: What shall we think of such things in a dying hour? Little do you think, whoever you are that are yielding to the tempter, how you are filling your dying pillow with thorns; and will most probably bring on yourself a condemnation far heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. O may God take you out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set your feet upon a rock, and establish your goings!"

But concerning this evil we may say, as our Lord said concerning a deaf and dumb spirit whom his disciples could not cast out, "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting."

***~~3. The conscientious Christian.~~***

Blessed are you, who are enabled to maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and man." You are blessed, and shall be blessed. If you do not see so much of God as you would, you have far different views of him from what they have who give way to sin. The time is fast approaching, when you shall no more complain of darkness and distance from God, but shall "behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with it."

Yet even to you must I say: Watch against the assaults of sin and Satan.

It is not past experience that will keep you: for Solomon fell "after God had appeared to him twice."

Nor is it high attainments that will preserve you: for the man after God's own heart became a monument of human frailty and depravity.

Nor is even marriage itself sufficient to extinguish the unhallowed flame. You may have, if I may so say, whole flocks at your command, and yet it will not keep you from coveting your neighbor's ewe-lamb.

It is grace, and grace alone, that will enable you to hold on unto the end. In Christ you may trust with joyful confidence: "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding join." Moreover, he has promised that "you shall have no temptation without a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." Apply this promise to your souls, and you shall be enabled to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Depend not for one moment on yourselves, but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ," and may the very God of Peace sanctify you wholly! I pray God that your whole body, soul, and spirit, may be sanctified wholly unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

#1293

***~~The Peace-Makers~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.9)~~***

"Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God."

RELIGION is altogether a practical thing. It has its foundation indeed in *doctrines*and *principles*; but it has a superstructure of *dispositions*and *actions*, which are necessary both to its completion and utility. Nothing can be a stronger proof of this than the discourse before us: for, however we may suppose it designed to rectify men's notions respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and to explain the law in opposition to the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees—its direct tendency is to raise the standard of morality both in the hearts and lives of men.

The *beatitudes*which we have already considered, refer principally to the exercises of the heart. That which we propose to notice at this time, relates to the conduct: and, as our blessed Lord has counted it worthy of such a conspicuous place in his discourse, we may be well assured that it deserves from us the most attentive consideration.

Let us then, as on former occasions, consider,

***~~I. The character here spoken of.~~***

The term which we translate "peace-makers," may be understood, like those which have preceded it, as marking only a pacific temperament and conduct. But in that view it will correspond very nearly with "the meek," whose character has been already considered. We therefore take the word agreeably to the sense in which it is translated; and observe, that the peacemakers are those who are studious,

***~~1. To preserve peace where it is.~~***

View them in the whole of their conduct, and they will be found "following after the things which make for peace."

View them in the STATE. They are not like many who take upon them to condemn everything which their governors do. No, they see the evil of a murmuring, discontented, turbulent, and seditious spirit. They are "afraid to speak evil of dignities," they bear in mind the command of God, "You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people," and, instead of "exercising themselves in matters that are too high for them," and presuming to judge of measures without having one half the grounds of judgment before them, and "meddling with those who are given to change," they are characterized as people "quiet in the land."

View them in the CHURCH. It is their constant endeavor so to walk as to "give no offence in anything," to "cast no stumbling-block before any," but to edify all in faith and love.

Many there are, so bigoted to their own denomination, sect or party, or so fond of some particular doctrines, that they can scarcely meet a brother or a sister without bringing forward their favorite opinions; and not at all concerned what perplexities they cause in the minds of individuals, or what divisions in the Church, provided they can but make proselytes, and increase their own party.

Such generally obtrude themselves wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached; and are but too successful in "beguiling unstable souls," and in "corrupting them from the simplicity that is in Christ." This they do in direct opposition to the command, "Receive him who is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations." The peace-makers, on the contrary, will "bear the infirmities of the weak;" will deny themselves many lawful things, rather than wound a tender conscience; and will "become all things to all men," in short, they will do anything, or forbear anything, that they may "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

View them in the FAMILY. Here they are conspicuous for their unremitting exercise of forbearance and love. They do not take offence at every trifle: and, instead of thwarting the little humours and peculiarities of those around them, they are happy to gratify them, and to win their affections by courtesy and condescension. They remember that wise proverb, "Where no wood is, the fire goes out; so where there is no tale-bearer, the strife ceases," and, from a regard to this, they will not listen to tales and stories; much less will they contribute to the circulation of them. If constrained to hear one side of a question, they will suspend their judgment until they have heard the other: and will be studious to weaken, rather than confirm, the unfavorable impressions of the accuser's mind. If a person seems determined to strive with them, they will rather yield their right, than maintain a controversy with him.

Their conduct in their families may be briefly summed up in those words of David, "They keep their tongue from evil, and their lips from speaking deceit: they depart from evil, and do good; they seek peace, and pursue it."

***~~2. To restore peace it where it is not.~~***

They do not impertinently obtrude themselves on others, or interfere in concerns which belong not to them: they are aware that "he who meddles with strife belonging not to him, is like one who takes a dog by the ears." Yet, if they see an opportunity where they may properly interpose, they are willing, even at a considerable risk, to exert themselves to the utmost for the restoration of peace.

If chosen, or permitted to arbitrate between parties, they will not undertake the office but in a spirit of love, and with an ardent longing to accomplish the desired end. In executing the office of an umpire, they guard against any undue bias; well knowing, that without the strictest impartiality they can never hope to bring over the contending parties to an acquiescence in their decisions. Having begun the good work, they will persevere in it, notwithstanding all the discouragements which they may meet with from the obstinacy of those whom they attempt to reconcile. The more blameworthy of the two will usually be found the more unreasonable and perverse: but they will patiently bear with much opposition, if by any means they may attain the great object of their wishes.

In the exercise of this benevolent disposition, the are sure to find,

***~~II. The blessedness annexed to it.~~***

When it is said that "they shall be called the children of God, we must understand, that,

***~~1. They shall be so in reality.~~***

That this is the import of the expression, appears from the parallel passage in John's Epistles; where, having represented believers as called the children of God, he immediately adds, "Now are we the sons of God," and to the same effect he speaks in his Gospel; "To as many as believed, to them he gave power to become the sons of God."

Of course we must throughout all these beatitudes, guard against supposing that the reward annexed to the different dispositions is founded on any *merit*in man. The reward must always be considered as "a reward of grace, and not as a debt." It is not to be conceived that there should be such merit in making peace between our fellow-creatures, as that it should deserve such a reward at the hands of God. If we only bear this in mind, we need not be afraid of expecting all the honor which God here promises to the peaceful man.

It is taken for granted, that, in our offices of love to man, we are actuated by a sense of love to God: and that, while we labor to promote peace among our brethren, we are careful to have peace maintained between God and our own souls by the blood of Christ. Then shall we be "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty," yes, we shall "have a name given to us better than of sons and of daughters."

Together with this relation to God, the peace-makers shall possess all the exalted privileges connected with it: "being *sons*, they shall be *heirs*; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." It does "not indeed fully appear what they shall hereafter be: but this we know, that when they shall see their heavenly Father, they shall be like him; for they shall see him as he is."

***~~2. They shall be reputed such by their fellow-creatures.~~***

It is true, that the world at large are not very ready to acknowledge the excellencies of believers, or to allow their claims of relationship to God. But there is something in a *peaceful spirit*, which carries its own evidence along with it, and constrains the beholder to do it homage.

Paul particularly notices this; and declares that he who acts under its influence for the honor of Christ, is both "accepted of God, and approved of men." We know indeed that the enmity of the human heart against God is such, as to instigate men to persecute even unto death the very people whom in their consciences they cannot but admire. We therefore do not mean to say that the peace-makers shall meet with no hostility from men, for our blessed Lord and his Apostles were all crucified or slain. But that the proper tendency of their conduct is, to conciliate the regard of men, and to impress them with the idea, that they are actuated by the grace of God, and honored with his peculiar favor.

Surely this blessedness is worthy of our pursuit. To be Children of the Most High God is the great object to which we should continually aspire: and to approve ourselves such to others is also most desirable; because we shall thereby "silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrain them to "glorify our Father who is in Heaven."

***~~Let me, in conclusion, urge you to seek this blessed character.~~***

**Think how *happy*you will be in the possession of it.** "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of those who make peace." It is not possible to engage much in such labors of love, without having our own souls refreshed and comforted with the heavenly employment. The sacred oil which you pour on the heads of others, will regale you with its fragrancies; and the dews of divine grace, which, through your instrumentality, descend on others, shall enrich and fertilize your own souls.

**Consider further, how *serviceable*you will be in your day and generation.** As one litigious or contentious person may be the means of producing incalculable evils to the Church and to society; (for a little fire is sufficient to destroy a whole town;) so one pious, discreet, and active peace-maker may extinguish flames, which might have spread desolation and misery all around. See an instance of this in *Abigail*, who, by her seasonable interposition, restrained the wrath of David, and saved the lives of Nabal and all his family. Thus may you confer blessings on all around you, and heap blessings also on your own heads.

**Lastly, consider what a *recompense*awaits you in the eternal world.** There shall this promise be fulfilled to you in its utmost extent.

Cultivate then this amiable disposition, that you may be "sons of God, without rebuke, and shine as lights in a benighted world."

#1294

***~~Persecution for Righteousness' Sake~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:10–12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10â12)~~***

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

CHRISTIANITY, to one who is not acquainted with its real nature, must appear full of *paradoxes*. In the preceding verses, we are informed what practical religion is; and, in the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, we have the same truths yet more plainly and explicitly declared. Had any uninspired person avowed such sentiments, we would have been ready to pronounce him mad: for there is scarcely anything which we regard with dread, but a blessing is annexed to it; or anything which we consider as desirable, but a woe is denounced against it: the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the despised, are congratulated; and the rich, the full, the laughing, and the honored, are represented as in a truly pitiable condition. But perhaps the greatest paradox of all is that people possessed of vital Christianity should be objects of persecution; that their piety should be the ground of that persecution; and that they should, on this very account, be esteemed happy. But so it is: and so it will appear; if we consider,

***~~I. The case here supposed.~~***

Our blessed Lord evidently supposes that his people will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. But,

***~~This, it must be confessed, is a very improbable case.~~***

The very character of his people seems to preclude the idea. Were the disciples of Christ the very reverse of what they are, we might well expect them to be objects of hatred and contempt. But who can hate the humble, the meek, the pure, the peaceful, and those whose chief desire is to serve and honor God? What connection can there be between the verses of our text, and the whole preceding context? One would imagine that the declaration before us was altogether destitute of any foundation in fact.

That their very *righteousness*should be the ground of their suffering, appears still more strange. If they were obnoxious to the charge of sedition, or to anything else that rendered them bad members of society, one would not wonder that they should be evil treated on those accounts, notwithstanding they might in other respects be eminently holy. But that their conformity to Christ should be the true reason of the world's enmity against them, seems incredible.

***~~We are taught to expect that it would exist.~~***

Our blessed Lord warned all his disciples, that they would receive, each in his appointed measure, the very same treatment as he received. And his Apostles guard us against being surprised or offended at it.

We must not indeed imagine that our enemies will avow the real ground of their aversion: they will not say, I hate you for your piety: they will give some other name to piety: they will call it fanaticism, or hypocrisy, or intolerance; and under that character will raise up their voice against it. When the Jews threatened to stone our Lord, he said to them, "Many good works have I done among you; for which of them do you stone me?" They replied, "For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because that you, being a man, make yourself God."

In like manner they sought to put him to death for violating, as they alleged, the sanctity of the Sabbath day. But whence came all this zeal for God's honor, and for the observance of the Sabbath? Were they all so holy and so righteous? No, in the midst of all their pretended concern for God's law, they were ready enough to violate it themselves, and even to commit murder: which was a demonstration, that the reasons they assigned were mere pretexts; and that *the sanctity of his character was the true ground of their opposition to him*. Precisely thus must we expect persecution, ostensibly as evil-doers, but really as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

***~~Experience proves that it does exist.~~***

Look at the holy men of old: where will you find one who was not persecuted for righteousness sake? And are the descendants of Cain or of Ishmael extinct? Is not that which Paul spoke in reference to Ishmael, still found true? "As then he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now."

Christians are not indeed dragged, as formerly, to prison and to death: but shall we therefore say that they are not persecuted? Are they not "reviled?" Have they not "all manner of evil spoken against them falsely?" Do not men "separate them from their company," and "reproach them, and cast out their name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake?" Yes truly: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer, yes and do suffer, persecution."*There is not a single exception to be found.*Times and circumstances may produce considerable difference in the nature or degree of opposition which may be made to the Lord's people: but all will have to experience some. *Christianity is the same in itself that it ever was: and it will be found the same in its effects*. Christ "came not to bring peace, but a sword," and whoever gives himself up to Christ, must expect to find that "his greatest foes will be those of his own household."

Granting, then, that this case does exist, let us consider,

***~~II. The light in which it should be viewed.~~***

To the eye of sense it has a very terrific aspect: but to the eye of faith it is by no means formidable: on the contrary, the believer views his persecutions,

***~~1. As a badge of honor.~~***

He looks back on all the prophets; he looks at Christ and his Apostles; and sees that they all trod the same thorny path before him, and "were made perfect through sufferings." Hence he views persecution as "the reproach of Christ;" and, in submitting to it, considers himself as "a partaker of Christ's sufferings." While others consider him as degraded by the contempt cast upon him, he regards himself rather as exalted by it; he views it as "turning unto him for a testimony," that he is indeed a faithful servant of his Lord.

Paul, speaking of sufferings for Christ's sake, represents them as a special gift of God, an honor bestowed upon us for Christ's sake: and in this light all the Apostles regarded them. For when they had been imprisoned and scourged for their fidelity to their Divine Master, they went out of the presence of the Council, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ's sake."

Thus, Christian, should you do: you should "glory in the cross of Christ;" you should "take pleasure in persecutions for Christ's sake;" and instead of being ashamed of the indignities which you suffer, you should glorify God on account of them.

***~~2. As a means of good.~~***

Even at present the believer feels that his trials are subservient to his best interests; that his tribulations tend to increase his "patience, experience, and hope;" and bring him a hundredfold blessings into his soul. And when he looks forward to the eternal world, and considers how rich "a recompense" he shall there receive for every sacrifice which he has here made for God, he "accounts himself happy" in being called to bear the cross. He knows that "the trial of his faith will be found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" and that "his afflictions, which are but light and momentary, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He expects assuredly "the kingdom of Heaven," because God has promised it to him. Yes, he expects more: he expects that "his reward shall be great in Heaven," and increased in proportion to his sufferings. He expects it also as a just retribution: but still he does not expect it as *merited*by those sufferings: he makes the atoning blood of Christ the only foundation of his hope: and it is for Christ's merits, and not his own, that he is thus exalted.

This distinction is accurately marked by the Apostle John; who, seeing in a vision all the martyred saints who "had come out of much tribulation," tells us, that "they had washed their robes," not in their own tears or blood, but "in the blood of the Lamb; and that therefore they were before the throne of God." Bear this in mind, my brethren, and do not hesitate to expect all that God has promised.

***~~3. As a ground of joy.~~***

Our blessed Lord, in reference to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, says, "Blessed are you;" and he calls upon them to "rejoice, and be exceeding glad." To the same effect also his Apostles speak; congratulating every persecuted saint, and encouraging him to "glory in all his tribulations."

Doubtless, "afflictions are not joyous in themselves, but grievous." But when regarded in the preceding views, they become real sources and grounds of joy. Paul was certainly a very competent judge: and he, after a careful computation founded on actual experience, says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!" However painful therefore they may be, if only they conduce to our everlasting felicity, they must, and will, to every believing soul, be an occasion of joy. He will "take joyfully the confiscation of his goods;" and, if his blood is poured out as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice and service of the Church's faith, he will congratulate himself on it as a happy event, for which he has reason to bless and glorify his God.

***~~Let me however subjoin a word of caution.~~***

***~~Take care that your cross is indeed the cross of Christ.~~***

If it is brought upon you by your own fault or imprudence, it is your own cross, and not the cross of Christ. See that you do not, from a pretended zeal for God, neglect or violate your duties to man. If you suffer, take care that it is for well-doing, and not for evil doing.

***~~Let me add also a word of encouragement.~~***

God does not "send you on a warfare at your own charges." He bids you to "commit your soul to him in well-doing," with an assured hope that he will keep it. Your merciful Savior, who has trod the way before you, will sympathize with you under your trials, and overrule them all for your good, and in due time put you safely, and forever, beyond the reach of all!

#1295

***~~Christians the Salt of the Earth~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.13)~~***

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

LITTLE does the world think how much they are indebted to those very saints whom they "revile and persecute for righteousness' sake." The extirpation of them (which is so much desired by many) would leave the world an entire mass of corruption, without anything to heal its disorders, or to stop its progress towards utter destruction. Were the saints removed out of it, the rest would soon become as Sodom and Gomorrah.

The representation given of them in the text fully justifies this idea. They are called "the salt of the earth." This, of course, must be understood of those only who have the spirit of true religion in them: for all others, whatever they may possess, are as vile and worthless as the real Christians are good and excellent.

The words before us will lead us to consider,

***~~I. The worth and excellence of truly spiritual Christians.~~***

***~~The use of salt, as intimated in this expression of our Lord, is to keep other things from putrefaction and corruption.~~***

This is the office that has been executed by all the saints of old.

View them from the beginning; and they will all be found active in their generation, and zealous in benefitting the world around them.

*Noah*preached to the antediluvians a hundred and twenty years, indefatigably exerting himself to bring them to repentance.

*Lot*, in Sodom, "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds," and strove to turn the people from their horrible abominations.

All the *prophets*in successive ages labored in the same blessed work, using all their efforts to lead their hearers to the knowledge of the only true God, and to an obedience to his holy laws.

How the *Apostles*acted in relation to this, it is needless to observe. They lived for no other end, but to make known the way of life, and to "turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

All, indeed, were not favored with the same success. Those who preceded the Savior, rather sowed the seed, than reaped the harvest: but his disciples, through the influence of the Spirit of God upon their labors, were instrumental to the conversion of thousands and of millions; all of whom in their respective spheres endeavored to disseminate the same principles, and to spread "the savor of the knowledge of Christ" wherever they went. Take only one man, the Apostle Paul; and who shall say how much corruption he was the means of preventing in the world?

***~~This is the office which every Christian, according to his ability, still executes.~~***

Ministers labor for this end in the word and doctrine—and private individuals feel themselves bound to co-operate with them, yes, I may say, to be "fellow-workers also with God." No one who has received the grace of God in truth, will "live any longer unto himself," he will seek to glorify his God, and to do good to those around him. Has he any relations, a father, a mother, a wife, a child, going on in ignorance and sin? He will endeavor by all possible means to rectify their dispositions, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. He will not say with himself, I am but as a grain of salt, and therefore can do no good: he will thankfully employ his influence, however small it may be, for the benefit of those to whom it will extend. Even the poorest have access to some poor neighbor like themselves: and the resolution of the weakest will be like that of the Church of old, "Draw me, and we will run after you;" that is, 'Draw me, and I will not come alone, but will bring all I can along with me.'

Shall this be thought a small matter? No, surely: for if a Christian be instrumental, even in the course of his whole life, to convert one single person from the error of his ways, he has effected a good which exceeds in value the whole material world: for he has "saved a soul from death, and covered a multitude of sins."

Thus is the truly spiritual Christian, a man of great worth and excellence. But all who profess religion are not of this stamp: the text itself declares that there are some of a very different character; and that nothing can exceed,

***~~II. The worthlessness of those who have not the savor of true religion in their souls.~~***

Salt that has lost its savor is here said to be "good for nothing; but is trodden under foot by men." This shows the desperate state of those who are not truly alive to God. Their prospects are indeed gloomy in relation to,

***~~1. Their personal recovery.~~***

Salt that has lost its savor, cannot by any means be restored to its former pungency. And thus it is with those who, after some experience of the power of godliness, have made shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience. Doubtless, "with God all things are possible;" and therefore He can restore the most determined apostate. But there is very little reason to hope that he ever will; since he has told us, that such a one shall be given over to final impenitence.

The state of one who has merely declined in religion is certainly not so desperate; but still it is truly deplorable. If a man had never known anything of religion, it might be hoped that the truths of the Gospel would influence his mind; but if he is already acquainted with those truths, and they are not able to preserve him, how can it be hoped that they shall have efficacy to restore him?

While "the heart is yet tender," the Gospel is mighty in operation; because God accompanies it with his power from on high: but when "the heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," and the Spirit of God has withdrawn his agency, there is great reason to fear that the man "will draw back unto perdition." How solemn are the admonitions given on this subject to the Church at Ephesus, and to that at Sardis! Let everyone then who has declined in religious exercises and enjoyments, even though his *declensions*be ever so secret, tremble, lest that threatening be fulfilled in him, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways!"

***~~2. Their ministerial usefulness.~~***

"All who have received the gift, are bound to minister the same to others, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." But the man that has lost the savor of religion in his own soul, is ill qualified for this: he has not inclination to do it, he has not courage, he has not ability. When religion flourished in his soul, he could converse upon it with pleasure: "Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth would freely speak." But now he can converse on any other subject rather than that: he finds no satisfaction in maintaining fellowship even with the saints: it is not to be wondered at therefore that he has no disposition to instruct the ignorant, and reform the wicked. Indeed, he is afraid lest that proverb should be retorted upon him, "Physician, heal yourself!" and his own conscience will remonstrate with him in the energetic language of the Apostle, "You who teach another, don't you teach yourself?" And though no change has taken place in his intellect in reference to earthly things, his understanding becomes clouded in relation to spiritual things: his gifts in a great measure vanish together with his grace: he once could speak and pray with fluency; but now his mouth is shut; and he experiences the truth of that singular declaration, "From him that has not (that has not improved his talent) shall be taken away even that which he has."

But it is observed of the salt, not only that it is "good for nothing," with respect to its primary uses of keeping other things from putrefaction, but that it is "not fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill." The fact is, that salt, when destitute of its proper qualities, has a tendency rather to produce sterility than to promote vegetation, if it be cast upon the land. This is intimated in many passages of Scripture.

Just so is the effect produced by those who have lost the power of godliness, and departed from God: they cast a stumbling-block before men, and "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of."

The world may do what they please, and the individuals alone are blamed; but let any one who professes religion do anything amiss, and religion itself must be accountable for it, and the name of God is blasphemed on his account. This indeed is most unreasonable and absurd: nevertheless so it is: and a most aggravated woe is thereby entailed on all who occasion such an offence.

***~~3. Their final acceptance.~~***

Even here they are rejected both by God and man. Those who walk consistently, are hated and despised by the ungodly world. But those who walk inconsistently, are despised a thousand times more; and this God has ordained as a just punishment for their treachery. As for his own abhorrence of them, it is scarcely possible for language to express it more strongly than he has declared it.

Moreover, if they repent not, the same divine indignation will pursue them in the eternal world. What reception they will then meet with at his hands, he has plainly warned them. The saints with whom they associated here, will then disown them, and cast them out of their society. The lifeless professor of religion, who brought forth no fruit to perfection, will be banished from Heaven with abhorrence: so true is that expression in our text, "They shall be trodden under foot of men!"

***~~Seeing then that the power of godliness is of such importance, we call upon you all,~~***

***~~1. To seek it.~~***

It is not a lifeless formal religion that will avail for your salvation. The command of God to every one of us is, "Have salt in yourselves." The distinction between the true Christian and the self-deceiver is, that the one "savors the things of the Spirit," which the other does not. We must "delight ourselves in God," or it will be in vain to hope that ever He will delight in us.

***~~2. To preserve it.~~***

The "salt may soon lose its savor." Religion is not like the sculptor's work, which if left ever so long remains in the state it was: but like a stone rolled up a hill, which will descend again as soon as the impelling force is withdrawn. The stony-ground and thorny-ground hearers show that we are prone to depart from God, or to rest in a carnal state while maintaining outwardly a spiritual profession. It is a melancholy, and an undeniable fact, that many "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." Let us then "stir up the gift of God that is in us," as we would stir a languishing fire; that we "lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

***~~3. To diffuse it.~~***

We must never forget the office which God has assigned us in our respective spheres. The treasure committed to us earthen vessels, is not for ourselves only, but to enrich others. "Our speech should always be with grace seasoned with salt." Let us then exert ourselves to the utmost of our power to instruct the rising generation—to reform the habits of the world—to send the Gospel to the Heathen—and to impart to all within our reach the knowledge and salvation of God.

#1296

***~~Christians the Light of the World~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:14–16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14â16)~~***

"You are *the light of the world*. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven."

IF we had not been authorized by God himself, we would never have presumed to designate the saints by such honorable appellations as are unreservedly given to them in the Scriptures. Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most glorious; nor is there anything, either in this terraqueous globe or in the firmament of Heaven, which does not partake of its benign influence: yet even to that are the saints compared; "You are the light of the world."

That all the parts of our text may come easily and profitably under our view, we shall consider,

***~~I. The office to which God has destined his people.~~***

Strictly speaking, neither Prophets nor Apostles could arrogate to themselves the honor which is here in a subordinate sense conferred on all the saints: it belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the Sun of Righteousness;" and who says of himself, "I am the light of the world."

John the Baptist, (who was greater than all the Old Testament prophets,) expressly declares, that "he was not that Light; but that Christ was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world." In this view, the name of *moons*would rather befit us, because we shine only with a borrowed luster; reflecting merely the rays which we have received from the Lord Jesus: but, as exhibiting to the world all the true light that is in it, God has been pleased to dignify us with that higher name, "The light of the world." He has sent his people to fulfill that office in the moral realm, which the sun performs in the natural world.

***~~1. He has qualified them for it.~~***

There is a light in their minds, which reason and philosophy cannot impart, and which no man can possess, unless it has been given from above. "God has shined into their hearts to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is that mystery which was hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to the saints. The lowest of his people are in this respect wiser than the wisest of unenlightened men, because they are taught of God. We are aware that this is an offensive truth; and that the learned will ever reply in the language of the offended Pharisees, "Are we blind also?" But it is no less true at this day than it was in former ages, that "God has hid his Gospel from the wise and prudent, and revealed it unto babes; even so, for so it seems good in his sight."

Now this qualifies his people to instruct others. It is possible enough that they may be very ignorant in all other things; but of these things "they have the witness in themselves," and therefore are enabled to speak of them just as they do of the things about which they are daily conversant. They may not speak scientifically about their bodily feelings; but when they tell you of their wants and their supplies, or of the diseases and the remedies which they have found effectual to remove them, they know what they affirm. Thus respecting the great truths of the Gospel, they are enabled to speak from their own experience; and the greatest philosopher in the universe may sit at their feet and learn.

***~~2. He has ordained them to it.~~***

It is a favorite idea with many, that they are to be religious; but that their religion is not to be seen. *Under the pretense of hating ostentation, they conform to every practice of the world, and are in no respect distinguishable from the mere decent moralist*. But, when they think that a man may serve God faithfully, and yet avoid the notice of those around them, they only deceive their own souls. For,

**In the first place, they cannot do it if they would.**

"A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." If while the world around them are "living after the flesh," and "walking in the broad road that leads to destruction," they "walk after the Spirit," and confine themselves to "the narrow way that leads unto life," how can it be that they should escape notice? *Their whole spirit and temper and conduct differ from the world, as much as light from darkness*. We will suppose, their light is but small; and if exhibited before the meridian sun, it might easily be overlooked; but the smallest candle attracts notice when shining in the midst of darkness: and this is precisely their case. The splendor of their conduct may not be such as of itself to command admiration; yet it cannot but be seen by reason of the surrounding darkness. But,

***~~In the next place, they ought not to do it if they could.~~***

"Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel, but to give light to all that are in the house," nor does God "bring his people out of darkness into his marvelous light" solely for their own sakes, but "that they may show forth the praises of Him who has called them," and diffuse the light which they have received. They are bound therefore, by every tie of duty and gratitude, to make him known to others, and to advance, as much as possible, his glory in the world.

Moreover, their fellow-creatures also have a claim upon them. Who that should see a blind man walking on the brink of a precipice, would not feel himself bound to warn him of his danger; and account himself guilty of a murderous cruelty towards him, if the man should perish through his neglect? If then we should feel it a duty to give him the advantage of our superior light in relation to his bodily welfare—then how much more ought we to do it in relation to his eternal soul! The command given to every enlightened soul, is, "Arise, shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

This leads us to speak of,

***~~II. The duty resulting from it.~~***

That we are not to do anything from ostentation or vain-glory is certain: whatever proceeds from such a principle is altogether hateful in the sight of God. *Those who seek the applause of man must expect no other reward*. But we are not to be so restrained by these considerations as to decline that course of action which will bring glory to God. On the contrary, we should "make our light to shine before men," and "so" shine, as to compel all who behold it "to glorify our Father who is in Heaven."

It may be asked, How can any conduct of ours accomplish this? I answer,

***~~First, it may show men the unreasonableness of their prejudices.~~***

All manner of prejudices are entertained against the Gospel; and all that we can say is insufficient to remove them. But what we *do*has a very powerful effect: it will often "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and make them ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ"

***~~Next, it may lead them to embrace the Gospel.~~***

The Apostle speaks of husbands, who never would have attended to the written or preached word, being won by the good conduct of their wives. From the history of the Church in all ages, we know that there are many who owe their first impressions of religion to the consistent conduct of some eminent saint; nor can we doubt but that if the dispositions and character of religious people more uniformly corresponded with their holy profession, "the word would have an abundantly freer course," and would be much sooner glorified throughout the world.

**Lastly, it cannot fail of stimulating many to increasing activity.**

*The force of example is exceeding great.*Many, for want of associates in well-doing, are discouraged, and attempt but little, because they think that but little can be accomplished. But, when they see a person more abundant in labors than themselves, they are stirred up to a holy emulation; they blush at the view of their own unprofitableness, and while they are thankful to God who has given such grace unto men, they strive with redoubled ardor to serve and glorify their God.

***~~We shall conclude this subject with showing,~~***

***~~1. How we may become lights to the world.~~***

Simple as this question may appear, there are few who would answer it aright. Almost all would propose to attain this distinction by *doing*; and would be shocked at being told that it must be attained by *believing*. Yet that is the very way by which our blessed Lord has taught us to seek it: "Believe in the light, that you may be the children of light." This, of course, is not to be understood as though a *bare assent*to any truths whatever would sanctify the soul: it is to be understood as directing us to the Gospel, and to the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in it. To believe in the light, is to look for salvation entirely through Him whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice for sin; it is to live altogether by faith on him, and to make him our all in all. This would render our union with Christ *productive*; and would lead to our renovation after the Divine image. Then would we "shine indeed as lights in a dark world;" and God himself would be glorified in us.

***~~2. What we should do if we have already attained that honor.~~***

Remember that the eyes of all are upon you, and that God's glory in the world is very greatly affected by your conduct.*Any fault in you will soon be noticed by the world.*Those who pay little regard to the stars that shine in their orbits, will yet be observant enough of a falling star. In like manner, those who overlook the radiance of ten thousand saints, will mark with triumph the fall of a professor, and derive from it an argument against all serious religion.

Be on your guard then against everything which may either eclipse your light, or cause it to shine with diminished splendor. Be earnest also to get forward in your Christian course. The brightest of us emits only as yet the faint gleam of early dawn: "our profiting must continually appear;" and "our path be as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day".

#1297

***~~The Law and the Prophets Confirmed By Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.17), [18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.18)~~***

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."

TO have just sentiments on religion is a matter of incalculable importance. While we are mistaken respecting any fundamental truths, we not only lose the benefit and comfort of those truths, but are in danger of rejecting them when proposed to our consideration, and enlisting ourselves among the avowed enemies of the Gospel.

The Jews were almost universally expecting a temporal Messiah. Hence, when our blessed Lord appeared in such lowly circumstances, and inculcated doctrines so opposite to their carnal expectations, the people thought either that he was an impostor who deceived them, or that he was come to subvert and destroy all that had been delivered to them by their forefathers. Our blessed Lord anticipated and obviated their objections: "Do not think," says he, "that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

By "the law and the prophets," I understand, that system of religion which the moral law inculcated, and all the prophets enforced. To establish and confirm these was the great end of our Savior's advent. He has confirmed them as to the great scope of all that they have spoken in reference to,

***~~I. The way of salvation.~~***

The way of salvation, as revealed in the Old Testament, is by faith in the promised Messiah.

The **moral**law proclaimed this. The moral law, it is true, said, "Do this and live." But it was never the intent of the moral law to put men upon working out their salvation by their obedience to its commands. The law could never give life to man since the fall. It could only show him his duty, and thunder out its curses against him for his manifold transgressions. It required perfect and perpetual obedience; in default of which, it doomed him to everlasting destruction. Thus by its unbending severity it compelled everyone that was under it to seek salvation in some other way. It showed to men the necessity of a Savior, and thus prepared them for the manifestation of Christ by the Gospel. This is the very account given of it by Paul, who sums up his testimony in these significant expressions, "Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

The **ceremonial**law held forth the remedy, of which the moral law declared our need. All its sacrifices directed men to that great Sacrifice which would in due time be offered on the cross: while the brazen serpent, the scape-goat, and all the various washings, displayed the efficacy of that remedy, and encouraged penitents to accept it. That the ceremonial law was intended to answer this end, we are sure; because our Savior himself and his Apostles constantly appealed to it, as prefiguring Christ, who is expressly said to be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes."

Precisely to the same effect is the testimony of all the **prophets**. Who can read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and not see that salvation is to be obtained through the atoning blood of Christ? We see him "wounded for our transgressions," and all "our iniquities laid on him," in order that we may be "healed by his stripes." Similar to this is the declaration of Daniel, who says, that Christ should "finish transgression, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness." In a word, "To him," says the Apostle, "give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins," and again, "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all those who believe."

And what, we ask, is the way of salvation in the **New Testament**?

Has the Lord Jesus Christ put aside this way of salvation? Has he not rather established it beyond all possibility of doubt? Hear his own words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father but by me." To cite all his declarations upon this subject would detain us too long: suffice it to say, that he speaks of his "blood as shed for the remission of sins," and "his life as given to be a ransom for many;" and declares, that, by being "lifted up upon the cross," he is qualified and empowered to "draw all men unto him."

Thus far then we have seen that Christ has confirmed the law and the prophets, as far as relates to the way of salvation. Let us now mark the same in reference to,

***~~II. The path of duty.~~***

***~~The ten commandments were given as a rule of conduct to the Jews.~~***

This summary of religious duties is emphatically called, 'The Law.' It was given by God in the most solemn manner, and enjoined without exception on the whole nation. The prophets, in their respective ages and places, maintained the authority of this law, and labored to bring the people into a conformity to its precepts.

***~~And what other rule is there prescribed to us?~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ has neither added to the Ten Commandments, nor taken from them. He has freed them from the corrupt glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, and has explained them according to their spiritual import. He has also specified certain duties which were not so clearly seen under the Mosaic dispensation, and has added new motives to the performance of them. But he has enjoined nothing which is not comprehended in one of those two commandments, that of "loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength," and that of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

On the other hand, he has bound upon us these duties in the most solemn manner; and told us, that he will estimate our character, not by the zeal with which we cry "Lord, Lord!" but by the care and uniformity with which we keep his commandments.

Here then is proof sufficient, that our Lord has not destroyed the law and the prophets, or in the slightest degree weakened our obligations to obey them. There are some professors of religion, and indeed not a few, who think that Christ has set aside the law as a rule of life. But they labor under a dangerous, yes, a fatal error.

When they say that we are released from the law as a covenant of works, they are right: but so were believers under the Old Testament.

When they say that we are released from the whole ceremonial law, they are right: but we must still observe every part of it in a spiritual manner, presenting Christ as our sacrifice, washing daily in the fountain of his blood, and "cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that we may perfect holiness in the fear of God."

But when they speak of being released from the law as a rule of life, they open the floodgates of licentiousness: and were it not that some of them, as we hope, have *more piety in their practice than in their principles*, they would have just reason to tremble for their state.

The truth is, that the advancing of our souls in holiness was a very principal object of Christ's incarnation and death. And "that very grace of God which brings salvation," so far from annulling any single command of God, itself "teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

***~~This subject is of peculiar use,~~***

***~~1. To rectify our views.~~***

As for those who think that salvation is by the works of the law, we shall pass them over on the present occasion; praying only that God may open their eyes before it is too late.

But there are many thoughtful and intelligent people, and not altogether destitute of piety, who imagine, that Christ has lowered the demands of the moral law, and purchased for us the liberty of being saved by a new law of sincere obedience: they think that for his sake our sincere obedience will be accepted, instead of perfect obedience: and that the defects of our obedience will be made up by the merits of Jesus Christ.

To such people I would say, Read the words of our text. Christ says he did not come to destroy the law; and you affirm that he has softened its rigors, and dispensed with those high attainments which the perfect law of God requires.

You will reply perhaps, If these things be not dispensed with, how are we to be saved? I answer, They are not dispensed with, no, not one of them: it is as much our duty to fulfill the whole law of God as it was Adam's duty in Paradise: nor, if we would be saved by the law, can we be saved on any lower terms.

But of salvation by the law we must not entertain a thought: we are condemned by the law, and must flee as condemned sinners to Jesus Christ, that he may wash us from our sins in his blood, and clothe us in his own unspotted robe of righteousness and salvation.

Some will exclaim, What new doctrine is this? I answer, this was the way of salvation revealed to Adam after the Fall; and it has been continued in all successive ages, until Christ himself came. Then was this mystery more clearly revealed to the world; and from henceforth the voice of God to every human Being is, "He who believes on the Son of God has eternal life; but he who believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Lay aside then your erroneous notions respecting a mitigated law and sincere obedience; and seek salvation in God's only dear Son, in whom alone it can be found.

***~~2. To regulate our lives.~~***

While some people object to salvation by faith alone as a licentious doctrine, others complain of us as raising the standard of holiness so high, that none, except a few devotees, can possibly attain it.

But I would ask these objectors, Which of God's laws are we authorized to set aside? Which are we even allowed to palliate and soften? Our blessed Lord has, with the strongest possible asseveration, said, that "not so much as a jot or tittle of the law shall ever pass away," how then can we presume to say, It shall pass away? Suppose we do lower the standard of obedience in compliance with your wishes, what will it profit you, unless God does it also? We should only deceive you, and ruin ourselves together with you.

But you will say, 'It is hard to have so much required of us.' Well, suppose it be hard; if it be required, we must do it: our only alternative is, to obey or perish.

But "are not his commandments grievous?" On the contrary, they all together form "a light and easy yoke," and so far are they from being deemed too strict by any real Christian, that there is not a true Christian in the world that would wish any one of the commandments to require less than it does. *A spiritual man does not complain of the strictness of the law, but of the wickedness of his own heart*: and his desire is, not to have the commandments of God lowered to his attainments, but his attainments elevated to the utmost height of God's commandments.

Let this then be the desire and endeavor of us all: let there be no sin harbored, not even in thought; nor any duty neglected, whatever difficulties we may have to encounter, or whatever trials to endure. If we "have a hope of salvation through Christ, we must purify ourselves even as he is pure."

#1298

***~~The Danger of Little Sins~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.19)~~***

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven."

IT must be confessed, that among those who profess a high regard for the Gospel, there are some who speak of it in terms, which, to say the least, have an antinomian and licentious aspect. In their zeal against self-righteousness, they are apt to represent the law as altogether abolished: knowing that we are no longer under the law as a covenant, they express themselves as if we were freed from it also as a rule of life.

But we must never forget that the Gospel is a "doctrine according to godliness;" and that "the law, so far from being made void through faith, is established by it." In the words preceding the text, our blessed Lord had said, that "he came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them" and in the words before us, he teaches us to infer from thence the undiminished authority of the sacred code.

To elucidate his assertions, we observe,

***~~I. That the commandments of God are universally to be obeyed.~~***

***~~It is certain that some commandments are of more importance than others.~~***

There can be no doubt but that the moral precepts, which are founded in our relation to God and to each other, are of more importance than the positive institutions, which are founded only in the sovereign will of God. Our Lord himself, comparing the divine institution of paying tithes with the exercise of judgment, mercy, and faith—calls the latter "the weightier matters of the law," though at the same time he determines, "These ought you to have done; and not to leave the other undone."

The positive institutions may even be set aside, if they interfere with our discharge of moral duties. A strict observance of the Sabbath is enjoined: but, if a work of necessity or of mercy demand our attention, we are at liberty to engage in it, notwithstanding we thereby violate the sacred rest of the Sabbath: for God has said, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Indeed, even in the moral law itself, there is a difference between the duties of the first and of the second table; those which relate to God being more important than those which relate to man. Hence our Lord says, that "to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, is the first and great commandment."

***~~But the authority on which every one of them stands is the same.~~***

God is the great lawgiver: and whatever his command is, it is, as long as it is in force, binding upon all to whom it is given. We are no more at liberty to abrogate one than to set aside another. If we allowedly violate any one of them, we do, in effect, violate them all. If any two be absolutely incompatible, the positive precept, as I have observed, gives way, and ceases for the time to be a command. So if two moral precepts such as that of obeying a parent, and of obeying God, are irreconcilable, then obedience to God is then of superior and paramount obligation.

God himself has assigned limits to man's authority, beyond which we are not commanded to obey him. Man cannot dispense with any of the divine commandments: they can only be repealed by that authority which first established them. Neither in theory nor in practice are we at liberty to make them void: we must both "do" them ourselves, "and teach" the observance of them to others. We must not add anything to them, nor take anything from them. The injunctions which God has given us on this head are strict and solemn: and, if we presume to violate them, it is at the peril of our souls.

It is intimated that some will both "do and teach" them: which leads us to observe,

***~~II. That an unreserved respect for all of them is characteristic of the true Christian.~~***

***~~Ungodly men have but little reverence for the divine commands.~~***

The Pharisees of old laid a far greater stress on ceremonial than on moral duties; on "washing pots and cups," than on cleansing the heart: and they actually made void some of the commandments by their traditions. The Papists do the same at this day, denying the sacramental cup to the laity, commanding the consecrated wafer to be worshiped, and granting pardons and indulgences to those who are able to pay for them. Would to God that there were no such impieties among Protestants also! It is true, we do not acknowledge any power in the Pope to dispense with the laws of God: but we take the power into our own hands, and deal as freely with the commands of God as ever the Pope himself can do. One commandment is deemed uncertain, another unreasonable, another unnecessary; and all are reduced to the standard which we ourselves approve. As for the *penalties*with which they are enforced, "we huff at them," and assure both ourselves and others that they shall never be executed.

***~~But the true Christian dares not thus to insult his God.~~***

It is his habit to "tremble at the word." When once he hears, "Thus says the Lord," his mouth is shut; and he sets himself immediately to obey the divine command. Instead of complaining that "any commandment is grievous," he loves the whole law; he accounts it "holy, and just, and good." He would not have any part of it lowered in its demands on any account. His desire is rather to have his soul "cast into the very mold of the Gospel," and to be transformed perfectly into the image of his God. His prayer is, "Let my heart be sound in your statutes, that I be not ashamed," let me "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"

The Christian's disposition towards the commands of God ought to be cultivated by every one of us, since it is certain,

***~~III. That on such a respect for them depends our everlasting happiness.~~***

***~~Nothing less than this will suffice to prove our sincerity.~~***

It is allowed, without any great difficulty, that heinous violations of God's law will affect our eternal state: but smaller transgressions are considered as of but little consequence. But this does not accord with our Lord's assertions in the text. There we are told that the breach of one single law will be fatal, yes, though it be the least of all the commandments of God. We are not to understand that the unintentional and unallowed defects in our obedience will prove fatal to us: for who then could be saved? But any evil which we allow and justify, or, as the text expresses it, which we "do and teach," will certainly exclude us from the kingdom of Heaven.

The text might seem to import that such conduct would only diminish the degree of our happiness in Heaven: but our Lord elsewhere warns us, that it will entirely exclude us from Heaven; and that our only alternative is, either to part with sin altogether, or to suffer the penalty of sin, eternal death.

***~~But where obedience is unreserved, it will receive a glorious recompense from God.~~***

That there is no merit in our obedience, is allowed. But that our obedience shall receive a reward of grace, every page of the inspired volume declares. The more perfect our conformity to God's law, and the more energetic our maintenance of its authority have been, the higher testimonies of God's approbation we shall most assuredly receive; and our exaltation in Heaven shall be proportionably "great." Particular sanctity and zeal may subject us to reproach from men; but it will meet with honor from God: for he has said, "Those who honor me, I will honor."

***~~Learn then from hence the importance of,~~***

***~~1. A renewed heart.~~***

The unregenerate heart "neither is, nor can be subject to God's law." We "must be born again," and be "renewed in the spirit of our minds," before we can truly say, "I delight to do your will, O God; yes, your law is within my heart." Let us then seek to be made "new creatures in Christ Jesus." Then shall we be prepared both to "practice" the commandments ourselves, and to "teach" them to those around us.

***~~2. A faithful ministry.~~***

Many, in fact, say unto their ministers, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." But to what purpose would it be to comply with their wishes? In what could such ministrations end? "If the blind lead the blind, must they not both fall into the ditch?" On the contrary, if we "practice" the whole revealed will of God, as far as we are enabled, "and teach" it faithfully unto others, we have reason to hope that we shall have many to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" in the last day.

Instead of complaining, then, that your minister is too strict either in his life or preaching, be thankful that you have a minister who desires to live for no other purpose than "to save himself and those who hear him."

***~~3. A pure conscience.~~***

"Who can understand his errors?" says David; "O cleanse me from my secret faults." Truly it is no easy thing to be a Christian. Let us examine carefully whether there be not some secret unsubdued lust within us, some worm at the root of our gourd. If there be, woe unto us, for "Except we repent, we shall surely perish." If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things: but if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence towards God." "Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect unto all his commandments."

#1299

***~~Evangelic and Pharisaic Righteousness Compared~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.20)~~***

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven."

IT would be a gratification to many to know the lowest degree of piety that would suffice for their admission into the kingdom of Heaven. But to have such a *line*drawn for us, would be by no means profitable: for it may well be doubted, whether any, who under present circumstances are slothful in their pursuit of holiness, would be quickened by it; and there is reason to fear that the zeal of many would be damped.

Information, however, of a nature not very dissimilar, is given to us; and it will be found of the highest importance to every child of man. Our blessed Lord has marked out for us a *line*, that must be passed by all who would be numbered among his true disciples. There were certain characters, very numerous among the Jews, characters much contemplated and much admired; these, he tells us, must be surpassed. To equal the most exalted among them will not suffice: our righteousness must exceed theirs, if ever we would enter into the kingdom of Heaven. The people we refer to were the Scribes and Pharisees. The Scribes were the learned teachers and expositors of the law. The Pharisees were a sect who affected peculiar sanctity, and were regarded by the people as the most distinguished patterns of piety and virtue. The two were generally associated together in the Scriptures; because the Scribes, though not necessarily, yet, for the most part, belonged to the sect of the Pharisees: and, so united, they were considered as having all the learning and piety of the nation concentered in them.

But notwithstanding the high estimation in which they were held, our Lord most solemnly affirmed that none of them could, in their present state, be admitted into Heaven; and that all who would be counted worthy of that honor, must attain a higher righteousness than theirs.

This information, I say, is valuable; because, though it is not so definite as to encourage any to sit down contented with their attainments, it serves as a standard by which we may try our attainments, and a criterion whereby we may judge of our real state.

In investigating the subject, there are two things to be considered:

**I. HOW our righteousness must exceed theirs.**

To prepare the way for showing wherein our righteousness is to exceed theirs, we must begin with stating, as clearly as we can, *what righteousness they possessed*. But in doing this, we shall be careful neither to exalt their character too much on the one hand, nor to depress it too much on the other. Indeed, precision in this part of our statement is of peculiar importance; for, as a comparison is instituted between their righteousness and ours, we are concerned to have the clearest knowledge of that by which our estimate must be formed.

Their character was a mixture of good and evil. They had much which might be considered as righteousness; and at the same time they had great defects.

Their righteousness, such as it was, was seen; their defects were unseen.

Their righteousness consisted in acts; their defects, in motives and principles.

Their righteousness was that which rendered them objects of admiration to men; their defects made them objects of abhorrence to God.

Let us begin with viewing the favorable side of their character. And here we cannot do better than refer to the account which the Pharisee gives of himself, when addressing the Most High God; and which our Lord particularly adverts to, as characterizing the more distinguished members of their community.

After thanking God that he was "not as other men are," he first tells us *what he had not done:*he was "not an extortioner," nor could be accused by any man of demanding, on any account whatever, more than was his due. He was "not unjust" in any of his dealings, but, whether in business transactions, or in any other way, he had done to all as he would be done unto. "Nor was he an adulterer," common as the crime of adultery was among the Jews, and great as his advantages had been for insinuating himself into the affections of others, he had never availed himself of any opportunity to seduce his neighbor's wife. In short, he had avoided all those evils, which the generality of publicans and sinners committed without remorse.

He next proceeds to specify *what he had done*. He had "fasted twice every week," in order to fulfill the duties of mortification and self-denial. He had been so scrupulously exact in paying his tithes, that not even "mint, or rue," or the smallest herb in his garden, had been withheld from God: "he paid tithes of all that he possessed."

From other parts of Scripture we learn, that the Pharisees were peculiarly jealous of the sacred rest of the *Sabbath*; insomuch that they were filled with indignation against anyone, who, even by an act of the greatest necessity or mercy, would presume to violate it.

They *prayed*to God also, and that not in a mere cursory manner, hurrying over a form which they got through as quick as possible: No; "they made long prayers, as well in the corners of their streets, as in the midst of their synagogues." As for the purifications appointed by the law, they were punctual in the observance of them: they even multiplied their washings far beyond what the law required; and were so partial to them, that they never came home from the market, or sat down to their meals, without washing their hands. They even wondered that anyone who pretended to religion, could be so profane, as to eat without having first performed these important rites. Nor must we forget to mention, that they abounded in almsgivings; regarding themselves not so much the owners, as the stewards, of the property they possessed.

In a word, religion, in all its visible branches, was, in their eyes, honorable; and, in token of their high regard for it, they made their phylacteries broader than any other sect, and "enlarged the fringes of their garments;" thus *displaying*before all men their zealous attachment to the laws of God.

Nor were they content with thus fulfilling their own duties: they were desirous that all should honor God in like manner: persuaded that they themselves were right, they strove to the uttermost to recommend their tenets and practices to others, and would even "compass sea and land to make one proselyte."

Of course, the attainments of all were not exactly alike: some would excel more in one branch of duty, and others in another branch. Paul himself was of that sect, as his parents also had been before him; and he was as fair a specimen of them, as any that can be found in all the records of antiquity. He was, "as concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church, (whom he considered as enemies to God;) and, as concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Having thus ascertained what their righteousness was, we can now proceed to point out wherein ours must exceed it.

But here it will be proper to observe, that as all were not equally eminent in what may be called their righteousness, so, on the other hand, all were not equally faulty in the wicked part of their character. We must take the Pharisees as a body, (for it is in that view that our Savior speaks of them in the text;) and must not be understood to impute to every individual the same precise degree either of praise or blame. Nor must we be considered as saying, that no one of that sect was ever saved: because, previous to the coming of our Lord, there doubtless were many who served God according to the light that they enjoyed: but this we must be understood distinctly to affirm, that no person who enjoys the clearer light of the Gospel, can be saved, unless he attains a better righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees, as a body, ever did attain, or than any one of them, while he rejected the Gospel, could possibly attain.

I am well aware, that, when we consider their fastings, their prayers, their alms-deeds, their strict observances of all the ritual laws; together with their zeal in promoting the religion they professed; and take into the account also, that they were free from many of the more gross and common sins; we shall seem to have left no room for superiority in our obedience. But, whatever may be thought of their attainments, our righteousness must exceed theirs.

***~~Our righteousness must exceed theirs in the nature and extent of it.~~***

From what has been already spoken, it sufficiently appears that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was for the most part external and ceremonial; or, where it seemed to partake of that which was internal and moral, it was merely of a negative kind, and extremely partial in its operation.

The Christian's righteousness must be totally different from this: it must be *internal*and *spiritual*: it must descend into the heart, and have respect to the whole of God's revealed will. The true Christian will affix no limits to his exertions; he will set no bounds to his heavenly desires. He does not limit the commandments to their literal sense, but enters into their spiritual import, and considers a disposition to commit sin as nearly equivalent to the actual commission of it. He considers himself as accountable to God for every inclination, affection, appetite; and endeavors not only to have their general tendencies regulated according to his law, but to have "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

In a word, he aspires after perfection of every kind: he desires to love God, as much as to be saved by him; and to mortify sin, as much as to escape punishment. Could he have his heart's desire, he would be as "holy, as God himself is holy," and as "perfect, as God himself is perfect."

Thus, in the nature and extent of the two kinds of righteousness, there is an immense difference: nor is there a less difference in their principle and end.

Would we know what was *the principle*from which the Pharisaic righteousness proceeded? We can assert, on the most unquestionable authority, even that of Christ himself, that they did "all their works to be seen be men." And Paul no less strongly marks the end, to which all their zeal was directed. He confesses that "they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge: for, being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God."

In these respects then we must differ from them. We should shun ostentation and vain-glory, as much as we would the most enormous crimes. We should bear in mind that anything done with a view to man's applause, is altogether worthless in the sight of God. Whatever it is, we have in the applause of men the reward we seek after, and the only reward that we shall ever obtain.

We should also dread self-righteousness as utterly inconsistent with a Christian state. Paul assures us, that "the Jews, who sought after the law of righteousness, did not attain to any justifying righteousness, because they sought it not by faith, but, as it were, by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone."

Just so, the making of our own works the foundation of our hope of salvation, argues a contempt of that "foundation which God has laid in Zion;" it thrusts out from his office the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness," and who, from that very circumstance, is called, "The Lord our Righteousness."

A truly Christian spirit will lead us, even "after we have done all that is commanded us, to say: We are unprofitable servants, we have only done that which it was our duty to do." See this exemplified in the Apostle Paul, than whom there never was but one brighter example of piety in the world: he, after all his eminent attainments, "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ."

Now then, compare the righteousness of the two parties:

The one, "cleansing carefully indeed and superstitiously, the outside of the cup and platter, while within they were full of many unsubdued lusts."

The other, allowing not so much as an evil thought, but "cleansing themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

The one, filled with a high conceit of their own goodness, and claiming Heaven itself on account of it, while they aimed at nothing but the applause of man.

The other, in the midst of their most strenuous exertions to serve and honor God, renouncing all dependence on themselves, and "glorying only in the cross of Christ."

The one, a compound of pride, unbelief, and hypocrisy.

The other, a compound of humility, and faith, and heavenly-mindedness.

Whatever may be thought by those who know not how to appreciate the motives and principles of men, we do not hesitate to apply to these parties the distinctive characters assigned them by Solomon, and to say, that "Wisdom excels folly, as much as light excels darkness."

We proceed to the second point of our inquiry, and ask,

***~~II. WHY our righteousness must exceed theirs.~~***

The text furnishes us with a sufficient answer: If we are no better than they, the Lord Jesus assures us, "that we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven." Under the expression, "The kingdom of Heaven," both the *kingdom of grace on earth*, and the *kingdom of glory in Heaven*, must be comprehended; for they are, in fact, the same kingdom; and the subjects in both are the same: only in the one, they are in an infantile and imperfect state, whereas, in the other, they have attained maturity and perfection: but from both shall we be alike excluded, if we possess not a better righteousness than theirs: the Lord Jesus will no more acknowledge us as his disciples here, than he will admit us into his beatific presence hereafter.

We cannot then without this be partakers of the kingdom of **grace**. The Lord Jesus Christ has told us plainly, that he does not regard those who merely "*say*unto him, Lord! Lord!" however clamorous they may be, or ostentatious of their zeal for him: he approves of those only "who *do*the will of his Father who is in Heaven." We may assume the name of his disciples, and be numbered among them by others. We may associate ourselves with them, as Judas did, and be as little suspected of hypocrisy as he. We may even deceive ourselves as well as others, and be as confident that we are *Abraham's children*as ever the Pharisees of old were. We may, like them, be quite indignant to have our wisdom and goodness called in question; "Are we blind also?" "in so saying, you condemn us." But all this will not make us Christians. A sepulcher may be whitened and rendered beautiful in its outward appearance; but it will be a sepulcher still; and its interior contents will be as loathsome as those of a common grave.

It is to little purpose to "have the *form*of godliness, if we have not the *power*;" to "have a *name*to live, while yet we are really dead." *God will not judge us by our profession, but our practice*: "Then are you my friends," says our Lord, "if you do whatever I command you." To this effect is that declaration also of the Psalmist, having asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" He answers, "He who has clean hands, and a pure heart."

The truth is, that those whom Christ will acknowledge as his disciples, have been "born again," they are "renewed in the spirit of their minds," "they are new creatures; old things are passed away, and all things have become new," they have been taught the spirituality and extent of God's law; to know, that an angry word is murder, and an impure desire adultery; and in that looking-glass they have seen themselves guilty, polluted, and condemned sinners. They have been stirred up by this view of themselves to flee unto Christ for refuge, as to the hope set before them in the Gospel. Having "found peace with God through the blood of his cross," they devote themselves sincerely to his service, and strive to "glorify him with their bodies and their spirits, which are his."

Here is the true secret of their obedience; "The love of Christ constrains them; because they thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." This is conversion; this is regeneration. This is what every Scribe and Pharisee must be brought to: even Nicodemus, "a master in Israel," must become a disciple of Christ in this way: for our Lord declared to him in the most solemn manner, that, "unless he should be thus born again, he could not enter into the kingdom of God."

The same is true in relation to the kingdom of **glory**. While we are in this world, the tares and the wheat, which grow together, may so resemble each other, that they cannot be separated by human sagacity. The *tares*which Jesus speaks of(as I myself know by experience) cannot, even when full grown, be immediately distinguished from wheat by a common observer: the difference, however, is soon found by rubbing the ears, which in the tares are nearly empty, and in the wheat are full of grain.

The same may be noticed also in the religious world. Not only common observers, but even those who have the deepest insight into characters, and the best discernment of spirits, may be deceived; but God can never be deceived. However specious we may be in our outward appearance, he will discern our character through the thickest veil; "he searches the hearts, and tries the thoughts;" or, as it is yet more strongly expressed, "he weighs the spirits," he knows exactly the qualities of which every action is compounded, and can separate, with infallible certainty, its constituent parts. When we shall stand before him in judgment, he will distinguish the sincere Christian from the hypocritical and specious Pharisee, as easily "as a man divides his sheep from the goats." Then shall the final separation take place; "the *wheat*shall be treasured up in the garner, and the tares shall be burnt with unquenchable fire."

Here then is a further reason for the assertion in our text. If an *external religion*would suffice, we might rest satisfied with it. But if we have a Judge, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," to whom the most secret recesses of the heart are "naked and open," just as the inwards of the sacrifices were to the priest appointed to examine them; and if, as he has told us, "he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the hidden counsels of the heart;" then must we be, not hypocritical Pharisees, but real Christians, even "Israelites indeed, and without deceit." We must not be contented "with being Jews outwardly, but must be Jews inwardly; and have, not the mere circumcision of the flesh, but the inward circumcision of the heart, whose praise is not from men, but from God."

The peculiar importance of the subject, we hope, will plead our excuse, if we trespass somewhat longer than usual on your time. In our statement we have been as concise as would consist with a clear exposition of the truth.

In our **APPLICATION**of it we shall also study brevity, as far as the nature of the subject will admit. An audience habituated to reflection, like this, will never grudge a few additional moments for an investigation so solemn, so weighty, so interesting as the present.

**1.**The first description of people, then, to whom our subject is peculiarly applicable, and for whose benefit we are desirous to improve it, is that class of hearers who come short of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Many there are, it is to be feared, who, so far from "not being as other men are," cannot at all be distinguished from the generality of those around them—who, instead of "fasting twice a week," have never fasted twice, nor even once, in their whole lives, for the purpose of devoting themselves more solemnly to God: who, instead of "making long prayers," never pray at all, or only in so slight, cursory, and formal a manner, as to show that they have no pleasure in that holy exercise. Instead of keeping holy the Sabbath-day, they "speak their own words, do their own work, and find their own pleasure," almost as much as on other days; or if, for decency's sake, they impose a little restraint upon themselves, they find it the most wearisome day of all the seven.

Instead of paying tithes with scrupulous exactness, they will withhold the payment both of tithes and taxes, if they can do it without danger of detection; thus showing, that they have not even a *principle of honesty*to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Perhaps they may now and then give away something to charity; but they do not consecrate a portion of their income to God as a religious act, nor even account it their duty so to do, notwithstanding "every man" is expressly commanded to "lay by him in store for charitable uses, according as God has prospered him."

Instead of being able to appeal to God that they have never been guilty of whoredom or adultery, they stand condemned for one, or both, of these things in their own consciences; or, if they do not, their chastity has proceeded from other causes, than either the fear of God, or the hatred of sin.

Instead of honoring religion in the world, they have been ashamed of it, yes perhaps despised it, and held up to scorn and ridicule those who were its most distinguished advocates: thus, so far from laboring to proselyte people to righteousness, they have used all their influence to deter men from it.

What shall we say then to men of these characters? Shall we encourage them with the hopes of Heaven? Must we not rather adopt the Apostle's reasoning, "If the righteous scarcely are saved—then where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Yes, if the Pharisees, with all their righteousness, could not enter into Heaven, how shall they come thither, who are destitute of their attainments? If every one must perish who does not exceed their righteousness, what must become of those who fall so short of it? O that this argument might have its proper weight among us! *O that men would not trifle with their souls, on the very brink and precipice of eternity!*"Consider, brethren, what I say; and may the Lord give you understanding in all things!"

**2.**Next we would solicit the attention of those who are resting in a Pharisaic righteousness. This is the kind of religion which is held in esteem by mankind at large. An external reverence for the ordinances of religion, together with habits of temperance, justice, chastity, and benevolence; constitute what the world considers a perfect character.

The description which *Paul*gives of himself previous to his conversion, is so congenial with their sentiments of perfection, that they would not hesitate to rest the salvation of their souls on his attainments. But what said he of his state, when once he came to view it aright? "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He saw, that brokenness of heart for sin, a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ, and an unreserved devotedness of heart to his service, were indispensable to the salvation of the soul. He saw, that, without these, no attainments would be of any avail; yes, that a man might have all the Biblical learning of the Scribes, and all the sanctified habits of the Pharisees—and yet never be approved of the Lord in this world, nor ever be accepted of him in the world to come!

Is it not then desirable, that those who are in repute for wisdom and piety among us, should pause, and inquire, Whether their righteousness really exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees? Would they not do well to study the account which Paul gives of himself previous to his conversion, and to examine wherein they surpass him?

Alas! alas! we are exceedingly averse to be undeceived; but I would entreat every one of my hearers to consider deeply what our blessed Lord has spoken of such characters: "You are those who justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

**3.** Lastly, we would suggest some profitable considerations to those who profess to have attained that superior righteousness spoken of in our text.

You need not be told, that the examples of Christ and his Apostles, and indeed of all the primitive Christians, were offensive, rather than pleasing, to the Pharisees of old. The same disapprobation of real piety still lurks in the hearts of those who "occupy the seat of Moses," and you must not wonder if:  
your contrition is called gloom;  
your faith in Christ is called presumption;  
your delight in his ways is called enthusiasm;  
and your devotion to his service is called preciseness or hypocrisy.

Well, if it must be so, console yourselves with this, that you share the fate of all the saints that have gone before you; and that your state, with all the obloquy that attends it, is infinitely better than that of your revilers and persecutors: you may well be content to be despised by men, while you are conscious of the favor and approbation of God.

But take care that "you give no just occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully." The world, and especially those who resemble the Scribes and Pharisees, will watch your conduct narrowly, just as their forefathers did that of our Lord himself; and happy will they be to find occasion against you.

As for your secret walk with God, they know nothing about it: your hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, are nothing to them: these are the things which they deride as airy visions and enthusiastic deceits. They will inquire into those things which come more under their own observation, and on which they set an exclusive value: they will inquire how you conduct yourselves in your several relations of life; whether you are:  
temperate in your habits,  
modest in your demeanor,  
punctual in your dealings,  
true to your word,  
regular in your duties,  
and diligent in your studies.

They will point to many of their own followers as highly exemplary in all these particulars; and if they find you inferior to them in any respect, they will cast all the blame upon religion, and take occasion from your misconduct to confirm themselves in their prejudices.

Permit me, then, to say to all my younger brethren, and especially to all who show any respect for religion, that religion, if true and scriptural, is uniformly and universally *operative*; and that it is a shame to a Christian to be surpassed by a Pharisee in any duty whatever. Though I would be far from encouraging any of you to boast, I would entreat all of you so to act, that you may, if compelled by calumnies, adopt the language of the Apostle, "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they of the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool; I am more; in labors more abundant." Thus be also prepared to repel comparisons, or to turn them to your own advantage: and show, that, in all the social and relative duties, and especially in those pertaining to you as students, you are "not a whit behind the chief among them;" but even in the things wherein they most value themselves, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbor."

#1300

***~~Christ's Exposition of the Sixth Commandment~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.21), [22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.22)~~***

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of Hell fire!"

GENERAL statements, and general invectives, rarely carry any conviction to the mind: they must be supported by an induction of particulars, before they can produce any material effect. Assertions without proofs will be taken for calumny; but, when supported by fact, they will bear down all opposition. The assertions of our blessed Lord, indeed, needed no confirmation; because "he knew what was in man;" and because his miracles were a sufficient attestation to his word. Yet even He condescended to substantiate his accusations by appeals to fact.

He had intimated that the Scribes and Pharisees both did and taught many things contrary to his revealed will: and he had declared, that unless we have a better righteousness than theirs, we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven. To evince the truth of his charge, and of the declaration founded upon it, he shows that they had grossly perverted the sixth commandment: which on that account he proceeds to explain.

Let us consider,

***~~I. His exposition of this commandment.~~***

The commandment, "You shall not kill," was one of those proclaimed from Mount Sinai, and written by the finger of God himself on tables of stone. An order was afterwards given, that the crime of murder should be invariably punished with the death of the offender. These two were by the Pharisees joined together, as though they had been one and the same commandment: "You shall not kill; and whoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment." The effect of this union was that, first, the import of the commandment was thereby limited to actual murder; and, next, the sanction, with which it was enforced, was limited to a punishment inflicted by the civil magistrate. Hence all other violations of the commandment were either overlooked, as no offences at all, or were considered as of very light importance: and though God's future judgment might not be expressly denied, it was at least kept very much out of sight, by this method of interpreting the word of God.

To rectify these errors, our Lord gave his exposition of the commandment.

***~~1. He explained its import.~~***

It had been thought to extend only to actual murder; but he declared, that *it prohibited all causeless anger in the heart, and all outward expression of it with the lips.*

In determining the sinfulness of anger, two things are to be considered, namely, the object, and the occasion of our anger.

The only legitimate object of it is sin. The sinner himself should be regarded with love and pity; and only his sin should move our anger. Thus it was with our blessed Lord when he exercised anger; "He looked round about on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."

The occasion too must be just: our anger must not be causeless, or disproportionate to the offence, or of too long continuance. Where our anger is faulty in none of these respects, we observe the true medium; "We are angry, and sin not," but where any one of these barriers is broken down, there the anger becomes a violation of the sixth commandment.

Similar distinctions must be made respecting the outward expressions of anger. "Raca" was a term which indicated a contempt of the person to whom it was applied: it means, 'You empty worthless fellow.' "You fool," was an expression that implied a great degree of indignation and abhorrence, 'You reprobate villain.' Such expressions therefore as these must of necessity be considered as violations of the commandment, because they manifest a total lack of love and pity towards the person so addressed.

But it is not every reproachful word that is sinful. *Paul*said, "O foolish Galatians," "are you so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" *James*makes use of a similar expression; "Will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" Our blessed *Lord*spoke occasionally with far greater severity; "O fools, and blind;" "you hypocrites;" "you serpents and generation of vipers." But in these things he spoke as a prophet, bearing special authority; and consequently, unless specially authorized like him, we are not at liberty in these respects to follow his example.

The rule for us is plain; we may, like the Apostles, designate the characters of men by appropriate epithets; but we must never use any expression which implies a hatred or contempt of the person to whom it is addressed. If we do not strictly adhere to this rule, we violate the commandment.

Thus you see the import of the commandment. Let us next consider our Lord's explanation of,

***~~2. Its sanctions.~~***

We have observed, that the Pharisees, in their comments on this commandment, insisted almost exclusively on the temporal punishment annexed to the violation of it. Our Lord showed them, that the principal judgments would be felt in the eternal world; and that not only the direct act of murder, but all those other evils which he had represented as breaches of the commandment, would there meet with deserved punishment. This he illustrated by a reference to the different kinds of punishment which were inflicted in their courts of justice.

There were courts, established in different parts of the land, consisting of twenty-three members, who had power to try causes, and to inflict capital punishment on the guilty; and the people condemned by them, were beheaded.

There was also a great court or council, called the Sanhedrin, consisting of seventy-two members, who took cognizance of the greatest crimes; and the people condemned by them were stoned. But there were some offences for which people were condemned to be burnt alive: and these, it is thought, were executed in the valley of Hinnom. In that valley the people formerly had burned their children in sacrifice to Moloch; but, when the people were turned from that wicked idolatry, one method adopted for keeping them from returning to it was to defile the place as much as possible, and to render it detestable in the eyes of the people. For this purpose, all the filth of the city was carried there to be consumed; and fires were kept there on purpose to consume it. It is probable, that that spot was selected as the fittest place of execution for all who were sentenced to be burnt alive.

Now it is plain, that, of these three kinds of death, the last is far the most terrible: stoning was a more lingering death than beheading, and burning was still worse than stoning. A similar kind of gradation there will be in the punishments inflicted in the eternal world. Death, eternal death, will be the portion of all who die in their sins: but some will have a lighter, and others a heavier, weight of misery to sustain, in proportion to their respective degrees of guilt. "Those who are angry with their brother without a cause, will be in danger of the judgment," that is, of that lighter degree of misery, which may be compared to beheading. Those who suffer their anger to "break out into contemptuous expressions," and "say to their brother, *Raca*, shall be in danger of the council," and sustain a heavier punishment, answerable to stoning. And if any person shall entertain such rancor in his heart as to "say to his brother, You fool, he shall be in danger of Hell fire," that is, of that heaviest of all punishments, answerable to the being burnt alive in the valley of Hinnom: Hell fire being usually expressed in the New Testament, by a word importing, "The fire in the land of Hinnom."

Thus our Lord shows what are to be regarded as violations of this commandment, and that every violation of it shall receive a recompense proportionable to its enormity.

Having seen his exposition of the commandment, let us consider,

***~~II. The general instruction which it conveys to us.~~***

With the right exposition of the commandments every truth of the Gospel is intimately connected.

We may learn from this especially,

***~~1. The spirituality of the law.~~***

The law is not a mere letter, which imports nothing beyond the literal import of the words, but extends to all the thoughts and dispositions of the heart. It prohibits all tendencies towards the sin forbidden, and enjoins every virtue that is opposed to it. Paul speaks of this as a tiling known and acknowledged; "We know that the law is spiritual." In his unconverted state, indeed, he did not know it: he had the same view of the commandments as other Pharisees had, and thought he had never violated them, at least not so as to be condemned by them: but when God showed him the meaning of those words, "You shall not covet," he saw that "the commandment" was, as David had long before represented it, "exceeding broad," he saw that *there was not an inclination of the mind, or an affection of the heart, which was not under its cognizance and control*; and, consequently, that he had violated it in ten thousand instances.

This is the account which he himself gives us of his own experience: "I was alive without the law once; but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;" that is, 'Before I understood the law, I thought I had kept it, and would be saved by it; *but when I saw its spirituality and extent, I was sensible that I was a condemned sinner, and could never be justified by my obedience to it.'*

It is remarkable, that God has taught us this very lesson from the commandment before us. Moses was the meekest man upon earth: yet on one occasion he transgressed against this commandment, and spoke unadvisedly with his lips: "You rebels, shall we fetch water out of this rock for you?" and then, in his anger, he struck the rock twice. Now for this single transgression God excluded him from the earthly Canaan. And what was the import of this dispensation? It was intended to teach us, that *the law is violated as much by an angry word or temper*, as by murder itself; that *one single violation of it is sufficient to exclude us from the land of promise*; and that, though it is of excellent use to conduct us through the wilderness, it can never bring us into Canaan: that is the work of Joshua/Jesus, and of Joshua alone. Let us then learn this important lesson from the commandment before us; and be convinced, that there is no justification for us by the works of the law.

***~~2. The evil and danger of bad tempers.~~***

It is thought in general a sufficient excuse for passion, to say, that we are naturally quick and hasty; and, if a man do not long retain his anger, this hastiness of spirit is not considered, either by himself or others, as any great blemish in his character. But God does not judge so, when he tells us, that *anger in the heart exposes us to his heavy displeasure*, and that *the saying to our brother 'Raca' puts us in danger of Hell fire*. Surely we must have very little considered the effects of anger, if we can think so light of the criminality attaching to it. See what murderous purposes issued from it in the heart of David!—and what infernal acts were executed in consequence of it by the incensed sons of Jacob!—Or let us look nearer home, and see how often it terminates in blows, in duels, and in death. Who will say, that "the feet of an angry man are not swift to shed blood?" If nothing but the declarations of God himself will satisfy us, let us attend to them: "He who hates his brother, is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him," and again, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is vain!"

Hear then, you "dealers in proud anger;" hear what God himself speaks concerning you! Think it not a light matter to be angry with your wife, and children, and servants, on every occasion; and to be of such an irritable temper, that the smallest thing in the world suffices to put you in a passion. Whatever professions you may make of regard for religion, God tells you "not to deceive yourselves;" for that "no railer or reviler shall enter into his kingdom," and such a disgrace does he consider you to his religion, that he bids his own people "not so much as to eat with you."

You will say, "It is only with the lower class of people that I am angry; to my equals I am courteous enough." What then, is not one man your "brother," as well as another? Go and murder a poor man; and see whether the laws of the land will make any distinction: and, if they will not, much less will "God, with whom there is no respect of persons."*If you indulge anger in your heart, and express it with your lips, "Hell fire" will be your portion*, whatever be your own rank, and whether the objects of your anger be poor or rich.

If you would be Christians indeed, your habitual conduct must be agreeable to that precept, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

***~~3. The greatness of Gospel salvation.~~***

Let any one judge himself by our Lord's exposition of this commandment, and see how often he has been "in danger of the judgment, and the council; yes, and of Hell-fire itself." Yet here is only *one*commandment; and that too considered only in a very partial way. What then must be the amount of our guilt, when tried by *all*the commandments? And if such be the guilt of every individual among us, what must be the guilt of the whole world? Yet this was the guilt which was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and was expiated by his all-atoning sacrifice! How "mighty then must He be on whom such help was laid!" and*how precious must that blood be which could wash away such loads of guilt!*

We do not in general consider this as we ought: if we did, we could not but be filled with wonder at the stupendous plan which the *Father*laid, the Son *executed*, the Spirit *revealed*.

It is the full view of this subject that animates the heavenly hosts to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing," therefore, "blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever." And were we also to meditate more on these things, we should oftener catch the fire, and sing with enraptured hearts "the song of Moses and the Lamb."

#1301

***~~The Necessity of Seeking Reconciliation With Men~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.23), [24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.24)~~***

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

THE explanation which our Lord has given us of the sixth commandment, shows, that we are *not to confine the import of the commandments to the mere letter of them, but to regard them as extending to the words of our lips, and the dispositions of our hearts*. Nor must we imagine that they are intended solely to prohibit sin: they must be understood as inculcating all those virtues which are opposed to the sin forbidden. This is evident from the connection in which our text stands with the preceding context.

Our blessed Lord had declared that a wrathful word was in fact a species and degree of murder: and from thence he takes occasion to inculcate the necessity of exercising in every respect a spirit of love, so as, not only to entertain no anger in one's own heart against others, but so as not to leave room for the exercise of it in the hearts of others towards us. The direction which he gives us respecting it will lead us to show,

***~~I. The duty of seeking reconciliation with men.~~***

Wild beasts are scarcely more prone to injure their own species, than man is to oppress and injure his fellow-man. Indeed, considering what tempers we have, and what tempers exist in others, and what frequent occasions of interference with each other must of necessity arise, it would be a miracle if any of us had so conducted himself on all occasions, that no brother should on any account "have anything against him." We apprehend that no one who knows anything of his own heart, would profess himself so perfect, as never to have done towards another anything differently from what he would have wished to be done towards himself. Supposing then that "a brother has something against us," what is to be done? I answer:

***~~1. We should be willing to see our fault.~~***

*There is in us a self-love, which blinds our eyes, and prevents us from seeing our own defects*. Whatever relates to ourselves, we view in a partial light; so that we scarcely ever attach any material blame to ourselves. *Everyone complains of the injuries he receives, but not of the injuries he commits*. Take the report of mankind respecting each other, and the world is full of injuries; but take each person's report of *himself*, and no occasion of complaint wall be found to exist. But it would be far better to put ourselves in the place of those who are offended by us; and, instead of extenuating our own offences and aggravating theirs, to view the extenuations of theirs, and the aggravations of our own. This would be doing unto others as we would have others do unto us; and, if the habit of it were universal, it would soon root out all contention from the world.

***~~2. We should be ready to ask pardon for it.~~***

This is a condescension to which men in general are very averse to stoop. They would regard it as an act of baseness and cowardice; and therefore, even when conscious that they are wrong, they will rather risk the loss of their lives, than submit to it. But no man should be ashamed to make a suitable apology for any offence he may have committed.

When the friends of Job had, even with a good intention, incriminated him on account of supposed hypocrisy, God was incensed against them for their uncharitable conduct, and ordered them to make their acknowledgments to Job himself, and to entreat his intercession in their behalf. It was no excuse for them that they had been mistaken, or that they had intended well, or even that they had been actuated by a zeal for God: they had wounded the feelings, and defamed the character, of Job; and if ever they would obtain forgiveness from God, they must first of all ask forgiveness from their injured friend. Thus must we do: *it is an act of justice which we owe to man; and an act of obedience which we owe to God*.

***~~3. We should be desirous to make reparations for it.~~***

This was expressly required under the law: and it was practiced under the Gospel. No sooner was Zaccheus converted to the faith, than he engaged to restore fourfold to any person whom in his unconverted state he had defrauded. And *it is in vain to affect penitence, if we be not sincerely determined to make reparation, as far as is in our power, for any injury we may have done*. Who would give credit to a man for penitence, while he willfully retained the goods that he had stolen? Sincere contrition would urge him to undo whatever he had done amiss. And the same principle would produce the same effects in every person under Heaven.

Such is our duty towards an offended brother.

We now proceed to state,

***~~II. The importance of it in order to our acceptance with God.~~***

The command here given, to suspend the exercise of a solemn duty to God until we shall have performed this duty to man, shows,

***~~1. That no duties whatever can supersede the necessity of it.~~***

It is here taken for granted, that men will bring their gifts to God's altar, or, in other words, will draw near to him in the use of all his appointed ordinances. But will works of piety procure us a dispensation from the duties of the second table? Will the making of long prayers be any compensation for devouring widows' houses; or will the paying tithe of mint and anise and cummin atone for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth? No such commutation will be admitted by God; no such reserves are allowed: his word to us, under all such circumstances, is, "These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

***~~2. That no duties whatever will be accepted without it.~~***

A person is represented here as already with his offering before God's altar. But what says the word of God unto him? 'Finish your offering to me, and then go and be reconciled to your brother?' No, it is, "Go your way;" depart from my altar; leave your gift there, that it may be ready for you to offer after you are reconciled to your brother: but do not for a moment think of approaching me with acceptance, while your brother's rights are overlooked. "The prayer of the upright is doubtless God's delight," but, when presented by one who "regards iniquity in his heart, it not only shall not be heard," but it shall be held in utter "abomination."

Hear how solemnly God protests against all such hypocritical services. It is not in the power of words to express more holy contempt, or more rooted abhorrence, of such services, than is conveyed in these passages: and we may be assured, that if we attempt to draw near to God, either at his table or at the footstool of his grace, he will spurn us from him with indignation. Let us be ever so urgent in our supplications, his only answer will be, "Go your way."

Let us not however be misunderstood on this subject: we are not to imagine, that the circumstance of our being at variance with a brother is any excuse for staying away from the Lord's table: (it were strange indeed if a want of love to man would excuse a want of piety to God;) this is certainly not the meaning of our text: the meaning is, that, as we cannot be accepted of God in such a state, it befits us without delay to seek reconciliation with our offended brother.

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The necessity of frequent self-examination.~~***

It is here supposed that a person may be living in the exercise of religious duties, and, without being conscious of his danger, may be in a state wherein neither his person nor his services can be accepted of God: he goes to the altar of his God as usual, and there recollects that his brother has some cause of complaint against him.

Alas! there are many such self-deceiving people in the Christian world at this time. But how terrible! and they continue in their delusions until God himself shall bring their sins to remembrance at his judgment-seat! How dreadful will it then be to be told, "Go your way!" Let us then live in the habit of daily self-examination: *let us not leave any of our ways unnoticed, lest some hidden evil remain unrepented of*, and "separate between us and our God" forever. Especially when about to come to the supper of our Lord, let us try our ways with more than common jealousy, according to that advice of the Apostle, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him come."

Let us go back to our early days, and ask, Whom have we offended? whom have we defrauded? whom have we calumniated? whom have we encouraged in the ways of sin, or discouraged in the ways of piety and virtue? And, while we are careful to *wash away our stains in the Fountain opened for sin and for impurity*, let us be no less careful to obtain forgiveness from man, and to remedy the evils which we are unable to recall.

***~~2. The necessity of cultivating a humble spirit.~~***

*It is pride which renders us so averse to ask forgiveness of a fellow-creature.* But we have no alternative: if we will not seek reconciliation with an offended brother—then we shall not obtain it with an offended God. Let us only get our spirits humbled with a sense of our sin against God, and all the difficulty will vanish. We shall even feel a pleasure in making any acknowledgment which may tend to restore harmony and love.

Even if we are not conscious of having given any just occasion of offence, we shall not be satisfied, while we see a brother alienated from us: we shall be anxious to find the cause of his displeasure; to explain anything which he may have misapprehended, and alter anything he may have disapproved.

In short, if the Gospel had its due effect upon us, we should, as far as our influence extended, convert this wilderness into another Paradise. Our "swords would immediately be turned into ploughshares;" and "the wolf and the lamb would dwell together" in perfect amity. There would be "none to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain." O that we could see such a state existing all around us!

Let us at least endeavor to produce it in our respective circles. Let us appreciate as we ought the comfort of love, and the excellency of a Christian spirit. And let us seek that "wisdom from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

#1302

***~~The Importance of Seeking Reconciliation With God~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.25), [26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.26)~~***

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

IT is thought by many, that prudential considerations are unworthy of the attention of a Christian. That he ought to be influenced by higher principles, we readily admit. The love of Christ should be to him in the place of all other incentives, so far at least that he should not need any other motive for doing the will of God. But Christians are men, and feel the force of every principle which can operate upon the human mind: and therefore subordinate motives may fitly be proposed to them in aid of those which are more worthy of their regard.

Our blessed Lord, having explained the sixth commandment, inculcates the duties contained in it, particularly that of seeking reconciliation with an offended brother: and this he does, first from the consideration of the offence which a lack of a conciliatory spirit gives to God, and next from a consideration of the danger to which it exposes ourselves.

In the former view we have treated of it in the foregoing verses; in the latter view we are to speak of it at this time. But the peculiarly emphatic manner in which our Lord speaks in the words before us, will naturally, and almost necessarily, lead our thoughts beyond the mere concerns of time, to another tribunal before which we must all appear. We shall therefore consider our text,

***~~I. In its primary and literal sense.~~***

When we have by any means offended a brother, we should not defer the period of making proper concessions, but should make them "quickly," the danger of delay is great: for,

***~~1. The breach may become irreparable.~~***

When we have excited a painful feeling in the heart of another, or even injured him in a considerable degree, we may by instantaneous concessions abate at least, if not entirely remove, his anger. But the longer he is allowed to pore over the injuries he has sustained, the more his wound festers, and indignation rankles in his bosom. Continued pondering over the misconduct of the offending person brings to his recollection a multitude of incidents, which under other circumstances would have been overlooked, but, viewed through the medium of anger, are magnified into importance, and regarded as aggravations of the offence committed. Thus an aversion to make acknowledgments on the one side, begets inflexibility on the other; and that which might have passed away as a slight and transient dispute, becomes a ground of bitter alienation and deep-rooted aversion. To prevent this, we should strive to make up the matter "while we are in the way with him."

Instead of separating immediately, as is usually the case, and avoiding all means of friendly communication, we should labor to prevent matters from coming to an extremity: and set ourselves in the first instance to procure a reconciliation, precisely as we would to extinguish a fire that threatened to consume our house: we should not stop until the flames had gained an irresistible ascendant; but should set ourselves first to quench the fire, and afterwards guard against the occasions of future conflagration.

***~~2. The consequences may be radical.~~***

Our Lord supposes a person so irritated as to have determined to prosecute us in a court of law: and he supposes that the offence has been such as, when judgment is given against us, will terminate in our ruin. The compensation awarded him, and the costs of the suit, exceeding our power to discharge, we shall be cast into prison, and be liberated from thence no more.

This is a consequence which frequently happens for lack of timely humiliation in the offending party.

But where measures are not pursued to such an extent, the disagreement may yet be attended with most calamitous effects. And it will be well for us to remember, that, though the people we may offend may not be able to avenge themselves in that precise way, there is no person who may not at some time or other have it in his power to do us an essential injury: and therefore, though it is but a poor motive for a Christian to act upon, we may not improperly bear it in mind, as a subordinate consideration, to keep us from giving offence to any, and to stir us up to adopt the most prompt and effectual means of reconciliation with any whom we may have chanced to provoke.

That our subject may be more generally interesting, we shall consider the text,

***~~II. In a secondary and accommodated sense.~~***

Notwithstanding the Apostles occasionally quote the Scriptures in a secondary and accommodated sense, we would be very cautious in taking such a liberty with the word of God. But we can scarcely conceive that our Lord had not some reference to the future judgment, when the Supreme Judge of all will execute on every unhumbled sinner the punishment he deserves. Though our offences be primarily against our fellow-creature, God will take cognizance of them at the last day, if we have not sought forgiveness in this life, as well at the hand of our offended brother, as at his hands. But since we cannot absolutely affirm that this is the sense of our text, we are contented to call it an accommodated sense; more especially because, in this latter sense, we consider God as the offended party, no less than the Judge who takes cognizance of the offence. Let not this, however, be thought a great liberty, because he is really the offended party, whether our transgression is immediately against man or not; and, as we have observed, God will bring every work into judgment, whoever it might affect in the first instance.

With this apology we shall consider our text as prescribing a rule of conduct for us towards God, no less than towards our fellow-creatures: and this we may well do; for,

***~~1. Our duty is the same.~~***

We have all offended God, and that in instances without number. To humble ourselves before him is our bounden duty. This would be our duty, though no means of reconciliation had been provided for us: but when God has sent his only-begotten Son to make an atonement for our sins, so that we might be brought into a state of reconciliation with him in a way consistent with the honor of his law and of his moral government, we should be inexcusable indeed if we should delay to seek him one single moment. The ingratitude which such conduct would argue, would aggravate our past offences beyond measure.

***~~2. The reasons for it are the same.~~***

"Do it while you are still with him on the way." Though we are hastening to the judgment-seat of Christ, we are not yet arrived there: and there is yet time for reconciliation with our offended God.

This time however will be very short; how short we know not: we are advancing towards his tribunal every day and hour. But, if once the matter is brought before the Judge, all hope of mercy and forgiveness will be past: justice must then be dispensed according to the strict letter of the law. The sentence that will then be decreed will be unalterably fixed forever: so far from "paying the last penny" of our debt, we shall never be able to pay one penny: and consequently must endure the penalty of our sins forever and ever.

Who can reflect on the awfulness of that prison, and yet continue one hour in an unreconciled state? Consider the solemnity with which our Lord warns us against delay, and lose not another moment in imploring mercy at the hands of God.

***~~Reflections.~~***

***~~1. Of what value in the sight of God is brotherly love!~~***

If we were to judge by the little regard shown to it by men, we should account it of no value: but God declares, that whatever we may have, or do, or suffer, if destitute of love, we are no better than sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals. As far as we are possessed of love, so far we resemble him: as far as we are destitute of it, we resemble "the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning." Let us cultivate to the uttermost this heavenly grace.

***~~2. How happy would the world be if Christian love universally prevailed!~~***

"Love is the fulfilling both of the law" and the Gospel too. If the Gospel reigned in the hearts of all, "Judah would no more vex Ephraim, nor would Ephraim envy Judah." All would be harmony and peace throughout the world. To prove the blessedness of such a state, I need only appeal to those who have felt at any time the disquietudes arising from anger and contention, and have at last been enabled to re-unite with their brother in cordial amity and affection. What a difference is there in your feelings! Instead of being harassed with incessant vexation, how are you now filled with tranquility and joy! If then we have nothing more than our own happiness in view, we should, "as much as lies in us, live peaceably with all men".

***~~3. How earnest we should be in preparing for the future judgment!~~***

There, not overt actions only, but tempers and dispositions, will be strictly investigated: and a sentence will be passed upon us, founded on the moral state of our minds and hearts. Let us not trifle in a matter of such importance. Let us not be satisfied with saying, "I forgive all;" but let us inquire whether there be any person of whom we have not asked forgiveness?*Our proud hearts are very averse to stoop*; but if we do not humble ourselves now before God and man, the time will come when we shall "find no place for repentance, though we should seek it carefully with tears."

#1303

***~~Our Lord's Exposition of The Seventh Commandment~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.27), [28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.28)~~***

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

We do not wonder that the Jews were unacquainted with the spiritual nature of their law, because their authorized instructors were chiefly occupied in ceremonial observances; but that Christians should be ignorant of it, is astonishing, since the strongest light has been cast upon it in the New Testament, and every minister of Christ must make it known, in order to state with accuracy the scope and excellence of the Gospel. Yet it is certain that few Christians comparatively have just views of the law: and it is to be feared, that, in many instances, ministers themselves are not sufficiently aware of the importance of setting it before their people in all its spirituality and extent. The exposition of it which our Lord has given us in this sermon, precludes all possibility of doubt respecting its real import. In the words which we have now read, he interprets the seventh commandment: in discoursing upon which, it will be proper to consider,

***~~I. Its true import.~~***

The Scribes and Pharisees imagined that the prohibition reached no further than to the actual commission of adultery; but our Lord shows that it extended,

**1. To *mental*****impurity, as well as bodily impurity.**

The intent of God's law is to regulate our hearts. It can never be supposed that God should require us to "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," and leave us at liberty to retain all kinds of impurity within. He surely will not be satisfied with seeing us like "whited sepulchers." He forbids an evil desire, no less than an evil act: and especially in relation to the evil we are considering, he specifies every variety of it as alike hateful in his eyes: "adultery, fornication, impurity, lasciviousness," are all distinctly mentioned as "works of the flesh," which equally exclude us from the kingdom of God. Of course, the law does not condemn that attachment which is cherished in order to an honorable marriage; but it does condemn all desires which have not respect to marriage.

We forbear to enlarge upon the subject, wishing rather to commend it to your consciences before God; but we entreat you all attentively to consider what have been the workings of your own minds and hearts on different occasions, when perhaps you little thought what construction God put upon them, and in what light you were viewed by him.

***~~2. To the means and occasions of impurity, as well as to impurity itself.~~***

It is needless to observe, that the eye and the ear are inlets to evil, and that they need to be subjected to continual restraints. Our blessed Lord declares, that even a look, when employed for the purpose of exciting an impure desire, or when productive of that effect—involves the soul in guilt, no less than adultery itself. Peter speaks of people having "eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin." If the eye then may bring so much defilement on the soul, what shall we say of frequenting those places of public amusement, where everything that is seen and heard has a direct tendency to corrupt the mind? What shall we say of allowing our minds to be contaminated with light and frothy novels, with indecent pictures, with licentious conversation, or indeed with sensual thoughts? Can anyone who allows himself in such liberties as these, acquit himself of the charge which is brought against him in the text? Nor are they less criminal, whose dress is framed for this unhallowed end, and who sacrifice both decency and health to the detested purpose of inflaming the appetites of men. It is obvious, that, whether we are the tempters, or the tempted—we are highly criminal: however the imagination becomes defiled, that defilement constitutes us guilty in the sight of God.

Such being the view which our Lord himself gives us of the commandment, we proceed to consider,

***~~II. The effect which our Lord's exposition of it should produce upon us.~~***

Were the commandment restricted to its literal meaning, we might find cause perhaps for self-approval in relation to it. But when it is rightly interpreted, it affords to all of us abundant occasion for,

***~~1. Humiliation.~~***

"Who will say: My heart is clean, I am pure from this sin?" Who, if an adulteress were now to be stoned to death, would take up the first stone to cast at her? Who must not retire self-convicted, and self-condemned? If then we would know what ought to be our feelings before God, we have here an image whereby they may be illustrated in the clearest manner.

Conceive a woman who has for many years maintained an honorable character, betrayed at last into a betrayal of her marriage vows, and exposed to all the shame which her misconduct has justly brought upon her: how degraded would she be in her own eyes! how ashamed would she be to appear in the presence of her injured husband! how would she even loath her own existence, and hate the light which would expose her to public view!

Just such consciousness should we feel in the presence of our God, even when our conduct has been most blameless in the sight of men. We should take to ourselves our proper character; and, *knowing what abominations the omniscient God has seen within us—we should humble ourselves before him, and loath ourselves in dust and ashes*. We should put our hands on our mouths, and "our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, unclean!"

***~~2. Gratitude.~~***

Many instances there are of people, who, in former times, have been as moral in their habits as any of us—who yet, through the violence of temptation, have fallen, and brought indelible disgrace upon their names and families. Why is it, we would ask, that this has not been *our*lot? Is it that we have never found any disposition to commit the evils which have ruined them? Is it that we are not actually chargeable with those very evils in the sight of God, who identifies the desire with the act itself? Or rather, *is it not owing to the kind providence of God, who has screened us from temptation, or interposed in some way to break its force and rescue us from its power?*

We may perhaps be ready to ascribe our safety to a good education, and other secondary causes: but, if the First Great Cause had not rendered them effectual, they would have been as unavailing for us, as they have been for thousands all around us. Doubtless we have reason to be thankful . . .  
for the restraints of moral education,  
for a dread of public shame,  
yes, even for the laws of the land also.

All of these have had their weight, when perhaps other barriers might have been broken down: we have reason therefore to be thankful for them. But especially have we cause to bless our God for the checks of conscience, if at any time the progress of evil has been impeded by them. Whatever have been the means of preserving us from the actual commission of iniquity, the true source of our deliverance is the same: it must ultimately be traced to the providence and grace of God; and all the glory must be given to our heavenly Benefactor.

***~~3. Circumspection.~~***

When we consider how many temptations to evil present themselves to us on every side, and what depraved appetites lurk within us—we shall see reason to maintain continual vigilance and circumspection. It was wise in Job, who "made a covenant with his eyes, that he would not even look upon a maid." Solomon has wisely cautioned us to let our eyes look strait forward. If we regarded only the danger of falling into open sin, this advice would be good: but when we reflect on our Lord's assertion, that an impure look will be considered by Almighty God as adultery, we had need to be on our guard against the very first assaults of evil: we should "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation," we should "keep," not our *feet*only, but "our *hearts*also, with all diligence; knowing that out of them are the issues of life."

Remember then what we have already spoken respecting the means and occasions of impurity. Guard against the books, the places, the company, the conversation, that you have at any time perceived to be defiling to your souls. Be as careful of catching infection from those around you, as you would be if they were infected with the plague. Go not into the world, without carrying with you, as an *antidote*, the fear of God. Come not from your fellowship with the world, without washing away your defilements in "the fountain opened for sin and for impurity." Be on your guard also against your *secret thoughts*; remembering, that God is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of your hearts," and that he will bring every *secret*thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil."

It is solemn to reflect, what evils will be disclosed in the last day, and what fearful judgments will be denounced on many, who in this world were reputed chaste. May God enable us all to walk as in his immediate presence; and give us such a measure of his grace, as shall "sanctify us wholly," and "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!"

#1304

***~~The Necessity of Mortifying Every Sin~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29), [30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.30)~~***

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Hell."

MANY of the precepts of our holy religion are so strict, that people indisposed to obey them are ready to turn away from them in despair, exclaiming, "This is a hard saying—who can bear it?" But must we on that account keep back the truth, or lower the commands of God to the habits and inclinations of men? Must we not rather "declare the whole counsel of God," and enforce to the uttermost the authority of his word? Our blessed Lord has set us an example in this respect; an example which all his servants must follow.

He had declared, that an impure look was in God's estimation, mental adultery. To this it might be objected, that our constitution, rather than our will, was chargeable with this offence. But our Lord shuts out at once all objections of this kind, by saying that even a right eye or a right hand must be parted with, rather than that we should allow them to lead us to the commission of any sin; and that, *if we refuse to sacrifice anything for his sake—then eternal misery will be our merited and inevitable portion*.

In his words there are two things to be noticed:

***~~I. The alternative proposed.~~***

It is here supposed, that we have, both within us and without, many things which may operate as incitements to sin. And experience proves that this is really the case: there is not a faculty of our minds, or a member of our bodies, which may not become an occasion of evil; nor is there anything around us which may not add fuel to the flames of corruption that are within us.

*Beauty*has a tendency to create unhallowed desires*.*

*Splendor* has a tendency to call forth envy and ambition*.*

*Plenty* has a tendency to promote intemperance.

But *our Lord sets before us an alternative, either to turn away from those things which are occasions of evil—or to suffer the displeasure of an angry God in Hell.*

Now this is,

***~~1. An only alternative.~~***

Nothing less will suffice on our part; nor will any diminution of punishment be admitted on God's part. It is to no purpose to urge, that the evil disposition which we harbor is but small, or that it is in a manner necessary to our happiness. If it is as dear as a right eye, or as necessary as a right hand, it must be sacrificed. Nor is there any intermediate state, like that of purgatory, to which *small offenders*can be consigned. As *there is no medium between the renunciation of sin and the allowance of it—so there is no middle state between Heaven and Hell. The alternative is clear, definite, and irreversible. You cannot be "Christ's, unless you crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts."*

It is worthy of observation, that our Lord does not affirm that the retaining of a right hand or eye will ensure eternal punishment; but he takes it for granted; he considers it as an acknowledged truth. Yes, even before the resurrection of the body had been fully revealed, he considers that also as acknowledged; he takes for granted that the body, as well as the soul, shall be a subject of happiness or misery in the eternal world; and he assumes this truth as the ground of his argument. There can be no doubt therefore but that "the whole body will be cast into Hell," if any one member of it be made an instrument or occasion of sin.

***~~2. A desirable alternative.~~***

It may seem strange to represent such an alternative as desirable, but it is really so. For a permission to harbor one unmortified lust would be like a permission to drink so much poison, or to retain one disorder preying upon our vitals. But this is not all. *Sin, if allowed any part in our affections—will strive for mastery, and never cease, until it has attained an undisputed dominion.*It is a *leprosy*which will overspread the whole man; "a cancer which will eat," until it has consumed us utterly. Is it not desirable then to have it altogether eradicated, and to be compelled to wage incessant war against it? Were there any other alternative allowed us, we should lack a sufficient stimulus to exertion: we should be apt to side with the traitor, and, for the sake of present ease or gratification, to neglect our true interests. But, when there is no other choice given us, but either to mortify every sinful propensity—or to suffer eternal misery in Hell, we are constrained to gird ourselves to the battle, and to "fight without intermission the good fight of faith."

***~~3. A necessary alternative.~~***

This alternative is no arbitrary imposition to which we are subjected without necessity: it arises out of the very nature of things. God himself could not alter it consistently with his own perfections: he could no more give license to his creatures to harbor sin, or decline punishing it if harbored—than he could cease to be holy, or to have a due respect for the honor of his law.

But supposing he were to cancel this alternative, and to admit to the regions of bliss a person who retained one bosom lust, it would be of no avail; for Heaven to such a person would not be Heaven. Place a man here at a royal banquet; set before him everything that can please the appetite; let him hear the sweetest melody that ever charmed the ear; let all around him be as full of happiness as their hearts can hold—what enjoyment of it would he have, while "a thorn was in his eye?" We do not hesitate to say, that darkness and solitude would to him be far preferable to all this gaiety and splendor. And precisely thus would it be to one who would be admitted into Heaven, while one unmortified sin was yet rankling in his bosom!

What to do under such circumstances we learn from,

***~~II. The advice given.~~***

The advice is simply this: *To mortify sin without reserve*.

All are agree that sincere mortification of sin is a difficult and painful work, like the destruction of an eye, or the excision of a hand. But still it *must*be done. Of course, the language of our text is not to be taken literally: the maiming of the body, though it might incapacitate that individual member for the commission of sin, would effect nothing towards the eradicating of sin from the *heart*. We must understand the text as referring to the dispositions of the mind, and to the things which draw forth those dispositions into exercise. Do our connections draw us aside from the path of duty? Are we beguiled by their example, or intimidated by their authority? We must learn to withstand their influence, and to submit either to their hatred or contempt, rather than be betrayed by them into anything that is displeasing to God. Doubtless, we should do everything in our power to conciliate them; but if nothing but a dereliction of duty will satisfy them—then we must be prepared with meekness to reply, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge."

Do our *interests*betray us into sin? Are we engaged in a *trade*which we cannot carry on without doing things which our consciences condemn? Or have we *prospects*in life which must be sacrificed, if we will follow the Lord fully? There must be no hesitation on this point: we must pluck out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, and "cast them away from us" with abhorrence, rather than allow them to warp our judgment, and defile our conscience.

Are our *passions*the occasions of sin? We must learn to subdue them by fasting and prayer, and to restrain the gratification of them to the limits which God himself has assigned. We must "mortify our members upon earth," and "crucify the whole body of sin."

Let it not be said, We require too much. It is not man, but God, who requires these things. He has promised that "his grace shall be sufficient for us;" so that, however the work may exceed all human power, we need not be discouraged: we are authorized, every one of us, to say with the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Only "walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

The argument with which this advice is enforced, is such as no human being can withstand.

We have before observed, that our Lord assumes this as an acknowledged and indisputable truth, namely, that eternal misery in Hell must be the consequence of practicing one allowed sin. From hence he argues, that "it is expedient" to part with sin, rather than incur that tremendous punishment. The pleasure of sin will surely be too dearly purchased at such a price as this! Whatever we design to procure, we always consider what its value is. No man would give a large estate for a worthless insignificant bauble. Nor would any man gratify his palate with a poisonous drink, which he knew would fill him with excruciating agony to the last hour of his life.

We grant then that sin is pleasant, just for the moment: but will that momentary enjoyment repay an eternity of misery, of such misery too as no imagination can conceive? We grant too that something may be gained by sin: but can the gain ever equal the loss that will be sustained? "If a man should gain the whole world, what would it profit him, if by that means he lost his own soul?"

*Moreover, the pain of mortifying sin cannot be compared with the pain which will follow from the indulgence of it.*Be it so, the mortifying of sin is painful; but what are the sufferings of Hell fire? Were the pain of self-denial a million times greater than it is, it is but for a moment; whereas the pains of Hell are everlasting. Alas! who can think of them, and not tremble? Who can think of them, and hesitate one moment about the mortifying of sin?

See what we do when informed that the retaining of a limb will endanger our lives: we suffer amputation, however painful it may be; and are glad to pay the person that will perform the operation for us. O let us be equally wise in relation to our souls!

From the contemplation of this argument then, we most heartily concur in our Lord's advice: If your *connections*ensnare you, renounce them. If your *interests*ensnare you, sacrifice them. If your *passions*ensnare you, get them subdued and mortified. Having your choice given to you—learn with Mary, to "choose the better part."

***~~We cannot conclude the subject without pointing out to you the importance,~~***

***~~1. Of ministerial faithfulness.~~***

It can be no pleasure to us to speak of "Hell fire," and to alarm you with denouncing it as the portion of so great a multitude of our fellow-creatures. But what are we to do? What did our Lord himself do in the words before us? If we are silent, we cannot alter God's determinations; whether we tell you of it or not, this is the alternative which God has given you: we cannot reverse it; we cannot soften it; we cannot lower it to your wishes or attainments.

We may deceive and ruin you by our silence; but we cannot benefit you at all: we shall only involve ourselves in your eternal ruin. If indeed we have put a wrong construction on our text, then we are blamable for alarming you without reason: but yet, as long as we believe this to be the mind and will of God, we must declare it: "knowing, as we do, the terrors of the Lord, we must persuade men;" and you may at least derive this advantage from our warnings—namely, to be stirred up to a diligent inquiry after truth.

But suppose our interpretation of the passage to be just, of what infinite importance to you is it to be rightly informed respecting it! *How many of you may now escape the miseries of Hell—who, but for this warning, might have been subjected to them forever!*Surely then, brethren, you are indebted to us for our fidelity. You cannot but know that such faithfulness is the parent of contempt and calumny. But we would gladly endure infinitely more than ever we have endured, if only you would take heed to our words, and flee from the wrath to come. To all of you then we say, Be thankful for the ministry that probes you to the quick, and that consults your eternal welfare, rather than your approbation.

***~~2. Of personal integrity.~~***

Self-love inclines us always to view ourselves more favorably than we ought. If we are conscious of *some secret evil*, we excuse ourselves as much as possible, in order to dissipate all fear of future punishment. If we hear that evil exposed, we are rather led to contemplate it in others, than to view it in ourselves. Or if constrained to advert to our own case, we condemn the minister, either as too personal, or as too severe. But what folly is this!

If we had reason to apprehend that we had caught the plague, should we not be anxious to ascertain the truth, in order that we might counteract the infection, and escape its baneful effects? Why then are we not equally solicitous to know the state of our souls before God? Why will we shut our eyes against the light? What harm can arise from knowing what God has said concerning us? O put not away from you, brethren, the word of life! Rather come hither, in order that you may be probed; in order that there may be no undiscovered evil in you. Examine yourselves with all imaginable care.

*Be afraid of nothing so much as being left in ignorance, and deceiving your own souls*. When we speak the severest truths, apply them, not to others, but yourselves: take them as a light with which to search your own hearts: and beg of God to aid you by his Holy Spirit. Let David's prayer be ever on your lips: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."

#1305

***~~Divorces Forbidden~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.31), [32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 5.32)~~***

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."

THE laws of men cannot always proceed to the extent that might be wished in the support of truth and virtue. They must sometimes bend to circumstances, and tolerate evils which they cannot totally prevent. Even under the Old Testament Theocracy itself this necessity was felt and admitted. The laws of Moses, as far as they were purely moral, were perfect and inflexible; but, as far as they were political, they yielded in a measure to the state and character of the people for whom they were made. The Jews were a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people, and extremely licentious in their ways. They would multiply their wives to any extent that they chose, and divorce on the most frivolous occasions. Moses knew that an absolute prohibition of such practices would only render the men more ferocious, and the women more miserable: and therefore he contented himself with laying some restrictions on the men, that if divorces could not be prevented, they might at least be rendered less frequent, by being made more solemn, more deliberate, more manifest. He limited the permission to those instances wherein there was in the woman some moral, natural, or acquired defect, which was the ground of her husband's alienation from her. He then ordered that a writing of divorcement should be drawn up, and in the presence of two witnesses be given to her; so that, if she were afterwards married to another man, she might be able to prove that she was not living in adultery, because her former marriage had been annulled. This restriction, which was only a permission granted on account of the hardness of their hearts, was by the Scribes and Pharisees construed into a command to divorce their wives, as soon as ever they ceased to love them: and, under cover of this law, the most licentious and cruel practices almost universally prevailed.

Our blessed Lord, who came to put all his followers under the authority of the moral law, and to reduce the world to its primeval sanctity, declared, that this licentious behavior was contrary to the original institution of marriage; and that henceforth, as Adam and Eve were formed for each other, and united in marriage, without any latitude allowed to either of them to dissolve the connection, or to admit any other to a participation of their mutual rights, so should every man and woman, when united in wedlock, have an inalienable right in each other, a right that should never be cancelled, but by a violation of the marriage vows.

To this subject our Lord was led by his exposition of the seventh commandment. He had shown, that that commandment was no less violated by an impure look than by the act of adultery itself: and now he proceeds to show that those practices, which were supposed to be sanctioned by the Mosaic law, were never to be tolerated among his followers, since they were directly contrary to the spirit of that commandment. There was one, and only one reason, which should henceforth be admitted as a proper ground of divorce: and if anyone in future should put away his wife in defiance of this restriction, he should be dealt with as an adulterer in the day of judgment.

The restriction itself being so clear and simple, we shall not attempt any further elucidation of it, but shall rather point out the importance of the restriction to the welfare of mankind.

***~~I. It raises the female gender from the lowest state of degradation.~~***

While men were at liberty to take, and to divorce, as many wives as they pleased, the female gender were viewed in no other light than as females are regarded by the brute creation. Their moral and intellectual qualities were overlooked. Whatever distinguished them as a higher order of beings, was disregarded: their beauty only was deemed of any essential consequence; and they were valued only as means and instruments of licentious gratification.

Consider the state of those whom Solomon and Rehoboam selected as ministers to their pleasures. *Rehoboam*had eighteen wives and sixty concubines. *Solomon*had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines. What can be conceived more humiliating than the state of all those women? all cut off from converse with men; all precluded from a possibility of filling that station in life, to which, in common with other females, they had been ordained.

View those also who are selected for the choice of king *Ahasuerus*. Officers were appointed to gather together all the most beautiful young virgins throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of his empire: these were all to be purified with oil of myrrh and sweet fragrances for the space of a whole year; and then in succession to be admitted to the king for one night, and never afterwards to see him, unless called for by name. Four years had the succession continued, before Esther's turn for admission to him arrived; and she, pleasing him beyond all the rest, was appointed Queen. How incredible does all this appear that such a state of things should ever exist; that the parents should ever allow it; and that the females should ever endure it! Were it reported in any other history than that which we know to be divine, we would never believe that the whole female gender would ever be reduced to such a state of horrible degradation as this.

But from this degradation the Gospel raises them. By the restriction in our text, they are again elevated to the rank which the first woman sustained in Paradise. Though still inferior to the man in power and dignity, they possess equal rights with him. He has no more power to repudiate them, than they him. The wife has now the same property in her husband as he has in her: nor can anything but a willful alienation of it by infidelity on her part deprive her of it. If in one single instance he transfers to another those regards which by his nuptial vows were exclusively assigned to her—he shall be condemned for it by God, as certainly as she would be, if she were guilty of a similar transgression.

***~~II. It moderates the tempers and passions of men.~~***

Every one knows that power is a snare; and that it is difficult to possess unlimited authority without being sometimes led to exercise it in an unfitting manner. Suppose a man at liberty to divorce his wife whenever he chose, and to take whoever he would to fill her place; is it not probable that he would presume upon that power to tyrannize over her and oppress her? Is it not to be expected also that he would be easily captivated by youth and beauty, as soon as ever sickness or age should have robbed his wife of her former attractions? Under such circumstances, little could be hoped for, but inconstancy in affection, irritability in temper, licentiousness in manners, and cruelty in conduct.

But by the restriction in our text all occasion for these things is cut off; and a necessity is imposed of cultivating dispositions directly opposite. A man when first he plights his troth to a virgin, knows that he takes her for better and for worse. He is aware that the knot can never be untied; and that his connection with her forbids even a desire after any other. Hence then he sees the necessity of patience and forbearance towards her: he feels the importance of gaining her affections by kind usage: and he determines, by contributing to her happiness as much as possible, to ensure his own. If any man thinks that the restriction operates unfavorably on him, let him compare the tumultuous passions of a lawless libertine, with the chaste enjoyments of conjugal fidelity: and he will soon see the one is "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," while the other is a source of steady and increasing comfort to the last hour of his life.

***~~III. It provides for the happiness of the rising generation.~~***

What must be the effect of that licentious fellowship of which we have spoken? Would men feel much regard for children whose mothers they had ignominiously divorced? Would even the mothers themselves feel that regard for their children, which they would have done, if they had still retained the affections of their cruel father? The women, reduced to great extremities, would doubtless in many instances leave their children to perish with cold and hunger, if not put an end to their existence with their own hands.

But how different the condition of children under the present system! Now both the parents become their guardians, and equally exert themselves to make provision for them. *They look upon their children as their dearest treasure; and expect from them their richest comforts*. Hence they feel interested in imbuing their minds with Christian knowledge, and in regulating their conduct according to the Christian code.

In short, their happiness being bound up in their offspring, they, for their own comfort's sake, instruct them in whatever is necessary to make them good members of society at least, if not also members of the Church above. We say not indeed that this effect is universally produced: but we do say, that the restriction in our text, if duly considered, has a direct tendency to produce it.

***~~From this view of our subject we may see,~~***

***~~1. How great are our obligations to Christianity!~~***

God, even under the law, bore strong testimony against the licentious cruelty of his people: but our Savior has decided the point forever. None can henceforth inflict, or allow, such injuries as the Jews inflicted on their wives. Even those who have no regard whatever for religion, are partakers of these benefits, in common with the whole Church. Christianity has raised the tone of morals, and made those things infamous, which are approved and applauded where the light of the Gospel is not known. But if the ungodly and unbelieving are thus benefitted by the Gospel, how much more are they who feel its influence on all their conduct and conversation! They, knowing that the marriage union is indissoluble, set themselves to fulfill its duties; and in fulfilling them, are made truly happy. *Behold a Christian family conducting themselves after this manner, and then you will see what Christianity has done for an ungodly world*.

***~~2. How studious we should be to adorn its doctrines!~~***

In nothing is Christianity more seen than in the deportment of its votaries in family and social life. It is easy for men to be on their guard when they are in company, and to demean themselves reverently in the house of God: but it is not easy for people to be consistent in all their conduct amidst the various occurrences of domestic life. Here the tempers, if not restrained by grace, will break out: the husband will be imperious and harsh; or the wife will be fretful, querulous, and disobedient. Feeling a confidence that their respective weaknesses will be hidden from public view, they show them to each other without restraint.

Beloved brethren, inquire whether this be not the case with you; and, if it be, learn to mortify these unhallowed tempers. The true way to adorn religion, is to propose to yourselves that image by which the marriage state is represented in the Gospel. It is compared to that union which exists between the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. The Church renders unto him all grateful obedience; while he exercises towards it the most self-denying and endearing affection. Thus should the *wife*be cheerfully obedient to her husband—even as to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, in everything which is not contrary to the will of God. Thus should the *husband*should account it his joy to manifest towards her all possible love, never exercising authority over her but with a view to her best interests and her truest happiness. Only let this be the pattern for your imitation, and you will never wish for a relaxation of that law whereby you are united to each other in an indissoluble bond. You will rather bless God that he has made the bond so strict; and you will avail yourselves of your mutual influence to advance in each other your spiritual and eternal interest, that, "as fellow-heirs of the grace of life," you may dwell together in Heaven for evermore.

#1306

***~~Swearing Forbidden~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:33–37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.33â37)~~***

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

AMONG people unaccustomed to hear the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, a kind of jealousy is often excited by the very recital of the text; especially if the preacher is known to be zealous for those doctrines, and the passage which he has selected evidently inculcates them. This feeling is manifestly wrong; and every one who loves the Gospel sees in a moment the evil of indulging it. But is this feeling peculiar to those who are ignorant of the Gospel? No, by no means: for religious people themselves are too apt to yield to it, when any text is announced which leads only to the discussion of some moral subject. But if this feeling is wrong in the unenlightened part of mankind, it is a thousand times more so in those who profess to be enlightened, and who ought on that very account to love every portion of the sacred volume, and gladly to hear every truth insisted on in its season.

The subject of swearing does not seem to promise much edification to an audience conversant with the sublimer mysteries of our religion: but, if our blessed Lord saw fit to speak of it so fully in his Sermon on the Mount, we may be sure that our time cannot be misspent in investigating, as we purpose to do,

***~~I. The nature and extent of the prohibition before us.~~***

You must be aware that there is a very respectable body of people in this kingdom, who not only deny the lawfulness of oaths altogether, but make the abstaining from them an essential part of their religion; insomuch that the legislature, which exacts an oath from all others, allows them to give their evidence in a way of simple assertion. Now these people understand the prohibition in our text as unlimited: whereas we consider it as limited.

To exhibit it in its true light, I shall show,

***~~1. To what it does not extend.~~***

It does not extend then to oaths taken in a court of judicature. This is evident from their being absolutely enjoined on many occasions by God himself. Moreover, our blessed Lord submitted to be examined upon oath; and, on being adjured by the living God, gave a reply, which nothing else could extort from him. And by his disciples also such a use of oaths is manifestly approved: it is said, that an oath for confirmation is an "end of all strife."

Now then I ask, would such kind of oaths have been commanded of God, taken by Christ, and approved by the Apostles, if there had been anything necessarily and inherently wrong in them? We are well assured, that had they been in themselves morally evil, the use of them would never have been so sanctioned.

Nor does the prohibition absolutely extend to the use of them on any other solemn occasion. On some particular occasions they were imposed and taken by holy men of old. Abraham exacted an oath from his servant whom he sent to seek a wife for his son Isaac. Jacob took an oath from Joseph, as Joseph also did of the children of Israel, that they would carry up his bones to Canaan, and bury them in the promised land. And Jonathan made David swear to him to exercise tenderness towards his posterity, after he would be seated on the throne of Israel. Under the New Testament, the most distinguished of all the Apostles very frequently made an appeal to God, when the subject was such as needed a solemn confirmation, and could not be confirmed in any other way.

Who that considers this statement can doubt for a moment the admissibility of oaths on such occasions as could not otherwise be satisfactorily determined?

***~~2. To what it does extend.~~***

The foregoing limitation is intimated even in the text: for though the words, "Swear not at all," appear to be indefinite, yet it is plain that the prohibition was designed only to reach to such oaths as were used in common "conversation." "Swear not; but let your conversation be Yes, yes, Nay, nay."

Nevertheless the import of the prohibition is very extensive. It extends, first, to all irreverent appeals to God. The "taking of God's holy name in vain" is forbidden in the third commandment; which our blessed Lord is here rescuing from the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. They thought that nothing but perjury was a violation of that commandment: but he informs them that *all light mention of the name of God, and all irreverent appeals to him, were sinful*. Well would it be, if those who customarily curse and swear, and they also who occasionally use the words "God knows," were sensible of the guilt which they contract!

The prohibition extends also to all swearing by the creature. The Jews had a much greater reverence for the name of God than the generality of Christians have. Being averse to mention that, they invented an inferior kind of oaths, and swore "by Heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their own heads." To these they annexed less sanctity, and were therefore less scrupulous about the violation of them. But our Lord shows that to swear by the creature was, in fact, to swear by the Creator himself; since every creature was his, and existed only by his providential care. On another occasion he entered more fully still into this argument, and showed the folly of recurring to such subterfuges. In fact, if a separation could be made, there would be to the full as much guilt in swearing by the creature as in swearing by the Creator; since it would be an ascribing of omniscience and omnipotence to that which is incapable of knowing the things about which the appeal is made, or of executing judgment between the parties. This is idolatry; and, as idolatry, will be visited with God's heaviest displeasure. This statement is abundantly confirmed by the Apostle James, who prohibits the same kind of oaths under the pain of eternal condemnation.

Once more, the prohibition extends to all unnecessary confirmation of our word. All vehement protestations are unfitting the Christian character. Unless the urgency of the occasion require some additional testimony, a simple affirmation or negation is all that we should use: our "Yes should be yes, and our Nay, should be nay." If questioned, we may repeat our answer; "Yes, yes," or "Nay, nay;" but beyond that we ought not to go, except the authority of a magistrate, or the importance of the subject, absolutely require it.

Having thus endeavored to mark the extent of the prohibition, we will proceed to state,

***~~II. The reasons of it.~~***

Our Lord says, "Whatever is more than these, comes of evil." The words which are here translated "evil," may also mean, "the evil one," and in this sense many understand them. If we take them in the former sense, it relates to the source of such expressions; and if we take them in the latter sense, it refers rather to their tendency: since Satan instigates men to swear, in order that he may accomplish by that means his own malevolent designs. Both senses being equally good and proper, we shall include both.

***~~Our Lord then prohibits oaths, because they are evil,~~***

***~~1. In their source.~~***

Whence do they spring? Frequently from an undue vehemence of temper. Those who are irascible, almost always are intemperate in their expressions. They will swear, if not by God, yet by their life, their soul, their faith; or they will pledge their honor, which yet is God's, as much as their "head" is God's.

In short, whether they affirm or deny, they will, directly or indirectly, make God a party in their cause. If reproved for this, they will urge their passion as an excuse; but this is to urge one sin as an excuse for another: and, if we grant that hasty expressions originate in hasty tempers, they are on that very account exceedingly criminal. They "come from evil," and are for that very reason to be condemned.

But they arise also from low thoughts of the importance of truth. A person duly sensible of the sacredness of truth will not hastily convey an idea that his simple assertions are unworthy of credit: he will be cautious what he affirms: and, having affirmed anything, he will expect his word to be taken as much as his oath. If unreasonable people require more, he will rather leave the confirmation of his word to other testimony, than admit, by unnecessary oaths or protestations, the existence of an intention to deceive.

In direct opposition to such a character is he who wantonly transgresses the commandment in our text: he proves by that very act, that he has no such high sense of honor, no such value for truth, no such disposition to maintain his character for veracity. What then must that habit be, which so degrades everyone that yields to it; or rather, I should say, which marks him so destitute of the noblest attributes of man?

We may further add that all violations of this commandment proceed from a disregard of God, and of everything belonging to him. Who that had a reverence for the Divine Majesty, would dare to profane his name, and to appeal to him on every trivial occasion? People, when they take God's name in vain, account it sufficient to say, "I did not think of it," but what excuse is that? It says, in fact, 'I have no reverence for God: he has forbidden such levity; but I have no fear of offending him. He is present when I profane his name; but I have no wish to please him. Were I in the presence of an earthly monarch, I would take heed to my words, and put a bridle on my tongue; but, though I know that God both sees and hears me, I regard him no more than if he did not exist. It is true, he declares, that, "if I take his name in vain, he will not hold me guiltless;" but "my lips are my own: who is he, that he should be Lord over me?" Let him say what he will, or do what he will, I am determined to have my own way, and to set him at defiance.'

Once more I ask, what must that habit be, which betrays such a disposition as this?

***~~2. In their tendency.~~***

Satan, "the god of this world," is ever "working in all the children of disobedience." As he put it into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to lie, so he puts it into the hearts of ungodly men to swear. By this he has several objects to accomplish.

By this he hopes, first, to eradicate truth and virtue from the world. When he has prevailed on men so to cast off the fear of God as to take his name in vain, he will easily instigate them to anything else. Having already lowered their estimate of truth, he will soon lead them to overstep the bounds of truth, and occasionally to confirm their falsehoods also with oaths. Indeed he stirs up men to confirm with oaths that which is doubtful, more frequently than that which is true; and consequently to perjure themselves, without being at all aware what guilt they are contracting: and could he influence all, as he does the great mass of those who are under his dominion, there would be no longer any truth or virtue to be found. He was a liar from the beginning; and he would take care that all his children should be known by their resemblance to him.

By this too he hopes, in the next place, to bring God himself into contempt. How ardently he desires to attain this object, we need not say: but this is clear, that the means he uses to attain it are admirably adapted to the end proposed. Tell a person who is accustomed to swear, that God is displeased with him; and you make no more impression on him than if he had never heard of such a Being. Tell him that he shall be fined a few shillings, and he is all alive to the subject: but if you speak of "the judgments of God—then he puffs at them" with perfect contempt. Nor is it in the speaker only that these effects are produced: the hearers of such conversation gradually lose their abhorrence of the sin, and their tender concern for the honor of their God: and the more this insensibility is diffused, the more does Satan exult and triumph.

Lastly, by this Satan aims to destroy the souls of men. What destruction he makes in this nation by means of oaths, none but God can tell. This appears to many to be a little sin; and Satan easily seduces men to the commission of it. But, even if it drew no other sins along with it, it would not be small, nor would the consequences of it be unimportant.

God has said, that "he will not hold such people guiltless." They may hold themselves guiltless, it is true; but God will not form his judgment according to their estimate: he has fixed his determination, and will never reverse it. This Satan knows: and if he can but deceive us with vain hopes, he has gained his end. Yes, in truth, that roaring lion goes about, seeking to devour us; and then does he most prosper in his endeavors, when he leads us to "sport ourselves with our own deceivings."

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. Those who are addicted to the habit of swearing.~~***

I speak not to those who are familiar with oaths and imprecations (if their own consciences do not speak to them, all that I can say will be to little purpose)—but to those who make only occasional appeals to God, or take his name in vain.

View your sin as it has been set forth: view it in its source. What undue warmth of temper does it manifest! what insensibility to the value and importance of truth! and what a profane disregard of God! View it in its tendency: see how it tends to eradicate virtue from the world; to bring God himself into contempt, and to ruin the souls of men. Is this a habit that you will indulge? What do you gain by it? By other sins you obtain some kind of gratification; but by this, none at all—it brings no pleasure, no profit, no honor, along with it. In the commission of other sins you sell your souls for *something*; in this sin you sell your souls for nothing; you do not sell, but give, yourselves to your great adversary. O that God may impress this thought upon your minds, and that this word may be ever sounding in your ears, "Swear not at all!"

***~~2. Those who are free from that habit.~~***

Shall I tell you what the ungodly world are ready to say to you? "These people will not swear, but they will lie." Dearly beloved, this would be a dreadful reproach indeed if it were true: and whoever he is to whom this reproach attaches, that person has reason to tremble for his state before God. Tell me not of faith, or love, or anything else; for this is certain, that "all liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone."

Christian *tradesmen*, consider this in your dealings with mankind; for the generality of men lie in their buying and selling.

Christian *servants*, remember this when tempted to conceal a fault, or to exculpate yourselves from some blame.

Let all, of every class, and every degree, remember this. If you are Christ's indeed, you will remember him "in whose lips there was no deceit found." Let truth be in your inward parts, and let it be ever dear to your souls. Set a watch before the door of your lips; for "of every idle word you shall give account in the day of judgment." Yes, "by your words you shall be justified; and by your words you shall be condemned."

#1307

***~~Retaliation Forbidden~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:38–41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.38â41)~~***

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."

IF Christianity be worthy of admiration on account of the sublime mysteries it reveals, it is no less so on account of the pure morality it inculcates. *Its precepts are as far above the wisdom of fallen man, as its doctrines.*Search all the systems of ethics that ever were written, and where shall we find such directions as these? In vain shall we look for them in the productions of Greece and Rome: in vain shall we consult the sages and philosophers of any other nation: such precepts as these are found no where but in the inspired volume. The law of retaliation has in all nations been deemed equitable and right: but in the Christian code it is expressly forbidden.

In considering the subject of retaliation, we shall notice,

***~~I. The errors which obtain in the world respecting it.~~***

The Pharisees admitted of revenge; and grounded that license upon the word of God. The passages which they adduced in confirmation of their sentiments were strong; but they did not at all refer to the conduct of individuals towards each other, but of magistrates towards the community at large. To apply them to individuals, was a perversion of them, a perversion disgraceful to the teachers of such doctrines, and fatal to those who embraced them.

We, having our Lord's own comment on those passages, cannot any longer justify our errors by an appeal to Holy Writ: but yet our sentiments in relation to the subject treated of in our text, are, for the most part, precisely similar to those which were maintained among the Jews. Two things in particular we will specify, which are universally applauded among us, yet are exceeding contrary to the spirit of Christianity:

***~~1. A rigid maintenance of our rights.~~***

Doubtless our rights, whether civil or religious, ought to be dear to us: and a certain degree of watchfulness over them may well be admitted; because if our rights, whether public or private, are invaded by one person, they may by another; and if they are allowed to be curtailed, they may be altogether annihilated. But this will not justify that extreme jealousy which some express about their rights.

There are many who will talk incessantly about the rights of *man*, who yet will trample without remorse on all the rights of *God*. They will not allow the smallest infringement of their own liberty; while they themselves are the most oppressive tyrants, wherever their authority extends. These may boast of their firmness in maintaining what they think to be right: but "they know not what spirit they are of." How unlike are they to Paul, who, rather than insist upon the support to which, as a minister of Christ, he was entitled, would work at his trade by night, after having been occupied in preaching all the day! How unlike to Christ also, who, when, as the Son of God, he might have claimed exemption from paying tribute to the temple, wrought a miracle to satisfy the demand, rather than put a stumbling-block in the way of any by a refusal. We do not undertake to say, that, in cases of great importance, a person may not expostulate with his oppressor, as Christ did; or insist upon his right, as did the Apostle Paul; but we are perfectly sure that *a readiness to demand our utmost right on every occasion, argues a spirit very different from that which is inculcated in the Gospel of Christ*.

***~~2. A keen resentment of wrongs.~~***

This is thought highly noble. A disposition to pass by an insult or an injury would be deemed baseness and cowardice; and the person who indulged it would be banished from society, and held up to universal scorn and contempt. Hence arise wars, duels, and domestic feuds without number.

But is such a disposition agreeable to the word of God? Look at the conduct of David, when persecuted by Saul—he repeatedly had his adversary within his power, and could easily have killed him; but he would not: he preferred rather the committing of his cause to God; and rendered nothing but good, in return for all the evil that Saul had done unto him. And to show that he did not consider such conduct as a superfluous act of generosity, he brands the opposite conduct with the name of wickedness: "Thus says the proverb of the ancients; Wickedness proceeds from the wicked; but my hand shall not be upon you."

Compare with this the conduct also of the saints in the New Testament: James, speaking of them to their proud oppressors, says, "You have condemned and killed the just; and he does not resist you."

That the sentiments of the world on the subject of retaliation are quite erroneous, will appear yet further, by considering,

***~~II. The line of conduct which Christianity does require.~~***

The authoritative command of Jesus in the text, is this: "I say unto you, That you resist not evil," that is, that you resist not the injurious person. This, especially taken in connection with our Lord's illustration of it, undoubtedly enjoins us to live in the exercise of,

***~~1. A patient spirit.~~***

We are not to be inflamed with anger against those who treat us ill: but to bear their injuries with meekness and long-suffering. The direction of the Apostle is, "In your patience possess your souls," and again, "Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." I am aware that it is difficult to bear injuries, when we know them to be altogether unmerited. But to *abstain from everything vindictive*was enjoined under the Old Testament: and much more is it insisted on in the New Testament. And the more undeserving we are of the injurious treatment, the more are we called upon to display our patience, after the example of our blessed Lord, who *instead of rendering evil for evil, silently committed his cause to his righteous God and Father.*

***~~2. A yielding spirit.~~***

Suppose a person were to carry the insult so far as to strike us a blow upon the face—what ought we to do then? Are we not at liberty to return the blow? No, we may expostulate with the injurious person as our Lord did, "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but, if not, why smite me?" but we must not for a moment think of avenging ourselves. It may be said, this would be an encouragement to him to strike us again: we hope not; but if it were, it were better to "turn the other cheek," and be smitten again, than that we should resent the injury; for the blows only hurt our body; but *the resentment would wound our soul.*

Again, suppose any one were to injure us in our property, as well as our person, and, under the guise of law, were to "take away our coat"—what shall we do? Shall we indulge a litigious spirit, in order to get it back again? No! Rather let him "take our cloak also," than induce us to gratify an angry or vindictive spirit.

Once more—Suppose anyone, under pretense of some public emergency, were to infringe upon our liberty, and to compel us (as the Jews did Simon the Cyrenian, when they "compelled him to bear" our Savior's cross,) to carry a burden for them "a mile"—what then? Must we submit?

Whether in all cases, or not, I do not pretend to say: but this is clear; that it is better to "go with him two" miles, than to vex ourselves, and quarrel about it. The man that yields is always safe; he knows the extent of the injury which he receives: but he who once begins to contend, knows not where he shall stop, nor what injury he may suffer in his own soul, before the contention shall cease.

***~~3. A forgiving spirit.~~***

Forbearance and forgiveness are frequently united in the Holy Scriptures; nor should they ever be separated in our conduct. Nor would the exercise of forgiveness be so difficult, if only we considered how much greater injury people do to themselves, than they can possibly do to us. Do what they will, they can never injure us, except in mere external things. Our souls are beyond their reach. But, while they endeavor to injure us, they do the most irreparable injury to their own souls.

Let us suppose for a moment, that a person, robbing us of a little worthless fruit, were to fall down and break his leg; would not our pity for his misfortune swallow up all resentment for his fault? So then it should be with us towards all who injure us: there is no comparison at all between the injury they do to us and to themselves; and therefore we should be ready to exercise forgiveness towards them, and to implore forgiveness for them at God's hands.

***~~Learn then, from this subject,~~***

***~~1. How rare a thing real Christianity is.~~***

This is genuine Christianity—all, without this, is but an empty sound. Look then through the world, and see how little there is of it any where to be found; yes, let the saints themselves see how little of true Christianity they possess. This view of Christian duty may well fill every one of us with shame and confusion of face.

***~~2. How necessary a renewed spirit is, either to a right discernment of religion, or to the practice of it.~~***

The precepts of religion are no less foolishness to the natural man, than the doctrines. What heathen ever inculcated such lessons? or what unconverted Christian ever thoroughly approved them in his heart. People imagine that they have power to do the will of God: but can they do these things? *As well may they attempt to turn the course of the sun, as so to turn the current of corrupt nature.*We must have an *understanding*given us that we may know these things; and *strength*, that we may do them.

***~~3. How ornamental true religion is to every one who possesses it.~~***

Who can see a person acting up to the spirit of these precepts, and not admire him? Who can help admiring this spirit in Christ and in his holy Apostles? Surely, such are "beautified with salvation," and God himself must admire them.

***~~4. How happy the world would be, if vital Christianity universally prevailed.~~***

There would then be no scope for the exercise of these difficult graces, since no injuries would be committed upon earth. O that God would hasten that blessed time!

#1308

***~~Liberality Enjoined~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.42)~~***

"Give to him who asks of you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away."

TO render good for evil is a duty of indispensable Christian obligation; and many commentators consider it as particularly enjoined in the words which we have just read. If we take the passage as connected with the directions which immediately precede it, its meaning will be, that we must not be contented with a patient submission to injuries, but must actively exert ourselves to render to our enemies any service which they may require. But, as this is plainly enjoined in the verses following our text, we rather understand the text as expressing in general terms *the duty of liberality*, without confining it to any particular description of people: and in that light we propose now to insist upon it.

We shall inquire,

***~~I. What is that spirit which is inculcated?~~***

Were we to adhere strictly to the literal meaning of the words, they would apply only to those whose circumstances in life empowered them to give and lend to their more necessitous brethren. Moreover, they might, as to *the letter*, be obeyed by a person of opulence, while he was far from yielding to God any acceptable obedience. We must therefore inquire, What that spirit is which they inculcate? They enjoin,

***~~1. A spirit of compassion.~~***

It is to be supposed that those who make applications to us for a gift or loan, are themselves in necessitous and distressed circumstances. And towards all such people we should exercise sincere pity and compassion. We should consider them not merely as children of the same heavenly parent, but as members of our own body; and should have the same sympathy with them and desire to relieve them, as any one member of our body would feel towards any other that had sustained an injury. We should "look, not on our own things only, but also on the things of others;" "bearing their burdens," and being as ready to participate their sorrows as their joys.

The language of our hearts should ever be in unison with that of Job, "Did not I weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" This is a spirit which all must have, whatever be their situation and circumstances in life: and if we can "behold our *brother*in need, and shut up our compassion from him," it may well be asked, "How dwells the love of God in us?"

***~~2. A spirit of benevolence.~~***

This is a disposition of a higher kind. There is a natural tenderness in many, and a susceptibility of impression from tales of woe, at the same time that they are not active in searching out opportunities of exercising their benevolent affections. But our feelings towards mankind should resemble those of a tender mother, who needs not to have her sensibilities called forth by any distressing accident: she loves her child, and delights in administering to its needs: her regards are spontaneously exercised towards it; and, if she sees any occasion for more than ordinary attention, she finds her own happiness in contributing to the happiness of her child.

Thus, if we saw one to whom a gift or loan was necessary, we should be ready, at the very first intimation of the case, to stretch forth towards him the hand of charity, conceiving ourselves more blessed in an opportunity of imparting good, than he can be in receiving it at our hands. In a word, we should tread in the steps of our adorable Lord, who "went about doing good;" and, like the sun in its course, should exist only for the benefit of others, and diffuse happiness wherever we come.

***~~3. A spirit of generosity.~~***

Particular occasions must be met with a zeal proportioned to them. It may be that some urgent necessity has arisen, and that a great effort is requisite to sustain an afflicted brother. Or, it may be a season of general distress, when the multitude of those who need our assistance calls for more than ordinary exertions to relieve them.

We have an instance of this in the primitive Church. The Jews were so inveterate against their brethren who embraced Christianity, that they would, if possible, have deprived them of all means of subsistence. But the richer converts, who had lands or houses, sold them, and put all their money into one common stock; thus reducing themselves to a level with the lowest, that all might be supplied with "food necessary for them."

Another instance we have, in the churches of Macedonia, who, "in a trial of great affliction, and in the midst of deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of liberality," exerting themselves, "not only according to their ability, but beyond it," to supply their distressed brethren in Judea.

Thus should it be with us, when any great and extraordinary difficulty has arisen: our spirit should rise to the occasion: and, if we cannot emulate that glorious example, we should at least he ready to comply with the exhortation of the Baptist, "He who has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Doubtless this disposition is amiable—but how shall we determine,

***~~II. To what extent it should be exercised?~~***

With respect to the *disposition*itself we do not hesitate to say, that it admits of no limit whatever.

There is not a person in the universe who is not called to exercise it. The mechanic, or the laborer, should exert himself, according to his ability, to relieve others; he should "labor, working with his hands, not to support himself merely, but that he may have to give to him that needs." Even the widow that has but two mites, may yet exceed in her liberality all her opulent neighbors. The very person that receives relief, may yet pant for an opportunity to afford it to others: and, in that case, God, who sees his heart, will accept the will for the deed: "for, if there is first a willing mind, it shall be accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not." Nor is there any assignable limit to the degree in which the disposition should be exercised. The only limit that can be mentioned (if it may be called a limit,) is, to be "merciful—-even as our Father in Heaven is merciful."

But the precise manner in which it should be exercised must be regulated by circumstances. It must vary according to,

***~~1. Our own means and abilities.~~***

All people have it not in their power to do good to the same extent: nor can all who have the same income, devote the same proportion of it to the poor: for a man who has a family, cannot possibly have so much to spare, as he who has none but himself to maintain: nor can it be reasonably expected, that one, who, from his rank in society, has a certain degree of dignity to support, can afford as much as another, who, with the same income, has no such necessity imposed upon him.

Besides, people may be very differently circumstanced. One may be able to afford a loan, when he is not able, with propriety, to give outrightly. Another may be able to give a smaller sum, when he cannot lend a larger. Persons therefore must judge for themselves in such particulars as these; and regulate their conduct according to their circumstances.

***~~2. The necessities of those who apply to us.~~***

To offer to a person who has been suddenly brought from affluent circumstances to poverty, such a pittance as we might give to a beggar, would be to mock and insult him. On the other hand, to bestow on a common beggar, what would be suited to the other case, would be most unpardonable profusion. Besides, we must judge whether there exist any necessity at all: for, if we will give to all who are willing to ask, and lend to all who are willing to borrow—we shall soon exhaust our own resources, however great they may be: and, *by giving or lending where there is no necessity, we shall incapacitate ourselves for assisting those who are in real distress*. Here then, doubtless, is scope for the exercise of *discretion*. True liberality, instead of prohibiting such discretion, demands it at our hands.

***~~3. The prospect there is of our aid being effectual for the relief of him who asks it.~~***

Here is an *idle*man, who will do nothing for his own maintenance; a *prodigal*man, who never thinks of the use of money; a drunken and *profligate*man, who wastes all his substance in riotous living—to what purpose shall you exert yourself in any great degree for such people? *If you give them all that you have, and they will soon be poor again*. The best way to relieve such people, is to *provide labor*for them, and to make a reformation of their conduct necessary for their own subsistence. Sometimes a seasonable loan may enable a person to provide for his family, when, without such aid, he could not attain the situation which is open for him. There, to strain a point for him, is both liberal and wise: but where the case is such as occurs daily all around us, we must so give, as that we may have a reserve to lend; and so lend, as that we may have a reserve to give.

There are some cases, however, where we may well be absolved from either giving or lending, unless indeed just to supply the necessities of the moment; I mean, where a person's circumstances are so involved, that all we can do for him would be only as a drop in the ocean. There, if by public contributions we can aid him, well: but, if not,*to impoverish ourselves without benefitting him, would be, not piety, but folly*.

***~~It will not be unprofitable to subjoin a few hints for the use of,~~***

***~~1. Those who want relief.~~***

Many will ask a gift or loan without any real necessity. But such people should reflect, that while they trespass thus on the liberality of the rich, they are themselves oppressors of the poor. It is in no person's power to give to every one that asks, or to lend to every one that would borrow (for though Luke so expresses it, the direction must be limited in the nature of things); and consequently, those who by unnecessary applications exhaust the funds of a liberal man, deprive him of the power of doing good to others who need it more. None therefore should take undue advantage of the piety of others, or*seek from others what by increased activity they might furnish from their own resources*.

Another point of great importance is, that they who borrow, should adhere strictly to their word, as to the season of repaying the loan. It is incredible, how much they who violate their engagements in this respect—discourage, and (I had almost said) harden the hearts of those who delight in doing good. I know it is said, "Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return," and, if we be told, that the prospect of repayment is distant and uncertain, the duty is comparatively easy. But, when we are told that at such a season the loan shall be repaid, and find that the borrower thinks no more of his promises, or (as is frequently the case) asks a little forbearance in the first instance, and then, on finding it kindly exercised, construes that kindness into a forgiveness of the debt—that conduct has a sad tendency to wound the feelings of the liberal, and to make them averse from lending.

In this view, therefore, the injury which such wicked people do, is exceedingly great. I call them "wicked;" for so the Psalmist designates them; "The wicked borrows, and does not repay." Nor is it their benefactors only whom they injure, but society at large; inasmuch as they prevent the exercise of benevolence towards many people far worthier than themselves. To all therefore who have contracted such obligations, I would recommend tenfold diligence and self-denial, until they have executed their engagements, and fulfilled their word.

***~~2. To those who impart relief to others.~~***

It sometimes happens, that even in the generous mind a niggardly thought will arise, and a backwardness to exercise the benevolence that is called for. Against such thoughts God has very strongly cautioned us: and we shall do well to be on our guard against them. We should be careful "not to be weary in well-doing." We should remember, that *God himself is pledged for the repayment of all that we either give or lend, provided we act from a principle of faith and love*. The best means of preventing such an evil thought is certainly to get the soul impressed with a sense of Christ's love in dying for us. But, next to that, it will be well to reflect, that we are only stewards of what we possess; and that, though no individual has an *absolute*claim upon us, the poor at large have; a portion of our property is their "due," and we ought to pay it without delay. Let then every one put aside a portion of his income for benevolent use, and bear in mind, that both his present and future happiness will be augmented in proportion to his liberality.

#1309

***~~Love to Enemies Enjoined~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:43–48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.43â48)~~***

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

IT is well said by the Psalmist, that "the commandment of God is exceeding broad;" since it reaches to every disposition of the mind, and requires infinitely more than man, in his present weak and degenerate state, can perform. Indeed, though many traces of the law still remain upon the heart, and are discoverable by the light of reason, there are depths in it which unaided reason could never have fathomed, and a breadth and length which it could never have explored. Among the precepts which we consider as known only through the medium of Revelation, we would particularly specify that which is contained in the text. Human nature would itself approve of love to *friends*; but our Lord commands us to love our *enemies*.

In discoursing on the text, we shall be led to consider,

***~~I. The duty inculcated.~~***

The Jewish teachers in general sanctioned the indulgence of hatred towards enemies.

We must, in justice to them, acknowledge that they had some shadow of reason for their opinions: for God had commanded the Jews entirely to extirpate the Canaanites: and, though some little favor was to be shown to the Edomites and Egyptians, the Ammonites and Moabites and Midianites were never to be treated with kindness; and "the very remembrance of the Amalekites was to be blotted out from under Heaven." Moreover, the duty of love seemed to be restricted to those of their own nation: and in case even a Jew should accidentally kill any person, the man who was the nearest relative of the deceased was at liberty to kill the manslayer, in case he could overtake him before he could enter into a city of refuge, or would be able afterwards to find him outside the gates of that city.

But these mistaken teachers did not consider that a commandment given in relation to those nations which were *devoted to destruction* was not intended to be made a rule of conduct between individuals. Nor did they recollect, that, while they restricted the word "neighbor" to those of their own nation, the Decalogue itself had taught them to comprehend the whole universe under that name: (for a Jew was no more at liberty to "covet the wife" of a Heathen, than he was of a Jewish man.)

Nor, lastly, did they reflect, that the ordinance relative to the man-slayer was altogether typical of Christ and of his salvation.

In opposition to such erroneous notions, our Lord enjoined, in the most authoritative manner, the *love of enemies*.

He takes for granted, that his faithful disciples would be "hated, reviled, and persecuted," and under all the evil treatment which they may receive, he commands them to return:  
kind words for bitter words,  
benevolent actions for spiteful actions, and  
fervent prayers for the most cruel oppressions.

Not that this was any new precept: it was enjoined under the law as strongly as under the Gospel; and was exemplified too under the legal dispensation, in almost as eminent a degree as even by the Apostles themselves. There is this difference, indeed, that the exercise of such heavenly tempers was less frequent among the Jews, because few of them comparatively attained to any high degrees of piety. Whereas, now that "the Spirit is poured out more abundantly" upon the Church, this is a common attainment, or rather, I should say, a universal attainment, among all who are truly converted unto God. Our blessed Lord set us the example, "going as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers, not opening his mouth," either in threatenings or complaints. Even in the agonies of crucifixion he prayed for his murderers, as Stephen also did in his dying moments, and thousands of others also have done amidst the flames of martyrdom. This is our duty, even in such extreme cases as are here supposed; and consequently must be so in all cases of inferior importance.

However difficult this duty may appear, we shall address ourselves cheerfully to the performance of it, if only we consider,

***~~II. The reasons for performing it.~~***

The Lord's people are represented by the Apostle as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people, that they should show forth the praises (or virtues) of him that has called them." But how are they to answer this great end of their calling? It is very principally by attending to this duty. By their performance of it they are to mark,

***~~1. Their resemblance to God.~~***

The whole race of mankind, with comparatively few exceptions, is up in arms against God. A very great proportion of them are bowing down to stocks and stones: and almost all, even of those who acknowledge the one true God, are yet denying him daily, and showing their enmity to him by wicked works. But how does he requite them? Does he avail himself of his power to deprive them of every comfort, and to punish them all according to their deserts? No, with much long-suffering he endures all their provocations, notwithstanding they are "vessels of wrath already fitted for destruction." He even loads them indiscriminately with all the bounties of his providence, "making his sun to rise equally on the evil and on the good, and sending rain equally on the just and on the unjust."

In like manner must we act towards those who injure us. We must bear with them, and do them good according to our ability: and it is by such conduct alone, that we can approve ourselves his children.

Let us not, however, be misunderstood: it is not necessary that we should deal with such people altogether as our friends: for even God himself does not do that: he comes to his own people in a more intimate manner, and "sups with them," and "makes his abode with them," and "manifests himself unto them as he does not unto the world."

Thus also may we do. There is a love of *benevolence*, a love of *beneficence*, and a love of *delight*—if we may so speak. The two former must be exercised towards all: the last may fitly be reserved for those who alone possess the dispositions worthy of it. Such a preference God himself authorizes, when he says, "Do good unto all men, but *especially*unto those who are of the household of faith."

***~~2. Their superiority to the ungodly world.~~***

God will not be satisfied with seeing his people live after the manner of the ungodly. To what purpose have they been "redeemed," if they are to retain the same "vain conversation" which those around them follow? To what purpose have "their eyes been opened to behold the wondrous things of God's law," to what purpose have they been adopted into his family, and been filled with his Spirit, and been made heirs of his inheritance, if they are not to walk worthy of their high calling? Are their superior knowledge, obligations, prospects, and assistances, to have no practical influence upon their lives? The vilest of publicans and sinners will love and benefit their friends; and is this a standard for God's redeemed people? No, they must love their enemies: else, "What do they more than others?" *Surely, if we are no better than others in our dispositions and conduct, we shall be no better than they in our eternal destiny.*

That we may have a more complete view of this duty, let us inquire into,

***~~III. The extent to which it is to be performed.~~***

The law of God is at once the rule and measure of our duty.

The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God. It was originally written upon the heart of man: and man's perfect conformity to it constituted that image of God in which he was created. To have these dispositions restored, and thereby to regain that image, is the object which we are taught to aspire after with incessant ardor. God has promised to his people that they shall be "renewed after his image in righteousness and true holiness," and of that promise we must seek the full accomplishment. To dream of a conformity to God's *natural*perfections, would be folly and madness: we cannot possibly be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. But his *moral*perfections we may and must attain: nor ought we to be satisfied with any precise measure of them; we should never think we have attained anything, while anything remains to be attained.

To a perfect conformity to that law we must be ever pressing forward.

This was Paul's mind. After he had preached the Gospel for twenty years, and had attained an eminence of piety which probably none but the Lord Jesus Christ himself ever surpassed, he said, "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of God in Christ Jesus." Nor is this a pursuit proper for Apostles only; it is equally necessary for all. "Now are we the sons of God," says John: "and every one that has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure." In a word, the model for our imitation is God: nor must we ever stop, until we are as "holy as God is holy," and as "perfect even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

***~~We cannot contemplate this subject without noticing,~~***

***~~1. What need we have of mercy at the hands of God.~~***

Let us look back through our whole lives, and see how numberless have been our transgressions against this holy law; and let us look into our own hearts, and see what a proneness there is in us yet daily and hourly to transgress it. Who does not find, that, when injured and insulted, his heart is ready to rise against his adversary in a way of retaliation and invective? Who does not feel, that, without the divine assistance, he can no more maintain the exalted spirit here spoken of, than he can create a world?

Let us then humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. Let us acknowledge our desert of his heavy displeasure, and our need of pardon through the blood of Christ. Let us at the same time implore the assistance of his Holy Spirit, that we may be enabled to "walk as Christ walked," and to exercise that kindness towards others which we desire and hope for when standing before his tribunal.

***~~2. What encouragement we have to expect mercy at his hands.~~***

Has God required us to love our enemies, even while they are manifesting towards us their enmity to the utmost of their power; and will not he himself show mercy to us, when we lay down the weapons of our rebellion? Again; has he required of us such tempers as fruits of our conversion; and will he refuse us that grace which is necessary to produce them? Assuredly not. If he gives the bounties of his *providence*to his most inveterate enemies—then he will surely give the blessings of his *grace*to his suppliant and repenting friends? Let not then a sense of past guilt appall us, or a sense of present weakness discourage us: but let us "go boldly to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need."

#1310

***~~Christians Do More Than Others~~***

***~~[Matthew 5:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.47)~~***

"And if you greet your brethren only,*what are you doing more than others?*Do not even the tax collectors do so?"

OUR Lord is here rescuing the law from the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. It is quite a mistake to imagine that he extended the law beyond its original meaning. The law was perfect, being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will. Had it required less than it now does, it would have been unworthy of God: in fact, unless its demands are now extended beyond what they ought to be (which we know is not the case,) it must have given men a license to love God and our neighbor less than we really ought: or, in other words, it would have given a license to sin.

The particular command to which our Lord refers in the context was, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This the Scribes and Pharisees interpreted as giving a liberty, if not an absolute command, to hate our enemies. But our Lord shows, that every man, whether friend or enemy, is comprehended in the term "neighbor," and that every man therefore has a claim upon us to be loved by us as ourselves. If we extend our regards to friends only, "What," says our Lord, "are you doing more than others?" This is a very pointed question, importing that the Lord's people ought to do more than others, and may reasonably be expected so to do. In confirmation of this truth, I will,

***~~I. Show why the Lord's people may reasonably be expected to do more than others.~~***

The question is founded in reason and justice: for, if we be the Lord's people in truth,

***~~1. We are more indebted to him than others.~~***

All are indebted to him for the gift of a Savior, and for the offer of eternal life through him. (Of temporal blessings such as the whole world partake of, I forbear to speak.) But true Christians are indebted not merely for a gift of the Savior to them, but for having from eternity been given to the Savior as his peculiar people, whom he should redeem from death, and enjoy forever as "his purchased possession." It is surprising how often our blessed Lord speaks of them under this character in his last intercessory prayer. And it is always mentioned as *a distinguishing mercy, that raises them far above the rest of the world, and entails the greatest obligations upon them*.

Moreover, the *faith*by which they are brought into this union with Christ is also the gift of God. "To them it is given in the behalf of Christ to believe in him." And this is no less a distinguishing mercy than the other: for the whole world, with the exception of this little remnant, are in unbelief.

The *peace*too that flows from this union, O what an inestimable gift is that! "To the wicked there is no peace," but these have "a peace which passes all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and glorious."

Say, whether this be not a very abundant reason for our showing to God more gratitude than others, and laboring to serve him with every faculty both of body and soul?

***~~2. We have greater assistances from him than others.~~***

Every man has, more or less, what may be called the common influences of the Spirit. For there is no man who has not occasionally felt some compunction for his sins, and some desire of amendment. But whence do "these good thoughts and holy desires proceed, but from God?" They would no more arise in the heart of fallen man than of the fallen angels—if they were not suggested by the Spirit of God. But believers have what may be called the special grace of God; by which I understand, not a different kind of grace, but a different degree, even such a degree as shall prevail over all the resistance which it meets with in the soul. Nor is it only in order to their first conversion to God that they are so wrought upon, but through the whole of their lives are they preserved and strengthened by the same Spirit, in order to their final salvation. To what a degree this strength is communicated to them, may be seen in various passages of Holy Writ: it is equal to that which God exerted in raising up Jesus Christ from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers of earth and Hell. It is such as to display the powers of Omnipotence itself, and to approve itself the workmanship of Him who created the universe out of nothing.

All this is unknown to others, who, having never earnestly implored this aid, are left under the power of Satan, and are "carried captive by the devil at his will." And is not this a call upon them for exertion? And does it not afford a just ground of expectation, that they shall do more than others who have no such assistance?

***~~3. We make a greater profession of zeal for God than others.~~***

The generality not only make no particular profession of love to God, but account this very want of profession a sufficient reason for all the carelessness and indifference which they manifest. But the believer does not thus glory in his shame. He knows his obligations to God; nor is he ashamed to confess them. He knows that he has been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and that, "having been bought with a price, he is bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit, which are God's."

He considers himself as called to die unto the world," yes, to be "crucified unto it, and to have it crucified unto him, by the cross of Christ." He acknowledges that "his affections are to be set, not upon things below, but on things above," and that he has nothing to do in this world but to prepare for a better world. Hence, if occasion require, he speaks of himself as . . .  
running in a race,  
wrestling for the prize,  
and engaged in a warfare.

These things he professes, not from vain ostentation, but from necessity; or rather, he does not so much profess them as do them: and the profession is rather the result of his efforts, than any declaration independent of them. As far as mere profession is concerned, he would rather be silent than talkative: but *his life speaks*; and he is content that it should speak, if only it may afford a light which may be instructive and animating to those around him.

But this profession, whether voluntary or not, calls for consistency in his conduct, and makes it indispensable for him, while calling himself "a child of light and of the day," not to walk as those who are "children of darkness and of the night."

***~~4. God's honor is more involved in our conduct than in that of others.~~***

Others may do what they will, and no one thinks of reflecting on religion on their account. Nay, even the grossest immoralities may be committed by them, without exciting any surprise, or attracting any notice. But let a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ do anything amiss, and the whole world hears of it: nor is he alone blamed, who commits the evil condemned, but all who are connected with him in the same religious society are blamed also; yes, and all religious people generally, as being all alike. Even the Gospel itself is condemned as sanctioning such conduct, and as having a natural tendency to produce it. The general feeling on such an occasion is that of exultation and triumph by the wicked: "There, there, so would we have it." Had Saul committed the evils which David did, though the act might have been blamed, God's honor would not have suffered. But when David sinned, "the name of God was everywhere blasphemed on his account."

What an obligation then does this lay on Christians to "walk holily, justly, and unblamably" before men, that "the way of truth may not be evil spoken of through them!" If there is a "woe unto the world because of the offences" which are committed in the Church, and which harden multitudes in their infidelity—then much more does woe attach to that man who commits the offences, and casts a stumbling-block in the way of others, to the destruction of their souls as well as of his own. In proportion therefore as any deviation from the path of duty in us may prove injurious to God's honor and the interests of his Gospel, we are bound to "Pay careful attention, then, to how we walk—not as unwise people but as wise;" that all who behold our light may be led rather to approve of our principles, and to glorify our God.

If our obligation to approve ourselves "more excellent than our neighbors" has been established, let us,

***~~II. Inquire what we do more than others.~~***

What do we more,

***~~1. For our own souls?~~***

The world, alas! evince but little concern for their own souls. A formal round of duties is all that they judge necessary: and if they are observant of the outward decencies of religion, such as frequenting the House of God, attending upon the Lord's table, maintaining family prayer, and repeating some form of devotion twice a day in their closets—they think they have done all that is required of them, and are ready to say, "What lack I more?" But all this may be only "a *form*of godliness, without the power," and a service wholly unacceptable to the heart-searching God.

"What then do you more than this?" Are all of you doing even as much? Are not even these forms neglected by too many? But supposing you to be observant of these, what do you more than others? Alas! the generality would be utterly at a loss to answer this question. But the true Christian shall answer it, even though he be only at present "a babe in Christ."

Do you ask me, What I do more? (he may say,)

I search out my sins yet daily, in order to humble myself before God on account of them.

I mourn over all that I have seen amiss in my whole conduct through life.

I sigh, I groan, I weep, I smite upon my breast from day to day, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

I flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge.

I renounce utterly all other ground of hope.

I trust altogether in his atoning sacrifice, as expiating my guilt, and reconciling me to my offended God.

I set my face towards Zion. Though I travel not so expeditiously as I could wish, I make it my daily labor to advance. I make no account of any difficulties, if only I may get forward in my heavenly way.

The one concern of my life from day to day is, how shall I save my soul? "What shall it profit me if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul?"

Now, my dear brethren, is this *your*state? are you thus concerned about your souls? and does your conscience bear witness, that, while others are occupied chiefly about the things of time and sense, "you account the whole world but as dross and dung, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but his?"

Is this, I say, *your*state? Is it the state of all among you? of all? O would to God it were! But, if the truth were known, and it is most assuredly known to God, there are but *few*who can truly declare this to be the daily habit of their minds. Yet must it be your habit, if ever you would be Christians indeed, and behold the face of God in peace.

***~~2. For the honor of our God?~~***

Little is this thought of by the world at large. But the true Christians are not unconcerned about it. They know that God may be honored by them: and it is their most anxious desire to bring glory to their God. There is not a perfection of the Deity which they do not endeavor to honor and exalt:

his omniscience, by walking as in his immediate presence:

his omnipotence, by committing altogether to him their every concern:

his love, his mercy, his truth, his faithfulness, by embracing his gracious offers in the Gospel, and relying on his promises as a sure ground of their hope.

They walk with him, as Enoch did: they maintain "fellowship with him and with his Son Jesus Christ" all the day long: accounting it their chief joy to have a sense of his presence, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon them. In their actions, they consider not what will advance their own honor or interests, but what will promote his glory: and, having ascertained that, they go forward in the prosecution of it, without any regard to consequences. A fiery furnace, or a den of lions, has no terrors for them. They fear nothing but sin, and account it an honor and a privilege to lay down life itself in His service, and for His glory.

And now let me ask, is it thus with all of you? Are all of you thus studious to exalt, to honor, and to glorify your God? Have earthly things no value in your eyes, in comparison of God's favor, and of his love shed abroad in your hearts? Yet without this you cannot be Christians indeed. Our blessed Lord has said, that "whoever loves his life shall lose it; and that he only who is willing to lose it for his sake, shall find it unto life eternal."

***~~3. For the benefit of mankind?~~***

To this there is a special respect in my text. The Pharisees maintained, that we were at liberty to hate our enemies: but our Lord said, "If you love your friends only, what do you more than others?" The loving of enemies is an attainment far above the reach of the world at large. If they abstain from revenge, it is quite as much as they ever aim at. And as for endeavoring to "win the souls" of their enemies, the thought never so much as enters into their minds.

But the true Christian has a far higher standard of duty in reference to these things. He feels, indeed, that it is no easy thing to

"love his enemies,  
to bless those who curse him,  
to do good to those who hate him, and  
to pray for those who despitefully use him and persecute him;"

but he labors to do it, and implores grace from God that he may be able to do it; and determines, through grace, "not to be overcome bt evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Nor is he forgetful of his obligation to seek the eternal welfare of *mankind*. Hence he labors for the diffusion of the sacred oracles throughout the world: he finds delight in aiding every effort that is made for the salvation both of Jews and Gentiles: and in his more immediate neighborhood he strives to promote, as far as in him lies, the spiritual and eternal interests of all around him.

In his *relative duties*also especially he endeavors to show the influence of true religion: as a parent or child, as a husband or wife, as a master or servant, as a ruler or subject, he makes a point of fulfilling his duties, so that the most watchful enemy shall have no reason to speak reproachfully.

Once more then let me ask, is it thus with you? Is there among all of you such government of your own tempers, and such a victory over all your evil passions, as that you adorn the doctrine of God our Savior, and *exhibit in the whole of your deportment his blessed image?*As followers of Christ, all this is required of you: you are called, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on affections of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; and to be forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if you have a quarrel against any man, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" If you will approve yourselves to be Christ's, "your righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees." You must take even God himself for your pattern, and seek to be "perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

***~~See then,~~***

***~~1. How vain is that plea, that you are as good as others!~~***

Before that plea can be of any avail, you must inquire whether others are as holy as they ought to be: for if they are not, your equality with them can be no ground of satisfaction in the prospect of the future judgment. *What consolation will it be to those who shall experience the wrath of God in Hell, that they were as good as any who walked in "the broad road that led them to destruction?"*It is not by any *human*standard that you will be judged in the last day, but by the standard of God's unerring word: and whether you are as good or better than others, it will avail you nothing, if you are not found such as God requires, "Israelites indeed, and without deceit".

***~~2. How desirable is it to have our evidences of piety clear and decisive!~~***

The question put to us in the text, will be put to us in the last day: "What did you more than others?" This question we ought to be able to answer now, in order that we may give a satisfactory answer then: and the more satisfactorily we can answer it now, the more comfort we shall have in looking forward to that day, and the more boldness when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Whatever then you have attained, forget it all, and press forward for yet higher attainments, so that, whenever the day of Christ shall arrive, you may rejoice, "and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

#1311

***~~Directions Respecting Alms-Deeds~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:1–4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1â4)~~***

"Take heed that you do not do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in Heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."

THERE are some duties so plain and obvious, that it is scarcely necessary to insist upon men's obligation to perform them. Among these is the duty of relieving our fellow-creatures in distress, and making *our abundance*instrumental to the supply of *their necessities*. Our blessed Lord takes it for granted that all his disciples will be found observant of the duty itself; and therefore does not stop to inculcate the necessity of it; but merely gives directions respecting it, that it may be performed most beneficially to themselves, and most honorably to God.

The passage according to this reading requires, first, that our acts of righteousness in general should be devoid of ostentation.

Next, that we should guard against ostentation, more especially in those several duties, which, as Christians, we are bound to perform. We are called to serve God with our souls, our bodies, and estates; and we must do the first by prayer, the second by fasting, and the third by alms.

Whichever reading we adopt, our subject will be the same: we shall be led to consider the directions which our Lord gives us in reference to alms. He tells us,

***~~I. What we are to avoid.~~***

A very principal feature in the character of the Pharisees was ostentation: "they did all their works in order to be seen by men." Against this in particular our Lord cautions us.

***~~1. Ostentation is an evil to which we are prone.~~***

While the caution itself implies this, ("Take heed,") the experience of every individual attests it.*Who does not feel a desire after the applause of man?*Who does not consult in too great a degree the opinion of those around him? The more decent among the unconverted seem to be actuated by no other motive than applause of man: while even the godly themselves are by no means exempt from its influence. It is not, however, without much self-knowledge and self-examination, that we can discern the workings of this principle within us. We give ourselves credit for better motives and better principles, at the time that impartial observers mark distinctly the deceptiveness of our dispositions and conduct.

***~~2. Ostentation is an evil to be most carefully avoided.~~***

The bestowing of alms, like everything else, must be judged of by the *motive*from which it springs.

When done in order to acquire a character for benevolence and liberality, it is pride.

When done with a view to the obtaining of influence, it is worldly ambition.

It is then only to be deemed piety and charity, when it is produced by a concern for God's honor, and from real love to our fellow-creatures. Precisely in proportion as any ulterior motive actuates us, the action, however good it may be in other respects, is debased. It is not only stripped of all the good which it might otherwise have, but has in it a positive infusion of evil. Our blessed Lord called those "hypocrites," who in distributing their alms, sought to draw the attention and admiration of the public—and such are all who tread in their steps.

If our actions proceed from principles different from those which are pretended and avowed—we may palliate them as we please; but God will affix to them no other name than that of *vile hypocrisy*. It is scarcely needful, methinks, to say, that such a disposition must be put away with abhorrence.

But there is yet a further reason for guarding against this evil; namely, that *actions proceeding from such a principle can never be accepted of God*. They may, and probably will, procure us the reward we seek after—they may render us popular, gain us applause, increase our influence, and bring us into high reputation for liberality and goodness. But they will never receive any reward from God: they are not done for him; and therefore he will not accept them: they have no real piety in them; and therefore he will not reward them.

We can easily see, that, if a person should spend ever so large a sum in feeding those by whose charity he is to be raised to eminence and distinction, he would not for a moment imagine that he laid God under any kind of obligation, or was entitled to expect any remuneration from him; the sums he lavished were the price of his worldly honors.

Thus, as far as pride, or ostentation, or vanity, or worldly interest, excite us to liberality—we renounce all claim upon God. He has said indeed, that "what we give to the poor, we lend to him; and that he will repay it;" but he will never acknowledge as a loan to him, what was given by us to purchase the applause of man. Supposing it was pure gold in the first instance, we turn it all to dross the very moment we begin to pride ourselves in it.

In both of these views then the caution deserves our deepest attention, and ought to be followed with the greatest care.

Having told us what to avoid, our Lord proceeds to inform us,

***~~II. What we should observe and do.~~***

***~~We should, to the utmost of our power, strive for secrecy.~~***

Doubtless there are occasions whereon we are called to dispense charity in a more public manner, and when the concealment of our name would have an injurious effect. On such occasions we do right to "let our light shine before men." But, in all such instances, we should have the testimony of our own consciences, that it is the honor of *God*, and not our *own*honor that we seek. Where no such necessity is imposed upon us, we should "not let our left hand know what our right hand does," we should hide our good deeds from others; we should hide them also from ourselves.

Where we have not made an *open parade*of our charities, but have conformed to this precept as it respects others, we yet are too apt to contemplate our own actions with a very undue measure of self-delight. Though we have not studied to make them public, we are delighted to find that they are known; and are pleased with the thought that we stand high in the estimation of others. The *hints*which are suggested to us respecting the extent of our benevolence, and the greatness of the benefits we have conferred, are very gratifying to our proud hearts; and the accidental discovery of our goodness is relished by us, as a rich equivalent for the self-denial we exercised in concealing it.

Alas! what deceitful hearts we have! At the very time that we profess to avoid the notice of others, we are secretly reveling in self-delight. If we view our actions with right motives, they will furnish us rather with grounds of humiliation and gratitude. For, how small are our utmost exertions, in comparison with the greatness of our obligations, or the extent of our duty! What reason have we also to be ashamed of the *mixture*of motives, which has often operated to the production of them! And more particularly, what reason have we to adore and magnify our God, who has deigned to make use of such unworthy instruments for the good of his people and the glory of his name! This is the light in which our benevolence should be viewed; this is the spirit in which it should be exercised.

What we do secretly for God, shall be openly rewarded by him.

He notices with approbation the hidden purposes of our heart: and every man who seeks only the praise of God shall assuredly obtain it. God will look not at the sums we give, but at the *motive*and *principle*from which we give it: and even "a cup of cold water given with a single eye to his glory, shall in no wise lose its reward."

Even a desire which we were not able to carry into effect shall be accepted by him, just as David's was, who desired to build a house for the Lord: "You did well, in that it was in your heart."

How far God will recompense our liberality with present comforts, we cannot absolutely determine; but he will surely "recompense it at the resurrection of the just;" and he would account himself unrighteous, if he were to forget to do so. This, however, we must ever bear in mind, that *our actions are always exalted in God's estimation in proportion as they are lowered in our own*: and that the people whom he represents as honored and rewarded by him, are those who were altogether unconscious of their own excellencies, and were surprised to hear of services noticed by their Judge, which were overlooked and forgotten by themselves.

[Matthew 25:37-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.37-40). "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. How impossible it is for any man to be justified by the works of the law.~~***

We inquire not now into any kind of gross sin—we will suppose that all of us are free from any imputation of that kind; and that our lives have been altogether spent in doing good. Yet who among us would present his alms-deeds before the heart-searching God, and defy him to find a flaw in them? If we cannot do that, we must renounce all confidence in the flesh, and rely only on the meritorious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

***~~2. How thankful we should be that a Savior is provided for us.~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ is come into the world to seek and save us. He is that Great High Priest who "bears the iniquity of our *holy*things," and will clothe us with the unspotted robe of his righteousness, provided we are willing to put off "the filthy rags of our own." Let us look then to him, whose works alone were perfect. Let us remember, that "though we know nothing against ourselves, yet are we not hereby justified." God may have seen much sin in us, where we ourselves may have been perfectly unconscious of it. But if, on the whole, our "eye has been single," our imperfections shall be pardoned, and our services be recompensed with "an eternal great reward!"

#1312

***~~Directions Respecting Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:5–8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.5â8)~~***

"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."

WHAT David spoke respecting the Pentateuch is strongly exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount, "By it are God's servants warned." Both sins and duties are here exhibited to us in their proper light. The *sins*of the heart are reprobated, no less than those of the outward act. The *duties*which are performed without proper motives and dispositions are shown to be void of any real worth. Hence we are warned to look chiefly at the heart, and to judge of our state entirely by what we find there.

If, for instance, we have been in the habit of dispensing alms, we must not therefore conclude that we have pleased God, unless, upon an examination of our own hearts, we have the testimony of our conscience that we desired to please him.

In like manner, if we have been given to prayer, we must not imagine that our prayers have been accepted, unless they have been offered in sincerity and truth. To this effect our Lord teaches us in the words of our text; in which he gives us directions respecting prayer, and guards us against those dispositions which are too frequently indulged in the performance of that duty.

***~~I. Against hypocrisy.~~***

***~~An ostentatious display of devotion is most hateful to God.~~***

The Pharisees of old were intent only on gaining the applause of man. Hence, on every occasion, they acted a part, as players on a stage. Even their private devotions were made subservient to their main design; and were ostentatiously displayed in places of public concourse. They pretended to have so much reverence for God, that they would not defer their accustomed services even for a few minutes, but would perform them on the corner of a street, or in any other place, however conspicuous and frequented; while, in reality, the whole was a contrivance, in order to attract notice, and *obtain a high reputation for sanctity*. Such people our Lord justly calls "hypocrites," and their services he declares to be altogether unacceptable to the heart-searching God.

These ostentatious acts are no longer seen; but the *disposition*from whence they arose, prevails as much as ever. We shall not now speak of formalists, who frequent the house of God in order to be accounted religious, because we shall notice them under another head. Yet there are many in the religious world who very nearly resemble the Pharisees of old, while they themselves have not the least idea that there is any such defect in their character.

I refer to those who are forward to pray and to expound the Scriptures in religious societies, while *they have no delight in secret prayer, but only in displaying their gifts and talents*. I would notice those also, who, in the house of God, use unnecessary peculiarities, whether of voice or gesture, in order that they may appear to be pre-eminently devout. Nor must we overlook those who carry the same hypocritical desires even into their own closets, and contrive, either by the loudness or the length of their devotions, to convey to their families an idea of eminent piety. But such dispositions, by whoever indulged, are hateful to God: and in proportion as we are actuated by them, we debase our best services, and render them an abomination to the Lord.

***~~In all our approaches to God, we must strive for privacy and retirement.~~***

Doubtless, when in the house of God, we ought to conduct ourselves with the deepest reverence: nor should we be afraid of the observations which may be made upon us by ungodly men. Whatever consequences may attend a reverential regard for God, we ought not to put our light under a bushel; but should, like Daniel, brave death itself, rather than for a moment deny our God.

But where our devotions are professedly private, and no necessity is imposed upon us, we should shun everything which has the appearance of ostentation or vain-glory, and study to approve ourselves to Him alone "who sees in secret." It is his approbation only that we should regard; and from him only should we seek "a recompense of reward."

At the same time it becomes us to be equally on our guard,

***~~II. Against superstition.~~***

Superstitious services are scarcely less common than those which are hypocritical.

The Heathen imagined that their gods were to be moved by long services and vain repetitions. Hence the worshipers of Baal cried to him, "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!" and continued their cry from morning to noon, and with increased earnestness from noon to evening. And to this hour a great part of the Christian world (the Papists, I mean) continue a superstition as absurd as any that can be found in the heathen world: they repeat their Ave-Marias and their Paternosters a great number of times; (keeping an account thereof with their beads;) and then think that they have performed an acceptable service to the Lord, though they have not offered to him one spiritual petition.

Happy were it if such superstition were confined to them: but the same thing obtains also among ourselves. *What is more common than for people to attend the house of God, and to go through the service in a dull formal manner, and then to return home satisfied with having performed a duty to their God?*Yet the religion of many who imagine themselves devout, consists in nothing but a repetition of such services: and if these services are repeated on the week days as well as on Sunday, they take credit to themselves for possessing all the piety that God requires.

In some things, I confess, these people set an example worthy the imitation of the religious world: they are always in their places at the beginning of the service; and they show a becoming attention to it throughout the whole, both in their reverent postures and their audible responses: and, if my voice could reach to every professor of religion throughout the world, I would say, Learn from them; and as far as these things go, Imitate them.

Still, however, inasmuch as the religion of these people consists in forms only, without any suitable emotions of the heart, it is no better than the worship of the heathen. Our Lord himself says, that "in vain do any people worship him, who draw near to him with their *lips*, while their *hearts*are far from him."

Some who are truly saved, have yet the remains of this old leaven within them; and are apt to judge of their state, rather by the number and length of their services—than by the spirituality of their minds in them. It would be well if some who minister in holy things, and who multiply their services beyond what their strength will endure, would attend to this hint.

But we should have more correct notions of the Deity, than to imagine that he requires or accepts, such services as these.

We mean not to say, that people may not profitably and acceptably prolong their services to any extent, when their spirits are devout and their hearts are enlarged; for our Lord himself spent whole nights in prayer and in communion with his Father. Nor do we say, that all repetitions of the same requests must necessarily be superstitious; for our Lord himself, thrice within the space of one hour, retired for prayer, and poured out his soul in the very same words. But we must be understood to say, that the acceptableness of our prayers does not depend on the length of them. God does not need to be informed or to be persuaded, by us: he is omniscient, and "knows what we need, before we ask him;" and he is all-merciful, and is infinitely more ready to give than we are to ask. We mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that God is prevailed upon by it to do what he was otherwise averse to do. It is true, he requires us to be importunate: but such expressions as these are not to be strained beyond their proper import.

The use of prayer is,  
to affect our own souls with a deep sense of our guilt and misery;  
to acknowledge our entire dependence upon God;  
to raise our expectations from him; and  
to prepare our hearts for a grateful reception of his blessings; that, when he has answered our petitions, we may give him the glory due unto his name.

It is a truth not generally known, that *the very disposition to pray is a gift from God*; and that God does not give because we pray, but stirs us up to pray, because he has before determined to give. This truth, well digested in the mind, will keep us equally from a presumptuous neglect of prayer, on the one hand, and from a superstitious use of it, on the other hand.

In addition to the foregoing cautions, we will suggest two or three others, arising out of a more minute attention to the text, which will serve as a further application of the subject.

***~~Guard then,~~***

***~~1. Against neglect of prayer.~~***

Our Lord does not here directly enjoin prayer as a duty, but he takes for granted that all his followers will pray. On any other supposition than this, his directions would lose all their force. In a subsequent part of this sermon he both enjoins it as a duty, and suspends on the performance of it all hopes of obtaining blessings from God. In truth, it is not possible for a child of God to neglect prayer. *Prayer is the very breath of a regenerate soul*, and "as the body without the spirit is dead," so the soul, without those spiritual affections which go forth to God in prayer, is dead also. As soon as ever Saul was converted to God, the testimony of God respecting him was, "Behold, he prays."

Those who neglect prayer, are decidedly ranked among the workers of iniquity, on whom God will pour out his everlasting vengeance. Think then, beloved, how many there are among us, who have reason to tremble for their state! O that every prayerless person would lay this thought to heart!

***~~2. Against formality in prayer.~~***

Prayer is a service of the heart, and not merely of the lip and knee. It is a "pouring out of the soul before God," and "a stirring up of ourselves to lay hold on God." Let none then deceive themselves with mere formal services, whether public or private.

As to the circumstance of using a written form of words, that makes no difference either way: a person may pray spiritually with a form, or formally without one. The true point to be ascertained is, *Do the feelings and desires of our souls correspond with the expressions of our lips?*If they do, that is acceptable prayer; if not, it is altogether worthless in the sight of God.

In the foregoing address, we have warned the infidel and profane. In this address, we would warn the superstitious and hypocritical. Yes, we must testify against them, that God looks at the heart; and that they never will find acceptance with him, until they come to "worship him in spirit and in truth".

***~~3. Against unbelief in prayer.~~***

It is our duty not only to pray, but to pray in faith. We are to draw near to God as "a Father," and as "our" Father. It is our privilege to "have access to him with boldness and with confidence by faith in the Lord Jesus." We "should lift up holy hands to him, without doubting." We are told that "if we waver in our minds, we must not expect to receive anything at his hands." Let us then come to him with enlarged hearts: let us "open our mouths wide, that he may fill them." Let us ask, whatever we feel that we stand in need of: and, when we have asked all that we are able to express, let us think what unsearchable gifts he has further to bestow: and when we have exhausted our store of words and thoughts, let us remember that he is "able to give us exceedingly abundant above all that we can ask or think." Petitions offered in such a frame as this, will never be unacceptable: such addresses will never be considered as "vain repetitions," even though they were offered every hour in the day. Indeed, such a frame as this is intended by the Apostle, when he bids us to "pray without ceasing," and such devotions will surely bring with them a rich reward. Even in this world will God "reward" them, and "openly" too, by the manifestations of his love and the communications of his grace. And, in the world to come, he will say concerning us, as of Nathanael of old, "Behold an Israelite indeed," a man of prayer: "I saw him under the fig-tree," and in other places where he retired for prayer; and I now, in the presence of the assembled universe, bear testimony to him as a faithful servant, who shall inherit the kingdom, and possess the glory which I have prepared for him.

#1313

***~~Hallowing God's Name~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.9)~~***

"After this manner therefore pray: Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name."

IT is of the utmost importance to every human being, to know how he shall approach his God with acceptance. Hence some even of the heathen philosophers endeavored to instruct their disciples how to pray. We do not find indeed any form of prayer provided for the Jews, with the exception of some short passages which may be regarded in that light. But in the New Testament we are informed that John the Baptist gave special instructions to his disciples respecting prayer; and our blessed Lord composed a prayer which should be used by his followers, and should serve also as a pattern for prayer to his Church in all ages. If it be thought that it was intended only for his disciples in their infantile state, previous to the outpouring of the Spirit upon them, let it be remembered, that it was recorded by the Evangelists a great many years after the full establishment of Christianity, without any hint of its use having been superseded: and consequently, we have the same reason to use it as the form and pattern of our supplications, as the Apostles themselves had. The only difference is, that as our Lord more clearly taught them afterwards to offer their petitions in his name, we must avail ourselves of that further information, to render our prayers more acceptable to God.

It being our intention to enter at large into the consideration of this prayer, we shall confine ourselves at present to that portion of it which we have read; in which are two things to be noticed:

***~~I. The invocation.~~***

It is to God alone, and not to creatures, whether angels or men, that we are to address our prayers: "God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another." But to him we are invited to draw near; and are taught to regard him,

***~~1. As a loving Father.~~***

Under this title God was known to his people of old. Indeed it was the appellation, which, in their eyes, was the surest pledge of his love: the appellation too in which he himself appeared peculiarly to delight. And well may it be a comfort to us to be permitted to address him by this endearing name: for, if he is a Father, he will . . .  
pity our weakness,  
and pardon our sins,  
and supply our every want.

True, if we have no nearer connection with him than the ungodly world, and are his children only by creation, we can derive comparatively but little comfort from it, because we are in rebellion against him. But if we are his children by adoption and grace, what may we not expect at his hands? When we come to him as members of that great family, pleading for ourselves individually, and for the whole collectively, and addressing him in the name of all, as "our Father," methinks he cannot turn away his ear from us: "We may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Only let us come with "a spirit of adoption, crying, "Abba, Father!" and, however "wide we may open our mouths, he will fill them."

***~~2. As an almighty Friend.~~***

When we are taught to address God as our Father "in Heaven," we are not to understand it as merely distinguishing him from our earthly parents, but as intended to impress our minds with a sense of his majesty: to remind us, that he sees everything which passes upon earth, and that he has all power to relieve us, to the utmost extent of our necessities. The consideration that he is our Father, encourages us to come "with boldness and with confidence;" but the thought that he is that "high and lofty One who inhabits eternity," and dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; the thought that he knows even the most secret motions of our hearts, and is alike able to save or to destroy; these considerations, I say, are calculated to beget a holy fear in our minds, and to *temper our boldness with reverential awe*.

Such are the feelings which should be blended in our hearts, whenever we draw near to a throne of grace. We should go to God as our Father; but, remembering that "he is in Heaven and we upon earth, we should address him in words select and few."

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The address.~~***

In this prayer there are six different petitions:

three for the advancement of God's honor,

and three for the promotion of our happiness.

The former having the precedence, may fitly teach us, that*a regard for God's honor ought to be first in our intention and desire*. Yet it may well be doubted whether the address which is presented to God in our text, is a petition, or a thankful acknowledgment. Perhaps, in so concise a form as this, both may be properly included. Agreeably to this idea we shall consider the address,

***~~1. As thanksgiving.~~***

Though not generally regarded in this light, it seems naturally enough to bear this construction, inasmuch as it accords exactly with the feelings of a devout soul, when impressed and animated with a sense of God's paternal love. Suppose a person to have been meditating on:  
the perfections and attributes of his God,  
the stupendous display of his love and mercy in Christ Jesus,  
his covenant engagements to his believing people,  
and the innumerable benefits conferred upon them;

suppose him also to be warmed with the thought that this God is his God, his Father, and "his eternal great reward"—what would be the first effusions of his soul? Would he not burst forth into praises and adorations, and even labor for words whereby to express his love and gratitude towards him? Thus it was with David on many occasions; and thus it will be with all who truly delight themselves in God. Sometimes, no doubt, the believer's mind will be led to dwell rather on other subjects, whether of confession or petition, as circumstances may require: but where nothing extraordinary has occurred to distract his attention, surely the language of adoration is most expressive of his feelings, and most suited to his state.

***~~2. As supplicatory.~~***

The Christian will not be satisfied with his own personal endeavors to honor God. But will wish and pray that the whole universe may render him the honor due unto his name. Hence he will beg of God to banish from the world all ignorance and error; and so to reveal himself to mankind, that all may be constrained to show forth his praise.

This, I say, is near unto the heart of the believer: he will long to promote it to the utmost of his power: he will pant after it, as an object of his most anxious desires: and he would be glad if every creature, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, could unite in this as their one blessed employment.

***~~Hence we may learn,~~***

***~~1. How glorious is the liberty of God's praying people.~~***

They are rescued from the dominion of slavish fears and selfish desires. "Happy are you, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!" Inexpressibly happy are all whose hearts accord with the language of our text! Methinks they resemble, as nearly as such imperfect creatures can, the inhabitants of the realms of light. The cherubim around the throne veil their faces and their feet, in token of that reverential awe which they feel in the presence of the Deity: and the glorified saints cast down their crowns before the footstool of their Lord, to express their sense of their unworthiness of the mercies given unto them; while the whole united choir vie with each other in hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb!

Thus it is with the saints on earth, both in their secret chambers and in the house of God: they are filled with adoring thoughts of God their Savior, and "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Doubtless they experience changes in their frames, and seem at times almost to have forgotten their high privileges: but in their better seasons they show forth the power of divine grace, and enjoy a foretaste of Heaven. O that all of us might know their blessedness, by sweet experience!

***~~2. What losers are they who neglect prayer.~~***

The generality of people account prayer a drudgery: but they are bitter enemies to their own souls. What loss do they suffer in having God for an enemy, when they might have him for their Friend and Father! As for God, he suffers no loss:*if they refuse to glorify him willingly—then he will glorify himself upon them against their will.*Reflect then, brethren, what sufferers you are, while you are turning your back on God! You have no Father to go to in the time of trouble; no sweet assurance that Almighty wisdom and power are exercised for your support; no anticipations of the blessedness of Heaven. On the contrary, all your enjoyments are empty, and all your prospects are dark. In this world you have little happiness above the beasts; and in the world to come, an eternity of extreme sorrows. O that you would now begin to pray! O that God might say of you this day, as he did of Saul immediately after his conversion, "Behold, he prays!" Then, however desperate your case may now appear, you would soon be received into the family of God, and be partakers of his inheritance for evermore.

#1314

***~~The Lord's Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.10)~~***

"May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven."

HIGHLY as the Lord's Prayer is esteemed among us, and frequently as it is used, there is scarcely any part of Scripture less considered: we are contented with repeating the words, without ever attending to its true import. The fact is, that though it is written for the use of all, none can use it aright but the true Christian: it is the Christian alone, whose heart can embrace the subjects contained in it.

The first petition which we are taught to offer, is, that God's "name may be hallowed" and adored. The two next petitions (which now come under our consideration) are intimately connected with it; they have respect to,

***~~I. The universal establishment of his kingdom.~~***

The kingdom, for the establishment of which we pray, is that of the Messiah.

The dominion which God exercises by his *providence*, cannot be more universal than it is: "his kingdom rules over all." But the government which he maintains over the souls of men has in every age been extremely limited and partial. That is the kingdom which God has determined to erect: of that the prophets have distinctly prophesied, and declared that it should be subjected to "Messiah the Prince," its extent is to be universal, and its duration to the end of time.

The time was now at hand when the foundations of this kingdom were to be laid: and there was a general expectation, both among the godly and the ungodly, that measures for its establishment would speedily be adopted. True it is, that few, if any, sufficiently advert to the spiritual nature of this kingdom: but our Lord gradually rectified the apprehensions of his followers respecting it: and taught them to expect the long-wished-for period; and to pray that nothing might be able to retard its arrival.

Some have thought, that, since the establishment of Christianity in the world, there is no further occasion for this petition: but there is, in fact, the same occasion for it now as there was at the first moment it was suggested to the disciples: the only difference between their use of it and ours is, that *they*prayed for the commencement of this kingdom, and *we*pray for its progressive and final establishment. Indeed, the kingdom itself will never have attained its utmost bounds, until every enemy of it be put under the Messiah's feet, and every subject of it be perfected in glory.

Nor can this event have too prominent a place in our prayers.

After the general petition that God's name may be glorified, we are taught immediately to desire the advent of the Messiah's kingdom. Nor is this without reason: for *it is by the establishment of this kingdom, and by that alone, that God's name can ever be sanctified in the earth*.

Look at the *Heathen*world, who are worshiping devils, or bowing down to stocks and stones: what glory has the Lord from them?

Look at those who are carried away by the *Mohammedan*delusion, or hardened by Jewish infidelity: these profess indeed to acknowledge the one true God; but they cast his word behind them, and are avowed enemies to his only-begotten Son.

Look at the professing *Christian*world, by whom he is dishonored no less than by any of those whom we have before mentioned. With the exception of a little remnant whom he has renewed by his grace, there is not one on earth that truly loves him, or cordially adores him. All others have some *idol*in their hearts which they prefer to him, some *darling lust*which they will not sacrifice for his sake. Here surely is abundant reason why we should entreat him to put forth his almighty power for the conversion of the world.

Let this petition then be offered by us with constancy, and with an earnestness proportioned to its importance. Let us pray that "the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified among us," that he would "gird his sword upon his thigh, and ride on in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness;" until "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ."

God requires this at our hands; nay more, the creation itself demands it of us. "The whole creation are represented as groaning and travailing in pain together" in expectation of this event; and therefore may well be considered as calling on us to exert ourselves in every possible way for their complete deliverance. Whenever then we contemplate the state of those around us, or extend our views to the Heathen world—let us lift up our hearts to God, and pray, "May Your kingdom come!"

Closely connected with this petition is that which next occurs, for,

***~~II. The unlimited execution of his will.~~***

This will flow from the former, as an effect inseparable from it. *We cannot approve ourselves subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom in any other way than by our obedience to his will*. Hence we are taught to pray, that God's will may be done by ourselves and all mankind, even as it is done in Heaven: and that too,

***~~1. In a way of cheerful acquiescence.~~***

The angels, notwithstanding they dwell immediately in the presence of their God, and behold "the works which he does for the children of men," are yet not privy to his ultimate designs; nor do they understand the full scope of all that they behold. As, under the Mosaic dispensation, the cherubim upon the mercy-seat were formed in a bending posture, looking down upon the ark, in order, as it were, to search out the mysteries contained in it, so are the angels represented by Peter as "desiring to look into" the Gospel salvation; and Paul says, that the revelation which God has with progressive clearness made of himself unto the Church, is no less instructive to them than to us. But we are well assured that they never for a moment doubt either the wisdom or goodness of God in any of his dispensations.

In this they are a fit pattern for our imitation. We know not the secret purposes of God in anything that he does: his ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known. But we should be satisfied in our minds, that "he does, and will do, all things well;" and that, though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne." However mysterious his ways may appear, we should at all times solace ourselves with this, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter." *Were this spirit universally prevalent, discontent would be utterly banished from the world. Under the most afflictive dispensations we should maintain a humble composure and a thankful frame.*What a desirable state! How honorable to God! What a source of happiness to man!

***~~2. In a way of active obedience.~~***

Here also are the angels a pattern for us: they are "ministers of God, to do his pleasure; and they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." The very first intimation of the Divine will is quite sufficient for them. Whatever the office is, whether to deliver Lot from Sodom, or to destroy a hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians, they execute it with equal readiness and equal pleasure. Thus should we engage in the service of our God: it should be "our food and our drink to do his will." We should hearken diligently to his word, in order to learn what we have to do; and then we should do it:  
without hesitation,  
without weariness,  
without reserve.

Nor should we be satisfied with having our own souls brought into this state; we should long to see every sinner upon earth, and "every thought of his heart, captivated in like manner to the obedience of Christ." The Apostle's prayer should be the language both of our hearts and lips.

But who can effect this change? Who can subdue the unruly wills and affections of sinful men? None but God! He must "make them willing in the day of his power, or they will continue in their rebellion even to the end. To him therefore we should look; and to him should we make our supplication, that he would "reveal his almighty arm," and subdue the nations to the obedience of faith.

***~~From this directory for prayer, we cannot but observe,~~***

***~~1. What elevation of mind true piety inspires.~~***

Statesmen and philosophers, however enlarged their minds, are occupied solely about the things of time and sense. Whereas the Christian, even though he is poor and illiterate, "separates himself" for the pursuit of higher objects, and is primarily concerned with eternal and heavenly realities.

The universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom,  
the unlimited execution of the Divine will,  
the bringing down of Heaven to earth,  
and the assimilating of earth to Heaven,  
these are the subjects of his daily interest and meditation; these are the objects of his most ardent desire.

The men of science justly value themselves on having enjoyed the blessings of education: they know and feel the benefit of having their thoughts raised to the contemplation of objects that are out of the reach of vulgar and illiterate minds. But the Christian surpasses them incomparably more than they surpass the lowest of mankind: his meditations are more noble, and his mind is more enlarged. Let us learn then to form a proper estimate of piety; and to regard it with the veneration it deserves.

***~~2. What happiness true piety is calculated to produce.~~***

Let these petitions be answered; let this state of things prevail; let the Messiah reign in the hearts of all mankind; let the example of angels be emulated by every human being. Will anyone say that this would lessen the happiness of the world? Will anyone say that he even feels a doubt upon the subject? No, we are all convinced in our consciences, that in proportion as we approximated to the *holiness*of angels, we should also participate their *bliss*.

See what it is that occasions by far the greater part of misery in the world: "Whence spring wars and fightings among us, but from the lusts which war in our members?"

It is to the same source that we must trace the greater part of our bodily disorders and our mental troubles. *Sin is the parent of misery in ten thousand different forms*—and it is piety alone that can heal the wounds which sin has made. If any who profess piety are not happy, the fault is not in piety, but in them: they have either erroneous notions of God's kingdom, or a partial regard for his will. Let them only possess the dispositions implied in these prayers, and they will have a very Heaven upon earth!

#1315

***~~The Lord's Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.11)~~***

"Give us this day our daily bread."

IN those petitions which relate to the glory of God, that occurs first which is the most comprehensive and the most important. In these petitions which relate to the welfare of man, a different order is observed. *The comfortable support of our bodies, instead of being of chief importance, is, when compared with spiritual blessings, quite insignificant*. Yet is a petition respecting that with great propriety placed first; because, unless our bodies are preserved in life, there will be no further scope for the communication of grace on God's part, or the exercise of it on ours. The subject of this petition indeed is such, as many would think scarcely worthy of a place in so short a summary of prayer as that before us: but our Lord did not account it so; and therefore we should not.

That we may form a right judgment concerning it, let us consider,

***~~I. The import of this petition.~~***

There are two things in it which call for explanation:

***~~1. The general scope of it.~~***

Some have thought, that, because Christ is represented as "the bread of life" which every one must eat, we are here taught to pray for the knowledge and enjoyment of Him: while others have thought, that the prayer referred to the sacramental bread, which in the primitive Church was partaken of daily by the whole body of believers. But neither of these interpretations accords with the terms in which the petition is conveyed. The plain and literal sense of the words seems to be that which was intended by our Lord. It may be thought strange indeed, that, when three petitions only are suggested for the welfare of man, one of them should be confined to his bodily concerns. But it must be remembered that those are the concerns in which we are most apt to overlook the interpositions of Heaven; and consequently, that we particularly need to have this very direction given us.*Nor is it a small matter to acknowledge the agency of God in things of such apparently inferior importance: for it leads us to realize the thought of an overruling Providence in everything, even in the death of a sparrow, or the falling of a hair of our head.*

***~~2. The particular limitations contained in it.~~***

The things for which we pray, are limited to the *necessities*of life. This is the general acceptance of the term "bread" in Scripture: it comprehends all the things which are needful for the body, but not any luxuries or extravagances. Doubtless those necessities will vary according to our rank and situation in life, and according to the numbers we have dependent on us for support: and what would be a extravagance under some circumstances, would be no more than absolutely necessary under other circumstances: but, due respect being had to these things, this must be the limit of our requests. If we ask for anything, "to consume it upon our lusts, we ask amiss."

The measure also of these necessities is limited. We are not to ask for a future store of things upon which we may exist for a time independent of God; but simply for such things as are requisite for our *present*subsistence. The term that is used in our text is indeed variously interpreted: but, when compared with the corresponding passage in Luke, its meaning will evidently appear to be that which our translators have affixed to it: *We pray from day to day, that God will give us what is necessary for the day.*We are not even to "take thought for the morrow;" at least, not so as to feel any anxious care respecting it: for we know not that we shall be alive on the morrow; or, if we be spared, we know that He who provided for us yesterday and today, can do the same tomorrow. On Him therefore we should "cast our care, believing that he cares for us," and that he will provide whatever in his wisdom he shall see good for us. In every place, in every event, in everything, we should see, as it were, that name inscribed, "Jehovah-jireh," *The Lord will provide.*

Now this petition will be found extremely important, if we consider,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it.~~***

We need not put any forced interpretation on our text in order to render it instructive; for, it teaches us many practical lessons that are of great importance:

***~~1. That we should be moderate in our desires of earthly things.~~***

*Our hearts are naturally set on earthly things.*Our Lord tells us, that the Gentiles think of little except what they shall eat, and drink, and wear. And it is precisely thus with the great mass of those who bear the Christian name. The heathen themselves do not exceed us in an eager pursuit after the good things of this life. Nor is perfect contentment known even among those who possess the largest fortunes: there is always something beyond their present attainments which they are aspiring after, and anxious to possess.

But it should not, nor indeed can it, be thus with any true Christian. *The man who sees the worth and excellence of heavenly things can no longer pant after the worthless things of time and sense*: he is like a man, who, having looked at the sun, sees a dark spot upon every earthly object. From that moment, Agur's wish is his: in his addresses to his heavenly Father, he can ask for nothing more than food and clothing: possessing that, he is content: or even if he does not possess it, he "knows how to suffer need as well as to abound;" and, when "having nothing, feels that he possesses all things."

Let this lesson then be learned by us: and let every one of us apply to himself that solemn caution, "Do you seek great things unto yourself? Seek them not."

***~~2. That we should depend on God's providence for the supply of them.~~***

God is the true source of temporal blessings, no less than of spiritual blessings. It is he who causes the earth to bring forth, and instructs men how to cultivate it to advantage: and, without his blessing, all our labors would terminate in disappointment. *The whole creation exists upon his kind and bounteous provision.*Now because we have so long been habituated to receive the productions of the earth, either spontaneously presenting themselves to us, or rewarding the labors of our hands—we are very apt to overlook the Divine Donor, and to forget our dependence upon God. But we are in fact as dependent on him as "the birds of the air, which neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns," and we should in the habit of our minds live upon his providence, precisely as the Israelites did in the wilderness; and receive "our daily bread" at his hands, as much as if it were daily given to us from the clouds.

We are indeed to labor for the things which are necessary for the body, as well as for those which pertain to the soul. The prohibition which our Lord gave respecting this, is not absolute, but only comparative. If we will not labor for ourselves, we have no claim for assistance either from God or man. Nevertheless, when we have labored with ever so much skill and diligence, we must bear in mind, that "our daily bread is as truly the gift" of God, as if we had not labored for it at all: and our hope for the future must be in him alone, as much as if we were, like Elijah, subsisting daily on provision brought to us by ravens.

***~~3. That, whatever be the portion which God sees fit to give us, we should be therewith content.~~***

A person who should form his judgment by outward appearances, would think that there is an exceeding great difference between the comforts of the rich and of the poor. But there is really far less difference than we are apt to imagine. The richest man has no security for his possessions: experience proves that kings may be hurled from their thrones, and nobles be reduced to exist on charity. Moreover, while men possess their wealth, they may, by disease of body or disturbance of mind, be deprived of all comfort, and be made to envy the poorest man who is in the enjoyment of health and peace. But the *pious poor*have necessities secured to them on the most inviolable of all tenures, the promise of a faithful God.

Besides, the rich have very little conception of the happiness that is derived from seeing the hand of God in their daily provision. This happiness is reserved for the poor. They are constrained to feel their dependence on God: and, when they receive their supplies, they often behold such peculiar circumstances attending them, as mark in the strongest manner the interposition of their Divine Father in their behalf.

Can anyone doubt whether provision sent in such a way be enjoyed with a greater zest than that which is supplied out of our own store? Surely the thoughts which arise in the mind of a poor man on such occasions, which fill his eyes with tears of gratitude, and his mouth with songs of praise—are an infinitely richer feast than all the luxuries which even royal wealth could procure.

Let not any then be discontented with their lot: "the rich and the poor meet together" far more nearly than is generally supposed: "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses," but in the *blessing*which he enjoys along with it: "The blessing of the Lord, it makes rich; and he adds no sorrow with it."

Our blessed Lord, who often lacked bread to eat, and "a place where to lay his head," has sanctified a state of poverty, and shown that *the Father's love is not to be judged of by his external dispensations, or his children's happiness substantially affected by them*.

Are any of you then under circumstances of trial? Be of good cheer: it is a small matter. It is a small matter for your bodies to be in want, provided "your souls be satisfied with the plenteousness of your Father's house." Only "eat abundantly" of "the living bread," "which is meat indeed;" and then the scantiest pittance that you can exist upon shall be sweet as honey or the honeycomb. Feed richly, I say, on that; and "you shall never hunger," as long as the world shall stand. As it respects your body, "your bread shall be given to you, and your water shall be sure." As it respects your soul, you shall evermore "delight yourself in fatness."

#1316

***~~The Lord's Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.12)~~***

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

THE petitions of men to the Supreme Being will be presented in a different order, according to the general state of their minds, or according to the particular circumstances in which they are placed. A person just awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, would most probably assign the first place in his petitions to that which, at such a season, would press most forcibly upon his mind—the obtaining of reconciliation with an offended God. But when he has obtained peace with God, and is enabled to come to him as a child unto his father, his slavish fear gives way to an sincere concern for his father's honor, and his own personal safety occupies a less prominent situation in his prayers. Not that he is less interested in the welfare of his soul than before; but he is more interested in other concerns, which, at the first, had no place in his thoughts. Accordingly we find, in that form of prayer which our Lord himself has prescribed as the most perfect prayer, this order is observed.

The devout soul is first led to express its concern for the universal establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom; and then, after one petition for the preservation of its existence in the body, it is taught to implore the pardon of all its multiplied transgressions. This is the portion of that prayer which we are at this time to consider: and in it we shall notice,

***~~I. The petition itself.~~***

To pray for the forgiveness of our sins is,

***~~1. Universally necessary.~~***

*Sins*are here spoken of under the notion of *debts*: for as by the preceptive part of the law we are bound to obedience, so by the sanctions of the law there is laid upon us an obligation to suffer punishment in case of disobedience.*Our sins therefore are debts which we owe to divine justice for our violations of the laws of God.*And who is there among the children of men that has not many debts to be forgiven? We readily acknowledge that there is a great difference between different people in respect to the guilt they have contracted. But "there is no man that lives and sins not," "in many things we all offend," "if any say that they have not sinned, they make God a liar, and his word is not in them." God's testimony respecting the whole race of mankind is that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" and, consequently, that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before him."

What then must be done? Can anyone discharge his own debt? If any will attempt it, what method will he pursue? If he will perfectly obey the law in future, that will no more satisfy its demands for past disobedience than the ceasing to increase a debt will discharge a debt that is already contracted. If he will endeavor to atone for his sins by tears of penitence—rivers of tears will never suffice to wash away one sin. There is but one possible remedy remaining for him; and that is, to cast himself upon the mercy of God, and to implore forgiveness for the Redeemer's sake. In this respect all are upon a level: whether our sins have been greater or less, this is the only way in which we can return to God with any hope of acceptance. The proud self-justifying Pharisee will be dismissed with abhorrence; and only those who come in the spirit of the self-abasing publican will obtain mercy at his hands.

There are two sorts of people indeed, who are apt to indulge very erroneous conceptions on this subject. Some suppose that they are so completely *justified*as not to need any renewed applications for pardon. Others suppose that they are so perfectly *sanctified*as not to have any fresh occasion for pardon. But as David, after God by Nathan had sealed his pardon, still implored mercy at the hands of God, so must we; and those who fancy themselves living in a sinless state, are proud deceivers of their own souls. There is not a day or an hour in which any human being has not just occasion to offer the petition in our text.

The corruption of his nature,  
the transgressions of his former life, and  
the imperfections of his very best services,  
all require it of him.

***~~2. Infinitely important.~~***

Consider the state of a man whose iniquities are not forgiven: God, the Almighty God, is his enemy. He is every moment in danger of dropping into Hell. He neither has, nor can have, any solid peace in his mind. He lives but to aggravate his guilt, and augment his condemnation. Can anyone reflect on this, and not see the importance of urging the petition in our text? The only wonder is, that any person in an unforgiven state can close his eyes in sleep, or give attention to any of the concerns of time or sense—until he has first implored mercy at the hands of his offended God.

But while the general importance of this petition is obvious, there certainly is some obscurity in,

***~~II. The limitation or condition annexed to it.~~***

To understand this part of the Lord's Prayer aright, we must compare the expressions as recorded by Luke, with those which are used in the text. Luke says, "Forgive us, *for*we forgive others," but in the text we pray, "Forgive us, *as*we forgive others." Now we cannot doubt but that both the Evangelists have given the prayer with accuracy, so far at least as not to comprehend in it anything which was not intended by our Lord. We, therefore, shall take the petition in both views, and consider it as importing,

***~~1. A profession of our readiness to forgive others.~~***

This is a frame of mind which God requires in all who come to him for mercy; and *he warns us not to expect mercy at his hands while we are indisposed to exercise it towards others*. Such is the explanation which our Lord himself gives of his own words: and, taken in this sense, they are a kind of plea with God to grant us our desire, and an encouragement to ourselves to expect it.

The duty of forgiving others being imposed upon us as a condition, without the performance of which God will not forgive us; a consciousness of having performed the duty emboldens us to ask forgiveness at his hands. Moreover, while we thus appeal to God respecting our endeavors to obey his commandments, we do in effect acknowledge the agency of his Spirit, and the efficacy of his grace; without which we should have neither the ability nor inclination to fulfill his will.

In this view then it is also encouraging; for, if God has already bestowed his grace upon us, and we have a clear evidence of it by its operation on our hearts and lives, we may reasonably hope, that he will yet further extend his mercy to us in the pardon of all our sins: we may regard his past favors as a pledge and earnest of others yet to come, and especially of those which our souls most need, and which he himself is most ready to bestow.

***~~2. A consent that the mercy we show to others should be made the pattern of God's mercy to us.~~***

We cannot with propriety request that the forgiveness which we exercise towards others may be the measure of that which we would receive from God; (because everything we do is so extremely imperfect:) but the *pattern*it may and ought to be.

Of course, as in the former case, when we speak of a condition, we are not to be understood as if there were anything meritorious in forgiving others, or as if God bargained with us, as it were, and bartered away his mercies. Just so, in the present case, we are not to be understood as if there were, or could be, anything in us that was worthy of God's imitation. There is a sense in which we are to be "pure, as God is pure," and "perfect, as he is perfect." In a similar sense, though not with equal strictness, we may beg of God to forgive us our offences, as we forgive our offending fellow-creatures; that is,  
freely,  
fully,  
cordially,  
and forever.

True it is that, in offering this petition, we need to speak "with fear and trembling;" lest there be in our hearts any root of bitterness unperceived by us, and *lest, when praying for forgiveness, we do in effect pray, that we be not forgiven*. And, that no doubt may exist respecting our sincerity in forgiving others, we ought to be rendering good for evil, and "heaping thereby coals of fire on the heads" of our enemies, to melt them into love. Then may we use this petition with safety, with confidence, and with comfort.

***~~From this view of our subject, we learn,~~***

***~~1. The temperament of a Christian.~~***

Knowing that his own debt to God is ten thousand talents, and that his fellow-creature can at the utmost owe to him only a few pence, the Christian dares not take him by the throat unmercifully; lest God should retaliate on him, and require at his hands the debt, which the whole universe could never pay. Freely has he received forgiveness; and freely does he grant it, even to those who may have injured him in the highest degree. All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, are put away from him, with all malice. He is kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving towards others, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven him.

Let us examine then whether this is indeed our character. Let us search whether our mode of speaking of others, and of acting towards them, accord with it. For, if we bring our gift to the altar with an unforgiving spirit, God bids us to "go our way," and not presume to expect any tokens of his favor, until the most perfect reconciliation has been sought with our offending or offended brother.

***~~2. The privilege of a Christian.~~***

Here God permits, encourages, and commands us to ask of him the free and full pardon of *all*our sins. No consideration whatever is had to the number or greatness of them: the command is given to every human being; and the fullest possible assurance, that none shall ask in vain.

Some however have thought, that because no mention is here made of Christ and his atonement, we need not to have respect to him in our addresses at the throne of grace. But we must remember, that our Lord had not yet declared the whole of what he had come to reveal. This sermon was delivered quite at the commencement of his ministry, and before the minds of his followers were sufficiently prepared for the clearer manifestation of divine truth. What therefore he afterwards declared respecting the intent of his death and resurrection, must direct us in our use of this prayer. He has told us that he "shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins;" and that we must present our petitions to God in his name. Consequently we must have respect to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his intercession, whenever we approach our God, whether in the use of this prayer, or of any other, which we may think suited to our state. If the necessity of Christ's atonement seems to detract from the freeness of the pardon, Paul saw no ground whatever for such an objection.

Be it known then to all, that the way of access unto the Father is opened to us through the crucifixion of the Son of God; and that, if only we ask forgiveness in the Redeemer's name, our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and be irrecoverably "cast into the depths of the sea!"

#1317

***~~The Lord's Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.13)~~***

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

THE obtaining of God's pardon would satisfy a person who was merely alarmed by the terrors of Hell; but a truly regenerate person will desire deliverance from *sin*as much as from *Hell*itself. He knows that he could not be happy even in Heaven, if sin retained in any respect dominion over him. Hence, having implored pardon for his past sins, he will, with equal earnestness, desire victory over his remaining corruptions. But how is this victory to be gained, seeing that we are encompassed with temptations, and assaulted by all the powers of darkness? It must be gained by committing ourselves to the care of our heavenly Father, and by seeking from him,

***~~I. The guidance of his providence.~~***

***~~We are continually endangered by the temptations that surround us.~~***

Temptations present themselves to us on every side. Everything that is agreeable to our senses or flattering to our minds, has a tendency to draw us from God. Even the things which are the most innocent when moderately enjoyed, often become *snares*to us. Our food, our clothing, our comforts of every kind, and even our dearest relatives—are apt to engross our affections too much, and to become the objects of an idolatrous regard. The cares and troubles of life also are frequently sources of unbelieving anxiety, or murmuring discontent. Moreover, the contempt too generally poured upon religion has not infrequently a fatal influence on our minds, to keep us from inquiring after God at all, or from confessing him openly before an ungodly world.

**To these external temptations, incalculable force is given by the corruptions of our own hearts.** We are of our own selves prone to evil. The heart is ready to catch fire from every spark; and all the appetites and passions are quickly brought into activity in the service of sin. In vain does reason remonstrate with us: "the law of sin that is in our members, wars against the law of our minds, and brings us into captivity," yes, even when the spiritual principle lusts and strives against the corruptions of the flesh—so strong is the corrupt principle within us, we cannot do the things that we would.

***~~Well therefore may we pray to be kept from their power.~~***

We are not to suppose that God is active in tempting us to sin: James expressly says that it is our own lust, and not God, that is the occasion of sin. But God may in his providence give scope for the exercise of our corruptions, as he did when he raised up Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and opened the Red Sea before him for the purpose of making him a more signal monument of his displeasure.

On the other hand, he will often put an obstacle in the way of his people, so as to keep them from executing the evil suggestions of their hearts. He will plant a "hedge;" and, if that will not suffice, "he will build up a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways." This he can do in ten thousand ways, without at all infringing upon the liberty of the human will. Thus he diverted the patriarchs from destroying Joseph, and David from wreaking his vengeance upon Nabal.

Moreover, he has promised to do this in answer to our prayers. He will either make a way for us to escape from the temptations that assault us; or he will moderate them, so that they may not be too powerful for us; or he will increase our strength, that we may be able to overcome theme. In a word, he will "order our goings," and "direct our paths."

If we were to depend on our own wisdom, we would only increase the difficulties which we designed to avoid: but if we make God our refuge, we shall be preserved. He has bidden us "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation;" and he will never allow us to use these means in vain.

But as we cannot hope to be kept from every temptation, we should also pray to God for,

***~~II. The assistance of his grace.~~***

***~~Besides our in-dwelling corruptions, we have, in Satan, a great and powerful enemy.~~***

The words which in this and some other places are translated, "from evil," might properly be translated, "from the evil one." Satan is represented in Scripture as a most subtle and cruel adversary to man. He is called:  
a *serpent*for his subtlety,  
a *dragon*for his fierceness, and  
a *God*for the dominion that he exercises over the children of men.

**To withstand him in our own strength is impossible.** He has *wiles*which we cannot discover, and *devices*which we cannot fathom. If permitted, he could destroy the holiest of men. None are out of his reach. He not only instigated a wicked Judas to betray his Master, and a hypocritical Ananias to lie unto his God—but an intrepid Peter to deny his Lord. If our Lord's intercession had not prevailed to secure the faith of this favored servant, Satan would have "sifted him as wheat," and brought him to everlasting destruction.

***~~We should therefore pray to be delivered from him also.~~***

God will deliver us from him, as well as from temptation. He has provided armor for us, which, if used aright, shall defend us against all his fiery darts. The head, the chest, the legs, have their several and appropriate means of protection. Every part is also doubly guarded by the *shield*of faith: and a *sword*of heavenly temper is put into the believer's hands; a sword which Satan is not able to withstand; a sword by which the Savior himself prevailed over him, and which, though in the weakest hands, shall vanquish all the powers of Hell.

Does anyone ask, How shall I get this armor? We answer, Pray to God to give it to you. It is . . .  
by prayer that it is obtained;  
by prayer it is put on;  
by prayer we are rendered expert in the use of it;  
and by prayer our heart is steeled with courage, and our arm confirmed with strength.

The petition that is taught us in the text will answer every end; and urged with frequency and faith, will soon make us more than conquerors.

Would we see the whole exemplified? Behold the instance of Paul: in him, the assault, defense, and victory, are all exhibited before our eyes. Satan assaulted him with the utmost violence: the Apostle instantly betook himself to prayer; and his triumph was speedy and complete: and in like manner shall "God's strength be perfected in our weakness," if only we rely on him for our deliverance. Were we a thousand times weaker than we are, his grace should assuredly be sufficient for us.

***~~The petition, thus explained, is of use,~~***

***~~1. For caution.~~***

When people are urged to watch and pray, and to abstain from those things which are the occasions of sin—they are ready to complain that we are too strict, and that we abridge the liberties of men without necessity. But, what can be expected, if we will frequent every scene of vanity, and mix indiscriminately with all, whether godly or ungodly? What can be expected, but that we should drink into the spirit of the world, and be drawn into many sinful compliances? Does not every one find this to be the effect of associating with the world? Is not a conformity to its maxims and habits the almost necessary consequence of such conduct? Men, if on a field of battle, would not for their pleasure go and expose themselves where it was almost impossible to escape a wound; and yet, when their souls are in danger, they will venture any where for the sake of conforming to the world, or of obtaining some worthless gratification.

But how can such people offer the prayer which our Lord has taught us? Is it not a mockery to beg of God "not to lead us into temptation," when we are rushing into it daily of our own accord? Know you then, beloved, that *your practice should correspond with your prayers*. Know, that to expose yourselves to sin is to tempt your God: yes, it is to tempt the devil to tempt you. If you would be preserved by God, you must "keep" yourselves, not your feet merely, but "your hearts also, and that with all diligence," avoiding not only sin itself, but also the *means*and *occasions*of sin.

***~~2. For encouragement.~~***

It may please God for wise and gracious ends to allow you to be strongly tempted by the wicked one. Perhaps he may design to manifest and confirm the grace he has already given you; or to discover to you some hidden evil in your own hearts; or he may design to keep you from falling into sin, or to make use of you for the strengthening of others by a contrasted exhibition of your own weakness, and of his unbounded mercy in your recovery.

But, whatever be his object, and however painful your trial may be, remember, that Satan is a vanquished enemy; that he cannot go beyond the limits which God has assigned him; and that your God is ever at hand to hear and answer your petitions. Were you called to contend in your own strength, your situation would be awful. But you are commanded to "cast your care on God, who cares for you," and to "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God." Be strong then, and fear not: "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and know that he who has taught you to look to him for guidance and protection, will "keep you from falling," and "bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

#1318

***~~The Lord's Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.13)~~***

"For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever Amen."

ON a review of the Lord's Prayer, we cannot but be thankful that such a summary is here given us, not only because we are hereby instructed *what*to pray for, but are assured that, as great as the petitions are, they shall all be granted, if we offer them up in faith.

The conclusion of the prayer which we have now read, is not contained in Luke's Gospel. But we must remember, that the prayer was given to the disciples at two different times, and on different occasions: and that in the one it might be contained, though it might be omitted in the other. Doubts indeed have been suggested whether it originally formed any part of the prayer before us: but, while the Latin versions and fathers omit it, it is found in most of the Greek manuscripts, and is quoted by most of the Greek fathers: from whence the translators of our Bible have admitted it as a part of the sacred text; as we also may safely do on their authority. Certain it is that there is in these words a perfect correspondence with the prayer itself; and that they admirably express the feelings of a devout soul. This may be understood in a twofold view:

***~~I. As a devout acknowledgment.~~***

It is often called a doxology, or an ascription of praise to God: and in this view we may observe concerning it,

***~~1. That it accords with many other passages of Holy Writ.~~***

Such effusions of praise are frequent in the Holy Scriptures: indeed the very words appear to have been taken from that thanksgiving of David, which he uttered when both he and his people had been consecrating their offerings to the Lord for the building of his temple. In the New Testament such doxologies abound. The Apostles frequently interrupt the thread of their argument, (if it can be called an interruption,) by breaking forth into rapturous expressions of praise and thanksgiving; and more frequently conclude their epistles with such tokens of grateful adoration. Sometimes also we find, that, after pouring out their souls before God in prayer, the Apostles address their thanksgivings to him, just in the way that we are taught to do in the prayer before us. The propriety therefore of addressing God in this manner is evident, since it is sanctioned by the example of the saints in all ages.

***~~2. That it is well calculated for the use of the Christian Church.~~***

Every work of God, whether animate or inanimate, renders unto him a tribute of praise: the beauty and order of the whole creation, and the adaptation of everything to its proper end—declares aloud the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator. But the people of God must be active in rendering praise to him; according to that distinction of the Psalmist, "All your works praise you, O God; and your saints shall bless you." The redeemed of the Lord are called upon to testify their obligations to him in this manner day and night: it is "lovely" for them so to do, and, "if they should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out against them."

Where shall we find words more proper for our use? They are so *concise*as to be easily remembered, and so *comprehensive*as to include every thing that we could wish to say. They are, in fact, an epitome of that song which saints and angels are singing in the realms above—and, if we offer them in a befitting manner, we shall have an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.

Nor is there a small emphasis to be laid on the word with which the prayer concludes. "Amen," when annexed to praise and thanksgiving, denotes the full concurrence of the soul in all that has been uttered. In the fourth century, it was customary for the whole Church to utter this word aloud, in order to express their cordial assent to everything that had been spoken; and at times, as Jerome tells us, the sound was like thunder. As far as respects their earnestness, we approve of their custom: but we think that true devotion would be less clamorous: and we far prefer that mode adopted by the Church in the days of Nehemiah, when the earnestness was equally, but more suitably, expressed; being chastened and tempered with ardent affection and reverential awe.

But we have observed that the words of our text may be also interpreted,

***~~II. As a humble plea.~~***

***~~Pleading with God is the very essence and perfection of prayer.~~***

In all the more solemn addresses to the Deity recorded in the Scriptures, pleading bears a very conspicuous part.

We must not however imagine that such a mode of prayer was adopted with a view to prevail upon God to grant what he was otherwise averse to give: we mistake the nature of prayer altogether, if we think that it has any such power, or is to be used for any such end.

*Prayer is rather intended to impress our own minds with a sense of our manifold necessities, and of our dependence upon God for a supply of them*; and thus to prepare our souls for a grateful reception of the Divine favors: and consequently, the more urgent our prayers are, the more will these ends be answered; and God will be the more glorified by us, when he has imparted to us the desired benefits. It was with such views that Moses, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and all the saints of old, presented their petitions, enforced and strengthened with the most urgent pleas. And it is impossible to feel our need of mercy, without following their example in this particular.

***~~As a plea, this part of the prayer admirably enforces every petition in it.~~***

Great are the things which we have asked in it: and utterly unworthy are we to offer such petitions at the throne of grace: but God is a mighty Sovereign, who "may do what he will with his own," and therefore may hear and answer us, though we be the basest and the vilest of the human race. It is this idea which we express, when we say, "for yours is the kingdom." The word for shows that it has respect to what goes before, and that we urge this consideration as a plea, to enforce the preceding petitions. Next to the sovereign right of God to answer us, we plead his power. *Nothing short of omnipotence can effect the things which we desire of God in this prayer*: but he is almighty, and all-sufficient: "with him all things are possible," and we acknowledge our conviction, that "there is nothing too hard for him."

Lastly, we plead "the glory" which he will derive from granting all the things which we have prayed for; in the conversion and salvation of the world at large, and in every mercy given to ourselves in particular, whether in the supply of our bodily needs, or in the pardon of our sins and the preservation of our souls. This *sovereignty*and this *power*are his immutable perfections; and this *glory*will redound to him through all eternity, even "forever" and ever.

Such considerations may well animate us in our addresses at the throne of grace, and encourage us in a further confirmation of our petitions by the word "Amen."

We have already mentioned one sense of the word "Amen;" namely, that it is *a full assent to all that has been uttered*. But it has another meaning also, and imports *a desire that the things which have been asked may be granted*. In this latter sense it is often doubled, in order to express more strongly the ardor of that desire.

Would we understand its just import? we may see it illustrated in the prayer of Daniel; where, having enforced his petitions by many urgent pleas, he comes at last to renew them all with redoubled ardor; not indeed by the word "Amen," but in a more copious strain, expressive of the idea contained in it.

In the Apostolic age the use of this word was universal in the Church: while one person addressed the Lord in the name of the whole assembly, all who were present added their "Amen," and thereby made every petition and thanksgiving their own.

Nor has the word lost its use and emphasis even in Heaven: for the whole choir, both of saints and angels, are represented as using it in both the senses that we have mentioned; "saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen."

O that, in adding our Amen to the prayer before us, we might resemble them; and so utter it now from our inmost souls, that we maybe counted worthy to utter it in full concert with them to all eternity!

#1319

***~~A Forgiving Spirit Necessary to Our Acceptance with God.~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14), [15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 6.15)~~***

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

THE different petitions of the Lord's Prayer are collected from different parts of the Old Testament, and concentered so as to form *a concise and comprehensive summary of all that we need to pray for*. But there is annexed to one of the petitions a limitation, which was altogether new, and which greatly needed some elucidation. Our Lord however did not stop to explain it at the time, but finished the prayer first, and then added, in confirmation of it, the words which we have now read; showing us thereby that the clause had not been lightly introduced, but was of great importance, and indispensable necessity.

It certainly appeared strange, that we should presume to make our own compassion towards others the pattern and the measure of God's compassion towards us: but our Lord would have us to know, that *it will be in vain to expect mercy at God's hands, unless we exercise it towards our fellow-creatures*: on this condition, and on this only, can we hope for acceptance with him in the day of judgment.

Having already had repeated occasion to consider the subject of forgiveness of injuries, we shall now advert rather to the manner in which that duty is here enjoined; and shall show,

***~~I. In what sense the salvation of the Gospel may be called conditional.~~***

This subject has been a fruitful source of controversy in the Church of Christ: but both sides of the question are true according to the sense which we annex to the word "condition."

***~~Salvation is not conditional in a way of personal merit.~~***

There are those who think that God engages to give us Heaven, *if*we will perform so many good works; and that, when we have performed those good works, we may claim Heaven as a debt. To affirm that salvation is conditional in any such sense as this, would entirely make void the Gospel of Christ. Salvation would then be of works, and not of grace.

It would be to no purpose to say that these terms were procured for us by Jesus Christ, and that we must therefore refer the honor of our salvation unto him, and accept our reward as the purchase of his blood: for, though the procuring of the terms might be his act, the performing of them must be ours: and when we had performed them, we should have whereof to glory before God. But by the Gospel all glorying is excluded: and therefore salvation cannot be conditional in the way that we are now speaking of.

***~~But salvation is conditional in a way of inseparable connection.~~***

"God has chosen men to salvation;" but it is "through sanctification of the Spirit, and through belief of the truth." Faith and holiness are required of us; but the performance of them gives us a claim upon God only so far as he has freely engaged himself by his own gracious promises. It does not warrant us to expect anything on the ground of merit: we cannot go to God, as laborers that have performed their task, and say, "Pay me what you owe me!" On the contrary, "if we had done all that was commanded us, we would still account ourselves unprofitable servants;" and must accept eternal life as the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

But still we must do these things—and without doing them we cannot possibly be saved. God has appointed the *means*as well as the *end*; and the end is to be attained only in and by the means. It is certainly true that "the purpose of God according to election shall stand;" but it is no less true, that it shall be effected only in the way that he has appointed; and that, whatever men may fancy about their predestination to eternal life, "unless they repent they shall all perish;" and "if they believe not, they shall not see life;" and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." In this sense therefore salvation is conditional: the obligations that are upon us are indispensable; and no person whatever shall be saved who disregards them.

The import of the term *condition*being fixed, we shall proceed to show,

***~~II. The reasonableness of the condition here imposed.~~***

***~~Here it will be proper to mark the precise nature and limits of the condition imposed.~~***

The forgiving of others is not so to be understood as to supersede the exercise of governmental authority. God has appointed magistrates as his vice-regents in the world, and has put the sword into their hands "for the punishment of evildoers, and the support of those who do well," and if they should forbear "to execute wrath" upon those who violate the laws, they would themselves be guilty of a dereliction of their public duty. Such lenity therefore is not comprehended in the duty which is here inculcated.

Neither does the duty here spoken of altogether prohibit us from the personal exercise of our just rights, either for self-defense, or for the obtaining of legal redress. The Apostle Paul pleaded his right as a Roman citizen in order to protect himself against the injuries with which he was menaced; and appealed to the tribunal of Caesar to obtain that justice which was denied him in the inferior courts. He has indeed expressed his disapprobation of a litigious spirit, and especially such a shameful exercise of it as led Christians to drag one another before the tribunals of heathens. But he does not prohibit Christians from submitting their claims to the arbitration of judicious people among themselves; and consequently he does not require us so to forgive those who injure us, as in no case to seek redress.

If the only alternative be to suffer an injury, or by angry contention to embroil ourselves in difficulties and quarrels—our Lord has determined the point for us, and bidden us to "turn the other cheek to a man who has smitten us," rather than retaliate the injury, or do ourselves a still greater injury by yielding to a vindictive spirit.

But to a certain extent, the support of our just rights is necessary for the preservation of the peace of the community; and consequently we not only are permitted, but bound, in some instances, to maintain our rights, and to punish those who would rob us of them.

But *nothing is ever to be done from a vindictive spirit. The smallest disposition to revenge is strictly prohibited*. We not only must not avenge ourselves, but must not for a moment be pleased with the news that any evil has happened even to our most inveterate enemy. So far from wishing him evil, we ought to the uttermost to do him good: to love and bless him when he hates and curses us; and to pray fervently to God for him, at the very time he is doing us all the injury in his power. The work of retribution must be left to God, "to whom alone vengeance belongs;" and we must content ourselves with "heaping coals of fire upon his head"—to melt him into love.

***~~Now on our performance of this duty God suspends the salvation of our souls.~~***

The reasonableness of this condition will easily appear. If we exercise this grace of forgiveness from proper motives, and in a becoming manner, it will be a clear evidence that we are renewed in the spirit of our minds. There are, it is true, some people of so easy and gentle a disposition, that they would rather pass by an offence than be at the trouble to resent it. But *the forgiving spirit of which we are speaking must proceed from a sense of our own utter unworthiness, and of the exceeding greatness of that debt which has been forgiven us.*It must proceed also from a sense of love and gratitude to our Lord and Savior, and from a desire to honor him by treading in his steps and "walking as he walked."

Now where such principles and such conduct are found, there will every other grace be found also: there is in an eminent degree the image of God enstamped upon the soul; and there is "a fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light." It is reasonable therefore that such a person, possessed of such humility, such faith, such love, such patience, such self-denial, and such an obediential frame—should be forgiven by his God. There is a perfect correspondence between his work and his reward.

On the contrary, a person of an unforgiving spirit shows, beyond a doubt, that he is altogether unhumbled for his own sins. If he had a proper consciousness of the guilt which he himself has contracted, he would feel no disposition to cast a stone at others. Nor would he take a fellow-servant by the throat for a few pence, when he was sensible how many talents he himself owed unto his God. Who, that reads the parable by which our Lord has illustrated this subject, does not see the equity of the sentence passed upon the unforgiving servant? So must also that universal sentence be accounted reasonable by every dispassionate man, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who has showed no mercy."

On whichever side then we view the condition, it appears most reasonable. It is most reasonable that the forgiving should be pardoned, and the unforgiving punished: and knowing as we do, the determination of God to act agreeably to this rule, we must prepare to expect our sentence of condemnation or acquittal according to it.

***~~From this one subject we may obtain a deep insight into Christianity: we may behold,~~***

***~~1. Its consistency.~~***

Persons from different motives are apt to represent the declarations of God in his word as at variance with each other; and, according to their respective views, to wrest the meaning of them for the purpose of maintaining their own particular system.

Some, because the grace of God is freely proclaimed to sinners, will not endure the mention of a *condition*, or admit that there is any kind of conditionality in such passages as that before us.

Others, because of such passages, will not endure to hear of God's electing grace, which they suppose to be inconsistent with them.

Others again, because of the difficulty of reducing everything to their comprehension, are ready to reject Christianity as altogether inconsistent with itself.

But there are no two positions in the whole book of God, which are inconsistent with each other. That there are difficulties, we admit: but so there are also in every other work of God, whether of creation or providence: and if there were none in the work of redemption, we would have reason to think that it was not really of divine original. No man that ever lived could reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but is there therefore an absolute inconsistency between them? Does not everyone see that the inability to reconcile them arises from the weakness of our intellect and the narrow limits of our knowledge? The same difficulty is complained of by some in reference to the subject before us. But it is obvious from the statement we have made, that enough may be said to satisfy a humble mind, though there may still be difficulties left for the confounding of a proud spirit. This is really the case with respect to every other doctrine in the Bible: there may be, as in some works of human production, wheels moving in a variety of directions, and appearing to an ignorant person to obstruct each other; but there is a unity in the whole design, and a subserviency in every part to the production of one common end.

Let us then be on our guard against that controversial spirit that leads men to wrest or stumble at the word of God. And, if there are difficulties which we cannot reconcile, let us be content to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

***~~2. Its equity.~~***

It is astonishing to hear with what presumption many will arraign the justice of God: 'If he has not elected me, then how can I help myself? If he imposes on me conditions which I cannot perform, then with what equity will he condemn me?' The Apostle's answer to such proud objectors is that which most befits their state: "Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God?" Yet the subject before us may suffice to show, that "God will be justified in his sayings, and be clear when he judges." The day of judgment is called "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and such it will appear to all.

Those who now quarrel with the deep doctrines of predestination and election, will then find, that God has ordered everything in perfect wisdom and equity. None will then presume to arraign his counsels. None will then object that any are saved or condemned contrary to strict justice.*Not one ungodly person will be found among those that are saved, nor one godly person among those that perish.*Both the forgiving and unforgiving will have judgment "measured to them, according as they have meted unto others;" and every man's happiness or misery will be exactly apportioned to him, according to his works. The *godly*indeed will feel no difficulty in ascribing their salvation to God and to the Lamb. The *ungodly*must forever ascribe their condemnation to their own incorrigible folly and wickedness.

***~~3. Its excellency.~~***

The evils which Christianity are intended to remedy are *guilt*and *wickedness*: and these it does remedy most effectually. Forgiveness of sins is freely offered to every penitent believer, without any respect to the number or greatness of his offences: "the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse him from all sin," if only the sinner believes in Jesus, "he shall be justified from all things," without exception.

But does Christianity make no provision for holiness? Does it leave men a prey to evil dispositions, and a torment to each other? No, it requires a change both of heart and life. It requires the exercise of universal love. It requires a conformity to God himself. It saves not one single person, whom it does not increasingly change into the image of God.

Were Christianity universally prevalent, and if it had its full operation in every heart, there would be no unkindness in men towards each other, nor any trouble in their own minds. O that its influence were more generally known, and more deeply felt! Let those at least who profess to have embraced it in sincerity and truth, show forth its power. Let them show *what amiable tempers it produces in the mind, and what a lovely behavior it produces in the life*. If at any time they receive an injury, instead of meditating revenge, let them say, 'Now has my God given me an opportunity of recommending religion, and of glorifying his name: now has he called me to display the excellency of his Gospel and the efficacy of his grace.' Such conduct would serve as an evidence to our own minds that we are the Lord's, and would constrain others also to acknowledge that God is truly with us.

#1320

***~~Directions Respecting Fasting~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:16–18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.16â18)~~***

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

IN temporal concerns, men rarely, if ever, confound the means with the end: they expect not the end, but in the use of the means; nor do they use the means, but in reference to the end: they put both in their proper place, subordinating the one to the other; and using the one in order to the other.

But in religion, nothing is more common than either to separate or confound the means with the end. To separate them, by expecting the end without the means. Or to confound them, by resting in the means, as if they were the end. For instance: God has appointed fasting as the means of advancing our souls in holiness; but while some expect to attain holiness without any such self-denying exertions—others rest in the duty itself, and make that their righteousness. Of the former description are the generality of Christians at this day. Of the latter were the Pharisees of old, against whose errors our Lord is guarding his disciples throughout the whole of this Sermon on the Mount. In the foregoing chapter he has rectified our views in relation to *sin*; he now rectifies them in relation to *duty*.

In considering the words before us, we shall notice,

***~~I. What is implied in them.~~***

It is obvious, that, while our Lord gives us directions how to fast, he intimates,

***~~1. That fasting is a duty.~~***

Of this there can be no doubt. Some indeed have thought, that the only fast required of us was to abstain from the commission of sin: but, by the same mode of interpreting other parts of this chapter, they will set aside prayer and almsgiving; both of which are required here, not by a positive precept, but by implication only, precisely as fasting is required in the text.

Under the Jewish economy there was an annual fast, which all were bound to observe with great strictness, namely, that on the great day of atonement. On particular occasions other fasts were instituted: by Joshua, when some of his men had been slain by the men of Ai: by the eleven tribes of Israel, when in two successive conflicts they had been defeated with great slaughter by the tribe of Benjamin.

Besides other public fasts ordered by those in authority, we find *the most eminent of God's servants observing fasts in private*. *David*, as well on account of the unhappy state of his enemies, as on account of his own personal afflictions, "wept and chastened his soul with fasting" *Daniel*, desirous of knowing the time which God had fixed for the deliverance of his people from Babylon, sought the Lord, not in prayer only, but "with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."

These things, though observed under the law, show that fasting was not a mere legal ordinance, which in due time was to be disannulled; but a mode of worship suited to the necessities of our fallen nature, and acceptable to God at all times. Indeed, the heathens themselves saw the propriety of approaching God in this manner; insomuch that the governors of *Nineveh*, when threatened with the divine judgments, proclaimed a fast, and caused it to be strictly observed, not by the people only, but even by the animals themselves.

***~~2. That all his followers would be observant of it.~~***

This he takes for granted: for why should he give them directions respecting an ordinance which he did not intend them to observe, and which he knew they would not observe? It is manifest that he expected his people to fast, as well as to give alms and pray; and indeed, on another occasion, he declared they should fast. During his presence with them, it would not have been expedient for him to require it, (because his disciples were not yet prepared for such austerities;) nor would it have been suited to their state and condition, (because it was rather a season proper for holy joy.) But after his removal from them, there would be abundant occasion for such self-denying duties; and his disciples would be strengthened for the performance of them. Accordingly we find that they were "in fastings often," and that they rarely addressed themselves to any extraordinary duty, such as that of ordaining elders, or separating people to the work of the ministry, without having first implored direction from God in fasting and prayer.

Having shown that there is a duty implied in the text, we proceed to consider,

***~~II. What is expressed.~~***

Here are directions given for the due performance of this duty.

***~~1. Fasting should he performed unostentatiously.~~***

Religion, of a certain kind at least, was in high repute among the Jews: and consequently there was a great temptation to assume an appearance of piety among them. Hence the Pharisees observed frequent fast-days, (generally "twice in the week,") and studiously endeavored to attract the attention of others by their squalid appearance. They omitted to cleanse and anoint themselves, as at other times; and "disfigured their faces," probably by dust and ashes which they had strewed on their heads, or, at all events, by downcast and gloomy looks.

Similar temptations do not occur to us. The habits of modern times are not such as to render that kind of sanctity an object of applause: it would rather be thought an indication of insanity: and therefore hypocrisy is rarely seen among us in that garb. Nevertheless, *the caution against an ostentatious display of piety is at no time unseasonable*. Diversity of customs, however they may produce a change in the modes of showing hypocrisy, make no change at all in the dispositions of the heart: and therefore we must understand this caution as extending to everything whereby our religious exercises may be ostentatiously displayed.

***~~2. Fasting should he performed sincerely.~~***

As on the one hand, we are not to desire to be seen by men; soon the other hand, we should act as in the presence of the all-seeing God. But here we fail. In seasons of great public calamity, our government has always called us to humble ourselves before God: and the words which we have uttered at such times have been well suited to the occasion.

But how little of real repentance has God seen among us! The true way to keep a fast unto the Lord, is by *deep humiliation of our souls, and a resolute amendment of our lives*. The former is inculcated by the Prophet Joel—the latter by the Prophet Isaiah. But in how few instances have our professions been realized! Well may God complain of us, as of his people of old, "When you fasted, did you fast unto me, even unto me?" Truly, in sincerity of heart we have been as deficient as ever the Pharisees of old were. The only difference between them and us has been that they had the appearance of piety without the reality, and we have been equally destitute of both. We have, with the exception of uttering a few words in a place of worship, rejected even the form of that duty, which we ought to have observed in deed and in truth. But "God is not deceived; nor will he be mocked," if we thus pour contempt on him and his ordinances, he will require it at our hands at the last day. Let us then, on every renewed occasion, endeavor so to approve ourselves to God, that "he who sees in secret may reward us openly."

**In the review of this subject, we may learn**,

***~~1. Whence it is that religion is at such a low ebb among us.~~***

Many are convinced of their lost estate, and live miserably under a sense of guilt, without ever obtaining either pardon of their sins, or victory over them. The reason is precisely that which is stated by our Lord himself: "they seek to enter in at the strait gate, but are not able because they do not *strive*." They do not rise to the occasion: if a few vague wishes would be effectual, they would soon become new creatures: but if days of fasting and humiliation be found requisite, they will not submit to such a task: *they will rather lose Heaven, than be at so much cost to obtain it.*They find by experience, that what our Lord said respecting some evil spirits whom his disciples could not cast out, is true respecting some of their deep-rooted lusts and habits: "This kind cannot come out, but by prayer and fasting," but, as they will not use the means of deliverance, God leaves them still in bondage; and "they are led captive by the devil at his will."

The want of spirituality in many religious people must be traced to the same source: they do not aspire after high degrees of piety; they are satisfied with low attainments, and with scanty measures of peace and joy. What might they not attain, if they would even learn of a heathen centurion to abound in fasting and prayer! How much *happier*too, as well as *holier*, would married people be, if they were occasionally to practice those habits which obtained frequently in the primitive Church! Let it be remembered by us, that they who will build high, must dig deep; and, that *the more we are abased in humiliation and contrition, the more shall we be exalted in peace and joy*.

***~~2. Whence it is that our nation is still under the afflicting hand of God.~~***

To those who would show true patriotism, we would recommend the example of Nehemiah; confident that such intercessors are the real bulwark of the nation. If the humiliation of so wicked a prince as Ahab succeeded so far as to defer the judgments of God to the next generation, we may well hope, that the genuine repentance of many would prevail for the entire removal of them from our land. "As long as we continued to seek the Lord, the Lord would make us to prosper."

#1321

***~~Laying Up Treasures in Heaven~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:19–21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.19â21)~~***

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

MUCH of our Lord's sermon on the mount was intended to explain the true import of the Law, in opposition to the false glosses with which the Scribes and Pharisees had obscured it. But in many parts of it the instruction is general, and unconnected with any particular people or circumstances. The Pharisees indeed were covetous: but the whole human race are more intent on earthly than on heavenly things; and therefore the exhortation in our text may be considered as equally important in every age and place.

In discoursing upon it, we shall consider,

***~~I. The direction given.~~***

This consists of two parts, the one negative, the other positive:

***~~1. The negative part.~~***

This is not to be understood as though there were no situation or circumstances wherein it were allowable to lay up money: for it is certainly the duty of all people to make provision for those whose subsistence depends upon them. Those who refuse to support their aged parents or relatives would be deemed worse than infidels: nor, by parity of reasoning, can they be considered as acting more suitably to their Christian profession who neglect to make a necessary provision for their children. But we may gather from the very terms in which the direction is expressed, what are the limitations with which it is to be understood. The *measure*, the *manner*, the *end*, are all clearly defined.

We are not to lay up "treasures." What is necessary for the carrying on of our trade, or for the supporting of ourselves in old age, or for the enabling of our family to maintain that rank of life wherein they have been educated, may be considered as allowable. But what is laid up for the sake of enriching and aggrandizing our family, may be justly included in the prohibition before us. Of course, no precise sum can be fixed; because what would be wealth to one man, would be poverty to another. But whatever argues discontent, and a desire of elevating ourselves and our families above the rank which Providence has allotted us in life, should be regarded with a jealous eye and a trembling heart.

The "treasuring up treasures," as the original term imports, may fitly represent to us that kind of solicitude which our Lord forbids. Though it is a mode of expression quite common in the Greek, yet it conveys an idea of selfishness and covetousness which are altogether contrary to the Christian character. Christianity does not require a man to cast away, or even to give away his paternal inheritance, or all the fruits of his own labor: but it absolutely forbids him to find delight in treasuring up his wealth, or in looking to it as a source either of safety or happiness. The laying up of treasures "for ourselves" is also particularly forbidden: and in this view there is little difference, whether we have respect to our own personal comfort, or the comfort of our children, who are, in fact, a part of ourselves. The saying, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years," argues a selfish and earthly mind; and renders us peculiarly obnoxious to the Divine displeasure.

Thus the prohibitory part of this direction must be taken somewhat in a qualified sense, as it respects the act; though it is altogether unqualified, as it respects the habit of our minds.

***~~2. The positive part.~~***

Here there is not the same necessity for assigning any limits to the expression, or for guarding people against excess in their endeavors to follow the Divine command. Here the measure, the manner, the end of our desires should accord with the full import of the words themselves. What we lay up in Heaven should be considered as our richest "treasure," and we should "treasure it up" with insatiable avidity. We should lay it up also with an especial view to "ourselves." What we now possess, we should dispose of for the good of others; but what we lay up in Heaven, can be enjoyed by ourselves only; and should be regarded by us as the only portion deserving our pursuit.

This then is the direction which we are to follow: and herein we may well take for our guides those people who go abroad for the acquisition of wealth. They go thither for one fixed purpose, which they follow uniformly during their continuance there. They never for a moment forget that they are laboring with a view to their future happiness in their native country. They never allow a year to pass without inquiring how far they have succeeded in expediting or securing the great object before them. They lose no opportunity of remitting home the produce of their labor: and they feel increasing satisfaction in proportion as the time approaches for the termination of their present exertions, and the complete fruition of their long-wished-for enjoyments.

So should it be with us. We should follow our present occupations as subservient to future happiness. We should account every day lost which has not added somewhat to our store, and laid a foundation for eternal bliss. We should make our remittances from time to time, depositing to the utmost of our power in the *bank of Heaven*; and should consider ourselves as rich, not in proportion to what we spend at present, but rather in proportion to what we can lay up for future enjoyment.

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The reasons with which it is enforced.~~***

These are taken from different sources:

***~~1. From the comparative value of the different kinds of treasure.~~***

*Earthly*treasure, of whatever kind it be, is perishable in its nature, and uncertain in its duration. Whereas *heavenly*treasure is incorruptible, and eternal.

The wealth of the ancients consisted much in the number of their superb garments, which "moths" might easily destroy. Even their precious metals might at last be consumed by "rust" and canker; and at all events they might be taken away by deceit or violence. The *uncertainty of earthly possessions*was never more manifest than in the present age.

But if we are rich in faith and in good works, if we have laid up treasures of that kind in Heaven, what shall ever lessen their value, or who shall ever rob us of the enjoyment of them? "No moth or rust shall ever corrupt them; no thief shall ever break through to steal them."

Say then, Whether this is not reason sufficient for laying up treasures in Heaven, rather than on earth? Even if we could realize all our expectations with respect to this world—our happiness must be short, because life itself is coming speedily to a close. There is not a human being who does not feel the insufficiency of earthly things to make him happy What then can they contribute to our happiness in that day, when nothing of them shall remain, except the fearful responsibility for having idolized and abused them, and the tremendous judgments of God for having allowed them to alienate our minds from him?

But the very exercise of grace is happiness, independent of the reward which it will receive in glory; and the more we abound in good works now, the happier shall we be to all eternity; for "every one shall receive according to his own labor."

***~~2. From their uniform influence upon the heart.~~***

Whatever our treasure is, it will occupy the supreme place in our affections, and engage in its service the noblest powers of our souls. But is such regard due to any earthly thing? Does not God claim our heart as his throne, on which he is to reign without a rival? Has he not required us to "love him with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength?" If then we make anything else our treasure—we rob him of his honor, and cast him down from his throne. And will he not fearfully resent such conduct? Will he not say, "Bring hither those who were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me?"

Surely this consideration may well instruct us in the path we are to pursue: it proclaims loudly to us, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth." If, indeed, God would be contented with a divided heart, we might be less scrupulous about the objects of our pursuit: but as "he is a jealous God," and "will not give his glory to another," it befits us to live in this world "as pilgrims and sojourners," and to direct all our efforts towards the attainment of his favor and his inheritance.

***~~This subject affords abundant occasion,~~***

***~~1. For reproof.~~***

Would one not suppose, from the conduct of the world at large, that our Lord's instructions had been the very reverse of what they are? If he had bidden us lay up treasures on earth, and not in Heaven—he would have found us to be a very obedient people. But his command is plain; and it is at the peril of our souls to disobey it. True it is, that a compliance with it is deemed folly; and a habitual violation of it is accounted wisdom: but "God sees not as man sees," his judgment respecting this is the very reverse of theirs: and by God's judgment shall our doom be regulated in the eternal world.

Think not that we mean to decry industry; for diligence in earthly pursuits is recommended and enjoined by God himself. It is the *regarding of earthly things as the sources of our happiness*that is condemned in the text. If we will make earthly things our treasure, they are the only treasure which we shall ever possess.

***~~2. For encouragement.~~***

If it were necessary to lay up treasures on *earth*, you might well be discouraged. One might say, I have not abilities for it: another, I have no capital to trade with: another, There are too many competitors in my line of business: another, I have been robbed and impoverished by a treacherous partner, or a dishonest debtor. But no such grounds of discouragement exist in relation to *heavenly*treasures. The wisest philosopher has no advantage over the most illiterate peasant: there is equal access afforded to every one to *the inexhaustible riches of Christ*, by the improvement of which alone any one can be made "rich towards God," competitors for heavenly wealth promote, instead of impeding, each other's success: nor shall either deceit or violence ever prevail against those who commit their cause to God. Let all of us then unite in this glorious work: let us be satisfied with no attainments; but "covet earnestly the best gifts," let us be ever "pressing forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before."

Whatever we have of this world's goods, let us lay them out for the Lord with prudent generosity: let us "lend" them to him, and he will repay us again. But if we are *poor*in this world, let us honor the Lord by cheerful contentment; assured that every grace we exercise, whether passive or active, shall be richly "recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

#1322

***~~The Single Eye~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22), [23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 6.23)~~***

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

REASON is certainly the richest endowment of the human mind. When regulated by the word and Spirit of God, it will direct our paths, and enable us to guard against every dangerous error; but it is capable of being so warped by specious reasonings, and selfish considerations, as to become an engine of Satan, and an instrument of our more aggravated ruin. There is nothing, however unreasonable, which a perverse spirit will not do; nor anything, however criminal, which it will not justify. Hence our blessed Lord, in the passage before us, inculcated on his followers the necessity of having "a single eye," and of acting on all occasions with a well-informed and upright intention.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The instruction here given us.~~***

There is "a light within us," which is to the soul what the natural eye is to the body; and, if preserved in healthful exercise, will serve, in most instances, to direct our steps: but if it be vitiated and obscured by the film of vile affections, it will itself become as darkness.

But it may be asked, Can *reason*or *conscience*ever be so perverted as to become darkness? I answer, Yes, and this is actually the case,

***~~1. When, though it does shine, we will not follow its direction.~~***

The eye, supposing it to be free from any defects, is capable of directing all the motions of the body. So reason or conscience, if freed from all undue bias, will serve in a great measure to regulate the active powers of the soul. But as a person who should keep his eyes shut in order that he might not behold the light, would be in the same predicament with one who was really blind; so the person who either will not bring his reason and conscience to the light of God's word, or obstinately determines to persist in the paths of error, is, in effect at least, as much in darkness, as if he did not possess any such faculties.

***~~2. When it is obscured by any defect in the organs of vision.~~***

As diseases or defects will destroy the sight of our bodily eyes, so will sinful affections impair the powers of the mind. Prejudice, passion, or interest, will often blind us to such a degree, that we cannot discern the things that are most obvious to others. We all are sensible of this weakness in others; and it would be well if we were more on our guard respecting it in ourselves.

Not to mention the innumerable instances which manifest themselves in our conduct towards each other, how universally are men blinded in their conduct towards God! While Christianity in general, is allowed to be both good and necessary, there is scarcely any regard paid to its particular, and most distinguishing tenets. Its fundamental *doctrines*, such as original sin, justification by faith, regeneration by the Holy Spirit—are discarded as erroneous; and its most essential *precepts*of holiness and self-denial are ridiculed as preciseness and enthusiasm. Where the jaundiced eye receives such an impression respecting the most important truths, its light must be considered as no better than darkness.

***~~3. When under a professed regard to it, we do what is in itself evil.~~***

It is no uncommon thing to put "evil for good, and darkness for light," and to engage earnestly in some evil conduct under the idea that we are doing what is right. Our Lord has taught us to expect that men would persecute and even "kill his faithful followers, and imagine all the time that they were doing God service." And Paul, in the midst of all his boasted morality, persecuted the Christians even unto death, and persuaded himself that "he ought to do" so. A similar conduct yet obtains in the world. There are thousands who yet think it their duty to oppose the progress of the Gospel, and to repress by every means in their power its influence over their friends and relatives. The light of such people surely is, not only dark, but darkness itself.

It appears then, that our Lord cautions us not to neglect or violate the dictates of our conscience. And to impress this *lesson*more deeply on our minds, I will mark,

***~~II. The vast importance of it to every child of man.~~***

The Jews had manifested a most astonishing perverseness in resisting all the evidences of our Lord's mission; and he well knew how fatal it would prove to them, if they should persist in it any longer. Hence he gave them this solemn caution, which may, for similar reasons, be given also unto us,

***~~1. The evil against which we are guarded, is a common evil.~~***

Though there is much ignorance in the world, yet there are few, if any, whose practice does not fall very far short of what they know to be their duty. There certainly are different degrees of light in the minds of unconverted men; but all in some measure "resist the truth," and "imprison it in unrighteousness." When therefore this evil is so general, should we not be on our guard against it? When all of us see how much it prevails in others, should we not suspect its influence over ourselves? Let every one tremble for his own house, when he sees it standing in the midst of a general conflagration.

***~~2. It is an evil to which we are prone.~~***

The *heart*is justly said to be "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It is ready and ingenious in coloring over its own devices, and in justifying whatever tends to its own satisfaction.

The *world*also presents to us ten thousand pleas that serve to confirm our delusions.

And *Satan*, who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, doubtless lends his aid to lead us astray, and to keep us ignorant of our real state.

Who is there among us that has not experienced this proneness to self-deception? The very Apostles on some occasions "knew not what spirit they were of." And who has not repeatedly found, that the things, which seemed right in his eyes at one time, have, in an hour of sober reflection, appeared to have been extreme folly? Surely then *we never can be too watchful against the treachery of our own hearts*.

***~~3. It is an evil that greatly aggravates our guilt.~~***

God has given us a conscience capable of "accusing or excusing" us according to the true tenor of our actions. Now if we either warp it by vile affections, or silence it by continued opposition to its dictates—then our sin is aggravated a hundred-fold. This is repeatedly declared both by Christ and his Apostles. And can we suppose that our punishment also will not be proportionably enhanced? Will not "the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, be beaten with more stripes than he who transgressed through ignorance?" Will not those, who improved a less degree of light, "rise up in judgment against" those who enjoyed more ample means of instruction, and yet neglected to improve them? No doubt, it were "better never to have known the will of God at all, than, having known it," to live in an allowed opposition to it.

***~~4. It is an evil that involves us in the greatest danger.~~***

If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, we have reason to fear that God will give us up to our own delusions, that we may believe a lie, and receive the condemnation due to our perverseness. He sometimes allows the light itself to have no other effect than to blind our eyes. And what a tremendous judgment would that be! We should only wander further and further from God, until we had "filled up the measure of our iniquities," and be thus "treasuring up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath." Should we ever be left to this state, "better were it for us that we had never been born."

***~~Having thus explained the reasons of this caution, we shall conclude with a few words of advice.~~***

***~~1. Get your conscience truly enlightened.~~***

It needs the illumination of God's word and Spirit. Without that it will be but a blind guide at best. God however has promised, for the comfort of those who seek him, that "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way."

***~~2. Regard the dictates of conscience in little things.~~***

Conscience must maintain an uncontrolled, unlimited sway. You must "exercise yourself daily to keep it void of offence towards God and man." If you violate its dictates in small things, you will soon cease to reverence it in greater matters. But listen to its voice on all occasions, and it will never allow you to err greatly. There shall always be a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it."

***~~3. Guard against worldly and carnal lusts.~~***

It is astonishing to what a degree even the most sensible men, as David and Solomon, may be blinded by "foolish and hurtful lusts." The love of money, of pleasure, or of honor, alas! how will they warp the judgment, how will they divert us from the path of duty! Love not the world if you have any wish to possess the love of God. The two attachments are inconsistent and incompatible with each other.

***~~4. Set the Lord Jesus ever before you.~~***

He is the light of the world; and if you will follow him, you shall never walk in darkness. If know what Christ would have done in your situation—then do that resolutely and universally.

#1323

***~~The Services of God And Mammon Inconsistent~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)~~***

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."

THE dictates of pure and undefiled religion are so remote from the apprehension of the natural man, and so contrary to his inclinations, that they need to be presented to him with the clearest evidence, and most convincing energy. Hence our blessed Lord continually illustrated his doctrines by images taken from common life, or by truths universally known and acknowledged.

The irreconcilableness of the service of God with the service of Mammon is very little considered: the world in general have no idea of it: but *the impossibility of being wholly at the disposal of two earthly masters is obvious enough*; because, when their commands interfere with each other, the servant, in obeying one, must disobey the other; and in cleaving to one, must, virtually, renounce the other. This being acknowledged, we are prepared to confess the same in relation to God and Mammon. It is thus that our Lord introduces and confirms the aphorism before us: in discoursing upon which, we shall show,

***~~I. The import of our Lord's assertion.~~***

"Mammon" is a Syriac word, signifying riches; and *it is the great idol to which all the world are bowing down*. But as wealth is principally sought for on account of its connection with pleasures and honor, we need not confine ourselves to the precise idea of riches; but consider Mammon as signifying the world with all its vanities, of whatever kind they be.

But what are we to understand by "serving" God and Mammon? Here is the difficulty; and this is a point that must be determined with much caution and judgment. When our Lord says, "You cannot serve God and Mammon,"

***~~He does not mean that we cannot render them any services.~~***

This is not the case even with earthly masters: for we may serve two or three masters, provided they be contented with services that are partial, subordinate, or successive. And in such a manner as this, we may serve both God and Mammon.

He does not mean that we cannot render them the **services which are their due.**

If only we clearly ascertain what services are due to each, we shall find that they are not at all incompatible with each other. Those who are averse to perform their duties to God, are very apt to represent them as inconsistent with the duties of relative and social life. But this is without any just foundation. It would be strange indeed if the duties of the two tables opposed each other: on the contrary, we cannot truly perform the one without performing the other also: in serving God, we shall serve the world; and in serving the world, we shall serve our God.

***~~His meaning is, that we cannot render them the services which they require.~~***

God requires that we should love and serve him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. He requires that . . .

everything *evil*shall be renounced for him;

everything *indifferent*be subordinated to him;

and everything *good*be done with a direct reference to his will as the rule, and his glory as the end.

The world, on the contrary, prescribes laws and maxims for our conduct which God has never prescribed, yes, which he has expressly forbidden. And it is in this contrariety of the one to the other, that we must look for the fuller explanation of the words before us.

Let us then proceed to state, in reference to this assertion,

***~~II. The grounds and reasons of it.~~***

If it be asked, Why can we not serve both God and Mammon? we answer, Because,

***~~1. Their interests are different.~~***

God has a cause which is exceedingly dear to him; a cause which occupied his mind from all eternity, and for the promotion of which he has given his only-begotten Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to instruct us. The interest he pursues, is the reign of Christ on earth, and the establishment of his kingdom throughout the world. He longs to bring down Heaven upon earth, that men may be, as nearly as possible, in a paradisiacal state, and in a constant fitness for glory.

The world knows nothing of such an interest as this: it proposes nothing of the kind: on the contrary, *to please and gratify the carnal mind is the one scope of all its plans*. In pursuit of this it labors to draw away its votaries from the consideration of heavenly things, and to fix their attention upon the things of time and sense.

What prospect have we then of rendering acceptable service to those whose interests are so widely different?

***~~2. Their commands are contrary.~~***

God commands us to "make our light shine before men." He tells us "not to be conformed to this world," but to "come out from it," and to be "crucified to it through the cross of Christ." He tells us not only to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them."

Against all this the world sets its face. It does not approve that we should serve God even in secret; but that we should trouble others with our light, this is insufferable. How peremptory it is in its commands respecting this, may be seen in every age, from the time of Cain to this present moment.

Now how is it possible that we should render obedience to both these masters? The one says, "Arise, shine!" The other says, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." It is evident, that, whichever we obey, we must of necessity disobey the other.

***~~3. Their services are inconsistent.~~***

This appears in part from what has been already spoken. But the inconsistency is expressly and frequently stated by God himself. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him," "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." "The minding of earthly things marks us enemies of the cross of Christ." "The carnal mind is enmity against God;" and "we must mortify it, if ever we would enter Heaven."

Here the point is determined by God himself, and it is carried further than under the preceding head. For, if we would serve God acceptably, we must not only in some things disobey the commands of the world, but must utterly renounce all kind of allegiance to it. We must even oppose it, and fight against it. To parley with it, is betrayal of God. To make a truce with it, is treason to God.

***~~People standing very differently affected towards the world, we must address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are altogether servants of the world.~~***

Too many, alas! think not of anything but the world: they find no pleasure but in its services. Now, we grant that its service is pleasing to flesh and blood: but to whom has it ever afforded solid and permanent satisfaction? But suppose it could satisfy us here, what can it do for us hereafter? If we have served it, we must look to it for our reward. We cannot expect any recompense from God, except indeed that which our contempt of him has merited, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."

***~~2. Those who are endeavoring to unite the services of God and Mammon.~~***

Notwithstanding our Lord has so plainly declared the absurdity of all such attempts, men will not be persuaded to desist from them. They think that they may serve God sufficiently to secure his blessing—and yet serve the world in such a manner as to retain its favor. But, in addition to what our Lord has spoken, such people have also within themselves a demonstration that their wishes are impossible.

What is the state of their minds after mixing with worldly company, and drinking of the cup of worldly pleasures? Can they go to their God with freedom, and find access to him with confidence? Have they any enlargement of heart in their addresses to him? Are not their religious services a mere form—a cold, lifeless ceremony, in which they find no pleasure, and from which they derive no benefit? Is it not manifest that they make no progress in religion, and that, while their services are divided, *the world has their hearts*? Such people's religion answers no other end than to deceive and ruin them forever: for God is "a jealous God;" and will despise the offerings of a divided heart.

***~~3. Those who are halting between the two.~~***

Many are convinced that they ought to serve God alone; and yet they know not how to turn their backs upon the world. They are afraid of the contempt and ridicule which they shall incur, or of some losses which they shall sustain—and therefore they are undecided in their minds, how to act. But what folly is this! Is not the approbation of God and of our own conscience sufficient to counterbalance all the frowns of the world? and is not Heaven sufficient to compensate for any sufferings which we can be called to endure on earth? *Let it only be remembered that eternity is at hand; and that will be sufficient to make all the concerns of time to appear lighter than vanity itself*. Our Lord has plainly told us, that we must "hate even our life itself, if we would be his disciples."

Let us then make our choice: "If Mammon be God, let us serve him; but if Jehovah be God, let us serve him." Let us say, with Joshua, "We will serve the Lord."

***~~4. Those who are decidedly in the service of God.~~***

Who among you has ever found reason to regret that he took a decided part? Who has not found it a ground of exceeding thankfulness to God for enabling him so to act? *Go on then, having the world under your feet, and God in your hearts*. Be bold, yet be meek, in the service of your Lord. Be meek, I say, and patient under any trials you may meet with. You must carefully distinguish between the *ways*of the world and the *people*of it. The *ways*of the world you are to regard with aversion; the*people*of the world you are to regard with pity. Let it be seen in your temper, as well as in your conduct, "whose you are, and whom you serve." Show that, though you refuse to be servants to the world, you are its greatest benefactors. Look forward to the day when God will acknowledge and reward your services in the presence of the assembled universe.

#1324

***~~Against Worry~~***

***~~[Matthew 6:25–34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25â34)~~***

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

IF we affirm that men must serve God only and with their whole hearts, we appear to them to require more than is necessary, and to assign them a task which it is impossible to perform. But, while they are so averse to hear of what God requires, they do not consider *how closely privilege and duty are united*. For, while we yield up ourselves wholly unto God, he, on the other hand, permits us to look to him for a supply of all our needs. As an earthly master provides for the necessities of his servants, so much more will God, who therefore commands us to leave all our affairs to his disposal, and requires an affiance in him as a very essential part of our duty. Hence our blessed Lord having taught us how inconsistent are the services of God and Mammon, adds, "Do not worry about your life." That is, while you are serving God with fidelity, commit all your concerns to him with full confidence in his kind paternal care.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The caution here given.~~***

The evil against which we are cautioned is anxious worry.

Paul to the Corinthians, says, I would have you without worry." The word which he uses, is the same as that used by our Lord throughout this whole passage. A thoughtfulness about the future is by no means improper: there is a care and a foresight which Christian prudence requires: and they who go forward without due deliberation, invariably involve themselves in difficulties. The Apostles themselves, who under peculiar circumstances were supported without any care of their own, were afterwards commanded to use such means for their support as prudence dictated; and by this rule Paul himself walked.

The *ants*are proposed to us as examples; and, in truth, we cannot conceive the instinct of animals to be in anything more worthy of imitation, than theirs is in the particular to which Solomon alludes. They, in the harvest, lay up what will be necessary for their sustenance in winter; in like manner should we improve all present opportunities with a view to our future good, both temporal and spiritual. But they know nothing of worry.

Thus precisely should it be with us. We cannot be too industrious in our respective callings, if only we leave outcomes to God, and rest satisfied with his dispensations.

There are few perhaps who will not acknowledge, that all worry about superfluities, or about very distant events, is wrong: but yet they will vindicate it in reference to things which are near at hand, or are of prime and indispensable necessity. But it is respecting these very things that our Lord speaks: he bids us take no thought about "food or clothing;" no, not even "for the morrow," and, because we should be ready to pass over such a caution if it were only once or obscurely given, he repeats it no less than four times in the passage before us, sometimes in a way of plain direction, "Do not worry;" at other times in a way of expostulation, "Why take you worry?" This marks the vast importance of the subject: and it should dispose all our minds to humble submission and cordial acquiescence.

How much need there is for such a caution, every man's observation and experience will tell him.

Even the rich, who on account of their opulence should be thought most out of the reach of this evil, are as much under the power of it as any. No man indeed is exempt from it, unless he has been delivered from it by the grace of God. The worldly man feels it in reference to the things on which his heart is fixed: and even those who are in pursuit of heavenly things, are too often, through the prevalence of unbelief, still subject to its dominion; insomuch that they are harassed continually with disquieting fears, when they ought rather to be "filled with joy and peace in believing." There is therefore no order of men to whom this caution is not proper to be given; since all, from the highest to the lowest, stand in need of it; and it is no less applicable to the people of God than to the ignorant and ungodly world; to those who have "a little faith," as well as those who have no faith at all.

Let us now attend to,

***~~II. The arguments with which it is enforced.~~***

In this beautiful address, (which cannot be too much admired,) our Lord shows in a very convincing manner that worry ought on no account to be indulged.

***~~1. Worry is unnecessary.~~***

Let us only look around us, and see what God is doing in the animal and vegetable creation; how he feeds the *birds*of the air, which make no provision for themselves; and clothes with unrivaled beauty the *flowers*of the field, which have so short a continuance, and such an ignominious end. Can we conceive that God will take less care of us, who are so much higher in the scale of being, and whom he condescends to call his children?

Let us see also what he is doing in and to ourselves. He has given us a *body*, exquisitely wrought, and fitted to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. He has endued it not only with animal life, but with a rational and immortal *soul*. These also he has preserved even to the present hour; and altogether without any aid from us, or any anxiety on our part. If then he has given and upheld these noble faculties and powers, will he not give such provision as shall be necessary for the preservation of them? Can we suppose that He who has bestowed upon us so much, will withhold or grudge the food or clothing that are necessary for us?

Above all, let us see what he has engaged to do for his believing people. They "seek the kingdom of God" to be established in their hearts. They "seek his righteousness" and salvation. They seek "in the first place," and as their one great object, a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the enjoyment of those blessings he has purchased with his blood. While they do this, God has promised that all earthly comforts, as far as they are necessary, "shall be added unto them." Thus, in fact, they have a more secure title to earthly things, and a more certain possession of them, than any other people upon earth. What need is there then for such people to indulge anxious cares about the world? Both around them and within them they have an evidence of what God is doing; and in the Scriptures of truth they have a pledge of what God will do. Surely, then, it becomes them to suppress every anxious thought, and to commit all their concerns to the disposal and government of a faithful God.

***~~2. Worry is unprofitable.~~***

What good can any man obtain by all his worrying? Can he add "one cubit to his *stature*," or one moment to his *age*? Can he make one *hair*black or white; or "do even the least thing," which would not as easily be done without any solicitude at all? On the other hand, does not every man who indulges anxiety greatly injure himself by it? Every day brings evils enough along with it: and every man shall find scope enough for the exercise of all his patience, without multiplying sources of discontent.

What would we think of a man, who, being doomed every day to carry a burden which he was but just able to support, should be constantly augmenting his labors by taking on him tomorrow's burden, in addition to that which he was compelled to bear? Yet such is the conduct of those who harbor anxious thoughts about the morrow. And what is a man profited by such folly? What is the effect which he finds invariably produced upon him? Were he to act more wisely, he might pass comfortably through life; but by his own folly he is oppressed and overwhelmed, and his very existence is embittered to him, so that he is almost ready to "choose strangling rather than life."

The manner in which our Lord argues this point, deserves to be attentively considered. We are ready to think in general that worry is a fruit and evidence of our wisdom; but he again and again appeals to our reason, to convince us of the folly of such a disposition; and defies any human being to give him a satisfactory reason for indulging it. If therefore we will persist in indulging it, let us prepare an answer to that question of his in the text, "Why do you worry about clothing?"

***~~3. Worry is atheistic.~~***

"After all these things," says our Lord, "do the heathen seek." That the heathen should be making anxious inquiries about the things of this life, we do not wonder, because they know of no higher objects to be pursued, nor of any God who is able and willing to undertake for them. But does such conduct befit us? Us, who know that there is a God, and have been taught to call him by the endearing name of Father? Us, who profess to regard this world but as a passage to a better world, and to have our affections set entirely on things above? To what purpose have we been instructed in the knowledge of God, and in the great mystery of redeeming love? To what purpose have the unsearchable riches of Christ been opened to us, and the ineffable glories of Heaven revealed—if, after all, we are to live like heathen—anxious about the body, as if we had no soul; and depending on ourselves, as if there were no God?

As excusable as anxiety may appear:  
it proceeds from atheism in the heart;  
it overlooks God's providence;  
it usurps his power;  
it places *self*upon his throne.

If then we would not perish with the heathen, or rather under a heavier condemnation than they, in proportion to the superior light we have abused—let us guard against this evil disposition, and look to God to supply all our needs according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. Let us "cast all our care on him," assured and satisfied that "he cares for us."

***~~Advice.~~***

Our Lord traces this evil to a lack of faith: hence we see what is its proper antidote; and what advice should be given to all who would avoid it. It is that which our Lord himself repeatedly gave to his Disciples, to compose their minds under trials, and to qualify them for every part of their arduous undertaking: "Have faith in God." Believe in him,

***~~1. As a God of providence.~~***

Men think they honor God when they limit his operations to what they call great things: but, in fact, they dishonor him exceedingly, for they judge of him by themselves; and, because they would be distracted by a multitude of little concerns, they think that He would be also; or, at least, that they are unworthy of his attention. But there is nothing, however minute, which he does not order and overrule with as much care as he does the rise and fall of empires. "The very hairs of our head are all numbered!"

Let this then be a fixed principle in the mind, that "there is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord himself is the doer of it." As for men and devils, they are all, however unconscious of it, mere agents of his, "a sword in his hand," with which he effects his own gracious purposes. Be it so then, that we are destitute both of food and clothing for the morrow, and that we know not where to obtain a supply of either, we need not be anxious: for "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;" and if we call upon him, his word shall be verified, which says, "Those who seek the Lord, shall lack no good thing." Yes, the very straits and difficulties which we now feel, are "working together for our good," and shall hereafter form a ground of praise and thanksgiving to our God.

***~~2. As a God of grace.~~***

It is this view of God that will in a moment silence every doubt and fear. Who can reflect on what he has done, in giving his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify us—and doubt whether he will overlook our necessities, either of soul or body? Hear Paul's opinion of that matter: "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Apostle seems surprised that such a doubt should enter into the mind of man.

Be ashamed then, you who are filled with such anxiety about the issue of your warfare, and are saying, like David, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." Be ashamed, I say, and learn rather, like Paul, to say, "I know in whom I have believed."

You may be reduced to straits in spiritual as well as temporal concerns; but they shall only issue in the fuller manifestation of God's faithfulness and truth. His promise to you is, that "your place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; that bread shall be given to you, and your water shall be sure," and "He who has promised is faithful." Trust then in him, and "he will keep you in perfect peace;" trust in him, and he will "give you all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" nor shall you ever be "ashamed or confounded world without end."

#1325

***~~Against Uncharitable Judging~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.1), [2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 7.2)~~***

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

AMONG the many faults with which the Pharisees of old were chargeable, that of *censoriousness*appears to have been peculiarly prominent. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Pharisee is represented as condemning his fellow-worshiper, and building his own reputation on the ruin of the Publican. To correct that evil disposition, our Lord proceeds to show the danger of indulging it. We must not however limit his observations as though they were applicable to Pharisees only; for they are of general utility; and the subject they refer to is as necessary for our consideration as for theirs.

Some indeed imagine, that a sermon upon such a subject as this is scarcely to be called evangelical: but it should be remembered that in the Gospel there are two things, a foundation, and a superstructure; that both of them are necessary to a complete building; and that if the distinction between their respective uses be kept in view, they equally tend to the edification of our souls.

In discoursing on the words before us, we must notice,

***~~I. The prohibition.~~***

The prohibition, though given in general terms, must of necessity be limited: and it is of great importance to have its limits clearly defined. We shall therefore,

***~~1. Point out what is not included in it.~~***

It does not forbid the exercise of *magisterial*judgment. Magistracy is of God's appointment. It was ordained by him for the restraining of iniquity; and those who are invested with it are "not to bear the sword in vain." They must hear, must judge, must determine, must enforce and execute the laws: and they who fulfill their magisterial duties with zeal and uprightness, are to be regarded among the brightest ornaments and the richest blessings of a land.

It does not forbid the forming of a *discreet*judgment, whether of things or people, for the regulation of our own conduct. We are rational beings, and must walk agreeably to the dictates of reason and religion. Are any things proposed to us for adoption? We must examine whether they be worthy of our choice. We must "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." Do any people offer their advice, and profess to have their views rectified by the word and Spirit of God? We must not immediately take for granted that they are right, or yield ourselves implicitly to their direction: "Believe not every spirit," says John; "but *test*the spirits, whether they be of God."

It does not forbid our declaring of the judgments of *God*against sin and sinners. When we state, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," we are considered by many as violating the rules of charity. But charity does not require us to confound good and evil, or to contradict the plainest assertions of Holy Writ: it would be no charity, but rather the greatest cruelty, to act thus: and it is at the peril of our souls to do so. We must "rebuke a brother." We not only must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but must rather reprove them." It was no violation of this law when Paul reproved Peter for his dissimulation: nor will it be any infringement of our duty to declare, that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God," or to suspend from fellowship with ourselves, and from the communion of the Church, an offending brother.

Doubtless, if these things be done in an uncharitable spirit, they are wrong. But if done with kindness, and from a sense of duty to God, they will be approved and applauded by him.

***~~2. Mark distinctly what is forbidden.~~***

The judgment which we pass on others is then faulty, when it is *needless*, *unfounded*, *hasty*, or *severe*.

judgment. We are not appointed judges over all mankind. Nor have we a right to summon all our fellow-creatures to *our*bar. If their actions do not concern us, we should let them pass without presuming to pry into the merits of them. We are not to be "busy-bodies in other men's matters." God repeatedly puts the question to us, "Who are you that judge another?" The same question we should put also to ourselves: "What right have I to judge him? what call? what occasion?" And if no *necessity*is imposed upon us, we should leave the exercise of judgment to those to whom it properly belongs.

**Needless**judgment. Frequently do men form a judgment without any just or adequate grounds. There is a strong propensity in the human mind to indulge prejudice, and to harbor unkind thoughts both against individuals and bodies of men without any specific reason. When this is done, we readily listen to any report against the object of our aversion, and put a *bad construction*upon everything he says or does.

It was thus that our Lord was treated by the Scribes and Pharisees: though he "spoke as never man spoke," and was altogether "without sin," yet they always found fault with him, and loaded him with all manner of accusations.

The same kind of prejudice still operates in the minds of many, especially against pious people; so that if a person is only branded with some opprobrious name, it shall be sufficient to degrade him in their eyes, and to give validity to every calumny that malice can invent.

**Unfounded**judgment. Indeed where religion is out of the question, such "evil surmisings" frequently arise; and*a mere look, or motion, or word, that was perfectly innocent, shall be construed into a grievous offence, and be made an occasion of vehement indignation*. That such judgment as this is wrong, needs no proof: it is too palpable a violation of the golden rule to admit of the smallest defense.

Happy would it be if religious people themselves were not too often blameable on this account. They are but too prone to lay a stress on matters of indifference, and to condemn those who differ from them, as severely as if their practice were ever so criminal. But, however this conduct is cloaked with a plea of religion, it is most hateful in itself, and most injurious to the Church, and most offensive to God.

judgment.

**Hasty**judgment. But further, if our judgment have some foundation, yet is it faulty, if it be *rash*. We should give to every person an opportunity of assigning the reasons of his own conduct. It is the motive which chiefly stamps the quality of an action; and, until we have ascertained the principle from which anything proceeded, we never can form a proper estimate respecting it. What injustice was there in the construction which Michal put on the conduct of David when he danced before the ark! Had she waited until she was informed respecting the reason of his gestures, which appeared to her in such an unfavorable light, she would have seen cause rather to adore God for him, than to load him with such bitter reproaches.

On the other hand, the benefit resulting from inquiry may be seen in the termination of the cause between the Reubenites and the other tribes, on the subject of raising an altar on the other side of Jordan. Had not inquiry been made into the reasons of that act, thousands of lives would have been lost in causeless warfare: whereas, on an explanation of the matter, the act was approved, and every heart was filled with joy. A similar effect was produced by Peter's explanation of his reasons for going to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles. The law of Moses, and even the Roman law, required that no man should be condemned unheard: and certainly the same equitable rule is proper to be observed by us also.

**Severe**judgment. It is possible, however, that where we have cause for censure, our judgment may be too severe. The act which we condemn may have been wrong, and the principle may have been wrong also; but yet there may have been many circumstances to palliate the fault; and, if we do not take them into consideration, we shall load the offender with an unmerited degree of blame.

In like manner, if because of a single act we impute to him a habit of any sin; or if because one or two people have done anything amiss, we impute blame to all the body or party to which they belong; this is a most unjustifiable severity, though, alas! it is but too common.

It was in this manner that David's enemies acted, when they made his sin an occasion of condemning religion altogether, and of "blaspheming the very name of that God" whom he professed to serve. The Apostle tells us, that such would be the effect of misconduct in religious people, whether servants or others, that "the way of truth would be evil spoken of," and that "the name of God and his doctrine would be blasphemed." But the people who indulge such unhallowed tempers will ultimately be the victims of their own severity.

Such are the *limits of the prohibition*before us. Let us now proceed to notice,

***~~II. The considerations with which it is enforced.~~***

There is frequently, though not always, a visible correspondence between the work and the reward of men, even in this life. "With the *merciful*you will show yourself merciful," says the Psalmist; "and with an *upright*man you will show yourself upright; with the *pure*you will show yourself pure; and with the *froward*you will show yourself froward." In the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount we have many expressions to the same effect. Now this consideration should operate to guard us against indulging uncharitable censures: for if we do, we may expect,

***~~1. A similar recompense from man.~~***

People are invariably grieved when they are loaded with unmerited blame: and though they may not have it in their power to punish the injurious person in any other way, they will almost universally repay him, measure for measure, according to his desert. This is a species of revenge which every man has within his own reach, and can indulge without much danger of reprisal.

Accordingly we find that a censorious and uncharitable man, though listened to on account of the fondness which all men have for scandal, is yet disliked and dreaded by the neighborhood in which he dwells; because the very people who listen to his censures, expect that they themselves in their turn shall be the objects of his invective.

A man that is kind and amiable, and ready to make allowance for the frailties of others, will usually find reciprocal kindness at the hands of others: but the harsh, uncharitable, censorious person has little to expect but merited hatred and general condemnation. If, like Adoni-bezek, we exercise wanton cruelty towards men, we cannot hope for much mercy when we fall into their power. We do not indeed justify this kind of recrimination, because it is the duty of all to render good for evil, blessing for cursing: but, where divine grace has not subdued the vindictive principle, men will "do unto us, according as we do unto them."

***~~2. A suitable recompense from God.~~***

God considers the sin of censoriousness in a far different light from that in which it is generally viewed. He regards it as an invasion of *his*right, and an usurpation of *his*prerogative. The indignation with which he addresses those who presume to judge their brethren, is perhaps as marked as any that is expressed on any occasion whatever: "He who speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judge another?"

So again by another Apostle, "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that *He*might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Who are you that judge another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Let us not therefore judge one another any more." "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense" good or evil unto men according to their conduct towards others: and these are solemn warnings: and, if we will not attend to them, we shall disobey them at our peril: for the express determination of God is this, "He shall have judgment without mercy, upon him who has showed no mercy."

**Advice**.

***~~1. Search out diligently your own faults.~~***

Those who are most inattentive to their own faults, are most observant of the faults of others, and most harsh in passing censures upon them. If we did but see the numberless evils that we have committed, and the base motives by which our more specious actions have been defiled, we would blush and be confounded before God; and, like those who accused the adulterous woman before our Lord, we would find other employment than that of *casting stones at others*.

***~~2. Consider what mercy you have received at the Savior's hands.~~***

How justly might he have left you, as he did the fallen angels, to receive the due reward of your sins! Yet, instead of that, he pitied your state; he came down from Heaven in order to apply a remedy; he even shed his own precious blood to wash away your guilt, and to cover it from the sight of an offended God. Go now, with this mercy before your eyes, and gratify your spleen in censuring and condemning your fellow-creatures. No; you cannot do it, if your minds are suitably impressed with the mercy you have received. Go then, and imitate your Lord; and exercise that "love that shall cover a multitude of sins."

***~~3. Cultivate a spirit of love towards all mankind.~~***

See how you are accustomed to act towards those of your own family, or of your own party: how ready are you to veil or to extenuate their faults! *Think also how tender you are towards your own faults; and how ingenious in finding excuses for anything which you have done amiss*. Deal thus then with all mankind: regard them all as your friends, and love them as yourself. Only think what, in a change of circumstances, you would think it right for them to judge you, and let that be the rule of your conduct towards them.

Would you have them manifest towards you the "love that believes all things and hopes all things?" Then exercise it towards them. Where their conduct will admit of a favorable construction, fail not to view it on the charitable side. Where necessity compels you to condemn, still cast a veil of love over their transgressions, and hide them, as far as the rights of justice, and the good of the community will permit. If judged yourselves, "let it be a small matter to you to be judged by *man's*judgment," and be content to leave both yourselves and others to the judgment of a righteous *God*.

#1326

***~~The Beam and the Mote~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:3–5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.3â5)~~***

"And why do you look at the *mote* in your brother's eye, but do not consider the *beam*in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the *mote* from your eye'; when all the time there is a *beam*is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the *beam*from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the *mote* from your brother's eye."

OBSERVATION and experience show, that the *less*any person is acquainted with his own sins and infirmities—the *more*he will be disposed to censure the sins and infirmities of others. But as such a disposition is totally repugnant to that love which Christianity inculcates, our Lord cautioned his hearers against it, and taught them, in the parable before us—to scrutinize and reform themselves before they presumed to take upon themselves the office of censuring and reclaiming others.

In this parable we may observe,

***~~I. The evil of censoriousness.~~***

*Censoriousness is a compound of pride and malice*. It originates in a high conceit of our own worth, and a desire to reduce others to a level with ourselves, or to a state below us. It isan evil:

***~~1. Censoriousness is base in itself.~~***

The man who censures others professes a high regard for virtue, and a zeal for the honor of God. But what regard has he for virtue, who does not cultivate it in his own soul? or what zeal has he for the honor of God, who does not bring his own heart into an obedience to his will? Even supposing that he were not himself notoriously faulty in other respects (which supposition however will never be found true) *how flagrant is his breach of duty at the very instant he pretends such a regard for duty!*He violates the most acknowledged principle of common equity. He acts not towards others as, in a change of circumstances, he would think it right for them to act towards him. Therefore at the very instant he condemns others, he unwittingly condemns himself.

Who does not see the *hypocrisy*of the Pharisees, who were indignant with our Lord for working miracles on the Sabbath, while they themselves were conspiring murder against him? Such, in their degree, are all they, who are offended with a mote in their brother's eye, while they have a beam in their own. Well therefore does our Lord address them by that humiliating appellation, "You hypocrite!" A baser character than this can scarcely exist.

***~~2. Censoriousness is injurious to our neighbor.~~***

Every person values his reputation, and esteems the loss of it as a great misfortune. But in judging any man with severity, or exposing needlessly his faults, we rob him of his good name, and impoverish him without enriching ourselves. How injurious such conduct is we may see, if we will only consider what we feel when *we*are rigorously or unjustly censured. The sensibility we manifest, and the keen resentment we express, are sufficient indications of the injury which we suppose ourselves at least to have sustained.

***~~3. Censoriousness is insulting to our God.~~***

God claims it as his prerogative to *judge*. As he alone is privy to all the circumstances of any case—he alone can judge of it aright. Besides, he has appointed a day wherein he will display his righteousness, in awarding to every one a judgment suited to his real character: and he requires us to defer our judgment until that time. But in taking upon ourselves to censure and condemn others:  
we invade his prerogative,  
we usurp his power,  
we set ourselves in his throne,  
we supersede, or anticipate at least, his judgment.

In this light censoriousness is often stated by God himself; and a holy indignation is invariably expressed against those who shall presume to indulge it.

Our Lord having exposed the unreasonableness and impiety of this sin, gives,

***~~II. The advice proper for those who are addicted to it.~~***

The evil here reprobated is but too common, and that too, even among the professors of religion. Yes, perhaps, (their profession not being sufficiently tempered with humility and love) they are more exposed to it than others, from a mistaken idea that their professed regard for religion entitles them, as it were, to the office of censors. But to every one who has been guilty of it we should say,

***~~1. Consider your own great and manifold infirmities.~~***

There is no greater antidote to censoriousness than this. *While we continue ignorant of ourselves, we shall consider our own faults as few and venial, and shall be disposed to magnify whatever we may see amiss in others.*But a knowledge of our own hearts will convince us that if there is "a mote in our brother's eye, then there is a beam in our own." We may conceive many *extenuating*circumstances that may lessen the enormity of his conduct. But we shall know many *aggravating*circumstances to which God and ourselves alone are privy, which may serve to heighten our guilt, and to humble us as the very chief of sinners. When the woman taken in adultery was brought to our Lord, he bade those of her accusers who were without sin to execute the law upon her. We all know the effect which a conviction of their own personal guilt produced upon them. Thus *shall we also drop the stone which we have taken up to cast at our neighbor, when once we are acquainted with our own vileness.*

***~~2. Recollect the relation in which he whom you would condemn, stands to you.~~***

As every person wishes to conceal his own faults, so he will be ready to extenuate the faults of those who are near and dear to him. We do not usually hear men descanting on the infirmities of their parents or children, their wife or brethren.

Now the person whom the calumniator would traduce, is his brother. No less than thrice in the short space of the text is this endearing appellation given to our neighbor. Is he not entitled then, from this consideration, to some portion of that regard which we pay to our more immediate relatives? Should we officiously pry into his defects? Should we presume to incriminate his motives? Should we judge of his general character by a single act; or take an instance or two of indiscretion, and consider them as fixed and accustomed habits? Surely our "brother" should receive far different treatment at our hands. We should cast a veil over his infirmities, and exercise towards him that charity which hopes all things and believes all things.

***~~3. Purge your own heart from evil, that you may be the better qualified to reprove or advise others as occasion shall require.~~***

As people who dispense the laws must of necessity pass judgment on those who are brought before them, so must all the members of Christ's Church administer fraternal correction or reproof to each other.

It is not *all*judgment that the text forbids, but all *harsh*and *severe*judgment. It prohibits an over-officious prying into the faults of others, and a needless exposing of them to the world; but it leaves us at liberty to give that reproof which is necessary for the reclaiming of an offending brother.

But to admonish others with effect, we must attain some measure at least of purity ourselves. Let everyone then begin with rectifying his own conduct. Let everyone be solicitous to cast the *beam*out of his own eye, that he may afterwards assist with more propriety and effect in pulling out the *mote*from his brother's eye. We must not indeed wait until we are perfect before we attempt to benefit our brother; but we should study to attain an unbiased judgment, and should hide the lancet in a sponge if we would open a festering sore; and in every case we should regulate our endeavors with charity and discretion.

#1327

***~~Caution to be Used in Reproving~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)~~***

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces!"

IN the holy Scriptures there are not only such directions as are necessary for the saving of the soul, but such also as are of a prudential nature, calculated for the rectifying of our judgment, and the regulating of our conduct, in less important matters. A pious person would obtain salvation, though he should not be discreet in his mode of communicating instruction or reproof to others. But it is desirable that "the man of God should be complete, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," and therefore he should attend as well to those admonitions which are of secondary importance, as to those which relate to the fundamental points of faith or practice.

The words before us are connected with the prohibition respecting the judging of others. To judge others uncharitably will expose us to similar treatment from them, as well as to the displeasure of Almighty God.

Before we presume to judge others at all, we ought to be diligent in searching out and amending our own faults; without which we are but ill qualified to reprove the faults of others. We ought also to consider the state of the person whom we undertake to reprove: for if he is hardened in his wickedness, and disposed to resent our well-meant endeavors, it will be more prudent to let him alone, and to wait for some season when we may speak to him with a better prospect of success. Such is the import of the caution in our text; from whence we may observe,

***~~I. That religious instruction is often most unworthily received.~~***

***~~The value of religious instruction is but little known.~~***

Education in general is esteemed one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy; nor is any sacrifice, whether of time or money, deemed too great for the obtaining of the benefits arising from it. A richly-furnished mind, a cultivated taste, a polished manner—are distinctions which the richer part of the community particularly manifest: and they are most envied, who possess in the highest measure such accomplishments.

But knowledge of spiritual realities is considered as of little worth: though it would enrich the soul beyond all conception, and adorn it with all the most amiable graces, and is therefore most fully characterized by the name of "pearls," yet has it no beauty, no excellency, in the eyes of carnal men. The generality are as insensible of its value as swine are of the value of pearls, which they would "trample under their feet" as mire and dirt. Of this however we may be assured, that instruction, even though it be in a way of reproof, lays us under the deepest obligation to him who gives it.

***~~Many, instead of being pleased, are only irritated and offended at it.~~***

Nothing under Heaven has ever given more offence than this. Men may utter lewdness and blasphemy, and create but little disgust: but let them bear their testimony against sin, or proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ—and instantly an indignation is excited in every bosom. In the house of God indeed a certain license is allowed, provided the preacher be not too faithful: but in a private company the mention of such things is considered as a death-blow to social comfort, and is reprobated as an insufferable nuisance.

Even in the public ministry those who "labor with fidelity in the word and doctrine" are frequently treated with every species of indignity. No name is too odious for them to bear, no opposition is too violent to be raised against them.

It is supposed indeed by some, that the offence excited by ministers arises from the erroneousness of their statements, or the injudiciousness of their manner. But what then shall we say to the treatment which Christ and his Apostles met with? Did our *blessed Lord*lack any personal graces that could recommend his doctrine? Did he not exhibit "the meekness of wisdom," and "speak as never man spoke?" And was not *Paul*guided and instructed by God himself in his ministrations? Yet both he and his Divine Master were represented as babblers and deceivers; and one cry was raised against them both, "Away with them! It is not fit that they should live!"

Nor is it more against the *doctrines*of Christianity that this prejudice exists, than it does against its *practice*. The doctrine of "Christ crucified is still to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness," and the same anger that rankled in the bosoms of Herod and Herodias against John, who condemned their incestuous connection, is called forth at this time against any one who shall condemn the customs of the world. Our Lord's words may still be used by all his faithful followers, "The world hates me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil."

Doubtless the inveteracy of wicked men will show itself in different ways and different degrees, according to the different circumstances under which it is called forth: but no times or circumstances have ever superseded the necessity of attending to the caution in the text. There always have been multitudes who would take offence at the kindest efforts for their welfare, and, like ferocious "dogs, would turn again and tear you in pieces!" Reprove iniquity, and you will still be deemed "the troublers of Israel;" and those who are reproved will say of you, "I hate Micaiah, for he never speaks good of me, but evil."

From this aversion which men feel to religious instruction, it appears,

***~~II. That great caution is to be used in administering it.~~***

The direction in our text was given to the whole multitude of those who heard our Lord's discourse; and therefore may be considered as applicable,

***~~1. To ministers.~~***

Though it is not to be *confined*to them, it does not *exclude*them. Doubtless where numbers of people are assembled to hear the word of God, it is not possible to suit oneself to the disposition and taste of every individual. The rule which God himself has laid down must in such cases be followed: "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully." A minister must "warn men, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." He must "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God," "keeping back nothing that is profitable unto them," but "declaring unto them the whole counsel of God."

Still, however, the caution in the text is necessary for him. He should consider the state of his hearers, and should adapt his discourses to their necessities. Our blessed Lord, knowing how full of prejudice the Jews were, "spoke the word to them in parables, as they were able to hear it." In like manner, though we must not seek the applause of man, (for "if we please men, we cannot he the servants of Jesus Christ;") yet we should endeavor to "please all men for their good to edification," we should argue with them on principles which they acknowledge; we should be content to give "milk to babes," and to reserve the "strong meat" for such as are able to digest it. We should pay attention to everything that may lessen prejudice and conciliate regard. Though we must not affect "the wisdom of words, which would only make void the cross of Christ," we should "search out acceptable words," and be especially careful to "speak the truth in love." Our great object should be not to "deliver our own souls," (though doubtless we must be careful to do that,) but principally to "win the souls" of others.

***~~2. To Christians in general.~~***

As "men do not light a candle, to put it under a bed or under a basket, but to give light to those who are in the house," so God, when he illuminates any soul, expects that the light he has imparted should be diffused for the good of others. But in endeavoring to instruct others, we should consider the *tone*, the *manner*, the *measure*of instruction, that will be most likely to ensure success.

In particular, we should not press matters when our exhortations are contemned as foolish, or resented as injurious. Not that our concern should be about ourselves, as though we feared either the contempt of men, or their resentment; but we should be afraid of hardening them, and thereby increasing their guilt and condemnation. As to ourselves, we should gladly "suffer all things for the elect's sake," but for them we should "weep, as it were, in secret places," and "gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly we love them the less we be loved." If, indeed, after all our labor, we find that our efforts are only rejected by them with disdain, we may then with propriety leave them to themselves, and, like the Apostles, bestow our attention on more hopeful subjects. As the priests imparted of the holy food to every member of their families, but gave none of it to dogs—so may you give your holy things to others, and withhold it from those who have shown themselves so unworthy of it.

***~~We will now apply the subject,~~***

***~~1. To those who are strangers to the truth.~~***

From the indifference which is usually shown to divine things, it is evident that the value of religious knowledge is but little known. If we could inform people how to restore their health, or how to recover an estate, or how to obtain any great temporal benefit—they would hear us gladly, and follow our advice with thankfulness. But when we speak of spiritual benefits, they have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand: they are ready to say to us, as the demoniac to Christ, "Have you come to torment us before our time?" But let it not be so with you. Think in what light God represents such conduct. Think what regret you will hereafter feel. Think what augmented punishment you will endure. And may God "open your hearts, that you may attend to the things" that belong unto your peace, before they are forever hidden from your eyes!

***~~2. To those who know it.~~***

While we exhort you to be cautious in admonishing others, we would caution you also against being soon discouraged. Think not every one assimilated to dogs or swine, because he resists the truth for a season; but give "line upon line, and precept upon precept," and "instruct in meekness those who oppose themselves, if God perhaps will give them repentance, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will."

And while you take upon yourself to admonish others, be willing to receive admonition also yourselves. It is not every religious professor that is so open to conviction as he ought to be, and that will receive reproof like David, esteeming it as "an excellent oil, that shall not break his head." Watch over your own spirit, therefore, and exemplify in yourselves the conduct you require in others.

#1328

***~~The Importance and Efficacy of Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7), [8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 7.8)~~***

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.

WE need not look for a connection in every part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount; because the account of it which we have in this Gospel is nothing more than a summary, in which only the principal heads, together with some important sayings, are recorded. But, if we suppose the words of our text to arise from what has just preceded them, the connection may easily be found.

The commands to abstain from all uncharitable judgment, and to be intent rather on searching out and removing our own imperfections, and even when the faults of our neighbor are most glaring, to exercise much prudence and caution in reproving him; these commands, I say, are difficult to be obeyed: and therefore our Lord encourages us by the consideration, that we may *obtain by prayer whatever wisdom or strength we may stand in need of.*

The import of the text, however, will be the same, whether we take it as detached from the preceding context, or as connected with it; and it will naturally lead us to set before you the *nature*, the *importance*, and the *efficacy*of prayer.

***~~I. The nature of prayer.~~***

Prayer is not indeed defined in the words before us; but we may collect from the different terms by which it is designated, what are its inseparable attendants and its characteristic marks;

***~~1. Earnest desires.~~***

The words, "ask," "seek," "knock," must certainly imply a solicitude to obtain some specific object. Now this is the very life and essence of prayer. It is not the posture of the body, or a repeating of any words, either with or without a form, that can be called prayer; but*a prostration of the soul before God, accompanied with an ardent desire of acceptance with him*. We may confess our vileness in the most humiliating terms, or petition for mercy with the most suitable pleas, or render thanks to God in copious and devout acknowledgments; and yet, *if our hearts have not felt what our lips have uttered—we have offered no acceptable service to God*; "we have worshiped him in vain, because we have drawn near to him with our lips when our hearts were far from him." Desires in the soul will be accounted as prayer, though not expressed in words; but words without earnest desires are no better than a solemn mockery.

***~~2. Persevering endeavors.~~***

A mere exclamation under an impression of terror cannot be considered as prayer. Prayer imports such a desire after divine blessings as engages us in the pursuit of them from day to day; and this also is intimated in the very terms of our text. "Asking" only is not prayer, unless we "seek" also for the things in God's appointed way. Nor is "seeking" sufficient, if we do not, like people anxious to obtain an answer, continue "knocking" at the door of mercy.

We do not indeed deny but that a prayer may be offered by one in trouble, and then speedily turns away from God; but it is not accepted; and it is of acceptable prayer that we speak; for nothing else deserves the name of prayer. Whatever therefore a person may do on some particular occasion, he prays not to any good purpose, unless he "sets his face" determinately to seek after God, and to obtain from him those *daily supplies of mercy and grace*which his soul needs.

Hence the command of God is, "Pray without ceasing;" "Continue instant in prayer;" "Pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance."

***~~3. Humble expectation.~~***

Here again the terms of our text afford us a correct idea of the duty of prayer. It is evident that when a person "asks," it is with some hope of receiving; and when he "seeks," he has some prospect of finding; and if he "knocks" at a door, it is with some expectation that it shall be opened to him. Now this, beyond everything else, marks the true character of prayer. "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you," says the Psalmist, "and will look up;" that is, I will look up in expectation of receiving an answer to my prayers.

It is to the *prayer of faith*that the promise of an answer is given: "Whatever you shall ask, *believing*, you shall receive." Prayer destitute of this qualification is declared to be of no avail whatever: the man that offers it "must not think of receiving anything from the Lord." Hence the true and acceptable suppliant is distinguished as "looking unto God as a servant does to the hand of his master," and as "waiting upon God for his salvation."

The *nature*of prayer being explained from the text, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. The importance of prayer.~~***

We cannot but observe throughout the whole text the inseparable connection between the *means*and the *end.*It is thought by many that it is unnecessary to pray; because God, being omniscient, stands in no need of information from us; and being of his own nature inclined to mercy, he needs not our importunity to prevail upon him.

But these objections betray an utter ignorance of the *intent*of prayer. *Prayer is not intended to give information to God, but to impress our own minds with a sense of our dependence upon him, and to give him glory as the only fountain of all our blessings*.

Moreover, prayer, though often represented as prevailing with God, is not designed to dispose him to do anything to which he was before averse; but only to bring our souls to such a state as may prepare us for a worthy reception of those blessings which God has previously determined to bestow. Though, therefore, prayer does not answer, nor is intended to answer, the ends which ignorant people are ready to suppose—it does answer the most valuable ends; which are intimately connected with the salvation of our souls.

But we will suppose that there were no connection whatever between the means and the end; still, if God has united them, it does not befit us to put them asunder; nor can we ever expect the Divine blessing, if we attempt to separate them.

*Moses*was commanded to take his stick, or rod, and with that to work miracles in Egypt. What would he have wrought, if, in contempt of such means, he had left his rod behind him?

The *Israelites*were commanded to march around Jericho on seven successive days, and then to blow with rams' horns. Suppose they had disregarded these means on account of their inadequacy to produce any important result; would the walls of Jericho have fallen down?

Or if *Naaman*had persisted in preferring the waters of Abana and Pharpar to those of Jordan, would he have been healed of his leprosy?

Thus then, whether prayer has any proper effect or not, we must use it as God's ordinance; and if we will not use it, we shall infallibly lose those blessings, which, in the use of the appointed means, we might otherwise attain.

True, it is said of the Gentiles, that "God was found by those who sought him not;" but this refers only to their heathen state: for none ever ultimately found him, who did not walk with him in the daily exercise of faith and prayer: nor can there be found in all the sacred volume one single word that justifies a hope of obtaining anything at God's hands, in the neglect of this sacred duty.

On the contrary, when prayer is offered aright, the whole inspired volume attests,

***~~III. The efficacy of prayer.~~***

Nothing can be more express than the declarations of our text on this subject. The repetition of them is intended to assure us that no man shall ever "seek God's face in vain." It is of importance to observe, that in the promises before us there is no limitation whatever, either as to the *person*asking or the *blessing*desired. A person may have been as wicked as Manasseh himself, yet shall he not be cast out, provided he comes to God with sincere penitence in the name of Jesus Christ.

It must be remembered, that, since the coming of Christ, it is indispensably necessary that we should offer all our petitions *in his name*. This, in fact, was done even under the Jewish dispensation: for every penitent was obliged to put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice; and, when the Jews were in captivity, and consequently were unable to offer sacrifices, they must look towards the temple; which was a distinguished type of Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Let but our prayers be offered in a humble dependence on the sacrifice and intercession of Jesus Christ, and they shall assuredly prevail. God may not indeed answer us *immediately*; and, it may be, that he may not grant the *precise*thing which we pray for; but *he will answer in the best time, and in the best manner, granting that which eventually will be most conducive to his own glory and to our good.*

David and the Canaanite woman were allowed to wait for the blessings they desired; and Paul, yes, and Christ himself too, were answered, not so much according to the *letter* of their petitions, as according to the *spirit* of their petitions. But if we tarry the Lord's leisure, we may be as "confident" of an answer to our prayers, as of our own existence.

***~~In this subject we may find abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. For reproof.~~***

How many have never gone beyond the *mere forms*of prayer; and remain unmoved even when their self-deceit and hypocrisy are thus plainly set before them! How astonishing is this! Methinks, if God had appointed only one hour in a man's life, wherein he should be at liberty to avail himself of the gracious promises in the text—one would suppose that no one in the whole universe would be able to divert his attention from this sacred duty: he would long for the appointed season to arrive; he would meditate beforehand on everything which he could desire to obtain; and he would employ every moment of the prescribed time in most importunate supplications.

So, I say, we might suppose; but experience proves that, notwithstanding there is not an hour in our whole lives wherein we may not avail ourselves of this privilege, the generality have never found one single hour for that holy employment!

But would it be thus if God were for one hour to allow this privilege to those who are shut up in Hell? If the doors of Hell might be opened for their escape, would they neglect to "knock?" If all the blessings of grace and glory might be obtained by them, would they neglect to "ask?"

O then, let us "seek the Lord while he is near; let us call upon him, while he may be found." Think what a bitter reflection it will be in the eternal world, that we might have escaped the miseries of Hell, and obtained the glory of Heaven, by the exercise of humble and believing prayer—and we would not: we did not regard either the one or the other, as worth asking for. O that we may now be convinced of our folly, and not be left to bewail it to all eternity!

***~~2. For encouragement.~~***

If God had bidden us to do some great thing to obtain his favor, we should have been ready to do it. The poor benighted heathen, what pains and penances do not they undergo to obtain the favor of their gods! Yet no such things are required of us: we have nothing to do, but to "ask, and seek, and knock." Surely we should rejoice in so great a privilege, and determine to "take the kingdom of Heaven by the holy violence" of faith and prayer.

But some are discouraged, because they cannot pray with any fluency or enlargement of heart. Let not this however distress the minds of any. *It is humility, and not fluency, that makes our prayers acceptable*. Many a person who can only seek the Lord with sighs, and groans, and tears, will find acceptance with him—while others, who are admired by men, or filled with self-delight, will be rejected. Never, from the foundation of the world, was there a better prayer than that of the publican, *"God be merciful to me a sinner!"*

But some are discouraged because they have prayed long without receiving any answer to their prayers. Let not, however, any despond on this account. God may have answered them, though not precisely in the way that they expected: and the very continuance of their prayers is an evidence that they have not prayed in vain. It is evident at least that God has given them his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and of supplication; and this is a pledge and earnest of other blessings which they stand in need of. Let them "tarry the Lord's leisure, and he will comfort their hearts;" "let them wait, I say, upon the Lord."

#1329

***~~God's Readiness to Give His Holy Spirit~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:9–11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.9â11)~~***

"Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

TO argue from ourselves to the Deity, and to conclude that, because we should do, or forbear any particular thing, he would do the same—is, in many cases, extremely fallacious; because many things may be proper as a rule of our conduct towards others, which can in no respect be applied to the moral Governor of the universe. There are, however, some instances wherein such an argument may be urged, not only with propriety, but with great effect. Such an instance occurs in the passage we have now read; in considering which, we shall,

***~~I. Point out the force of our Lord's appeal.~~***

Our Lord addresses himself both to our feelings and our judgment.

Men who cannot understand a logical deduction, may comprehend, without any difficulty, the argument before us. Every one, whether he is a parent or not, knows sufficiently the feelings of a parent, to answer the question here put to him. We can scarcely conceive that any father should so divest himself of all the sensibilities of his paternal nature, as to refuse a piece of bread to his child. Much less can we imagine, that he should mock his child, by giving him a stone; or give him, instead of necessary food, a serpent or scorpion to destroy him.

Who then would think of ascribing such a disposition to God? God is the common parent of all his creatures; and he well knows that his Spirit is as necessary for the imparting and maintaining of spiritual life, as bread is for the support of our natural life. Will he then refuse that blessing to us, when we ask it at his hands; and leave us to perish without affording us the needful support?

It may happen, that an earthly parent may be indisposed, by passion or caprice, to do what is right; or he may be disabled through poverty. But there are no such impediments on the part of God, since he is subject to no infirmities; nor is there anything impossible with him. We may be sure therefore that he will at all times act worthy of the relation which he bears to his creatures.

But the force of the appeal lies in the contrast between God and us.

At first sight the appeal may seem inconclusive, since our children have a claim upon us, but we have none on God; and the gift of a piece of bread bears no proportion whatever to the unspeakable gift of God's Spirit. But it must be considered that we are "evil," so evil as to be capable of the greatest cruelties even towards our own children. Instances have occurred, wherein parents have not only murdered, but even eaten their own offspring; and the treating of them with extreme harshness and severity is no uncommon failing. Yet, with all our proneness to evil, and our readiness, under the influence of passion or temptation, to commit the greatest atrocities, there cannot be found a person on earth so depraved, as to act towards his children, in the general tenor of his conduct, in the manner stated by our Lord.

But God, on the contrary, is good, supremely, and only good, and therefore incapable of doing anything, which may in the smallest degree impeach his character. Besides, he has manifested his goodness in that most unparalleled act of mercy, the gift of his own Son; the gift of his own Son to die for us; and that too unasked; and at a time when we were in rebellion against him; and when he knew the treatment which his Son would meet with from an ungrateful world. Will he then refuse us anything? Will he not give us his holy Spirit, when we ask that gift at his hands; and when he knows that the bestowing of that gift will infallibly terminate in his own eternal glory?

It is in this very light that an inspired Apostle states the same argument; and therefore we may be well assured, that it is unanswerably conclusive.

That we may not however rest in a mere acknowledgment of this truth, we shall,

***~~II. Suggest a suitable improvement of it.~~***

Though the great scope of the text relates only to the prospect which we have of receiving answers to prayer,

We may learn from it,

***~~1. In what light we are to regard God, when we come to his throne of grace.~~***

Men in general either think of God as a Being that has no concern about this lower world, or as a harsh master, and a severe judge. Accordingly their prayers are either a mere lip-service, in which they themselves feel no interest; or the supplications of a slave under the apprehension of the lash. But we should rather go to him as a *Father*; we should consider him as a Being able and willing to support us, yes, infinitely more willing to give than we are to ask. How endearing is that address which we are taught to use, "Our Father in Heaven!" If we could approach him with the familiarity, and confidence, of dutiful and beloved children—then how sweet would be our fellowship with him, and how successful our petitions! Then, nothing would appear too *much*to ask, nothing too *trifling*to lay before him. We should spread before him our every want; and experience, on all occasions, his condescension and grace.

***~~2. What we ought principally to desire in all our addresses to him.~~***

The leading subjects of men's petitions usually are that their sins may be pardoned, and their ways reformed: and certainly these are important subjects for our supplications. But the offices of the Holy Spirit are very much overlooked even by the saints themselves: and though God will not altogether withhold his blessings, because we do not ask for them in the best manner, yet certainly it is of importance that we should feel our need of his Spirit, and express those feelings in our petitions to him.

We cannot repent or pray, unless God, "pours out upon us a Spirit of grace and of supplication."

We cannot know either our *disease*or our *remedy*, unless the Spirit is given to us "to convince us of our indwelling sin, and of the Savior's righteousness."

It is the Spirit's office "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and show them unto us." If we would "mortify the deeds of the body," it must be through the Spirit's influence. If we would bring forth the fruits of righteousness, it must be through the operation of the same Spirit, whose fruits they are. Every act of the spiritual life must be performed by the intervention and agency of God's Spirit. As Christ is *all*in *procuring*salvation for us, so the Holy Spirit is *all*in *imparting*salvation to us. Our illumination and strength, our sanctification and comfort, are all his gifts; and therefore we should continually acknowledge our dependence upon him, and ask of God the communications we stand in need of.

The importance of this is strongly marked by Matthew, who, relating the substance of our Lord's discourse, says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him?" But Luke sums up all good things in this, the gift of the Holy Spirit; because, without that gift, all that we possess is of no value; and with it, we cannot lack anything that is good.

***~~3. The efficacy and importance of prayer.~~***

Since God has so strongly declared his readiness to give us his Spirit, we may be well assured, that he will not refuse us any other good thing: "We may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." But, on the other hand, we can expect nothing without prayer: "God will be inquired of by us," even for those things which he has promised to give us; nor will he give, if we neglect to ask. This also is intimated in the text itself; his favors are limited to those who ask him.

It is true indeed, that the first desire after what is good is inspired by him; and, as far as relates to that, "he is found of those who sought him not, and known to those who inquired not after him," but when he has once communicated this desire, he expects that it should be cultivated and improved at the throne of grace; nor will he open the gate of Heaven to any, who do not knock at it with importunate and believing prayer.

And can we think hardly of this condition? What if we ourselves had invited a child to come and ask of us the richest gifts we could possibly bestow upon him, and had done everything in our power to assure him of our unalterable determination to grant his request; could he reasonably blame us for suspending our grant upon his performance of so easy a condition? Is there a parent in the world who would not say, If you are too proud to ask for it, you shall not have it?

Surely then if, through pride, or indolence, or unbelief, we will not make our supplications to God—we may well, yes, we must inevitably, be left to perish.

If this appears awful in one view, in another view it is most encouraging. Many are ready to say, 'Such an appeal as this affords no comfort to me: were I a child of God, I could not doubt but that he would give me all that I could ask, with greater readiness than I would give a piece of bread to my beloved offspring. But am I his child? and, if not, what is this assurance to me?'

But behold, as though he had intended to cut off all occasion for such a doubt, our Lord has here dropped the parallel, and says, "How much more will God give his Spirit, (not to his children, but) to those who ask him?" So then we have no occasion to inquire, Am I a child? We must go immediately to God and implore his best and choicest blessings, with a full assurance of success.

Some perhaps may reply, 'I have tried these means, and found them ineffectual.' But we are sure either that God has already answered in a way that was not expected, or that he will answer in due time. God cannot lie; and therefore we have nothing to do but to wait his time. Only let us "continue instant in prayer"—and Heaven, with all its glory, shall be ours!

#1330

***~~The Golden Rule~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.12)~~***

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

GOD is graciously pleased on some occasions to take those things which are good in men, for the purpose of illustrating his own ineffable and unbounded goodness. There is scarcely to be found a mother so destitute of feeling as to "forget her nursing child, and not to have compassion on the son of her womb." 'Such a monster,' says God, 'may be found: "yet I will not forget you."'

So, in the words before the text, we are told, that, "evil" as men are, there exists not a father so cruel as to give his child a stone or a serpent, when importuned by him for the food that is necessary for his subsistence: from whence this inference is made; "How much more shall your heavenly Father give good things unto those who ask him."

Such inferences are just and legitimate to a certain extent: but they must not be pressed too far. We must not presume to argue, as many infidels have done, "that because a benevolent man would not punish his enemy to all eternity, therefore God will not," for there is no parallel between the cases. Nor are God's actions to be measured by such a standard: *his written word will be the rule of his procedure*; and all conclusions that contradict that, will prove delusive at the last.

But though we cannot always argue from what man would do to what we may expect from God—we may safely, and in all cases, infer, from the superabundant goodness of God to us, the obligation which lies on us to exercise all possible degrees of kindness to our fellow-creatures. To this thought we are led by the connection in which our text stands with the preceding verses.

The words we have just read to you are an exhortation founded on the preceding representation of the Divine goodness: and certainly the argument is exceeding strong: for, if God in any case condescends to make our good actions a rule of conduct to himself—then much more should we make the unbiased convictions of our own minds the rule of our conduct towards all.

The direction that is here given us, is as important as any in the whole sacred volume. We shall endeavor to point out,

***~~I. Its import.~~***

It is almost dangerous to attempt an elucidation of so plain a command, lest we only obscure it, while we endeavor to explain it. But it is obvious that something must be supplied, in order to guard against the misconstructions which a caviler might put upon the words. The fact is, that all people do of themselves supply what is wanting in them, without being conscious that the sense which they affix to the words is the result of their own judgment, and not the strict meaning of the words themselves. I say there are TWO LIMITATIONS which all people do, though unconsciously, assign to the words, and without which they would not be a just rule of conduct to any man: and these are,

***~~1. That we must exchange situations, as it were, with the person towards whom we are about to act.~~***

It would be absurd to say, that we must actually conduct ourselves towards all people precisely as we would wish them to act towards us. There are a thousand menial services, which the more opulent part of the community must have done for them, and which it would be folly and madness in them to go and do for others. Besides, there are duties arising out of the very situations we hold; and which are not duties to any, except to those people who are so circumstanced.

Those, for instance, who are in authority, as rulers, or parents, or masters, are not called to obey their inferiors, because they desire to be obeyed by them. Were we therefore to construe the command without any limitation, we must break down all the distinctions in society, and set aside all the duties which God himself has connected with them. To prevent this, we must suppose the person to be in our situation, and ourselves in his; and then consider, what we would desire and expect from him. If, for instance, we are in authority, we should ask ourselves what treatment we should desire and expect, if we were in the place of our inferiors; and then we should act with all the kindness and condescension towards them, that we, in a change of circumstances, should expect at their hands.

***~~2. That we must make, not our inclination, but our judgment, the rule of our conduct.~~***

It is not sufficient to change places with the person towards whom we are about to act. For, if we put ourselves in the situation of a poor man, we might wish our rich neighbor to divide his property with us—but this is no reason why we should go and act thus: the thing is unreasonable in itself: and, however we might wish it, we should not for a moment think that justice or equity required it. So, if we were to put ourselves in the place of a convicted felon, we might wish the judge not to enforce the penalties of the laws against us: but that is no reason why we, if sitting in the place of judgment, should not enforce and execute the laws against others.

We must not consider so much what we might wish in such circumstances, as what we would, after full and impartial consideration, think right. We should think it right that the judge should investigate our cause with care, and make his decision with equity; and, on the whole, should lean to the side of mercy rather than of severity. But we could never persuade ourselves that felons should be permitted to violate the laws with impunity; because that would render the peaceful members of society a prey to every daring ruffian. It is evident then that we must call in the aid of judgment, and regulate our conduct according to its deliberate and unbiased dictates.

With the help of these two remarks, we shall be in no danger of misinterpreting the rule before us. Indeed these limitations are so obvious, that, as we said before, they are unconsciously supplied even by the most ignorant of mankind: so that we might have waved all mention of them, if it had not been expedient to mark with precision the limits, which, though generally acknowledged, are but indistinctly seen.

In a word, the rule is this: We must consider in all cases what we, under a change of circumstances, would think it right for another to do unto us; and that must be the rule of our conduct towards him.

Having thus considered the import of the rule, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Its excellence.~~***

A greater encomium cannot be passed upon it than is in the words before us: "This is the law and the prophets." But what is implied in this commendation? And what are those particular excellencies which it holds up to our view? It intimates, that the rule is eminently distinguished for the following properties:

***~~1. It is concise.~~***

"The law and the prophets" constitute a very large volume; to become well acquainted with which in all its parts, requires no little expense, both of time and labor. But, as vast as its circumference is, its lines all meet in this rule, as in their common center. We speak not indeed of the *doctrinal*part of this volume, but of the *preceptive*. This limitation, like those before mentioned, is necessarily implied, though not expressed: and, if we do not bear it in mind, we shall pervert this best of principles into an occasion of the most destructive error.

"The law and the prophets" have a twofold use:

first, to testify of Christ as the ground of our eternal hopes;

secondly, to state the law as the rule and measure of our *duties*.

To understand the commendation given to this rule as extending to the law and the prophets in the former sense, would annihilate the whole Gospel, and make the death of Christ of no avail. *We must therefore understand our Lord as speaking of the law and the prophets only so far as they contain a rule of life.*Moreover, when speaking of them expressly in this view, he comprehends the law under two great commandments:

The love of God.

The love of our neighbor.

And then he adds, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." But it is only to this second commandment that the rule in our text refers; and consequently, when we speak of the rule as comprehending the law and the prophets, we must be considered as limiting our assertion not only to the *preceptive*part of the law, in opposition to the doctrinal, but to that part of *the preceptive code which contains our duty to our neighbor*.

Let it be remembered, however, that there is not a page of the sacred volume which is not replete with instruction upon this point; and that this short sentence in our text is a summary of the whole.

Now if, on every occasion, we had to search the sacred volume for some precept directly to our point, the opportunities of acting would be passed before we had found such a direction as would be satisfactory to our minds. This would be the case even with those who were most conversant with the sacred writings, and much more with those whose time is almost entirely occupied with temporal concerns.

But behold, here is a SUMMARY:  
so *short*, that it is easily remembered;  
so *simple*, that it is easily understood;  
so *suited*to all occasions, that it is easily applied, by any person, and at any time.

Methinks this rule, to a Christian, is like the compass to a mariner. Were the master of a ship destitute of any means of directing his vessel, except those afforded him by the heavenly bodies, he might often be steering a very different course from that which he designed to take. But, by the help of the compass, the most illiterate sailor may know which way to steer: that little portable contrivance will direct him, whether by day or night, whether in a calm or tempest, and that too in every climate under Heaven.

Precisely thus it is with the Christian: there would be many times and occasions, when, if destitute of this rule, he would not know how to conduct himself aright: but, by the help of this, the most ignorant cannot lose his way—his path in every situation is made plain by it; and the "way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein."

***~~2. It is comprehensive.~~***

"The law and the prophets" contain directions proper for every person, in every rank, under every situation and circumstance in which he can possibly be placed. Nor is this rule at all less extensive: it will direct the *king*on his throne no less than the *poorest*subject in his dominions. There is not any single act, relating either to justice and equity, or to kindness and charity, or even to common decency and civility—which it does not equally embrace, and for which it does not provide a sufficient directory.

Under the Jewish dispensation, the high-priest had an opportunity of ascertaining the mind and will of God by means of his breast-plate. What the Urim and Thummim was, or how it conveyed information to the high-priest, is not positively known. But that God did make use of it in some way to convey to him the knowledge of his will, is certain: nor was there any subject whereon God would not have given him instruction, if he had sought it in a befitting manner.

Now we are repeatedly told in the New Testament, that all true Christians are both "kings and priests unto God," and one of the most distinguished privileges which, as Christians, we enjoy, is a liberty of access to God, every one of us for ourselves, without the intervention of any human being; and a permission to seek direction from him on every occasion. And has not God furnished us with the Urim and Thummim? Yes, he has: this very rule he has given us to carry, as it were, upon our breasts, that it may instruct us in every part of our duty. We may say respecting it, as Moses says of the Gospel salvation, "We need not go up to Heaven, to bring it down from above, nor descend into the deep, to bring it up from beneath; but the word is near us, even in our mouth and in our hearts."

Wherever we are, we need only set ourselves in the presence of God, and, with humble supplications to him, inspect our own bosoms, to see what light this rule will afford us; and we shall assuredly be guided in the right way. Whether we are rich or poor, learned or unlearned, and whether the subject be more or less important—no difference shall be made. If the point relates to states and kingdoms, or if it concerns only the smallest branch of moral duty to an individual—it shall equally be made known to us. And if, after that, we err—the error will not proceed from any defect in the rule itself, but from a lack of a more perfect discernment of it, or a more just application of it to the point before us.

***~~3. It is complete.~~***

What can be added to "the law and the prophets" to make them more complete? Vain would be the attempt either of men or angels to find in them one single flaw or defect: for while they comprehend every species of duty, they supply at the same time every motive for the performance of it: "The word of the Lord is perfect."

The same may be said also of the rule before us. No created wisdom can improve it; no man can find in it anything either superfluous or defective. Its comprehensiveness and conciseness we have before spoken of: and we may now notice, what indeed still more clearly displays its excellence, its singular operation on the human mind, not merely as a light to direct us in the path we should go—but as an incentive to us to walk in it.

The mode in which this rule operates upon us is this: it takes the most corrupt principle of the human heart, even that root of bitterness from whence every species of injustice springs; it suspends all the operations of that principle on the side of evil, and constrains it to become a powerful advocate of virtue.

*Selfishness is the real source of all those evils and calamities which men bring on each other.* It is to this principle that we must trace the wars of contending nations, the discord of families, the injustice, the fraud, and all the other evils that are found in the transactions of individuals. From this principle it is that men are universally disposed to expect too much, and to concede too little.

Now this rule, requiring us to put ourselves in the place of him towards whom we are about to act, cuts off at once all scope for the exercise of this principle in our own cause, and enlists it into the service of our neighbor; thereby inclining us as much to favor him, as it would otherwise have inclined us to benefit ourselves. At the same time it marks so strongly the reasonableness of true benevolence, as makes us abhor the thought of acting in opposition to it.

I may further add too, that while this rule operates thus as a stimulus to virtue—a consciousness of having acted agreeably to it is one of the richest rewards that man can enjoy on earth. If a man fails of accomplishing his benevolent purposes, he has a recompense in his own conscience from a sense that he has acted right himself. And, if he attains his end, he has double recompense: the testimony of a good conscience, and the joy of seeing that he has not labored in vain.

Say then, whether this is not justly called the *golden rule?*Surely, whether we consider the mode of its operation, or its peculiar efficacy, or the delight that invariably proceeds from conforming to it, its value is inestimable; nor can any terms be too strong in commendation of it.

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The scope and intent of true religion.~~***

It is surprising what a jealousy prevails in the minds of men with respect to this. Talk of religion, and especially of Christ, and of "the righteousness which is of God by faith in him, unto all, and upon all those who believe;" and a doubt immediately arises, whether you are not an enemy to good works. This is declared to be the proper tendency of such sentiments; and all manner of stories are raked together to countenance the idea.

As for those who deny that "the law and the prophets" testify of Christ, and point him out as the only source of "righteousness and strength"—we shall leave them to settle the matter with the Apostle Paul.

We shall at present notice those only who are so fearful about the interests of morality. Now we assert, that, however strongly the doctrine of justification by faith is maintained from "the law and the prophets," no man that pays the smallest deference to their testimony can fail to insist upon good works. When we read in one part of Scripture, that "the love of God and of our neighbor are the two great commandments, on which hang all the law and the prophets." And when we read in another part of Scripture, that "the doing unto others what we would have them do to us" sums up the Law and the Prophets (in substance); we are amazed that any human being could be found, who denies the necessity of good works; or that people would be so credulous as to impute this sentiment to all who embrace the doctrine of salvation through a crucified Redeemer.

Let the matter be investigated: let it be seen whether Paul was an enemy to good works; whether the great body of our English Reformers were enemies to good works: let us examine the writings of those who now uphold the same doctrine, and see whether they neglect to inculcate and encourage good works.

Truly, if people were not blinded by prejudice, they would see that one half at least of the obloquy that falls upon those who are contemptuously called *Evangelical*, is on account of the strictness of their lives and the holiness of their deportment. But, waving all these considerations, this at least is plain, that, whatever fault there may be in any set of men, "the law and the prophets" stand unimpeached: they, with one voice, require submission to the golden rule, and make the practice of that to be an indispensable test of men's regard for their testimony.

Let this then sink down into our ears; let it be remembered, that the very Scriptures which inculcate most forcibly the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, inculcate also a most exalted morality. The Gospel never did, nor ever will, bring any person to salvation in the way of sin; it is in the way of holiness only, and of a very exalted degree of holiness too, that any man can attain the salvation of the Gospel. Not that holiness will save him; it is the blood and righteousness of Christ that saves him: nevertheless it is an universal and unalterable truth, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." May God write that truth on the hearts of such as disregard good works, (if any such there be,) and especially on the hearts of all who set themselves against the doctrines of salvation through unfounded prejudices against them, as being of a licentious tendency!

***~~2. The effect and benefit of true religion.~~***

This is not to be looked for in the professions, but in the practices of men; yet not in the practice of some easy duties, such as those of generosity and kindness, but in an universal and habitual attention to the rule before us. Where Christian principles have their full operation on the mind, there this rule will be established in the heart, and be exhibited in the life. Take the conduct of the early converts to Christianity; and there you will see the precise change of which we are speaking: and their situations being peculiar, they carried the principle to the extent of selling all their possessions for the support of their poorer brethren. A still more wonderful instance we see in the Apostle Paul, who, from the time of his conversion to Christianity, was willing to do or suffer anything whereby he might facilitate the progress of the Gospel in the world. Knowing the advantages which, as a Christian, he enjoyed, he was willing even to lay down his own life, if by so doing he might bring others to a participation of them. The same change is still accomplished in the world; only it is less visible; the circumstances of the Church not calling for such a manifest display of it, and the measure of divine grace now enjoyed by the saints being, it is to be feared, more scanty than at that period. But can any one see the effects of religion, even as it is now exhibited, and not confess its excellence? Wherever it prevails, it establishes both in the heart and life this amiable principle: it brings men to do as they would be done unto. Suppose for a moment that one single man, the present disturber of the universe, were impressed aright by the Gospel of Christ, and brought under the influence of this principle, how many thousands and even millions of the human race would have reason to rejoice! And, if that principle were universally prevalent, what happiness would pervade the world! Such then is the effect, and such the benefit of true religion. It only remains that we urge you all to cultivate this principle. Let it not be said of any of you, 'He talks of faith in Christ, but he is covetous, dishonest, passionate, vindictive.' Let love reign in your hearts; and while you profess yourselves to be "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting," let the "tree be known by its fruit."

#1331

***~~The Narrow Gate and the Narrow Way~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13), [14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 7.14)~~***

"Enter by the *narrow gate*; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because *narrow is the gate*and difficult is the *way*which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Sentimentalism and philanthropy lead many to adopt views directly repugnant to the Scriptures. They imagine that few, if any, perish; and that, though the bulk of mankind live in a total neglect of God, they find mercy at the last. But no pretense of philanthropy should induce us so to contradict the plainest declarations of God. If there be any truth in the Scriptures, there are comparatively few who go to Heaven. And we need to be awakened to a sense of our danger by the exhortation before us. We shall consider,

***~~I. The duty enjoined.~~***

***~~The path of the ungodly is broad, and the entrance upon it is wide.~~***

There is no difficulty at all in entering upon an ungodly life; we need only follow our natural bent and inclination. Nor will they who frequent the broad road at all interfere with each other. The gross sensualist, the proud Pharisee, and the specious hypocrite, may have ample scope for their respective pursuits.*Sin may be indulged in ten thousand shapes*; and "all may go astray, every one in his own way."

***~~The path of the godly is narrow, and the entrance upon it strait.~~***

The way of God's commandments is that to which the godly are confined: and the entrance upon it is by conversion. A man must have seen the evil and danger of his former ways: he must have come to Christ who is "the door;" and, renouncing every other hope, he must cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart. Having thus entered, *he must go forward in a uniform course of dependence upon Christ, and devotedness to him.*

This is indeed a strait and narrow way. A partial repentance, a divided trust, a reserved obedience, will not suffice:  
our contrition must be deep,  
our faith must be sincere, and  
our dedication of ourselves to God must be entire  
—or we shall only deceive our own souls.

***~~To enter upon this path is our bounden duty.~~***

God never intended that men should follow the imagination of their own hearts. He calls us to himself, and invites us by every argument that can affect a rational being. Nor will he leave us to fail for want of strength. If we will exert ourselves in earnest and cry unto him for help, nothing shall be impossible unto us. As difficult as the duty is, it has been performed by many in all ages. We therefore should exert ourselves without delay. We must not stand aloof, doubting and hesitating whether we shall enter upon this way or not; nor must we put off the time of entering upon it to some more convenient season. The command of God is clear and universal, "Enter in at the strait gate."

We shall see the importance of this duty if we attend to,

***~~II. The arguments with which it is enforced.~~***

No stronger arguments can be urged than those suggested in the text.

***~~1. The broad way, however crowded, will infallibly lead us to eternal destruction.~~***

Every way of sin will destroy the soul. Whether our sin is open and notorious, or secret and refined—it will surely bring upon us the wrath of God. Nor will the numbers of those who walk in any way at all affect the quality of their actions. Sin will be sin, though the whole world should countenance each other in the commission of it. The idolatrous compliance of the Babylonish nation was not the less sinful because it was sanctioned by numbers; nor was the nonconformity of the three Hebrew youths rendered less acceptable to God on account of the fewness of those who dared to follow the voice of conscience. Neither indeed will the end of any way be changed on account of the numbers who walk in it. The inhabitants of Sodom, and of the antediluvian world—were not exempted from punishment because they were many. They were overwhelmed, as examples of God's vengeance to all future ages. Should not this then make us cautious what path we follow? Should it not stimulate us to flee from the destruction to which we are hastening? O! "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

***~~2. The narrow path, however unfrequented, will surely lead us to glory.~~***

God cannot but delight in holiness; and he will testify his approbation of it in the last day. Was Lot overlooked in Sodom, or Noah in the antediluvian world? So if there were but one faithful servant of God in the whole universe, he should in no wise lose his reward. Every step he took in the good way should be marked by God; and in due season he will arrive at his desired end. And, while tribulation and anguish should be assigned to the ungodly and disobedient, the Christian's patient continuance in well-doing should be rewarded with glory and honor and immortality.

Should anyone then be afraid of singularity? Is it not better to be a persecuted Elijah worshiping the true God, than to be an applauded worshiper of Baal? *Let the prospect of glory therefore encourage us to enter upon the narrow path*; nor let us doubt but that the enjoyment of the end will amply compensate for the difficulties of the way.

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. To those who are not yet entered in at the strait gate.~~***

Perhaps you think that the multitudes by which you are countenanced, afford a reasonable hope that you shall not perish; but it is not possible for God to assert the contrary more strongly than he has done in the words before us. Will you then, in spite of this warning, hope that the saved shall be many, and the damned few?

Or will you be contented to perish, seeing that you will have so many companions in misery? Alas! what comfort will it be to you to behold others as wretched as yourself? Will their torments assuage your anguish?

O dare to be singular in the midst of a wicked world; and say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, whatever others may do, we will serve the Lord.

***~~2. To those who are walking in the narrow way.~~***

You, no doubt, are blamed for your singularity. But "it is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment." To be reproached for righteousness' sake is no new thing. Nor have you any reason to repine if it is your lot. You have rather reason to rejoice and leap for joy.

Remember, however, that you are not to affect needless singularities, and call them religion. If you bring persecution upon yourselves by such means, you bear your own cross, and not the cross of Christ.

That alone which will be pleasing to God, is the following of his commandments. In that you cannot be too exact or resolute. But in indifferent matters it is desirable rather to manifest a meek and yielding disposition. Yet compliance may easily be carried too far. And, on the whole, it is expedient always to lean to the safer side. You are in continual danger of being turned out of the good path. Nor can you ever be safe except while you are looking to God for his direction and help.

#1332

***~~Men Known by Their Fruits~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:15–20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.15â20)~~***

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

THE greater part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount was intended to counteract the errors of the Pharisees, and the false glosses by which they had obscured the law of Moses. But, in the words before us, our Lord seems to have intended to counteract the general influence of the Pharisees. They were in high repute for sanctity among the people, even while they were filled with all manner of malignant passions. They pretended to have a high regard for religion; but they were, in fact, the bitterest enemies of all vital godliness. It was of great importance that the followers of Christ should know how to distinguish them: and for that purpose our Lord gave them a rule which, in its use and application, was easy, certain, and universal.

Let us consider,

***~~I. Against whom we are here cautioned.~~***

The term "prophets," though often applied to those who foretold future events, is often to be understood of those only, who, like common ministers, were engaged in preaching the word of God. Of these, many were occupied in disseminating error, rather than truth; and therefore they are justly called "false prophets." They were indeed, for the most part, very fair in their pretenses, and specious in their appearance; and in this respect were in sheep's clothing; but their views and designs were hostile to the best interests of the Church. They were proud, selfish, covetous, worldly, and oppressive; and when any opportunity arose of gratifying their malignant dispositions, they manifested their true nature, and showed themselves to be no other than "ravenous wolves." Of this kind are they,

***~~1. Who lower the standard of the law.~~***

This was the constant aim of the Pharisees: they explained away the spirituality of the law, and reduced it to a mere letter. Their great object was to reduce all religion to a few unmeaning observances. Against such people our Lord, not only in this, but in almost all his discourses, guarded his hearers. He represented them as hypocrites, and said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, which is hypocrisy."

Against such also it is necessary to guard men in every age. Persons of this description often obtain considerable influence by means of their rank and office in the Church; and make little use of that influence, except to decry all serious religion. Everything beyond their own attainments they call enthusiasm; and profligacy itself finds more favor in their eyes than true piety.

Whatever therefore be their station or their influence, our Lord bids us to "beware of them." If indeed they sustain the sacred office of ministers, then we must "observe and do whatever they enjoin," so far, at least, as it accords with the word of God. But we must not follow them one hair's breadth beyond: we must not be led by their influence, either to reject truth, or to embrace error; but must be on our guard against them; and "follow them only so far as they themselves are followers of Christ."

***~~2. Who corrupt and pervert the Gospel.~~***

Thus it was with the Judaizing teachers: they blended the observation of the Mosaic ritual with an affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ; and thus, in fact, destroyed the very foundations of the Gospel. Paul tells us, that they perverted the Gospel, and introduced another Gospel which was, in truth, no Gospel at all: and he guards us against them with a holy vehemence, which might appear almost to border on impiety: "If anyone, even though he be an angel from Heaven, preaches any other Gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed." "I repeat it," says he: "if an angel from Heaven so corrupts the Gospel, let him be accursed."

But are there no such teachers in later ages? Yes; in every age of the Church they are very numerous. Men are prone to unite something of their own with the meritorious work of Christ, as a joint ground of their hope; and they are very specious in their arguments: they seem as if they had a great zeal for morality, and were only afraid of countenancing licentiousness.

But whatever be their pretenses, we must be on our guard against them. Hear how pointedly the Apostle speaks: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the false circumcision." Beware then of all such people, and of their fatal errors; for "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," either in whole or in part: nor "can any man lay any other foundation than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

***~~3. Who distract and divide the Church.~~***

Many there were of this description even in the Apostolic age; men who would bring forward their own particular notions with a view to draw away disciples after them. Some would insist upon something under the name of science or philosophy: others would deny some of the plainest truths of Christianity: others would plead for a latitude in the indulgence of some particular sins: others would exalt one teacher or Apostle above all the rest. In short, they were men of an unquiet, disputatious, forward, contentious disposition; loving to have any kind of pre-eminence, and to raise their own credit or interest on the divisions and dissensions of the Church.

Now, says Paul, "Mark men of this description, and avoid them." "Receive them not into your house," says John, "neither bid them Godspeed." And well may we be on our guard against them. Many of them are extremely subtle; and some would almost withstand an Apostle himself. But they are only wolves, yes ravenous wolves too, in sheep's clothing; and though they may express much concern for the welfare of the Church, they fatten on the spoils of every fold to which they can get access.

But as it may often be difficult to discern the characters of these men, our Lord lays down,

***~~II. The rule whereby we are to judge of them.~~***

***~~It is a plain, acknowledged truth, that we must judge of trees by their fruit.~~***

No person will expect for a moment to find "grapes on a thorn, or figs on a thistle," common sense will tell him that every tree has its own proper productions; and that even the fruit it does bear will not be found in perfection, unless the tree itself be good.

"A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit; nor can a good tree bring forth evil fruit." The quality of the fruit will infallibly mark the quality of the tree itself. If the fruit be good, it will mark the tree to be deserving of culture and regard; but if the fruit be bad, to merit nothing but excision and the fire.

***~~Precisely in the same manner we must judge of those who call themselves prophets of the Lord.~~***

Twice is it repeated, "By their fruits you shall know them." We should inquire, What is the fruit of their doctrine upon themselves and on their hearers? If the people themselves be proud, worldly, covetous, and despisers of real piety—then we have no reason to think that they will ever produce the opposite dispositions in us. If they be resting on a wrong foundation themselves, they are not likely to build us up upon that which God has laid in Zion. If they be disputatious, contentious, ambitious of pre-eminence among their fellows, they are not calculated to be useful to us in bringing us to a meek, humble, and heavenly frame.

If our access to them be not such as to enable us to judge of their spirit and conduct, then we must endeavor to notice the effect of their doctrines upon others: and if we find that this is altogether unfavorable, we must be on our guard to prevent any evil accruing to ourselves. We may see in the Holy Scriptures, what was the temper, and what the conduct of Christ and his Apostles: and, if we find the word ministered unto us has a tendency to assimilate us to them, we may safely yield ourselves to its influence: but, if it be calculated to lower the standard of real piety, and to make us rest in low attainments, we should beware lest we be led astray by it, and beg of God that nothing may ever "corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus."

It may be said, that this will lead those who ought to be learners to put themselves in the seat of judgment and to become judges even of their own teachers. But it must be remembered that it is one thing to erect a tribunal for the exercising of public judgment, and another thing to form a judgment for the benefit of our own souls. The former is wrong, unless we are officially called to it: but the latter is necessary for our own salvation.

We are commanded "not to believe every spirit; but to test the spirits, whether they be of God." We are told also to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." But this we cannot do, unless we examine what we hear, and bring it to the unerring standard of "the word and testimony."

Though, therefore, we be not qualified to lay down the law for others, we must all judge for ourselves; since on the exercise of that judgment the eternal welfare of our souls depends. And if we feel ourselves incompetent for the work, we may apply to God for help; assured that "he will guide the meek in judgment;" and that "a way-faring man, though a fool, shall not be permitted by him to err," in anything that shall be necessary for the salvation of his soul.

***~~As a proper improvement of the subject before us, we would recommend to your attention the following advice:~~***

***~~1. Take care to profit by the ministry that you do enjoy.~~***

Though we must so far have our judgment exercised respecting the ministry of the word, as to determine whether its general scope be likely to profit us or not, yet, when we have reason to believe that the truth of God is proposed to us, we should not listen to it with critical ears: we should rather receive it with all humility of mind; and "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, able to save our souls." *We should not be satisfied with understanding and approving of what we hear, but should endeavor to reduce it to practice.*"If we be hearers only of the word, and not doers, we deceive ourselves". Let us then look well to the effect produced on our own souls, and, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby."

***~~2. Judge of your own state and character by the fruits you produce.~~***

If we are concerned to judge others, much more are we concerned to judge ourselves: for however wise and pious our instructors may be, it will be of no use to us, unless we be pious ourselves. Nor, however erroneous they be, shall we suffer, if we be taught and sanctified by the Spirit of God. *We must therefore not be contented with adopting right sentiments; but must take care that they influence us in a befitting manner.*We should often bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's word, and examine candidly what advancement we make in the divine life: knowing assuredly that if we be found cumberers of the ground at last, we shall be cut down and cast into the fire! But, if we have abounded in the fruits of righteousness to the glory of our God, we shall be accepted for Christ's sake, and be acknowledged by him as good and faithful servants, who shall forever participate in his joy.

#1333

***~~The Nature and Importance of True Religion~~***

**[Matthew 7:21–23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21â23)**

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

THE criterion, by which we are to judge of our spiritual state, is precisely the same as that whereby we determine the nature and value of things around us. As we know the different kinds and comparative excellence of trees by their fruits, so we may ascertain by our works whether we be *real* Christians, or only *nominal* Christians. It is by these fruits that we shall be tried in the last day; and, according as they have been conformable or not to the will of God, will our eternal doom be fixed.

Of this we are plainly warned in the words before us; which, as they cannot be rendered more intelligible, but would rather be enervated by any attempt to explain them, we shall endeavor to impress on our minds by an application of them to our hearts and consciences. There are *three distinct characters*, to whom, in prosecution of our purpose, we shall address ourselves:

***~~I. To those who make a profession of religion, but walk unworthy of it.~~***

Our Lord not only intimates, but expressly declares, that there are "many" who deceive themselves in the matter of religion. It is of infinite importance therefore that we should have just and accurate notions of vital godliness; and that *we should bring our experience of religion to the touchstone of God's Word*. It is evident that a person may have much which bears the semblance of piety, while he is far from feeling its genuine influence. He may say, "Lord, Lord," that is, he may not only profess to believe in Christ and to submit to his authority, but may profess it with considerable zeal and confidence; he may also preach, and even work miracles, in the name of Christ—and yet be destitute of that which alone can prove him to be a true Christian.

The examples of *Simon Magus*, and of *Judas*, sufficiently confirm this melancholy truth. It becomes us therefore to inquire, not only what *notions*we entertain, but *what effects they produce on our hearts and lives?*

Are we "doing the will of God?"

Are we doing it cheerfully, uniformly, progressively?

Do we walk with God, setting him constantly before us, endeavoring to approve ourselves to him in all we do, and worshiping him weekly in the Church, the family, and the closet?

Do we act towards our neighbor, as we, in a change of circumstances, should expect him to act towards us?

Do we pay a strict regard to truth and honesty in all our dealings?

Do we exercise candor in judging, patience in forbearing, kindness in pardoning, and generosity in relieving?

In short, is *love*the principle that regulates all our conduct?

Are we conscientiously discharging all our relative duties, as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects?

Are we, moreover, duly attentive to the workings of our own hearts, in order to suppress the motions of pride, envy, malice, covetousness, impurity, or whatever else may defile the soul?

Are we studious to mortify sin in the thought and desire, no less than in its outward actings?

Such is the true way to judge of our state: for only in proportion as we are enabled to practice these duties, have we any scriptural evidence of our acceptance with God. We do not mean that the performance of these duties constitutes the whole of religion: but that our faith in Christ is of no further value than as it manifests itself by these fruits. If we have not *oil*in our lamps, whereby we are enabled to make our light shine before men, we shall, like the foolish virgins, be excluded, however confidently we may knock at the gate of Heaven in expectation of admittance.

***~~II. To those who neither practice religion nor profess it.~~***

The text, though not so directly applicable to people of this description, may yet suggest to them abundant matter for most serious reflection. While some deceive themselves by a mere profession of religion, there are others who are satisfied with declaiming against hypocrites; who, *because they do not pretend to any serious religion, imagine themselves absolved from all obligations to it.*But if our Lord does not approve of those who externally honor him, because their lives do not correspond with their professions—can we suppose that he approves of those who openly dishonor and despise him? If they are excluded from his kingdom, shall not these also? If they are disappointed in their expectations, must not the hope of these also be as a spider's web? If they who can appeal to the judge himself that they have done much for him, be bidden to depart—then shall those, who have never done anything for him, find a favorable acceptance?

Let such people then learn, that to hate hypocrisy in others is to little purpose, unless they hate it also in themselves. The same rule of judgment is established for all. We shall all receive according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil. There shall be one doom for those who *abused*the Gospel, and for those who *rejected*it. If to the former it shall be said, "Depart, I never knew you;" of the latter it will be said, "But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slay them before me."

***~~III. To those, who both profess religion, and adorn it by a suitable conduct.~~***

Our Lord expressly declares, that those who *do*the will of his Father, shall enter into his kingdom: and his testimony is confirmed by numberless other passages of Holy Writ. Persons of this description are extremely different from the self-deceiving professors, not only in their practice, but also in their spirit and temper. Instead of making an ostentatious parade of their religion, they are intent rather on cultivating the inward graces. Instead of hastily entertaining an assured confidence, they are jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy. Instead of being forward to boast of what they have done for Christ, they are ashamed of their best services, and ready rather to dread his displeasure for what they have omitted, than to claim his favor for anything they have done. They still have indeed many infirmities: and it is their view of these that keeps them humble, and perhaps sometimes fills them with doubts and fears.

But God will easily distinguish between the *allowed sins*of the most specious hypocrite, and the *lamented infirmities*of the weakest of his children. While he says to one, "Depart you who are accursed," he will address the other in terms of approbation and delight.

Though neither leavened or blemished offerings should be presented in sacrifice to God, yet, if presented as free-will offerings, they were accepted. Thus shall the imperfect services of his people, if offered with a willing mind, come up with acceptance before him, and be recorded at the day of judgment as evidences of their faith and love. Let the believer then go on in a course of uniform and unreserved obedience: and let him not be discouraged because he does not possess talents that attract the admiration of men: but rather let him study to approve himself to God—and he who sees in secret, will before long reward him openly!

#1334

***~~The Wise Builder~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:24–27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24â27)~~***

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

IT is of great importance in preaching the Gospel, to discriminate between the different characters to whom we deliver our message, and to separate the precious from the vile. If this is neglected, the wicked will hold fast their delusions, and the righteous will continue in bondage to their fears: but if we are faithful in the discharge of this part of our duty, those among whom we minister will be led to a knowledge of their own proper character and condition.

Our blessed Lord, at the conclusion of his Sermon on the Mount, shows us *how we should apply our subjects to the hearts and consciences of our hearers*. In the words before us he describes,

***~~I. The character and condition of the godly.~~***

***~~Their character is drawn in simple but comprehensive terms.~~***

"They come to Christ," this is absolutely necessary to their entrance on the divine life. Until they have come to Christ under a sense of their own guilt and helplessness, they have no pretensions to godliness; they are obnoxious to the curse of the law, and the wrath of God.

After they have come to Christ, "they hear his sayings;" they sit at his feet, like Mary," desiring to be fully instructed in his mind and will. With this view they study the Holy Scriptures, and "meditate on them day and night," with this view also they attend the ordinances, and "receive the word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God."

They do not, however, rest in hearing his sayings; but they go forth to "*do*them." They desire to *know*his will in order that they may *do*it. They love the most searching discourses, because by them they discover the evil of their own hearts, and are led to aspire after a fuller conformity to the Divine image. Nor would they rest, until they feel every "thought and desire captivated to the obedience of Christ."

***~~Their condition is exhibited in an apt similitude.~~***

A man who builds his house upon a rock, shows that however temperate the weather may be at the time he is building, he expects tempests to arise: and when the storms do come, he feels himself secure, from a consciousness that his house is so constructed as to withstand their violence.

Now a godly man resembles him in *foresight*and in *security*. He knows that, though he may at present be able to live in some tolerable comfort without religion, it will not be always so. He feels that, when misfortunes, troubles, sickness, and death shall come, he will be miserable without a well-founded hope of immortality. Hence *he will not be satisfied with any religion that will not stand the test of scriptural examination*, for he knows that no other will prove sufficient in the hour of trial.

When the storms blow, and the tempests beat upon him, then he finds the benefit of having "dug deep," and laid his foundation well. Then he stands immoveable secure: the promise and oath of Jehovah are his firm support: Omnipotence itself upholds him. In vain do troubles from without, or temptations from within, assault him: even in the immediate prospect of death itself he retains his confidence, "knowing in whom he has believed," and assured that Jesus will save him to the uttermost.

In a perfect contrast to this, our Lord exhibits,

***~~II. The character and condition of the ungodly.~~***

Their character is the very reverse of that already drawn.

It is worthy of observation, that nothing is said of their coming unto Christ. Here is their radical defect: had they ever come as perishing sinners to him, they should have lacked nothing for the perfecting of their salvation: but they are too proud to stoop to such an humiliating method of obtaining mercy. They do not feel their desert of God's wrath, or their need of a mediator: and therefore, though they will compliment Jesus with the name of Savior, they will not flee to him for refuge as those who know that without him they must forever perish.

They will indeed "*hear*his sayings; but they will not *do*them." They may take a pleasure in hearing the Gospel preached; and, like Ezekiel's hearers, attend the ministration of the word with as much delight, as others listen to a musical performance. They may even show an extraordinary zeal about the ordinances of religion, and may alter their conduct, like Herod, in many things: but *there is some darling lust with which they will not part*. When their besetting sin comes to be exposed, they draw back, unwilling to have their wounds probed, and their lusts mortified. When they are required to "pluck out their right eye, and to cut off their right hand," they turn away, exclaiming, "This is a hard teaching; who can accept it?"

This stamps their character as ungodly. *It is not the commission of any gross sin that constitutes men ungodly; but it is the conscious retaining of some bosom lust*, the conscious rendering of only a *partial obedience*to the Word, the "not having the heart right with God."

The similitude also *reversed*exactly describes their condition.

A person who, because the weather is fair, builds his house without any proper foundation, will, as soon as storms and tempests arise, find reason for regret. The house, for lack of a foundation, will be undermined, and fall. He will then lose all the labor and money that he has bestowed upon it, and perhaps, with all his family, be overwhelmed in its ruins.

The ungodly man "is like him" in *folly* and in *danger*. His religion must come to the test at last: if it bears him through his trials in life, and uphold him with some degree of comfort in death, still it can never bear the scrutiny of the judgment day. Then every man's work will be tried as by fire; and that which does not endure the fire, will be burnt up.

How will the folly of trusting to vain delusions appear in that day! What regret and sorrow will arise in the mind of him who has labored so much for nothing! And how "great will be his ruin," when he shall have no shelter from the wrath of God, and when the goodly fabric that he built shall crush him to atoms!

O that we well considered this; and that all of us would *build as for eternity!*

***~~Let us learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. The necessity of practical religion.~~***

Religion does not consist in mere notions, however just or scriptural; but in a conformity of heart and life to the will of God. We must not, however, mistake, as though our works were the foundation whereon we are to build (that would indeed be a foundation of sand.) Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope; the only rock on which we must build: but then we must show that we do build on him, by the super-structure which we raise upon him: and if the superstructure is not such as to prove that we are founded on him, our hopes of standing in the day of judgment are vain and delusive.

***~~2. The excellence of practical religion.~~***

A house, whose foundation is deep, and fixed upon a rock, will stand, whatever storms or tempests may beat upon it. And thus it is with the practical and consistent Christian. His principles will bear him up in the day of adversity. He may defy all the hosts both of men and devils; for none shall ever separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. And when the most specious structures shall fall, to the confusion and ruin of those who erected them—then the wise builder shall dwell secure amidst the desolating judgments and the wreck of worlds!

#1335

***~~The Effect of Our Lord's Preaching~~***

***~~[Matthew 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.28), [29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 7.29)~~***

"And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."

IT has been thought by many that this section which is called the Sermon on the Mount, was not delivered at one time, but is only a collection of sayings which at different times were used by our Lord. But, as our Lord went through all the cities, towns, and villages of Judea, instructing the people—it is reasonable to suppose that he should frequently deliver the same truths in nearly the same expressions, because the same instructions were necessary for all. The repetition of them therefore, at different times, and at distant places, is no reason at all why they should not now have been delivered all at once—when so great a multitude was attending his ministry, and he had gone up upon a mountain for the purpose of addressing them to more advantage. Moreover, the words before us clearly show that this was one continued sermon; or rather, that these were the chief topics contained in it, together with the principal illustrations of them.

Having successively considered all the different parts of this sermon, we now come to notice,

***~~I. The peculiar character of our Lord's preaching.~~***

We shall not enter upon the subject of his ministry at large, but confine our attention to the discourse before us; which, both in the *matter*and in the *manner*, appears to have been well calculated to make a deep impression on his audience.

The things with which they appear to have been particularly affected, were,

***~~1. His wisdom.~~***

There was an *astonishing depth*in all that he spoke. His knowledge of the divine law was such, as infinitely surpassed all that even their most eminent prophets had ever manifested. David had acknowledged his inability to explore its depth: "I have seen an end of all perfection; but your commandment is exceeding broad." But the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of it were open to the view of Jesus, who saw it in all its spirituality, and in its utmost perfection.

He was able to expose and refute all the false glosses with which their most learned teachers had obscured the law; and to set it forth as reaching no less to the thoughts and intents of the heart, than to the most open actions of the life.

There was also a luminousness in his statements, which, like the light of the sun, carried its own evidence along with it. His illustrations were so apt, so easy, so familiar, so convincing, that every one who was open to conviction was constrained to assent to every word he spoke. Nor did he ever, like the Scribes, dwell upon matters that were altogether useless and unedifying; but he was always on subjects of prime importance, the knowledge of which was necessary for the salvation of the soul.

In a word, as at an early period of his life the doctors in the temple "were astonished at his understanding and answers," so now, on this and many subsequent occasions, his hearers "were amazed and asked: How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

***~~2. His faithfulness.~~***

He never flattered the people by countenancing for a moment their expectation of a temporal Messiah, but showed the spiritual nature of that kingdom which he was come to establish. Moreover, in his reproofs he spared not any: the greatest and most learned among the people were rather the more exposed to his censures, on account of the influence which they exerted over the minds of others. The fallacy of their reasonings, the defectiveness of their morals, and the hypocrisy of their religious acts, (their alms, their prayers, their fastings,) were held up to universal reprobation. All the multitude were warned plainly, that "unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could never enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

They were warned too:  
that they must yield a cordial and unreserved obedience to his instructions;  
that the conscious retaining of any bosom lust would infallibly destroy their souls forever;  
that every sinful affection, though dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand, must be cut off; or else they would assuredly take their portion "in hell-fire."

These were plain truths—not such as the people had been accustomed to hear from their teachers, who only "prophesied smooth things, or amused them with deceits." They were such truths as commended themselves to the consciences of all, and made them feel that they were sinners before God. Every person that heard him bore him witness, that "truly he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin."

***~~3. His authority.~~***

The Scribes were in the habit of founding their instructions on their own fallacious reasonings, or on the dogmas of some of the more learned Rabbis. But our Lord appealed to no authority above his own. He reasoned indeed for the conviction of his hearers; but the ground on which he required every word of his to be received, was his own authority: "*I*say unto you; *I* say unto you." In this he differed from all the prophets that had gone before him: *they*delivered their messages, as from Jehovah; "Thus says the Lord!" But *Jesus*, being himself "God manifest in the flesh, assumed a right to dictate as from himself." "You have heard from others" such or such a thing; but "I say unto you" the very reverse; and require you to receive the word on my authority. To this his hearers were ready to submit, for the miracles which he had already wrought without number had evinced his almighty power and Godhead, and were a standing testimony, that *his every word was to be received with implicit faith and unreserved obedience*.

Doubtless there were many other things conspicuous in his ministrations: his gracefulness and ease, his tenderness and compassion, his zeal and diligence—could not fail of attracting notice; but the points above specified, are those which seem more particularly adverted to in the words of our text.

Such was the preaching of our Lord. Let us now consider,

***~~II. The effect produced by it on his hearers.~~***

They appear to have been exceedingly struck with his address; yet not so affected as we might have hoped. We shall endeavor to point out,

***~~1. How far the effect was good.~~***

The word which we translate "astonished" does certainly imply a very deep impression made upon their minds. This impression consisted partly in admiration, with which they were filled; and partly in conviction, with which they were penetrated—a conviction of the truth, the importance, and the beneficial tendency of all he had spoken. The novelty, united with the circumstances before mentioned, made his ministry appear as superior to that of others, as the effulgence of the sun is greater than the light of a twinkling star. One sentiment evidently pervaded the whole multitude, "Never any man spoke like this man." At the same time they felt in their consciences, that, if this was true religion, they had hitherto been ignorant of it in their minds, and destitute of it in their hearts.

Now these two feelings were doubtless good, inasmuch as they argued an openness of mind, a freedom from offence, and a desire of further instruction. Accordingly we find, that, "when he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him." But, from all that is recorded, we have no reason to conclude that the impression made upon them was altogether such as might have been wished.

***~~2. Wherein it was defective.~~***

They should have been "pierced to their hearts" with a deep sense of their wickedness, and should have been led to cry out like those on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do to be saved?" Without such humiliation as this they could never be truly penitent: they never could abhor themselves, as every penitent must do, in dust and ashes.

They should have also given up themselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. He required all to take up their cross and follow him: but this was effected only to a very small extent, even to the hour of his death. The whole number of his followers amounted at the last to no more than one hundred and twenty.

Hence it is evident, that, whatever effects were produced on this audience, they were only *transient*; and, consequently, that the word preached did not profit the people, "not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."

They should have been brought to a new and heavenly life. Everything that falls short of this is in vain. We must "obey from the heart that form of doctrine into which we are delivered;" just as metal that assumes the shape of the mold whereunto it is poured. But we see not in this audience any . . .  
such tenderness of spirit, such melting of heart,  
such surrender of their souls,  
such transformation of their lives.

They appear only to have been like *Ezekiel's hearers*, who were delighted with his oratory, but were uninfluenced by his reproofs. [Ezekiel 33:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.30-32), "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to *listen*to your words, but they do not put them into *practice*. With their *mouths*they express devotion, but their *hearts*are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for*they hear your words but do not put them into practice*."

***~~Learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. How ineffectual is the Word without the Spirit.~~***

If any words could of themselves convert the souls of men, surely the words of our Lord Jesus Christ would have produced this effect. But even his discourses were often as water spilled upon the ground.

So it was also when his disciples preached: "Paul might plant, and Apollos water, but *God alone can give the increase*." The truth is, that nothing ever has been done, or ever can, for the saving of immortal souls, but by the operation of the Spirit of God.

It is the Spirit who quickens us from the dead.

It is the Spirit who opens the understanding and the heart.

It is "the Spirit who enables us to mortify the deeds of the body."

It is the Spirit who renews us after the Divine image.

When, therefore, we come up to the house of God, let us look, through the means, to Him who alone can render the means effectual for our good. Let us remember that the ministry of Christ himself will produce no saving effects without the Spirit. Let us remember that the Word, by whoever delivered, if accompanied by the Holy Spirit—shall be sharper than a two-edged sword, and be more powerful than "the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces!"

***~~2. In what a lamentable state are the generality of hearers.~~***

Multitudes, where the Gospel is preached with fidelity, will approve the word, and perhaps admire the preacher; but they are apt to put those feelings in the place of true conversion! Surely this is a point that deserves to be well considered. We should judge ourselves, not by our feelings towards the word, or towards him that ministers it to us—but *by the radical and abiding effects produced upon our hearts and lives*. Let it be a matter then of serious inquiry, Wherein does my reception of the word differ from that manifested by the auditors of our Lord? Perhaps I have been often struck, yes, "exceedingly struck," with admiration and conviction: but have I been brought to the exercise of deep contrition, of lively faith, of radical holiness? Know beloved, that unless the word has this effect upon you, instead of being to you "a savor of life unto life, it will be a savor of death unto death." Yes, your state will be less tolerable than even that of Sodom and Gomorrah!

***~~3. What reason we have for thankfulness that we possess the written word.~~***

Many of Christ's hearers probably regretted that they could not retain his discourse in their memory, and that they had it not in their hands for subsequent perusal. And the generality among us have reason to lament our inability to remember what we hear, even when the discourse embraces perhaps only a single point of that which was so diffusively treated by our Lord. But, whether this forgetfulness is our misfortune or our fault—we have this consolation at least, that the sermon of our blessed Lord is in our hands; that we may hear him preach it over to us, as it were, again and again. Yes, that we may even ask him to explain to us every point in it. What an advantage is this! What a value should we set upon it, if now, for the first time, his sermon were put into our hands!

But, alas! because it is accessible at all times, we are apt to make light of it: and many are blind enough to disregard it, because it refers rather to the *precepts*than the *doctrines*of the Gospel. Let us not however so slight our privileges. Let us study this portion of Holy Writ with peculiar attention. Let us endeavor to get every precept wrought into our hearts, and exhibited in our lives. Then shall we be indeed improved by it, and show forth the excellence of Christianity in all its perfection.

#1336

***~~How We Are to Follow Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 8:19–22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.19â22)~~***

"Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

ONE would have supposed, that, in such a history as that of our Lord, none but great things would be recorded; and that smaller incidents would be passed over as unworthy of notice: but the inspired writers, notwithstanding an inexhaustible fund of matter presented itself to their view, and they had previously determined to be as concise as possible, were directed by God to relate many circumstances, which to us would have appeared too insignificant to be mentioned in such a work. And for this we have abundant reason to be thankful: for, had any other plan been followed, the Scriptures would have been less calculated for general use.

Great events occur but rarely, and to few people; whereas small circumstances arise daily and hourly to all; nor is there anyone to whom they may not profitably be applied.

The short conversations recorded in the text appear of little importance; yet are they singularly instructive, and applicable to every human being. They serve in a peculiar manner to put us on our guard against two destructive errors, presumption on the one hand, and procrastination on the other: they guard us, I say, against,

***~~I. Presumption.~~***

***~~This is a common and fatal error in the Christian world.~~***

The Scribe here mentioned was manifestly guilty of it. He came to our Lord professing a determination, which he was but ill qualified to execute. Doubtless his intention was good: he came in a very respectful manner, and voluntarily engaged himself to become a stated follower of Christ: but it is probable that he thought his office and talents, as a Scribe, would procure him a more elevated station among the disciples: and it is evident that he expected to find his adherence to Christ rewarded with an abundance of earthly comforts.

Our Lord therefore rectified his mistake, and told him, that his followers must expect no better fare than he himself had, which yet in some respects was inferior to that which the wild animals enjoyed: for "foxes had their holes, and birds of the air their nests; whereas the Son of Man, though Lord of all, had not where to lay his head."

**The same fault obtains very commonly among ourselves.** Multitudes take up a profession of religion upon grounds equally mistaken: they expect to find ease, and popularity, and honor, as their portion here: and, because such things are promised to the believer in a spiritual view, they are ready to look for them altogether in a worldly view. They see that vital religion ennobles the soul; and therefore they expect the world to estimate it according to its true value. But they are much mistaken.

***~~It is of great importance that this error should be rectified.~~***

Before any person makes a profession of religion, it is requisite that he should consider carefully, what *duties*are required of him, and what *difficulties*are to be encountered by him.

Now the DUTIES are *not*such as the Scribe apprehended: namely, to wait upon Christ in an external profession of his religion (for we may go to the outward ordinances with the greatest punctuality imaginable, and yet be as far from Christ as ever).

Our Christian duties are:  
to mortify the whole body of sin;  
to crucify the old man with the affections and lusts;  
to be increasingly dead to the world, and alive unto God;  
and to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, viewing everything as he viewed it, regarding everything as he regarded it, and doing everything as he did it.

This is a work not to be undertaken lightly, or to be executed easily.

There are also innumerable DIFFICULTIES to be encountered. Whatever a man may think about worldly ease, or popularity, or honor, he will find that he must sacrifice all these, and be, like his Master, "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

He who will follow Christ acceptably, must "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach."

He must engage in a warfare, and maintain it manfully, against all his spiritual enemies.

He must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

If his own life stands in competition with his duty to God, he must sacrifice it cheerfully, accounting death in his cause the greatest honor.

Now these things, I say, should be well considered, and maturely weighed. We should consider . . .  
whether Christ is worthy of all this labor and sorrow;  
whether Heaven will be a sufficient recompense for it;  
and whether God has given us a heart to choose him thus for our portion and eternal great reward?

In this manner we should "count the cost;" and then, from a conviction that the *Pearl of Great Price*is indeed worth all that we possess, we should "sell all, and buy it."

But there is another error, against which we need equally to be guarded; namely,

***~~II. Procrastination.~~***

***~~This indeed is even more common than the former.~~***

The person whom our Lord enjoined to follow him, was already "a disciple," but it was our Lord's will that he should become a more stated attendant on him, and a preacher of his Gospel. But, though this man did not intend to shrink from the duty imposed on him, he thought he had a more imperious duty at the present, and that his obedience to the Savior's call should be postponed to that.

But our Lord would admit of no delay: he intimated to the man, that, however commendable it was to show a filial respect to his deceased parent, and however short the time might be that he would be detained by it—his call to follow him was clear, and of paramount obligation. He intimated further, that the business which he had desired to engage in might just as well be performed by others, who, being destitute of spiritual life, were unfit for the higher office to which he was called: "Let the dead bury their dead; but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

Now, though we may suppose that there was something peculiar in this, and therefore not applicable to ourselves in its full extent, it is evident that our Lord intended to impress on the minds of all this solemn truth, that nothing could justify a disobedience to his commands, or a delay in dedicating ourselves to his service.

But the fact is, that almost every one imagines he has some present engagement of more importance; and, when called to follow Christ, replies, "Let me first go, and do this or that: let me finish my present business; let me get out of my present situation; let me attain such an object." They will not say, "I will never follow Christ;" but they plead some excuse for not following him *at present*.

Alas! how many thousands perish through this delusion! They think "the fit time is not yet come;" they promise themselves "a more convenient season;" and thus they delay, until death cuts short their purposes, puts an end to their life, and begins their eternal doom.

***~~But this evil, like the former, must be banished from us.~~***

If so specious a plea was not admitted by our Lord, what other can be? We must not understand our Lord as pouring contempt on filial duty; for he requires all to "show piety at home, and to requite their parents" to the utmost of their power: but he would have us to know that *the duty of devoting ourselves to him is superior to every other*, and that "the kingdom of God and his righteousness must be sought by us in the first place." If any attention to worldly duties are pleaded for the neglect of our souls, he would remind us that the plea will not be admitted in the day of judgment. On some particular occasions, indeed, "he will have mercy and not sacrifice," but, in the great work of salvation, our duty to God must supersede every other. The care of our soul is the one thing needful; and that must be attended to, whatever else may be neglected. That admits of no delay. This is the only moment that we can call our own: and he who postpones the concerns of his soul until the morrow, has reason to fear that God will say to him, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!" "This should be regarded as the only accepted time, the only day of our salvation."

***~~From hence then we may further learn,~~***

***~~1. How to estimate the things of time.~~***

Our blessed Lord has taught us this effectually by his example. Though he was the Maker and Proprietor of all things, he chose to dwell in a more destitute condition than the beasts of the field or the birds of the air, even without any stated place where to repose his head. *By this he has shown what an empty worthless portion riches are; and how contented the poor should be with their humble lot.*He has shown, that to serve, and honor, and enjoy God is the most desirable state on earth; and that whether we have a larger or smaller portion on our way to Heaven, is scarcely worth a thought. *To follow him is our one duty, and should be our one concern.*If we have much of this world, we should serve him with it*.*If we have but little of this world, we should live, like the birds of the air, in a cheerful dependence on his good providence; contented equally "to abound, or to suffer need;" and feeling that when we "have nothing, we are really possessing all things."

***~~2. How to act in reference to eternity.~~***

*Eternity realities must, so to speak, swallow up every other concern.*We must make no account of anything that is to be sacrificed, or anything that is to be endured, in the service of our God; but must devote ourselves to him without hesitation and without reserve.

If, like the disciple in the text, we are called to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, we should show what exalted thoughts we have of the ministerial office, by our self-denying diligence in the discharge of it. We should "not seek great things for ourselves," or "entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life," but be contented with less of this world's goods, that we may be more at liberty to advance the interests of our Redeemer and the welfare of his Church and people.

But, whatever be our station in the world, we are equally called to "follow Christ;" and on our obedience to that call, our eternal happiness depends. I say not that we should neglect our civil or social duties; for God commands us to perform them with all diligence: but I do say that where the concerns of time and eternity interfere with each other, we must labor, "not for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give unto us."

#1337

***~~Christ Stills The Tempest~~***

***~~[Matthew 8:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.23-27)~~***

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

*THE more we see of Christ, the more we are constrained to admire him.* Every fresh miracle discovers to us more of his unbounded power and grace. The disciples had often been struck with wonder at the miracles wrought by him. They now beheld a miracle in which they themselves were deeply interested, and were stimulated by it to more exalted thoughts of his august character.

It will be profitable to inquire,

***~~I. What it was at which they so marveled.~~***

The disciples in crossing the lake were overtaken by a storm, and were in imminent danger of being overwhelmed by the waves. In this strait they called upon their Lord for help.

They had put to sea in compliance with their Lord's command; yet were they not exempt from the dangers incident to navigation. Christ himself submitted to be thus tossed by winds and waves, and in so doing has taught us what his Church must expect in this tempestuous world. His disciples, having exerted themselves in vain, applied to him.

In this they afford us a good example under our distresses. Perplexed by fear, and agitated by impatience, they addressed him rather in a querulous expostulation. Alas! how feeble is our nature under the pressure of heavy trials! How apt are we to mix our supplications with complaints against God! They showed however, with all their weakness, in whom their trust was, and that they had no hope but in his almighty aid.

He immediately interposed for their deliverance. He could, if he had seen fit, have prevented the storm; but then the disciples would not have discovered their own weakness, nor have seen this marvelous display of their Master's power.

It is for the same gracious ends that he permits our troubles; and, when they have brought us to him in fervent supplication, he will deliver us from them.

He arose from his pillow, and with authority rebuked the storm. Instantly the boisterous winds were hushed, and the roaring billows silenced. Though at other times the waters after a storm remained in a perturbed state, at his command they subsided to a perfect calm.

Such is the effect his word produces on "the tempest-tossed soul." *Terrors*that appalled the conscience, are dissipated as a cloud. *Temptations*that agitated the frame, are disarmed of their power*. Afflictions*, that overwhelmed the soul, are made to yield "the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Well might they marvel on an occasion like this. Nothing seems so much beyond the control of man as the winds and waves; but even these heard the voice and obeyed the will of the Lord Jesus. Well therefore might the disciples exclaim, "What kind of man is this!"

So stupendous a miracle should lead us to consider,

***~~II. What views of Christ will naturally arise from this display of his power.~~***

The disciples, through their ignorance and perplexity, scarcely knew what to think. But to us his conduct naturally suggests the following truths:

***~~1. Christ is the true and living God.~~***

His sleeping, through fatigue, showed him to be a *man*like ourselves; but his exercise of such power proved him to be *God*also. Moses had opened the sea by his wonder-working rod; and Elijah had made a path through Jordan by his mantle: but both confessedly wrought their miracles in dependence on God. Jesus, on the contrary, performed this miracle by his own power: and who, but God, is sufficient for such things? It is spoken of as the peculiar prerogative of God to rule the sea. Let us then bear this in mind in all our addresses unto Jesus. Let us indeed make this the ground of our application to him.

***~~2. He is never unmindful of his people's troubles, however he may appear to be so.~~***

The Apostles rather reflected on him as though he "cared not" for them. But his providential care was not the less exerted because he was asleep.

We also are ready on some occasions to think him unmindful of us. We too often adopt the impatient language of the Church of old—but the answer he gave to them, is equally applicable to us. We never need to be afraid if we are embarked with him. His ark may be tossed about and driven by tempestuous winds; but though everything else should perish, that would outride the storm.

***~~3. He will not withhold his aid on account of the weakness of our faith.~~***

The excessive fears of his disciples showed their want of faith. He therefore reproved them for having so little confidence in him. But he would not on that account refuse their request. In us also he too often sees the workings of unbelief: but he will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss." He frequently, when on earth, relieved those who doubted his power or his willingness to help them. It is well for us that he still exercises the same pity and forbearance. Doubtless, however, the stronger our faith, the more speedy and effectual, for the most part, will our deliverances be.

***~~4. He is as able to save us out of the greatest difficulties as from the least.~~***

We are ever prone to limit him in the exercise of his goodness; nor are even the most signal manifestations of his power sufficient to correct this propensity. But he who created and upholds all things can overrule them as he pleases; and his promises to his people are fully commensurate with their needs. Let us then go to him under our most pressing difficulties, and rest assured, that he is both *able*and *willing*to save us to the uttermost!

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. To the disobedient.~~***

God has been pleased to bestow on man the gift of reason, and to leave him a free agent in all which he does. Alas! how vilely do the generality abuse this transcendent mercy! They are more regardless of the divine command than even winds and waves. And is this the end for which God has so distinguished us? Is the privilege of volition granted us to encourage our revolt? Is it not rather, that our obedience to God may be a rational service? Let the disobedient stand amazed at their impiety. Let them wonder that the Divine forbearance is so long exercised towards them. Surely they have abundant need to offer that petition. O that they may be more impressed with their danger than ever the disciples were!

***~~2. To those who truly endeavor to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.~~***

All seasons are not alike in the spiritual, any more than in the natural, world. The greatest difficulties may encompass you, when you have the clearest evidence that you are in the way of duty. But know that *your Lord is an all-sufficient, ever-present help*. Do not then shun the path of duty because of any trial that may beset you. In the midst of all, possess your souls in faith and patience; and let the triumphant words of former saints be your song. Thus from personal experience you shall have richer discoveries of your Savior's care and love.

#1338

***~~Mercy Before Sacrifice~~***

***~~[Matthew 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.13)~~***

"Go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

PETER, speaking of his brother Paul, says, that in his writings there are "some things hard to be understood." The same may be said, in some degree, respecting all the inspired writers. There is, in many of their statements, a *height*which cannot be explored, and a depth which *cannot*be fathomed. Even the *precepts*which they give us are by no means always plain.

Some precepts are so *figurative*, that we are of necessity, constrained to divest them of their high coloring, in order to reduce them to the standard of practical utility. Thus, when it was said, "Whoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also," we cannot take it altogether in a literal sense, but must understand it as inculcating only a very high degree of patient submission to the injuries inflicted on us.

Some precepts are *obscure*, on account of the unqualified manner in which they are expressed: "Give to him that asks you; and from him that would borrow from you, turn not away." Were this precept followed in its full extent, the richest man would soon have nothing either to give or lend.

Some passages, like my text, are difficult because, while they are expressed in the most positive terms, they are to be understood only in a comparative sense.

Our Lord never intended to say that God did not require sacrifice, for the whole Mosaic law was written to show what sacrifices God did require. His meaning was that mercy was in itself far superior to sacrifice; and that, where the two came into competition with each other, mercy was to be preferred to sacrifice, and to be exercised to the neglect of sacrifice.

That we may enter fully into this subject, let us consider,

***~~I. The lesson that is here commended to us.~~***

Our blessed Lord, after calling Matthew the publican to the apostleship, condescended to attend a feast which his new disciple had prepared for him. To this feast many publicans and sinners were invited; and our Lord did not disdain to sit down to eat in their company, and to converse familiarly with them. For this he was blamed by the Pharisees, who thought such a condescension, on his part, a violation of his duty both to God and man: to *God*, who bids us "not to sit with the wicked;" and to *man*, to whom it must appear an encouragement to vice.

But our Lord vindicates himself, by showing, that such people were most likely to profit from his instructions, as the sick are from the physician; and that his conduct was in perfect accordance with their own Scriptures, wherein this lesson was plainly inculcated, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The import of this he bade them to learn: "Go and learn what that means."

Now, the meaning of it is,

***~~1. That moral duties are more important than those which are merely ritual.~~***

To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. You will find the utmost contempt poured on ritual observances, when devoid of piety: but in all the Bible you will not find one real exercise of grace despised. The smallest good imaginable you will see commended, and the will accepted for the deed. In moral duties there is a real and inherent excellence: in every one of them there is, what I may justly call, a conformity to God himself, to "whose image we attain by the universal exercise of righteousness and true holiness." They are good at all times, and under all circumstances. In contrast, ritual observances have no intrinsic value in them, except as being appointed of God for his honor, and as being made use of by God for our good.

For instance, what is there in the *seventh*day of the week, or the seventh part of our time? As far as regards the morality of that appointment, it might as well have been a third or a tenth or a twentieth part of our time.

And what is there in *sacrifices?* The killing of a bullock is in itself no better than the killing of a dog: and if God had so ordained, the blood of swine would have been as good as the blood of bulls and of goats.

As commanded by God, even the slightest ordinance is to be regarded with the deepest reverence: but, divest even Sabbaths and sacrifices of their divine authority, and I say again, they are of no value.

Hence David says, "You desire not sacrifice; else would I give it: you delight not in burnt-offering." And Samuel, reproving Saul, puts to him this pointed interrogation, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams."

**2. That, where they come in competition with each other, ritual duties must give way, and be superseded by the moral** **duties.**

The whole course of our blessed Lord's conduct upon earth attests this truth. On many occasions he, if I may so say, violated the Sabbath-day, performing his miracles then, as on any common day, and ordering a man to carry his bed upon the Sabbath-day. On account of these apparent violations of the Sabbath he was constantly accused as disregarding the laws of Moses and of God.

In the twelfth chapter of Matthew's Gospel we are informed that he authorized his disciples upon the Sabbath-day to pluck some ears of corn, and rub out the grain and eat it. The act was perfectly legal in itself: but, being done on a Sabbath-day, it was construed as a threshing of the wheat, and, consequently, as a work forbidden on that day. But our Lord justified them from the example of David, who, with his followers, had, contrary to an express command, eaten the show-bread which was the exclusive portion of the priests. He further justified them from the countless occupations of the priests in the temple, which turned the Sabbath, that should have been a day of rest, into a day of more than ordinary labor. These being *works of necessity*, the one for satisfying of their hunger, and the other for the serving of the altar, the ritual command was made void, being superseded by a call of more urgency, and of paramount obligation.

Such being the lesson here inculcated, let us consider,

***~~II. The vast importance of learning it.~~***

The manner in which our blessed Savior speaks, shows that this lesson is far from being generally understood; while yet it is so important, that it ought to be diligently studied by every child of God. It is a lesson of vast importance,

***~~1. For the forming of our principles.~~***

In the true spirit of the Pharisees of old, many among ourselves lay a very undue stress on outward observances, as recommending us to God. But the answer of Balaam to Balak, who had consulted him on this subject, gives us the true view of it: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" This was the question put to Balaam. His answer was, "He has showed you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

To the same effect is the declaration of Paul: "The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." It is the inward disposition of the mind that God regards, and not the service of the body. "The sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit is, in his sight, of more value than the cattle upon a thousand hills." *We must not, then, form a judgment of our spiritual state by our punctuality in outward duties—but by the depth of our humiliation, the simplicity of our faith, and the integrity of our souls in the way of holy obedience*. To this must we attend as of absolute and indispensable necessity: and any principle opposed to this will only deceive us to our ruin.

***~~2. For the regulation of our conduct.~~***

There must, of necessity, be times when our *ritual*duties and *moral*duties clash with each other. To wait upon God in the public assembly of his people is a duty which we all owe to him, and which should not be omitted without great necessity. But who will say that an attendance upon a sick and dying person is not a sufficient cause for neglecting, for a season, the house of God? Who will say, that if there was a general conflagration in a town, the inhabitants would be ill employed in extinguishing the fire, even though it were the Sabbath-day?

True, we must take care that we do not pretend a necessity which does not really exist: for we cannot deceive God; and therefore it befits us to be on our guard that we deceive not our own souls. But, supposing that we exercise an impartial judgment in determining the question before us, we may be sure that God will approve of the conduct that is founded on the rule before us.

There is a *medium*to be observed between a superstitious adherence to forms and a profane neglect of them: and it must be our endeavor so to approve ourselves to God, that we may have his Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are accepted by him.

#1339

***~~Two Blind Men Healed~~***

***~~[Matthew 9:27–30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.27â30)~~***

"When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it."

WE are so much accustomed to read and hear the miracles of our Lord, that the recital of them produces little or no effect upon us. But had we seen the multitudes of diseased people continually coming to him, crying after him, and breaking in upon his retreats when he was in the houses of his friends, we would have been greatly astonished.

In the passage before us we have a specimen of their importunity: two blind men, having in vain supplicated our Lord's assistance in the street, followed him into a house, and there obtained that relief, which, from prudential considerations perhaps, he had not chosen to impart in the presence of the people.

Waving many observations which will arise, when another miracle, exactly similar to this, shall be considered, we shall fix our attention upon two things, which are very strongly marked in the words before us:

***~~I. The object of faith.~~***

The whole sacred volume is to be received by us; but God has revealed in it the proper object of our faith: his perfections are the foundation on which we build; and though every perfection is equally an object of our love, yet there seems a propriety in regarding his power as the more immediate object of our faith; because it will be to no purpose to believe him well-disposed towards us, if we do not also believe him *able*to effect his gracious intentions.

In confirmation of this we may observe, that in the most eminent instances of faith, the power of God has been chiefly regarded.

And in the most remarkable instances of unbelief, his power has been principally doubted. Moreover God in a peculiar manner points out this attribute to our noticed, expostulates with us for not attending to it sufficiently, and exhorts us to take it for our strength.

The address of our Lord to the two suppliants leads us further to remark,

***~~II. The importance of faith.~~***

Our Lord makes more inquiry after faith than after any other grace. He overlooked many faults, where faith was exercised; and disregarded everything that was apparently good, if this were wanting. He invariably bestowed the highest encomiums upon faith; and made it, not only a condition, but the very measure of his favors.

***~~Application.~~***

***~~1. To unbelievers.~~***

If men may manifest a very considerable earnestness about salvation, and yet leave room to doubt whether they really believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ, how evidently must they be unbelievers, who have no solicitude about their eternal welfare! To judge of your faith, see whether you resemble these blind men in your consciousness of your need of a Savior, and your conviction of the sufficiency of Christ to save you! Your need of mercy at his hands is as real and as urgent as ever theirs was: and, if you really believe in him, you are going to him with the same importunity as was expressed by them: nor will you account any time or place unfit for the silent offering of your requests.

Think then, what will you answer to the Lord when he shall inquire respecting your faith! And what will you do, if he should say, Be it unto you according to your faith? Alas! too many of you need no greater curse than this. If you have no more pardon, peace, or glory, than in proportion to your present exercise of faith, the great mass of you, it is to be feared, will be eternally miserable indeed. O remember the fate of the unbelieving Israelites; and flee to Christ, every one of you, lest you perish after their example of unbelief.

***~~2. To those who are weak in faith.~~***

Can you see the multitude of our Savior's miracles, and entertain any doubt of his sufficiency? or the examples of so many who were strong in faith, and not be ashamed that, with your superior advantages, you should ever indulge unbelief? O fix it in your minds that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and to keep that which you have committed to him. Believe in the Lord, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall you prosper. But if you will not believe, neither shall you be established.

***~~3. To believers in general.~~***

*You will find that peace of mind, purity of heart, victory over the world, and indeed all that you hold dear, vary according to the weakness or stability of your faith.*Beware then of ever "limiting the Holy One of Israel." Beg that "what is yet lacking in your faith may be perfected." And seek to become "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

#1340

***~~Our Duty to The Benighted World~~***

***~~[Matthew 9:36–38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.36â38)~~***

"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

IT is an honor to the present age, that religion has assumed her true character of diffusive benevolence. There is much going forward in the circulation of the Scriptures in the different languages of the world, and in the sending out of missions to every quarter of the globe. But, when I say that there is much going forward, I speak only comparatively with what has been done for ages past: for, in truth, all that is done at present is little more than a drop in the ocean.

It is a comfort, however, to know, that the proper office of religion is better understood; and that piety, which, until lately, has been circumscribed within the narrow limits of a man's own family, now comprehends in its efforts the whole family of mankind. This was the religion which our Lord inculcated on his first disciples, and which, from the words before us, I will take occasion to recommend to you.

Let us then consider,

***~~I. The state of the world at large.~~***

Doubtless our Lord spoke primarily of the Jews, whose condition, in respect of piety, was truly deplorable. The authorized teachers were altogether intent on their own temporal interests, while they forgot entirely the spiritual and eternal interests of the people: so that the people were really as sheep without a shepherd. Happy would it be if there were not but too much occasion for similar complaints in the present day; and that not only among other churches, but our own. However, it is of *heathens*rather that I propose at this time to speak. They, as my text intimates, are in a state,

***~~1. Of destitution.~~***

The people "fainted" through their want of that nourishment which their priests ought to have administered. And among the heathen world there are multitudes who feel their need of mercy, but know not how to attain it. Nothing can be more clear, than that the most uncivilized savages have an idea of some Superior Being, whom they conceive themselves to have offended, and whom they wish to propitiate. For this end, they have recourse to penances, and pilgrimages, and self-inflicted tortures. It is quite afflictive to read of the rites prescribed by the priests of different religions for the obtaining of favor with their deities. They seem to have exhausted their ingenuity in searching out modes the most painful, the most odious, the most absurd.

And what is the effect? The people, after all their self-denying efforts, faint as much as ever, under a sense of the fruitlessness of their endeavors, and with fearful anticipations of their future doom.

Like *Hagar*, when her little stock of water was consumed, they see no prospect before them, but to lie down and die. No angel have they at hand to point out the fountain; which, though hidden, is close at hand. And this is the state of many hundreds of millions of our unhappy fellow-creatures, even of the whole heathen world. Would to God it were not also the state of millions among ourselves!

***~~2. Of danger.~~***

Sheep, without a shepherd are exposed to dogs and wolves, who may tear them to pieces at their will. In like manner, are the heathen world exposed to the assaults of that roaring lion, who is never satiated with his prey; even with *Satan*, who prowls throughout the world, seeking whom he may devour. By *temptations*too on every side, as well as by their own *indwelling lusts*, are they assailed; so that there is indeed no hope of escape for them: for no shepherd have they, to warn them of their danger, or to point out to them a place of refuge. A Deliverer, indeed, is at hand with them, if they did but know where to find him, and how to make their application to him. But they have no man to care for their souls, or to give them the information which they stand in need of. Hence "they perish for lack of knowledge," not indeed like sheep, by a mere bodily destruction, but under a load of guilt, that sinks them into everlasting perdition; even into "that lake of fire and brimstone," where they shall "lie down in everlasting burnings."

And can we doubt what is,

***~~II. Our duty towards them?~~***

Our blessed Lord has taught it us: has taught it,

***~~1. By his own example.~~***

He "had compassion on the multitudes." And whence is it that we are so unfeeling towards them? Is it that the heathen are in so much better state than the Jews who attended the ministry of our Lord? Were they who had God in the midst of them by his word and ordinances, such objects of compassion; and are not they who are altogether "without God in the world?"

I say then, again, Whence is it that we perhaps, in the course of our whole lives, have never spent one hour in mourning over their unhappy condition, or in praying to God for them? Had the smallest interest of our own been in jeopardy, we would have thought of it, and devised means to avert the impending calamity. But for their souls we have felt no anxiety; nor have we put forth any exertions for their eternal welfare. Truly, we have lain in more than brutish apathy, when we ought to have wept over them, as our Lord over Jerusalem: and to have had great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts, as Paul had for his Jewish brethren.

***~~2. By a particular command.~~***

"Pray," says he, "to the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." And who is "the Lord of the harvest," but Jehovah; for "all souls are his." And who but He can "thrust forth laborers into his harvest?"

For ministration at *home*, where ease, and honor, and emolument, are found, multitudes are ready to obtrude themselves, and to solicit employment in the sacred office.

But when God inquires for laborers in the *heathen*world, and says, "Who will go for us?" how few are found who are ready to reply, "Here am I; send me!" No, in truth: there are excuses enough then: one, like Moses, has not the qualifications for so great a work: another has some temporal occupation inconsistent with it: and another has married a wife, or intends to do so, and therefore cannot go. *Much labor and little pay, is not the preferment which the generality of us desire*. A thousand difficulties rise up to view; and every mole-hill becomes a mountain. And who but God can overcome this sad reluctance? Who can inspire men with zeal sufficient for this holy undertaking? None but He who formed the universe: none but He who called Andrew and Peter from their nets, and Matthew from the receipt of custom. "He has all hearts in his hands, and turns them wherever he will;" and can convert a proud and persecuting Saul into a humble, loving, and laborious servant of Christ.

We should therefore pray to him to effect this. He is a prayer-hearing God, and will not allow us to seek his face in vain. The whole night did Jesus spend in prayer, previous to his calling to himself his twelve disciples. And who can tell, if we were alike earnest in prayer, what might be effected in behalf of the heathen world? At all events, we are bound to use the means: and we have every reason to believe, that if "we would give no rest to our God," agreeably to his direction, he would arise for our help, and get himself praise throughout the earth.

***~~Improvement.~~***

***~~1. Be thankful for the blessings which you yourselves enjoy.~~***

Are you "faint," from a sense of your own guilt and helplessness? You have those at hand who are ready to offer you "the cup of salvation." Are you exposed to danger? You have shepherds to warn you of it, and to point out to you that Savior who is both able and willing to deliver. It may be that some of you understand, by painful experience, what it is to feel a sense of God's wrath upon the soul, and to be harassed with "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." O, what thanks do you owe to God, that the way of life is so plainly opened to you, and that you are so urgently called to walk in it! Be thankful, then, and avail yourselves of the privileges which you enjoy, and which "many prophets and kings have sought in vain."

***~~2. Endeavor to extend them to the whole world.~~***

This is the bounden duty of all, to whom the Gospel comes. Ministers and people are alike bound to use the efforts which are within their power. The poorest and weakest in the universe may lift up his soul in prayer. I call upon you, then; on you especially who are sensible of your own privileges; surely it will be strange indeed if you do not show a zeal for God. who has so distinguished you; and if you do not endeavor to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves enjoy. To you who are educating for the ministry I would particularly commend this subject. Not only pray that God would send forth others into his harvest. but beg him to give you grace. that you may be ready to go yourselves.

#1341

***~~The Limited Commission of the Apostles~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:5–7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.5â7)~~***

"These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

AFTER our blessed Lord had chosen his twelve servants whom he called apostles, he gave them a commission to go forth and proclaim his advent, just as his forerunner John the Baptist had already done. But considering the unbounded benevolence of our blessed Lord and that he was really come in order to save the whole world, we are rather surprised at the charge he gave them. especially as contrasted with the commission which he gave them after he was risen from the dead, and which is now given to all who preach in his name. We propose to consider,

***~~I. The restriction imposed on them.~~***

They were commanded to proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

By "the kingdom of Heaven" was meant the kingdom which the Messiah was appointed to establish. The expression "the kingdom of Heaven" was generally so understood at that time; and the people to whom the Apostles were sent were in no danger of misapprehending the tidings which they heard. The whole nation of the Jews were then expecting their Messiah: and though they formed very erroneous notions respecting the nature of his kingdom. they were persuaded that he was to be a King and to reign over them, and to put all his enemies under his feet. The same proclamation and in the very same terms had been made by John the Baptist and by our Lord himself: so that the office of the Apostles was not to bring new tidings to the people's ears, but only to call their attention to the truth which had already been extensively circulated throughout the land.

But in the execution of their commission, they were restricted to the house of Israel.

They were "not to go into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into any city of the Samaritans" but to give an exclusive attention to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The Jews, though professing to belong to God, were really "lost sheep," having gone astray from him, and wandered far from his fold.

But whence arose this restriction, and this extraordinary partiality towards the Jewish people? It arose, I apprehend, partly from the relation in which they stood to God, and partly from the very tidings themselves which were at that time to be proclaimed.

The Jews were God's peculiar people, with whom he had entered into covenant, and who had been consecrated to him by the sacred rite of circumcision. They were regarded by God as "his first-born;" who were therefore entitled to a priority in everything which related to their Father's inheritance. Besides, they had been taught to expect the Messiah to be born among them, descended, like them, from Abraham, and of the family of David, whose throne he was destined to inherit. To them, therefore, the tidings would be welcome: and when he should have been received by them who were best capable of judging of his pretensions to the Messiahship, he might with greater propriety and credibility be commended to the Gentiles as their Savior also: whereas, if he should be in the first instance proclaimed as a Savior to the Gentiles, a suspicion might naturally arise, in the minds of those to whom he was proclaimed, that he was unwarrantably obtruded upon them, and that his title to that august character would not stand the test of careful inquiry.

In addition to this, it had been foretold, that "the law should go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and, consequently, the Gospel must first be established there, in order that it might proceed from thence. Hence, even after our Lord's resurrection, it was enjoined on the Apostles to preach the Gospel, "beginning at Jerusalem," and though the restriction before referred to was then withdrawn, a priority was still reserved to God's ancient people; "salvation being intended for the Jew first, and then for the Gentile."

With thankfulness to God, we now proceed to notice,

***~~II. The liberty accorded to us.~~***

The tidings which we are commissioned to declare are more full and complete than those which the Apostles were then authorized to announce.

They could declare only that "the kingdom of Heaven was at hand," but we proclaim, that it is actually established; that the Lord Jesus Christ has vanquished all the powers of darkness, "triumphing over them openly upon his cross," and, in his ascension, "leading captivity itself captive." He is now enthroned at the right hand of God; and will, in due season, "put all enemies under his feet." True it is, that though his kingdom is at present but very limited, it shall be extended over the face of the globe, and all the kingdoms of the world be comprehended under it. This we, no less than the Apostles, are authorized to declare: and while our authority is the same,

***~~Our commission is far more extended than theirs.~~***

Wherever there is a lost sheep, whether among Jews or Gentiles, there are we at liberty to invite the perishing creature to the good Shepherd, and to bring him home to the fold of God. The commission given to us is to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature," and wherever there is a rebel against God, we may call upon him to lay down his weapons, and to submit to the gentle yoke of Jesus, who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Nay more: we are authorized to assure every sinner under Heaven, that if only he comes to Jesus, "he shall in no wise be cast out." Cast out, do I say? He shall, from being an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world—however far he may have been from God, he shall be brought near by the blood of Christ: and, from being a "stranger and a foreigner, he shall be a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God."

There is not a blessing enjoyed by any subject of the Redeemer's kingdom, which shall not be freely imparted unto him: and not in this world only, but also in the world to come. Every subject of the Redeemer's kingdom shall himself be made a king. He must indeed as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" but victory shall surely be secured to him; and, having overcome his spiritual enemies, he shall be a partaker of his Savior's glory, and "sit down with him upon his throne, even as he also overcame and has set down with his Father upon his throne."

Such is the kingdom of God, as it was preached by Paul; and to a participation of it I invite every soul that hears me this day.

***~~Now then learn,~~***

***~~1. What evidence there is of our commission.~~***

You may well inquire what authority we have to declare these things; and expect that we should be able to adduce some testimony from God himself, as a seal to our ministry. Behold then, in a spiritual sense, the very testimonies with which the Apostles themselves were honored. Did they "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils?" Such are the effects wrought by our Gospel also, on the souls of men. Say, brethren, Are there none of you that were once sick and leprous, yes, "dead in trespasses and sins," and "led captive by the devil at his will;" and who have, through the ministry of the word, been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son?" I trust that there are among you such "seals to our ministry," and such witnesses for God in this sinful world.

But where are these effects ever produced by any other doctrine than, that which is here announced? Where are men "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," by any other doctrine than that which Paul preached, the doctrine of the Cross? If, then, this doctrine has wrought effectually among you, and be the only doctrine which is the power of God to the salvation of men, then have you an evidence that "the kingdom of God is come unto you."

***~~2. What benefit you will derive from receiving our testimony.~~***

Form to yourselves an idea of all that the wisest and greatest monarch can bestow upon his most endeared favorites, and you will fall infinitely short of what the Lord Jesus will confer on you.

***~~3. what necessity is laid upon you to submit to Christ.~~***

If those who slighted the ministrations of the Apostles, who could only say that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand, were in a state "more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah"—then what do you think must be the state of those who pour contempt upon it now that it is established? I pray God, my brethren, that this guilt may never attach to you; lest, in the last day, the Savior himself issue respecting you that awful sentence, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me!"

#1342

***~~Diffusion of The Gospel, A Duty~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.8)~~***

"Freely you have received, freely give."

COMPASSION for the needs and miseries of men is a very distinguished feature of the Christian character. It is a lovely grace, even when it has respect only to the temporal necessities of mankind. But it is of a far higher stamp, when it is called forth by a view of their spiritual needs, and seeks to administer to their eternal welfare.

Such was the feeling which our blessed Lord and Savior chiefly manifested on the occasion before us, and sought to diffuse among those who were to be his more immediate followers and servants: "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Then having, on the following day, called his twelve Apostles, he bade them go out and preach, saying, "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand;" and, in confirmation of their word, to work the most benevolent miracles; that so the people might have, in the healing of their bodily disorders, an emblem and a pledge of what He was come to effect upon their souls. Then, reminding them how sovereignly he had acted in selecting them to this high office, he added, "Freely you have received; freely give."

This direction of his to the Apostles will afford me a fit occasion to set before you,

***~~I. The blessings which God has freely communicated to us.~~***

Those blessings which had been conferred upon the Apostles were great.

The Apostles had been called, from their several occupations, to follow their Lord; and had been drawn with a power which they were not able to withstand. They had been selected from all the people of Israel, to be more especially instructed by their Lord in the nature of his religion, which he was about to establish: for to them did our Lord explain in secret the truths which he had delivered only in parables to his public auditories. To them also was given an experience of what they knew, by an operation of divine grace upon their souls; and an authority also was vested in them, to proclaim to others the truths which had been so far revealed to themselves. They were empowered, also, to work the most astonishing miracles in confirmation of their word: and, ultimately, to become instructors, yes, and instruments of salvation also, to millions of the human race. Finally, their names were written in the Lamb's book of life; and they were taught to look forward to all the felicity of Heaven, as their sure and everlasting inheritance.

Not one of these things had they merited: not one of these things had they purchased or procured to themselves:*all these blessings*, whether official or personal, *had been freely given to them, as an act of sovereign grace on the part of their Lord and Savior*: and, in reference to every one of the mercies, our Lord could say, "You have not chosen me; but I have chosen you."

Nor are the blessings which have been given to *us*less worthy of notice.

True, we are not called to be Apostles, or to receive truth by inspiration, or to work miracles: but if we fall short of them in what relates to their *official*character, we are not a whit below them in all that is *personal*. "To us it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven;" while the great mass of mankind are yet lying in heathen darkness, without so much as one ray of light to guide them into the way of peace. I may add, too, that a faithful Gospel ministry is a great mercy, of which millions of those who possess the Christian Scriptures are yet destitute. But what, if we can say that our eyes have been opened to behold the truth, and our hearts opened to embrace it? What, if we can say that we have been "quickened from our death in trespasses and sins;" and that we have been enabled to give up ourselves to Christ, as his stated and avowed followers? What, if we have a good hope that "our names are written in Heaven" and that we have been "begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for us?" Have not we reason to bless our God?

Then, as to the *freeness*of these gifts; what have we ever done to merit them? Must we not acknowledge, in reference to every one of them, that God has gone before us with the blessings of his goodness? and that, in reference to them all, "He was found by those who sought him not, and made known to those who inquired not after him?"

Know you then, brethren, that as to the external ministration of the Gospel, it is what "you have freely received;" and if you have been made partakers of an inward experience of its power, for that also *you are altogether indebted to the free and sovereign grace of God*.

Let us, then, proceed to consider,

***~~II. The obligation which God has thereby entailed upon us.~~***

The Apostles received not their gifts for themselves only, but for the good of others. In like manner must we consider the benefits which we have received, as talents to be improved by us for the honor of our God, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures. This is true, even in relation to our *faculties*, our *property*, our *influence*in the world; but much more is it true in reference to the *possession of divine knowledge*, which is so distinguishing a mercy, and of such infinite importance to every man. To all, then, I say, "Freely give;" for,

***~~1. The call on us is as urgent as it was on the Apostles.~~***

Were the bulk of the *Jewish*nation ignorant; then what must the *heathen*be, who possess not one of their advantages? Cast an eye over a map of the globe, and see how small a part of the world is enlightened with divine truth. Not so much as the very name of Jesus is known to more than one-sixth part of the world; or, if known, is known only to be hated and abhorred. Go through the world, as the Apostles went through Judea, and say whether you will not *find the souls of men diseased and leprous, and under the power of Satan*, as much as ever their bodies were whom the Apostles were authorized and empowered to heal. Yes, truly, "the whole world lies in wickedness," and "under the power of the Wicked-one;" and it is the Gospel only that can heal them!

I therefore call upon you to send forth the Gospel, by any means in your power. Individually, I well know, you can do but little; but in concert you may do much. What might not the Christian world effect, if they all felt their obligations to the extent that they ought, and labored to fulfill them to the extent that they might? At all events, do you rise to the call of duty; and give as liberally as you have freely received.

***~~2. The obligation, too, is as great on us as on them.~~***

We are not to "hide our talent in a napkin," or, if we do, we must expect to be condemned as "unprofitable servants." We must give an account of our stewardship, and answer for every talent committed to our charge. On the score of responsibility, therefore, we are as much bound to exert ourselves as ever the Apostles were. But I am ashamed to urge such an argument as that.

Shall those who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and been renewed by his Holy Spirit, need any other motive to exertion than gratitude, especially when called to such a service as this? Should not "the love of Christ constrain them" to do all that they can in this blessed work? Let me hope that you need no other impulse than this; and that now, with one heart and one hand, you will combine in aiding the society whose cause I plead.

***~~3. The opportunity, also, is as favorable as ever theirs was.~~***

Was there at that time an expectation of the Messiah's advent? So is there now, to a vast extent, both among Jews and Gentiles. An idea seems to be gradually pervading the whole world, that one great religion is about to be established, to which all others will give way. And the Christian world, in particular, is beginning, and to an extent never known before, to feel its obligations, and to fulfill its duties in this respect. The diffusion of the Holy Scriptures in the different languages of the earth; the sending out of missionaries from almost every different church in Christendom; the zeal that is spread among all classes of society; and the liberality that is exercised; all bode well respecting the success of our endeavors. For, beyond all doubt, this zeal and liberality proceed from God: and what he has thus been pleased to excite, we may reasonably hope he will accompany with his blessing.

#1343

***~~Wisdom and Innocence to Be United~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.16)~~***

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

IT is a favorite idea with many, that a great part of the Scriptures was written for those only of the Apostolic age; and that it is improper for us to apply to ourselves what was delivered to them. Now we readily grant that *some things*had a peculiar and primary reference to the Apostles, and to others of that day; and that, as far as anything was peculiar to them, it would be wrong for us to take it to ourselves. But we must assert, on the other hand, that as far as we are in the same circumstances with them, what was spoken to them is strictly and properly applicable to us. What was delivered to the Apostles themselves in this address of our Lord, was only partially applicable to them at the time it was spoken. The foregoing part of the chapter was suited to them in their first mission through the land; but what is contained in our text and to the end of the chapter was comparatively inapplicable to them until after the day of Pentecost: yet, as far as circumstances required it, they were to regard it from the first moment that it was spoken to them. Thus then it is with us: every word of God, to whoever delivered, is to be considered as intended for us, in proportion as our situations accord with theirs to whom it was delivered.

Accordingly we do not hesitate to take to ourselves the direction in our text: nor is it to ministers only that we would apply it, but to Christians in general, whose situation in the world so far accords with that of the Apostles, that they universally need the same warning to be given them, and the same path of duty to be pointed out.

We shall proceed to notice then,

***~~I. The situation of Christians in the world.~~***

It may seem harsh to represent them as "sheep in the midst of wolves," and we will grant that the general establishment of Christianity, and the laws enacted for the support of it, afford a protection to us which the first Christians did not enjoy; but *the enmity of the human heart against God is the same as ever; and the light of Divine truth is as offensive to the carnal mind as ever*; and the hostility which exists against true Christians at this day, is the same as existed in the heart of Cain, and of all ungodly men in every age. It is the same in its nature, and, when unrestrained by law, is the same also in its degree; it only differs in the particular acts by which it is evinced. The distinction of wolves and sheep still exists, though the power of the wolves is restrained: but what Paul says in reference to Ishmael is still as true as ever, "As then he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit—even so it is now."

In confirmation of this, we appeal to the manner in which the godly are universally treated:

***~~1. A universal prejudice exists against them.~~***

Names of reproach are given them now, as much as in any age of the world. These names vary from time to time; but they are constantly understood to designate people that are weak and contemptible; and men universally affix a stigma to the character that is branded with them. Let any person, however respectable in himself, and however excellent in his deportment, be spoken of as a fanatic, or any other name of like import, and every one will conceive him to be either a weak enthusiast or a designing hypocrite. Everything that can be spoken to his disadvantage will be boldly asserted, eagerly listened to, and readily believed; nor will one single person in ever so large a company be found bold enough to vindicate his injured character. If a fault can be found in him, it will be magnified beyond all bounds—what he has done once or twice in his life, will be represented as his daily practice; and the faults of one will be imputed to the whole body. Nor can a wolf more delight in the blood of a lamb, than these do in tearing to pieces the characters of the Lord's people. We appeal to all, whether this is not true? and whether there is not still as much reason as ever to say, "we know concerning this sect, that it is everywhere spoken against?"

***~~2. Their very character exposes them to injuries.~~***

It is well known to be an established principle with them, to suffer patiently, and not to avenge themselves; insomuch that if a person professing godliness should indulge an angry and vindictive spirit, he would be universally considered as having no pretensions to real piety. Hence everyone is bold enough to insult or injure them: a man that would not dare to show the smallest disrespect to a worldly character, will take liberties with them, and calumniate them without fear. As the defenseless condition of the sheep invites the wolf, whose ferocity would be curbed in the presence of a lion—so a cowardly principle operates on the world, and instigates them to attack those from whom they expect no vindictive retaliation.

***~~3. They are considered as the legitimate prey of all who choose to oppress them.~~***

It is well said by the prophet, "He who departs from evil makes himself a prey." Let any other respectable person be calumniated, and he will find someone to espouse his cause. But, as we before observed, the pious man has no advocate; every one has a right to say of him whatever he pleases. Let any other order of men be loaded with opprobrium, and multitudes will start up in their defense. Yes, even a word that can bear an interpretation unfavorable to them, will be construed into a libel. But ten thousand words, the most harsh, the most cruel, and the most unjust, may be spoken against pious people; the whole order of them may be condemned as fools and hypocrites, and no one will feel himself offended, nor will anyone complain of the uncharitableness of such censures.

Why then is this? Is it not, that these people are generally understood to be excluded in a measure from the common rights of men; and that everyone has a right to attack them as he will? Let a disorderly man interrupt a public or private concert, and a universal indignation will be excited against him. But let him disturb a religious assembly in their public or social ordinances, and the world will be far more ready to vindicate than condemn him; or, at most, will only smile, as though he had committed but a slight and venial offence.

Do not these things show, that pious people are not on a footing of equality with others; and that, in respect to such treatment, they are as sheep in the midst of wolves? Yes, truly, it both is so, and must be so: "The servant cannot be above his lord; and, if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household."

Let us now then consider,

***~~II. The conduct which that situation calls for.~~***

The *serpent*is said to be "more subtle than all the beasts of the field," and the *dove*is proverbially kind and innocent. Now the *wisdom*of the one and the *harmlessness*of the other are very desirable to be combined in the Christian character; because it is by such a union only that the Christian will be enabled to cope successfully with his more powerful enemies.

He should unite these graces,

***~~1. In the avoiding of evil.~~***

It is lawful and proper to avoid persecution, when we can do it without violating the laws of truth. The Apostles, "when persecuted in one city, were directed to flee to another," and that great champion of Christianity, Paul, when the Jews laid wait for him at the gates of Damascus, was "let down the wall in a basket," that he might escape their fury. Our Lord himself too, when ensnaring questions were put to him, so that his answer, whatever it might be, would be made an occasion of accusation against him, repeatedly avoided the snare, sometimes by not answering at all, sometimes by a significant action, sometimes by asking a question in return. Thus baffling the designs of his blood-thirsty enemies, and constraining them to say, "Never has any man spoke like this man."

In this way we may act also. We must not dissemble, like Peter, to please or satisfy any set of men whatever; but we may take advantage of the peculiar views and prejudices of our enemies, to divide their counsels, and avert from ourselves their combined malignity.

Thus did Paul, when the Pharisees and Sadducees were persecuting him with united fury: by professing himself a Pharisee, he engaged one half of his enemies on his side, and disconcerted the measures which would otherwise have been executed against him. There is danger, however, when on such ground as this, of violating Christian simplicity. It is safer far to take for our model the condescending kindness of the Apostle, in "becoming all things to all men," and in conforming ourselves to their habits and sentiments, wherever we can do it without violating the essential principles of the Gospel. In this way we shall truly comply with the direction in our text, and make the enmity of others against Christianity an occasion of displaying its unrivaled excellence.

***~~2. In the doing of good.~~***

It is lamentable to see how often well-meaning Christians defeat their own purposes by their lack of wise judgment. They will reprove sin; but they will reprove it with so much harshness, or in so public a manner, as to irritate only, and not to reclaim, the offender. In conveying instruction also, they overlook all the circumstances of time and place, as well as the state of those they address. They forget that there is much wisdom required "to win souls;" that they should "choose out acceptable words," which shall "distill as the dew," and insinuate themselves gently into the minds of the hearers. They will speak the truth freely at all times, without considering whether they be not "casting their pearls before swine, who will only tarn again and rend them."

Some, as soon as they have attained a little knowledge themselves, will set themselves up for public teachers, and take upon themselves the office of the ministry without any call, either from God or man; little thinking what a stumbling-block they cast before many, whom they harden in their prejudices against the Gospel of Christ. In a word, they think that zeal is everything; and that, if only they endeavor to do good, they need not be much concerned in what way they do it.

But they need to be told, that Paul himself, even when going to meet the whole college of Apostles, took the precaution of communicating privately with the chief among them first, lest by an abrupt disclosure of all his history at once he should excite their prejudices, and occasion disorder in the Church. It will be well for them to treasure up in their minds that observation of Solomon, "I wisdom dwell with prudence."

***~~3. In the whole of their deportment.~~***

Christians should be "a wise and understanding people," and should have their whole conduct regulated by "sound wisdom and discretion." They should be careful "not to give occasion to their enemies to speak reproachfully." They should rather be studious to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against them," and to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing."

This is strongly inculcated in those words of the Apostle, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are without," and it was admirably illustrated in the conduct of Daniel, which constrained his bitterest enemies to say, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it concerning the law of his God."

With this view, therefore . . .  
we should avoid all needless singularities;  
we should cultivate a meek and courteous spirit;  
we should be especially attentive to all the duties of our calling;  
we should labor to "please all men for their good and edification."

In short, our determination through grace should be like that of the Psalmist, "I will walk wisely before you in a perfect way."

We must however avoid everything that savors of artifice and deceit. There is an immense difference between carnal wisdom and that which is truly spiritual; there is a frankness and godly sincerity in the Christian's character which abhors all deceit and craftiness. Paul distinguishes them in that advice of his, "I would have you wise unto that which is good, but simple concerning evil;" and in his own example he observed that distinction with undeviating, unremitting cared.

***~~To assist you in the execution of these arduous duties, we subjoin a few directions:~~***

***~~1. Do not expect too much from man.~~***

You have been enabled perhaps to be "blameless and harmless, as sons of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation;" but do not therefore expect that the world will become your friends; if they "are at peace with you," it is as much as the Scripture authorizes you to hope for under the most favorable circumstances. The wolf must change its nature, before it can perfectly accord with the sheep. If wisdom and piety could have disarmed the world, Christ would never have suffered and died. "To do well and to suffer for it," is all that you are to expect from man.

***~~2. Do not be grieved at the evil treatment that you meet with.~~***

If you suffer for righteousness' sake, you are rather to rejoice; it is a great honor conferred upon you, a testimony from God in your favor, a means of glorifying him before men, and of augmenting your own glory in a future world. Be not then cast down by your afflictions, but rather glorify God on this behalf.

***~~3. Guard against the risings of your own spirit.~~***

If others are wolves, you are still to be as sheep—meek and patient, even like Him who was "led as a sheep to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." "In your patience possess your souls;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

***~~4. Look up to God for daily supplies of wisdom and grace.~~***

It is by the grace of God alone that we can do any good thing. If we attempt anything in our own strength, we shall fail. But God has promised, "if any man lacks wisdom or grace, and ask it of him, he will give him liberally and without upbraiding." Beg of him, therefore, to give you such continued and abundant grace, that you may be enabled to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

#1344

***~~Enduring unto the End~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22)~~***

"He who endures to the end shall be saved."

ONE cannot but admire the faithfulness of our blessed Lord, when calling his Disciples to follow him. It almost seems as if he intended rather to deter them from following him, since he forewarns them that such a step would inevitably bring upon them the heaviest trials from all around them. He goes so far as to tell them that they would be only "as sheep among wolves," in danger every moment of being devoured by their enemies. And all the consolation he administers to them is taken from the hope of his presence here, and his glory hereafter. You will have to sustain all these things; "but he who endures unto the end, the same shall be saved." In these words we have,

***~~I. A caution intimated.~~***

It is evident that our Lord intended to tell them what they must expect to endure for his sake; and how much depended on their patient perseverance in well-doing.

***~~They must experience great and heavy trials on their way to Heaven.~~***

They would have to contend with much from within—a carnal mind and a corrupt heart. They would have to contend with much from without—a tempting world and a subtle adversary, whose devices are capable of beguiling the most wary soul. All these they would have, to obstruct their way to Heaven; and all of them must be withstood, in order to a successful outcome of their labors.

Many trials, also, they would meet with, insomuch that "their own dearest friends would become their bitterest enemies." No other thing that could be done by them would give such general and inveterate offence as their adherence to him. They might become infidel, or licentious, and even profligate, and excite only *pity*; whereas their attachment to Jesus would provoke the most embittered *hostility*; and not from the immoral only, but the moral also: yes, on the whole, the self-righteous moralists would be the fiercer enemies of the two. Nor would imprisonment and death be too heavy penalties for them to expect at the hands even of their own parents or children.

***~~On their enduring of these to the end, would their everlasting salvation depend.~~***

It would be to no purpose for them to run well for a season, if they should stop before they reached the goal. They might suffer much and long, and yet perish—if they had not fortitude to sustain the utmost extremity of pain that could be inflicted on them. "If they would save their life, they must lose it: and on no other condition could they hope to save it to life eternal."

To this effect the Church has been warned in all ages. Lot's wife was made a sad example of the danger of looking back, after she had escaped from Sodom; as the whole Jewish nation had been, after their deliverance from the land of Egypt. The Prophet Ezekiel, in particular, had warned the Jews, that *a declension from the ways of godliness would infallibly involve them in ruin*. In like manner, the Church in all ages is here warned by our Lord, that "then only will his followers be made partakers of his salvation, if they hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end." "If any draws back, whatever be the occasion of that departure, it will be to inevitable and everlasting perdition."

But in my text there is, more directly and obviously,

***~~II. An encouragement expressed.~~***

***~~"Salvation" is here declared to be the certain recompense of our fidelity.~~***

Who is able to tell us what salvation is, even "that salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory?" Who can fathom any just idea of it? Who can inform us what it is to behold the Savior face to face; and to be seated with him on his throne; and to enjoy the most intimate communion with him to all eternity? Who is able to describe the blessedness of Heaven, and make us acquainted with the place, the company, the employment? Suffice it, however, to know, that the felicity of all the glorified saints shall be accorded only to those who are conquerors in this glorious warfare.

***~~And will not that abundantly compensate for all that we can ever do or suffer for Christ?~~***

Our sufferings, be they ever so heavy, are, in fact, but *short*and *light*even in our present estimation, provided we are looking steadfastly to the "things which are invisible and eternal." How light, then, will they appear, when once we come into the possession of that glory! Truly, if now, in the midst of all our trials, we say, that "the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us;" much more shall we say so, when all our troubles shall have passed away, and all the fullness of heavenly blessing shall be poured into our souls.

**Application**.

***~~1. Let those who are just entering on the Christian course "first sit down and count the cost".~~***

You well know how a man beginning to build a house, and relinquishing the work for lack of funds to complete it, exposes himself to shame and ridicule among men. And to what shame will you be exposed in the presence of God, if, after having begun to follow Christ, you turn back, for lack of fortitude to bear the cross which you had taken up for his sake! You must expect tribulation for his sake! You must expect persecution even unto death! You must be "willing not only to be bound, but also to die for his sake."

At the same time, you may expect grace sufficient for you in the time of trial. Only look to Him, and depend on him; and he will never leave you, nor forsake you; "nor shall any temptation come upon you without a supply of grace equal to your day, or a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Put into one scale all that man can inflict on the body; and in the other, all that God can confer upon the soul, in *time*, to sustain you under your sufferings; and in *eternity*, to recompense you for them. This do, I say; and you need not fear but that, however numerous your enemies may be, you shall be "more than conquerors through Him who loved you."

***~~2. Let all expect trials, "even to the end".~~***

"Never are you to put off your armor," until God gives you a discharge from this warfare. Satan, when repulsed in the wilderness, departed from our Lord "only for a season." At the close of our Savior's life, that wicked adversary made his assaults more powerfully than ever.

Just so he may do with you. You may have a long intermission of trials, both within and without: but you never know what a single day may bring forth. Gird on, then, your armor daily, even the whole armor of God; and "war a good warfare" even to the end.

When you first begin to follow Christ, you come to him as your only Savior; and, professing to renounce every other ground of hope, you say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength."

You profess, also, to "live altogether by faith in him;" "receiving everything out of his fullness," precisely "as the branch from the vine." This, then, is the course in which you are to continue. It is this which brings your trials upon you. It is because "you live godly in Christ Jesus, that you suffer persecution," and by persevering in this path, you shall surely attain the promise in my text, "You shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!"

***~~3. Let all keep their eye fixed upon the heavenly prize.~~***

It was "to this that Moses looked, when he accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." And you, brethren, if you keep the felicity of Heaven in view, will think little of the labor or the pains which you may endure in the acquisition of it. True, you must not look to it as what you are to earn by labor, or to merit by sufferings—you must look to it as the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, and as the gift of his grace. But still it will be granted only to those who seek it in God's appointed way: and it is "through much tribulation only that you are to hope to attain it."

If this appears formidable to flesh and blood, open the sacred volume, and see how others before you have triumphed, and how glorious the recompense will be when once it is attained. Survey the meridian sun for a few moments, and all earthly glory will appear dark. Get *Pisgah views*of the heavenly glory, and all earthly trials, however dark they may appear to the natural man, will have a splendor round about them, not unlike to the fiery furnace which was to preserve and sanctify the Hebrew youths, or like the fiery chariot which was to transport Elijah to the realms of bliss. In the near views of Heaven, you will welcome either sufferings or death; and, like the first martyr Stephen, you will bless the murderers who are transmitting you to the full enjoyment of it!

***~~#1345~~***

***~~The Doctrine of Particular Providence~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.30)~~***

"The very hairs of your head are all numbered."

NONE are so ignorant among us as not to acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being; but the extent of his agency, and the interest which he takes in the affairs of men, are by no means duly appreciated. We may judge however of this from the words before us; which we shall consider,

***~~I. As a speculative truth.~~***

To imagine a general Providence, and to deny or question his particular agency in everything that occurs, is absurd in the extreme. The doctrine of a particular Providence is fully confirmed,

***~~1. By reason.~~***

If there is anything in the universe which God does not inspect and control, there can be no dependence on prophecy; for untoward and unlooked—for circumstances may occur to thwart the purposes of God.

Suppose, for instance, that God had intended the murderous designs of Haman to take effect: then the little accidental circumstance of Ahasuerus not being able to sleep one night, and of his calling for the records of his kingdom to amuse him, and of their being opened at one particular part, would have given an unexpected turn to events, and disappointed the purposes of God. But, if all these things were ordered of the Lord, then were the most minute things that can be imagined, under his control, and subservient to the accomplishment of his will.

Again, if there is anything really fortuitous and unforeseen by God, He cannot be fit to govern the world. He cannot be *omniscient*; because he will gather information from accidental circumstances that were independent of him. He cannot be *omnipotent*; because there will be some things over which he has no control. In a word, He cannot be God; because he will lack all those attributes which are essential to a perfect Being. He will be weak and mutable; and will change with events, as we do. But, if all things are "ordered according to the counsel of his will," then is He every way fit both to govern and to judge the world.

***~~2. By Scripture.~~***

The Scriptures uniformly represent Jehovah as "doing according to his will, in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." All creatures are alike subject to his control, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate. The angels in Heaven, and men on earth, and devils in Hell—all do his will. The sun, moon, and stars move or stand at his command. The elements exert or suspend their accustomed operations. The brute creation, beasts, birds, fish—all move and act agreeably to his will. There is neither good nor evil, which is not done by him. Even moral evil is so far under his control, that, though he is not properly the author of it—it infallibly accomplishes his secret counsel, and his determined purpose. It is clear then, to the full extent of the assertion in my text, that "not a sparrow falls to the ground without him; and that the very hairs of our head are all numbered."

Let us next view the text,

***~~II. As a consolatory declaration.~~***

It speaks the richest encouragement,

***~~1. To ministers.~~***

Their trials and difficulties are great—as our Lord in the context has forewarned us. But, however great or numerous they may be, there is not one that can come upon us but by His appointment, or press more heavily than He sees fit to permit, nor operate but for the advancement of His glory and our greatest good. We have only to look to Him, and depend on Him; and he will give us all the protection, support, and consolation, that we can possibly stand in need of. If the very hairs of our head are numbered—then what shall we not be ready to encounter for Him, or to sustain in the execution of our high office?

***~~2. To the Church at large.~~***

Every person has his own peculiar trials, but the declaration in our text is equally applicable to them all: and that, realized in the mind, is abundantly sufficient to carry us through all and make us triumphant over all. Let every one call to mind his own peculiar temptations—and apply to himself the text, as if he were the only individual to whom it was addressed: and then let him go on his way, saying, "If God is for me, then who can be against me?"

***~~With such a word for our support,~~***

***~~1. Let us give ourselves up sincerely to God.~~***

It is only when we belong to Christ, that we can derive full comfort from the declaration before us. We must be God's people, if we would have him for our God. The duty and the privilege must go hand in hand.

***~~2. Let us serve our God cheerfully, and with our whole hearts.~~***

Let no call of duty be thought too hard, no service too difficult, no danger too great. Only let us realize in our minds the passage before us, and rest assured, that "our strength shall be according to our day," and "our reward according to our labor."

#1346

***~~The Rule of Christ's Procedure in the Last Day~~***

***~~[Matthew 10:32–39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32â39)~~***

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in Heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in Heaven. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

TO stand up in the place of Jehovah, and to declare his word to men, is so solemn and arduous an office, that the greatest of all the Apostles was constrained to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But, if it is so arduous under any, even the most favorable, circumstances—then what must it be when we are called to utter such solemn and weighty truths as those which we have just heard?

We should never forget that the word of God is delivered in terms that are broad and general; and that the modification of those terms, or the application of them to all the different circumstances that may occur, requires much caution, much wisdom, much discretion, lest, by too *strong*an enforcement of them, we "make the heart of the righteous sad;" or, by too *lax*an application of them, we make void the declarations of Heaven, and deceive men to their eternal ruin. May God enable us to discriminate aright, while, with a just mixture of tenderness and fidelity, we call your attention to the rule of Christ's procedure with his people in the last day; which rule is here *stated*, *vindicated*, *confirmed*.

***~~I. The rule of Christ's procedure with his people in the last day, STATED.~~***

***~~The Lord Jesus requires that we confess him before men.~~***

It is not a mere assent to his religion, as true, that He requires; he calls us to embrace it with our whole hearts, and to let all men see our attachment to Him who is the founder of it. We must never be ashamed to acknowledge that all our hope of acceptance with God is founded on his meritorious atonement; and that from Him, even from the fullness which God has treasured up for us in Him, we receive all the grace and all the strength whereby we are enabled to fulfill his will. We must avowedly *take his word as the exclusive rule of our conduct*; and not be afraid to declare, that the same is obligatory upon every man. We must be as lights in a dark world, and must so walk, that all men may read in our conduct, as in a written epistle, what is the whole of his will concerning us. On no account are we to "put our light under a bed, or under a bushel; but to set it on a candlestick," that all may see it, and be enlightened by it.

No consideration whatever should induce us to "deny him" in any way. If shame, or loss, or suffering, attach to a confession of him, we must not yield to intimidation, or be prevailed upon, for a single moment, to dissemble our attachment to him.

Our *love*to him must be paramount to every personal consideration; and *our*zeal for his honor be sufficient to bear us up under all the trials and difficulties which we can be exposed to for his sake.

***~~According as we approve ourselves to him in this respect, will be his conduct towards us in the day of judgment.~~***

Those who have confessed him in this world, he will then confess before his heavenly Father. 'These,' he will say, 'were my disciples indeed: they knew their duty to me, and they fulfilled it. I saw the trials to which they were called for my sake, and the fortitude with which they encountered all their difficulties; and therefore I say to them in your presence, and before the whole assembled universe: Well done, good and faithful servants; enter into the joy of your Lord!'

**But widely different will be his conduct towards those who have denied him.**They will come before him, perhaps with confidence, claiming him as their Lord, whom they have served and honored: but he will say to them, "Depart from me; I never knew you!" I never approved you, in the midst of all your professions of regard for me. Father, I deny their title to the name of my disciples: I disclaim all interest in them, all connection with them: "they were ashamed of me, and I am ashamed of them," and my sentence respecting every one of them is, that they "depart accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Now, if this rule, as carried into execution thus, appear exceptionable to any of you,

***~~II. The rule of Christ's procedure with his people in the last day, VINDICATED.~~***

This rule may be complained of perhaps:

***~~1. As unnecessary.~~***

Christianity, it may be said, is a religion of love, and is intended to produce nothing but harmony upon earth. Is not this the description given of its effects by the Prophet Isaiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall he down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them?" How, then, shall such enmity be shown against it, as shall tempt any man to deny his Lord? It is possible that such an effect might be produced, if it did not improve the characters of men: but its avowed tendency is, to change even the vilest of men into the very image of their God. How, then, can people so changed become objects of scorn and hatred to those around them? The rule is plainly unnecessary, because there never can be any occasion for the execution of it: Christianity can produce nothing but peace; and therefore the supposition that any should ever be tempted by persecution to deny Christ is altogether vain.

But, as specious as this objection is, it is not founded in truth: for though the *proper tendency*of Christ's religion is to diffuse peace and love, the *actual effect*of it is the very reverse. "Think not," says our Lord, "that I have come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household."

'What!' it maybe asked, 'was this really the *design*for which Christ came into the world?' No, but this *effect*is as universal and invariable as if it had been actually designed. And this may easily be accounted for:

Wherever the Gospel works effectually on the heart, there a great and visible change is wrought; for the person that obeys it is "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This change cannot fail to attract the notice of his neighbors, who are thereby reduced to the alternative of condemning it in the person changed, or of acknowledging the necessity of a similar change in themselves. Not wishing to experience it themselves, they embrace the other alternative, and reprobate the change as absurd fanaticism. If the person so changed stands in any near relation to them, they feel it on that account the more offensive, because the odium attached to it is, in a measure, reflected on themselves; and the self-condemnation, which they are constrained to feel, is far more acute than if the person exciting it had no connection with them.

Hence parents and relatives are generally among the fiercest opposers of such a change; and "a man's greatest foes are usually those of his own household."

Another reason for this is, that as those who are most nearly related to us possess a greater influence over us than others, they are the first people looked to, to exert that influence, whether of authority or love, for the reclaiming of us from our supposed errors.

Hence then it appears, that the rule is by no means unnecessary; since, if the world at large should forbear to show their hatred of the change, a man's nearest relatives will be sure to lay all kinds of stumbling-blocks in his way, to keep him from confessing Christ, and to lead him to a denial of him.

***~~2. As unjust.~~***

It is here taken for granted, that the person rejected by this rule has never been guilty of any flagrant transgression; and that his only offence has been that he did not confess Christ so boldly as he ought to have done; but, on some occasions, has rather denied him. Now, can it be supposed, that for such a slight offence as this the Lord Jesus will "deny," and everlastingly reject, "him?" Impossible! he can never inflict so severe a punishment for so trivial an offence.

But this objection has no real weight, as our Lord plainly shows us: "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he who loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he who takes not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me."

Let any man judge in this matter for himself. Can a person who, from fear of his parents, or love to his children, proves unfaithful to his conscience, and violates his duty to his Lord—be worthy of Christ? Can the Lord Jesus Christ ever confess such a one before his Father, and say, 'Here is one who has served me faithfully, and is worthy of partaking with me in my kingdom and glory?' Must he not rather say. 'Here is one who feared and loved his earthly relatives more than me; and therefore must look for his reward from them; for he is unworthy of any recompense from me?'

Again, supposing the person to maintain his steadfastness until matters came to the greatest extremity, and he were called, like the Roman criminals, to carry his cross, as our Lord and Savior did, to the place of execution, in order to die upon it—still could he be deemed worthy of Christ if he drew back then? May not the Lord Jesus say to such a one, 'Why have you drawn back? Did I not bear my cross for you? Did I not come from Heaven on purpose to bear it? Did I not bear it under circumstances ten thousand times more dreadful and appalling than any that you were ever called to encounter? And did I not do this for you, when you were an enemy? Did I not drink to the very dregs the cup of bitterness, of which you have been called only to take the slightest taste? How, then, can I confess you before my Father, when you would not endure such a transient pain for me? When you have loved your own ease or interest more than me—how can I account you worthy of my kingdom and glory? You are unworthy of me; and cannot but know that you are so. Had you "been faithful unto death, you should have had awarded to you a crown of life," but seeing you have turned back from me, my soul can have no pleasure in you?'

Who must not subscribe to such a sentence as this? This rule is thus fully vindicated by our Lord.

***~~III. The rule of Christ's procedure with his people in the last day, CONFIRMED.~~***

"He who finds his life, shall lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake, shall find it." A person may imagine himself a gainer by avoiding persecution, and regarding his present interests. But, "what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" If but the life of the body were at stake, who would accept a momentary possession of the whole world in exchange for it? How much less, then, would any person act thus, when the everlasting welfare of his soul was to be the price of his transient enjoyment?

On the other hand, Who does not submit to a momentary pain, when he is assured that it shall be productive of permanent and perfect ease? How much more may any momentary sacrifice be made in the assured prospect of eternal happiness and glory?

Know, then, that this is the alternative set before you. You may not, indeed, be actually called to lay down your life for Christ; but you must be ready to do so at any moment, and in any manner that you may be called to do it. If these terms appear too severe, nothing remains for you, but "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

If, on the contrary, you accept the Lord on these terms, even though you should be eventually required to lay down your life for his sake, you will be gainers in the final outcome; since "the sufferings of this present life, however severe or protracted they may be, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Thus, "are life and death set before you." Our blessed Lord has warned us, that "if any man comes to him, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be his disciple." Of course, we are not called *positively*to hate our relations, and our own life. But *comparatively*we are: and nothing under Heaven, whether pleasing or painful, is to have any influence upon our minds in comparison of love to the Savior's name, and zeal for his glory.

***~~Lest, however, this subject should be in any wise misapprehended, let me add a few words of ADVICE.~~***

***~~1. Do not affect needless singularity.~~***

Piety will make you sufficiently singular, without distinguishing yourselves by any marks, which a hypocrite may assume as well as you. Be as eminent for piety as you will. But in things that have no real connection with vital godliness, I would rather recommend a conformity with those of the age and station to which you belong.

***~~2. Do not lay too great a stress on non-essential matters.~~***

There are some things which are *essential*to the maintenance of a good conscience before God; and these things must be done or forborne, according to the dictates of your own judgment. But there are many things which are really *indifferent*, and which may be either done or forborne, according to the views which different people entertain respecting them.

In reference to such things, endeavor to understand and to maintain your liberty. Only use not your own liberty to the endangering of another's welfare; and neither judge those who allow themselves in a greater latitude than you; nor despise those who have not the same insight with you into the full liberty of the Gospel.

***~~3. Be particularly attentive to your own spirit.~~***

You may be right in the line of conduct you pursue, and yet be highly criminal in respect to the spirit you indulge in pursuing it. A parent, for instance, will urge upon you a conformity to the world, in some things that are positively and intrinsically evil; and you do right in resisting his solicitations or commands; because "you must obey God rather than man." But if you do it with petulance and disrespect, you sin against God; for no conduct on the part of your parent can absolve you from the duty of honoring him, even while the sinfulness of his injunctions prevents you from obeying him. A meek, humble, modest, and respectful deportment must be observed towards all people, and under all circumstances. Every violation of this is decidedly and unquestionably wrong. Your duty is, to "show all meekness to all men."

***~~4. Take the Word of God alone as your rule.~~***

Your friends will often bring before you the examples of different people, as sanctioning this or that conduct. But men are no examples to you. You must go to the word and to the testimony; and be regulated only by Scripture-precepts, and Scripture-examples. If you adhere not to this standard, no one can tell where you may be drawn. By complying with everything that any reputed saint has ever done—you may be drawn into evils without end. Leave others to stand or fall to their own Master; and be careful to approve yourselves to Him, whose judgment will determine your eternal state.

***~~5. Look up to God for strength to do his will.~~***

In the passage which our blessed Lord has quoted in our text, the Prophet teaches us to make this improvement of it. "The son dishonors the father, the daughter rises up against her mother; the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man's enemies are those of his own house." "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me." Yes, your God will hear you: and however difficult you may find it, on some occasions, to hold fast your integrity, "His grace shall be sufficient for you," and "you shall be able to do all things through Christ who strengthens you."

#1347

***~~Christ's Answer to John's Disciples~~***

***~~[Matthew 11:4–6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.4â6)~~***

"Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

IT has pleased God in every age so to deal with his most favored servants as to show, that though he had raised them up and qualified them for his service, he was not dependent on them, nor needed their labors for the support of his interests in the world. He has permitted many to languish on a bed of sickness, or to be immured in a prison, or to be cut off by an untimely death, when they might have been actively engaged in promoting his glory: and this circumstance has sometimes filled the weak and inexperienced with doubt. But it becomes all to submit with meekness even to his darkest dispensations, assured that, though clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne.

We are persuaded that this was the frame of the Baptist's mind when shut up in prison, and apparently neglected by his Lord and Master. Some indeed imagine that John was himself beginning to doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah: but when we consider the miraculous attestations of it which he had received from Heaven, and the many testimonies which he himself had borne to Christ, and the evidence which Christ daily gave of his Messiahship, and that there was no other person at that time existing as a rival of Christ—we cannot admit the idea that *John's*faith was at all shaken. But his *disciples*hearing of the wonderful miracles which Christ wrought, yet thinking that if he were the Messiah, he would have shown more regard for John, and used his almighty power to liberate him from prison—were much in doubt, and were therefore referred by their master to Jesus himself, in order to get all the satisfaction which they desired. To Jesus they came, and inquired whether he was the true Messiah or not. Our Lord, not choosing to let their faith rest on a mere verbal testimony from himself, gave them the fullest evidence of their senses, and cautioned them against yielding to the force of prejudice, or rejecting him on account of any circumstances which they could not altogether account for.

His answer to them will naturally lead us to consider,

***~~I. The grounds we have for faith in Christ.~~***

There were two things to which our Lord appealed in proof of his divine mission:

***~~1. The miracles he wrought.~~***

These were great and stupendous, wrought on the occasion, publicly, in the sight of these messengers; and they were of such a nature as did not admit of any confederacy or collusion. Nothing but a Divine power could have effected such things; and consequently *they were unexceptionable testimonies from God himself that he was the true Messiah*.

With the disciples of John, these miracles must have had peculiar weight; for John, whom they regarded as their master, had wrought no miracle; whereas the miracles which they had just seen were precisely such as the Messiah was to perform: and the very same prophet who had spoken most plainly of John's office, as the forerunner of the Messiah, had specified these very works as distinctive of the Messiah himself.

These works are still a standing proof that Christ was the promised Messiah. The *spiritual*effects which are still wrought by his word, and which precisely correspond with those miracles, are yet further evidences of the same truth: for wherever the true Gospel is preached, there "the spiritual *blind*receive their sight, the spiritual *lame*walk, the spiritual *lepers*are cleansed, the spiritual deaf hear, and the spiritual *dead*are raised up" to a new and heavenly life.

***~~2. The preaching of the Gospel to the poor.~~***

The philosophers of old addressed themselves only to the great and learned, while they wholly overlooked the lower classes of society; and even the prophets were sent principally to the kings and nobles of Israel.

But our Lord addressed himself chiefly to the poor—he sought to benefit the meanest and the vilest of mankind. This of itself was a strong presumptive proof that he was the Messiah, because an impostor would rather have sought to gain over to his interests the great and powerful. But it was foretold that the Messiah would have peculiar respect to the poor in his ministrations, and that this regard for them should eminently distinguish his kingdom upon earth.

This evidence also still exists, not merely as a historical fact, but as a matter of daily experience and observation: for it is universally true that wherever the Gospel is preached, that the poor are the people to whom the word is sent, and that they chiefly, though not exclusively, are benefitted by it.

But *faith*in Christ, notwithstanding these grounds, is not easy to be exercised; as will appear by considering,

***~~II. The difficulties it has to surmount.~~***

Our Lord himself intimates, as indeed the prophets had before declared, that he was likely to prove a stumbling-block to many: and it must be confessed that there were many things in him which were calculated to offend a carnal mind.

***~~1. The baseness of his appearance.~~***

His birth and education as a carpenter, his abject condition, (without even a place where to lay his head,) the poverty of his followers, together with the contempt poured upon him by all ranks and orders of men—were circumstances which must have been an occasion of stumbling to anyone, but especially to those who had been taught to expect only a temporal king, and a triumphant Messiah.

Let us only put ourselves in their place, and conceive of a poor carpenter, surrounded by a few illiterate fishermen, and professing himself to be the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world; what would we think of such pretensions? Whatever miracles he wrought, we would be very slow of heart to believe in him, and very backward to become his acknowledged followers.

Something of the same difficulty still exists; and it operates with great force upon the world at large. The followers of Jesus are still "a poor and afflicted people," despised and hated for his name's sake: and it is no easy matter to think that they are right, in opposition to the great and learned who reject him. We cannot endure to be told, that "what God has hidden from the wise and prudent, he has revealed unto babes." We are ready to reply, like those of old, "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But for this people, who knows not the law, they are cursed;" they are misguided, ignorant enthusiasts, wholly undeserving of any notice or regard.

***~~2. The mysteriousness of his doctrines.~~***

As poor and despised as he was, he professed to be God while he was yet on earth; yes, to be one with the Father, and to know and do all that the Father himself either knew or did. He declared that he would give his life a ransom for the souls of men; that all must "eat his body and drink his blood," if they would be partakers of his salvation; and that as soon as ever they should eat his flesh and drink his blood, they should dwell in him, and he in them, and he would give them eternal life, and raise them up to the enjoyment of it at the last day. Now these were "hard sayings," which they were not able to bear.

And are they not hard savings still? When we speak of a life of faith in the Son of God, of maintaining the most intimate fellowship with him, and receiving out of his fullness a constant supply of all spiritual blessings—are not these things deemed enthusiastic and absurd? Wherever these truths are insisted on with befitting energy, does not a considerable degree of reproach attach both to those who preach, and those who receive them? Yes, notwithstanding we profess ourselves followers of Christ. "The preaching of the cross is yet foolishness to us"—until God himself has humbled us in the dust, and subdued our spirits to the obedience of faith.

***~~3. The radical self-denying nature of his precepts.~~***

The very first condition imposed on his disciples was to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow him." He showed them by his own example what a superiority to everything in this world he required, and told them plainly that they must be no more of the world than he was. Finally, he warned them that he would acknowledge none as his disciples unless they were truly willing, at any time and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him.

How offensive these declarations and injunctions were to the carnal hearts of his hearers, we may judge by the conduct of the Rich Youth, who, though convinced in his judgment that Jesus was the Messiah, could not prevail upon himself to follow him, but abandoned all his hope in Christ, rather than make the sacrifice that was demanded of him.

And what is it that at this day forms the principal ground of offence against the Gospel? It is the purity and radicalness of its precepts. If only we would leave men at liberty to indulge their corrupt desires, and to retain their earthly and sensual dispositions—we might set forth the mysteries of the Gospel as strongly as we pleased. But, if we require from our hearers the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and a conformity to his heavenly example and holy precepts, we put a stumbling-block before them, which they fall over to their eternal ruin! They cannot, they will not endure to hear of such requisitions; and on account of their aversion to such restraints, they reject the Gospel altogether.

But that faith which is the gift of God will triumph over all, hence,

***~~III. The commendation given it, when duly exercised.~~***

To have the mind brought to a cordial acquiescence in all that is spoken of the Lord Jesus, is indeed a great victory; and blessed is that man who has attained it: for that acquiescence clearly shows,

***~~1. That he is taught of God.~~***

It is impossible for the human mind, blinded as it is by innumerable lusts and prejudices, to see the truth and excellence of the Gospel—unless it have been first enlightened by the Holy Spirit. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

When Peter confessed his Master to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God," our Lord told him, that "flesh and blood had not taught him this, but that his heavenly Father had revealed it to him;" on which account he pronounced him truly blessed: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah." And at another time he pronounced all his disciples blessed on a similar account: "Blessed are your eyes, for you see; and your ears, for you hear."

***~~2. That he is brought into the path of life.~~***

The man who exercises true and saving faith, must have "passed from death unto life;" for our Lord himself says, "This is life eternal, to know you, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." The change that has taken place in him is not in his understanding only, but in his heart—he must have become a new creature. The same Divine operation that wrought faith in his heart, must have produced every other grace, according to the measure in which the gift of faith has been bestowed upon him. Having "received Christ Jesus the Lord, he has the privilege of being a child of God."

And is not he blessed? What man on earth has so much reason to rejoice as he? When some were ready to magnify the blessedness of our Lord's mother on account of her having borne and nourished such a son, our Lord rectified their mistake, and taught them to consider every true believer as more blessed on account of his spiritual relation to him, than she was on account of her relation according to the flesh. "Yes rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

***~~3. That all the glory of Heaven is his.~~***

Being born of God, he is born "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for him; and he shall be kept by the power of God, through faith," unto the everlasting possession of it. "The Lord will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people." Say then, is not he blessed who has such a *Father*, such a *Friend*, such a *Protector*, and such a *portion*? Truly he is blessed: and the Lord himself will before long pronounce him so: "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

**Address**.

***~~1. Those who openly stumble at Christ.~~***

You think that because many *learned*people deny the divinity of his person, and the sin-atoning power of his death, your rejection of him is excusable. But no such excuse was ever admitted for his enemies of old: nor will it ever be admitted for you. It was foretold that he should be "a rock of offence; and that many would stumble at him and fall," but it was declared by our Lord himself, that "all who would fall on that stone would be broken in pieces; and that on whoever it would fall, it would grind him to powder." Beware then how you justify your infidelity or attempt to extenuate its guilt; for the unalterable determination of God is, that "he who believes not, shall not see life, but that the wrath of God shall abide upon him!"

***~~2. Those who profess indeed to receive him, but are inwardly offended at him.~~***

It is to no purpose to receive his word *in theory*, while we practically deny its influence on our hearts. He himself says, "Why do you call me *Lord, Lord*, and do not the things which I say?" *Do not judge yourselves, therefore, by your professions, but by the manner in which you live upon him, and serve him.*While there is any one saying of his that appears hard to you, or any one commandment that is grievous, or any other attainment that is not ardently desired by you—your heart is not right with God; and Christ, in that particular, is an offence unto you. O "judge yourselves, that you be not judged of the Lord."

***~~3. Those to whom Christ is altogether precious.~~***

To those who truly believe, he is precious. His *person*, his *office*, his *character*, his *word*, his *dispensations*, all are *precious*. "Yes, he is altogether lovely!" And what shall I say unto you? What is more suitable than the angel's address to Mary? "Blessed are you among men; you are highly favored of the Lord." You have within yourselves the evidence that Christ is "he who was to come;" and you have no occasion, or disposition, to "look for any other."

If you are "poor," adore his name that "his Gospel has been preached to you," and that you have not heard it in vain. Adore your heavenly Father too, who has "chosen the poor of this world, to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom."

If, on the other hand, you are among the *rich*, you have, if possible, still greater reason to adore the riches of his grace, for distinguishing you thus from the great mass of those who reject him, and for bringing you into his kingdom, notwithstanding all the difficulties which your wealth has interposed to obstruct your entrance. Labor then, with your more numerous talents, to bring more honor to him, and to evince to all around you, that his grace is still as efficacious to heal the diseases of the soul, as ever his word was to heal the diseases of the body. The various people whom he healed or raised from the dead were witnesses for him in every place. You be the same; and let the whole of your spirit and conduct approve itself to the world as his workmanship. So shall you be truly blessed both in time and in eternity.

#1348

***~~Christ's Commendation of John~~***

***~~[Matthew 11:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.11-12)~~***

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

OUR blessed Lord lost no opportunity of encouraging people to believe on him. He had forborne to applaud the character of John while John was bearing testimony to him, lest it should be thought that there was a concerted plan between them to exalt each other: but, when John was now shut up in prison, and come near to the close of his ministry, our Lord bore testimony to him in the most exalted terms. The people had flocked from every quarter to hear John: they had not traveled so far to see a fickle man, like a reed shaken with the wind, or a soft effeminate man, like those often bred in courts; but a prophet, who, with self-denying labor and unshaken steadfastness, was instructing and reforming the land: and such indeed he was, even like Elijah of old, whose spirit and character he bore, agreeably to the prophetic representation that had been given of him four hundred years before. Yet as eminent as John was, even greater than any prophet that had ever lived, our Lord told his hearers, that the least of his true disciples was really greater than the Baptist himself.

Many interpret this as referring only to those who should preach his Gospel; but though it is true that the Apostles were superior to John in their office, and should far exceed him in the success of their labors—we see no reason for limiting to them what was spoken to the whole multitude. We are persuaded, on the contrary, that this information was intended for the encouragement of all, and as an incentive to them to follow him, with the same avidity and zeal as they had manifested in following John.

Considering the passage thus as referring to all true Christians, we shall take occasion from it to point out,

***~~I. Their pre-eminent advantage.~~***

John was greater than all who had ever been born of woman, not in sanctity (for Daniel, and perhaps several others, were not a whit inferior to him in this respect,) but in office; being the forerunner of the Messiah, who did not merely speak of him at a distance, but pointed him out as present; and declared him to be that very "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." But the least in the Messiah's kingdom, which was just then founded upon earth, are greater than he, inasmuch as they have,

***~~1. A fuller discovery of Christ's character.~~***

John himself, and indeed the Apostles too, until after the resurrection, had very imperfect views of Christ. They saw not, or saw but very faintly, the dignity of his *person*, the necessity of his *death*, the certainty of his *resurrection*, or the nature of his *kingdom*. But the most ignorant of Christ's disciples have a comparatively clear, enlarged, and certain knowledge of him. They know what God has revealed concerning:

his *person*, as Emmanuel, God with us;

his *work*, as fulfilling and satisfying the law for us;

and his *offices*, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his redeemed people.

In this they are as superior to John, as John was to the least enlightened of all the ancient prophets.

***~~2. A richer experience of his love.~~***

They can tell, not merely what he is to do, but what he has done: yes, they can say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me." They have felt the virtue of his blood in purging their consciences from guilt, and the efficacy of his grace in subduing their most inveterate corruptions. They know what it is to receive out of his fullness the blessings which they need, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day. They have within themselves the evidence that he is a living, a gracious, and an almighty Savior, who . . .  
fulfills all his promises to them,  
guides them by his Spirit,  
upholds them by his arm,  
sanctifies them by his grace,  
comforts them with his presence,  
and renders them fit for the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom.

In this their superiority to the Baptist is as the meridian sun to the early dawn.

The ministry of John was as remarkable as his endowments. As he had clearer views than all who preceded him, so was the success of his labors incomparably greater: for almost the whole of Judea, and even of the people beyond Jordan, came and were baptized of him. Even those who were the most remote from the kingdom of Heaven, according to human apprehensions, were the foremost to seek admission into it, and to take it, as it were, from those, who, from their education and professions, seemed most likely to become the subjects of it.

In this conduct of theirs we may see a lively image of the followers of Christ, and may read,

***~~II. Their universal character.~~***

While they approve themselves the Lord's people by their views of his salvation, they manifest in relation to it,

***~~1. A fixed purpose.~~***

They regard the care of the soul as the one thing needful: other things may be good and useful; but this is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with for a single day: nor will anything be tolerated that would interfere with it. Allurements or menaces are alike disregarded by them. No *menace*is terrible to them in comparison of God's displeasure. No *pleasure*is desirable in comparison of his favor. Hence, if tempted, they reply: What shall it profit me to gain the whole world and lose my own soul? And, if threatened, they answer, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge." In a word, they readily part with all to obtain the pearl of great price; and having "bought the truth," nothing under Heaven can induce them to sell it.

As in a race the people contending for the prize may easily be distinguished from the spectators by the earnestness with which they pursue their object, so may these be known amidst a supine and thoughtless generation: they are lights shining in the midst of a dark, benighted world.

***~~2. A persevering endeavor.~~***

Having put their hand to the plough, they will not look back again. They know that they must "endure unto the end, if ever they would be saved;" and they wait upon God in prayer, and beg him to perfect that which concerns them. *They now desire, not merely to be saved from death and Hell, but to have Christ dwelling and reigning in them*: nor will they ever be satisfied until "every thought of their hearts is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

Hence their diligence in reading the word, and in every ordinance of religion, whether public or private. They find enemies both without and within: but they will not yield to discouragement. They know that their Redeemer is mighty, and able to save them to the uttermost; and therefore they go forth in his strength, and, though defeated, they rally; though wounded, they fight; though faint, they pursue; and never put off their armor until they are made more than conquerors.

**Address**.

***~~1. The ignorant Christian.~~***

Wherein are you superior to John and all the prophets? Truly you are worse than heathens, because of your neglect of your superior advantages. Remember that God will "take vengeance on those who know him not, and that obey not his Gospel."

***~~2. The formal Christian.~~***

You value yourselves on your moderation: and, if there be a person striving to take the kingdom by violence, you discourage him. You approve of striving in everything else; and disapprove of it where alone it should be used. Did you never hear that "many seek to enter into Heaven, but fail," because they do not strive? Beware lest that be your unhappy case.

***~~3. The fainting Christian.~~***

Be not weary in well doing. You have many difficulties, it is true; but you have omnipotence on your side: and "if God be for you, then who can be against you?" The temptations you have, may seem peculiar to you; but they are only "such as are common to man," and God engages that you shall have "none without a way to escape" from it, or strength to withstand it. "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

But beware of sloth: that will soon enervate the soul, and paralyze every effort in the way to Heaven. *The promises of God and the assistances of his Spirit do not supersede your own exertions*: it is true at this day, as much as in the days of Christ, that "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent must take it by force."

#1349

***~~The Heavy-Laden Invited to Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28)~~***

Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

IT is thought by many that the Gospel is a mere system of notions which may be received without benefit, or rejected without loss. But it is rather proposed to us as a remedy for all the miseries which sin has brought into the world. In it we are represented as guilty and undone: but Christ is set before us as a Savior, and is exhibited under every figure that can unfold his excellency, or endear him to our souls.

Under the Old Testament, he is shadowed forth . . .  
as a brazen serpent to heal the wounded,  
as a city of refuge to protect the man-slayer,  
and as a sacrifice to remove the sinner's guilt.

In the New Testament, he speaks of himself. . .  
as bread for the hungry,  
as living water for the thirsty,  
as a physician for the sick, and  
as a kind and hospitable friend, who invites the weary and heavy-laden to himself.

In the words here addressed to us, we may notice,

***~~I. The characters invited.~~***

Under the description of the weary and heavy-laden, we must certainly include **those who groaned under the burden of the Mosaic law.**

The ceremonial law required a great multitude of ritual observances, which, to those who saw not their typical use and tendency, must have appeared frivolous and arbitrary; and, even to those who had some insight into their meaning, they were an irksome task, and an intolerable burden. From this yoke however the Messiah was to deliver them; he was to annul the old covenant with all its ceremonies, and to establish a better covenant in its stead.

When therefore our Lord proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, he invited to him all that were weary and heavy-laden with the Mosaic law, and assured them that the yoke which he would impose upon them was light and easy.

There is however a further reference to **those who labored under temporal afflictions**.

None are such strangers to the common lot of mortality, as not to know that mankind are subject to many grievous troubles. Indeed, such are the calamities incident to life, that few, who have been long in the world, can cordially "thank God for their creation." But more especially when the hand of God is heavy upon us, and we feel the weight of great and multiplied afflictions, we are ready to hate our very existence, and to "choose strangling rather than life."

Many probably of those, to whom Jesus addressed himself, had drunk deep of the cup of sorrow: for their encouragement therefore he promised that, whatever their trials were, whether in mind, or body, or estate—if only they would come to him, they should find a *relief*from all, or (what would be of equal value) *support*and *comfort*under their pressure.

But doubtless we must principally understand by these terms **those who are oppressed with a sense of sin**.

Though all are sinners, all do not feel the weight of sin, because they know not what tremendous evils it has brought upon them. But when any are awakened from their lethargic state, and see what a good and holy God they have offended, they begin to tremble, lest the wrath of God should break forth upon them to consume them utterly. Perhaps they obtain a transient peace by means of their repentance and reformation; but their subsequent falls and backslidings rend open the wounds afresh, and make them feel how hopeless their condition must be, if they are left to themselves.

Even after they have attained peace through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, so that they no longer tremble for fear of condemnation, they groan more than ever under the burden of their indwelling corruptions, saying, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" These are the people for whose relief our Lord came into the world, and whom, above all, he invited to him in the words before us.

To ascertain more fully the import of his address, we proceed to consider,

***~~II. The invitation itself.~~***

By the expression, "Come unto me," our Lord could not mean to call them nearer to him, because they were already round about him: but as he himself explains the words, he called them to believe on him; or, in other words, to come to him in the exercise of faith, of hope, and of love.

Its import will best appear in a short paraphrase.

'To impart rest unto you all is the great end of my appearance in the world. Seek it therefore in me, and come to me, that you may receive it at my hands. Turn not away from me as an impostor; for I am the very person referred to in your prophecies, and sent unto you by the Father. Go not any longer to the vanities of this world in search of rest; for it is not in them; it is a gift which none but myself can impart unto you. Keep back from an apprehension that you can make satisfaction for your own sins, or cleanse yourselves from your iniquities: for you can never have redemption, but through my blood; nor can you ever subdue your lusts, but by my all-sufficient grace.

Neither delay your coming on account of your own unworthiness, as if it were necessary for you to bring some meritorious services as the price of my favor.

Come *just as you are*, with all your sins upon you! Stop not to heal yourselves in part; but come instantly to your Physician; come and receive all my blessings freely, "without money, and without price."

Come in *faith*, believing me able to save you to the uttermost, and as willing as I am able.

Come also in *hope*: let your expectations be enlarged: "you are not straitened in me; be not straitened in your own affections." Count up all the blessings of time; survey all the glories of eternity; stretch your imagination to the uttermost; ask all that *eye*ever saw, or *ear*heard, or *heart*conceived; and I will not only grant your requests, but give "exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think!" "Open your mouths wide, and I will fill them."

Come moreover in *love*. Be not like people driven to me through mere necessity, and influenced by nothing but a dread of condemnation; but contemplate my character, meditate on my kindness, strive to comprehend the heights and depths of my love; and let a sense of my love constrain you to walk with me, to depend upon me, to delight yourselves in me.'

Such may be supposed to be the import of the invitation. And every one who is weary and heavy-laden, whatever his burden is, may consider it as addressed to himself in particular, as much as ever it was to those, who waited on the personal ministry of our Lord. Let us then hear him thus inviting us, as it were, with his dying breath, and from his throne of glory. Let us go to him with one accord. Yes, let us fly to him on the wings of love, even "as the doves to their windows."

That nothing might be wanting to give efficacy to his invitation, our Lord added,

***~~III. The promise with which it is enforced.~~***

The world is glad to see us in our prosperity, and when we can participate in their pleasures. But in a day of adversity, when want and trouble come upon us, they are but too apt to lessen their regards for us, and to grow weary of our complaints. How different is the conduct of the Lord Jesus! He bids us "call upon him in the time of trouble," and, instead of turning a deaf ear to our complaints, promises to "give us rest."

How suitable is this promise to those to whom it is made!

What do the weary and heavy-laden desire?

If their troubles are of a *temporal*nature, they wish for something that shall soothe the anguish of their minds, and be a support unto their souls: and this our blessed Savior administers by the aids of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit.

Are their sorrows altogether *spiritual?* He speaks peace unto their conscience, saving unto them, "Be of good cheer, I am your salvation," he discovers unto them the sufficiency of his blood to cleanse them from sin, and the efficacy of his grace to subdue and mortify their lusts. He gives them that which nothing else in the universe can supply, a firm and stable hope of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory. Whatever other blessings he should offer to the soul, they would all be despised in comparison to this: it is . . .  
*bread* to the hungry,  
*drink* to the thirsty,  
*healing* to the sick,  
and *life* to the dead.

And can anything be more precious to a heavy-laden soul?

The term used in the text imports far more than an exemption from labor and trouble: it implies also that refreshment which a great and seasonable relief administers.

And how sweet is that peace which he imparts to a believing penitent! it is a "peace that passes understanding," a "joy unspeakable and full of glory!" Surely the consolations of his Spirit are fitly called "a pledge of our inheritance," since they are indeed a beginning and foretaste of Heaven in the soul. But we must extend our thoughts yet further, even to "the rest that remains for the people of God." Doubtless that was most eminently in the view of our blessed Lord; nor shall anything short of all the glory and felicity of Heaven be the portion of those who come to him aright.

That it is also a true and faithful saying, there can be no doubt.

Never did any come to our Lord without experiencing his truth and faithfulness. Many indeed there are who profess to follow him, while yet they are far from enjoying this promised blessing: but, instead of coming to him in faith and hope, and love, they are impelled only by terror; they listen to the suggestions of despondency; and they live under the reigning power of unbelief. No wonder then that they find not the rest which they desire.

But if any go to him aright, there is no guilt, however great, which is not removed from their conscience; there is no tumult of contending passions that is not moderated and restrained; there is no any earthly trouble in which they are not enabled to rejoice and glory. If under any calamity whatever we go to him like the Apostle, like him shall we receive such an answer as will turn our sorrow into joy, and make the very occasions of grief to be the sources of exultation and triumph.

**Application**.

***~~1. To those who feel not the burden of sin.~~***

If we are exempt in a measure from earthly calamities, we have reason to rejoice. But to be unacquainted with spiritual troubles is no proper subject for self-congratulation. It is "the broken and contrite heart alone which God will not despise." We may boast of our goodness, like the Pharisee, or the elder brother in the parable: but, like them, we shall have no forgiveness with God, nor any part in that joy, which returning prodigals shall experience in their Father's house. We must "sow in tears, if ever we would reap in joy." We must be heavy-laden with a sense of sin, if ever we would experience the rest which Christ will give.

***~~2. To those who are seeking rest.~~***

It is indeed a mercy to have an awakened conscience: but you must now guard with earnest and equal care against self-righteous hopes on the one hand, and desponding fears on the other. You may be ready to fear that your burdens are too heavy to be removed, and your sins too great to be forgiven: but the people, whom Christ invites, are the heavy-laden; yes, all of them without exception, whatever be their burdens, and whatever be their sins.

On the other hand, you may be tempted to seek rest in your duties or your frames: but it is Christ alone that ever can bestow it, and from him you must receive it as a free unmerited gift. Endeavor therefore to draw near to him in his appointed way; and be assured that he will draw near to you with his promised blessings.

***~~3. To those who have attained rest and peace.~~***

A deliverance from fear and trouble, instead of relaxing our obligation to watchfulness, binds us to tenfold diligence in the ways of God. When therefore our Lord invites us to come to him for rest, he adds, "Take my yoke upon you;" and then repeats the promise, in order to intimate that a submission to his will is as necessary to our happiness, as an affiance in his name. Let this then be your daily care. If his yoke were ever so grievous, you could not reasonably hesitate to bear it, since the burden of sin and misery, that he has removed from you, is infinitely heavier than any other can be. But "his yoke is easy and his burden is light;" and the bearing of it will conduce no less to your present, than to your everlasting felicity.

#1350

***~~Christ, A Meek and Lowly Teacher~~***

***~~[Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29)~~***

"Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls."

EVERY *office*which Christ sustains in the economy of redemption, is replete with encouragement to sinful man. His sufficiency as our great *High-Priest*to make atonement for us, and his power as our *King*to subdue our enemies, are subjects of frequent meditation, and sources of unspeakable comfort, to the true Christian. His *prophetic*office, especially as exercised towards ourselves, is less considered by Christians in general, though it is equally necessary for us, and no less conducive to our eternal welfare.

In a preceding verse our Lord has told us, that none can know the Father, except those whom the Son should reveal him; and, in the words before us, he invites all to come and learn of him the mysterious truths, which, though already recorded in the written word, cannot be apprehended aright—unless he unfolds them to us, and enables us to understand them.

In these words we may discern,

***~~I. Our duty.~~***

Christ having undertaken to teach us the way of safety and the way of duty, we should learn of him,

***~~1. With the teachableness of children.~~***

Children receive with the most implicit submission whatever their teachers tell them. Just so should we learn of Christ: we should not bring our own preconceived notions to the Scriptures, or presume to try the mysteries of revelation at the bar of our own corrupt reason; but we should believe whatever God has spoken, and receive it simply on the authority of the speaker. Nor should the opinions of the wisest men be of any weight with us, if they are clearly contrary to the voice of inspiration.

***~~2. With the diligence of students.~~***

They who have a thirst for knowledge, are almost constantly employed in deep thought, and laborious investigation. Nor do they account any pains too great, if only they can gain that eminence and distinction, which superior attainments will ensure. Thus should we be occupied in pursuit of divine knowledge; reading the word, "searching into it as for hidden treasures," meditating upon it day and night, and praying over it for divine illumination. While others are distracted and cumbered about many things, we should be sitting at the feet of Jesus, and embracing all opportunities of religious instruction, whether in public or in private.

***~~3. With the obedience of devoted followers.~~***

Earthly knowledge may be merely speculative. But divine knowledge must be *practical—*it is of no use at all, any further than it purifies the heart and renews the life. Whatever we find to be the mind and will of God, that we must do without hesitation, and without reserve. As the *reasonings*of men are to be disregarded when opposed to the declarations of God; so are the *maxims*of men to be set at nothing, when by adopting them we should violate a divine command. One single word, confirmed with *Thus says the Lord*, should operate more powerfully to the regulating of our faith and practice, than the sentiments and customs of the whole world combined.

The description which our Lord has given us of his own character, shows what abundant provision is made for,

***~~II. Our encouragement.~~***

Our Lord's words are not to be understood as an exhortation to learn meekness and lowliness from his example, but as a reason why we should cheerfully submit ourselves to his teaching. In this view they are very encouraging: they imply, that,

***~~1. He will condescend to our ignorance.~~***

Those who are proficients in deep knowledge, cannot bear the drudgery of teaching children the first rudiments of language. But Jesus, who is able to instruct the highest archangel, is yet willing to take, as it were, under his tutelage the most ignorant of mankind. As in the days of his flesh, "he spoke the word to men as they were able to bear it," so now will he give us "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little." When his own disciples forbade people to bring their children to him, under the idea that his time ought not to be occupied with people so incapable of benefitting by his instructions—he rebuked them, and desired that all, of whatever age or description, might have the freest access to him; being as willing to adapt himself to the capacity of a child, as to the more enlarged understandings of the Scribes and Pharisees.

***~~2. He will bear with our dullness.~~***

Human teachers are but too apt to feel irritation from the stupidity of their disciples. But Jesus, who has infinitely more to bear with than we can have, is ever patient, and ready to renew yet again and again the lessons that he has given us a thousand times. Scarcely any person can be conceived more dull of understanding than his own disciples, who, after he had been teaching them for nearly four years, were yet ignorant of the necessity of his death, of the ends of his resurrection, and of the spiritual nature of his kingdom. He was constrained sometimes to complain of them in this very view, "Are you also yet without understanding?" Nevertheless he continued to teach them, until he had initiated them fully into all the mysteries of his kingdom. And thus will he do to the most ignorant of men; he will "open their understandings," and "guide them into all truth."

***~~3. He will encourage our feeblest efforts.~~***

It frequently happens that those who are slow of understanding, are altogether driven to despondency through the impatience of their teachers. But Jesus is all meekness and lowliness and, however weak our efforts be, provided only they be sincere and humble, he will bless them with a measure of success, and with manifest tokens of his approbation. We may appeal to the experience of all, in confirmation of this truth. Who ever sought instruction from him in a way of reading and prayer, without finding his mind gradually opening to an apprehension of the truth? Has not Jesus shown, if we may so speak, a partiality for the poor and weak, revealing to them what he has hidden from the wise and prudent; confounding thereby the wisdom of the wise, and securing to himself the glory of his own work? Yes; in reference to the illumination of the mind, as well as to anything else, we may say, "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory."

But, in addition to the encouragement which his condescension affords us, we have a further inducement to learn of him, from the consideration of,

***~~III. Our reward.~~***

An attention to the instructions of earthly teachers is productive of no little benefit. But if we diligently learn of Christ, our advantages will be greater than we can well conceive: we shall find benefit to our souls; we shall obtain "rest,"

***~~1. From the uncertainty of conjecture.~~***

Mankind in general are in a state of doubt respecting the most important of all concerns: though they may assent to the principal truths of Christianity, they feel no assurance respecting them. But those who have learned of Christ, soon attain a full persuasion of the things they have been taught. The Scripture speaks of a threefold assurance:  
an assurance of *understanding*,  
an assurance of *faith*,  
and an assurance of *hope*.

Of all these, the men of this world have no idea—they are ready to speak of such things as marks of daring presumption. But the disciple of Christ has an inward witness of the truths he has learned; and knows perfectly that they are not a cunningly-devised fable. He can venture his soul upon them with as much confidence, as he can recline his weary body upon his bed. He knows in whom he has believed; and that the soul which is committed to Jesus, is safe forever.

***~~2. From the accusations of conscience.~~***

In spite of men's endeavors to silence the convictions of their conscience, they never can obtain peace but in God's appointed way. But the person that has learned of Christ to rely simply on his blood and righteousness, enjoys a "peace that surpasses all understanding." He knows that "the blood of Jesus will cleanse him from all sin," and that "there is no condemnation to the soul that believes in him".

***~~3. From the turbulence of passion.~~***

Whatever difference there may be in the natural tempers of men, all have some predominant passion or besetting sin that leads them captive. But the disciple of Christ has a new and more powerful principle infused into his soul; by means of which he is enabled to bring into subjection his corrupt appetites, and to mortify those evil dispositions which are such a fruitful source of misery to the unregenerate. This forms the great line of distinction between the Lord's people and others; for, whereas others are led captive by some sin, believers "have not so learned Christ, if they have indeed heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus," on the contrary, "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

***~~4. From the fear of death.~~***

Men may brave death on a field of battle; but all, except the true Christian, shrink from it in its more silent and gradual approaches. But Christ purchased for his followers a deliverance from this bondage to the fear of death. With respect to them, death has lost its sting: yes, death is counted among their richest treasures: and they are enabled to look forward to it with pleasure, as the period when all their conflicts will cease, and their joys be consummated forever.

"Such is the heritage of the servants of the Lord;" and such is the rest that Christ will impart to all who learn of him.

**Address**.

Are there any among us that are pursuing human learning with avidity? O remember, that the knowledge of Christ infinitely transcends all other knowledge, and will bring with it a more certain, and far nobler, recompense. Be persuaded then to devote to it some portion of every day, and the whole of your sabbaths, that you may not only be wise, but "wise unto salvation."

Are there any that are dejected on account of their own incapacity to learn? Consider the abilities of your Teacher; and say, whether he is not able to instruct you, as well as others? He can make "the blind to see out of obscurity, and out of darkness," yes, he will the more readily exert himself on your behalf, because the excellency of the power displayed in your proficiency will the more evidently appear to be of him. Take comfort then, and expect the certain accomplishment of that promise, "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord."

#1351

***~~Christ Greater Than the Temple~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.6)~~***

"I tell you that one greater than the temple is here."

IT is said, concerning our blessed Lord, that he "endured, in a most extraordinary degree, the contradiction of sinners against himself." And in reading his history, we are struck with it continually. There was not anything which he either said or did, which was not made a subject of cavil to his enemies. Even his most beneficent acts were condemned as violations of the law, or as affording occasion for "the Romans to destroy both their place and nation."

In the chapter before us, we have a remarkable instance of their carping at an action in his Disciples, which, if done by any other person, would have caused no complaint. Our Lord was going with his Disciples through a corn-field, on the Sabbath-day; and they, being hungry, plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them in their hands, and ate the corn. This the law of Moses expressly authorized them to do; and therefore the act could not be condemned. But the law prohibited all kinds of labor on the Sabbath-day; and the Pharisees, with hypocritical malignity, interpreted this act as a kind of reaping and threshing-out the corn; and cast reflections on our Lord for sanctioning such a violation of the Sabbath.

Our Lord therefore vindicated his Disciples: first, on the ground of its being a matter of necessity, in which case it superseded the observance of a ceremonial institution. In proof of this, he adduced the instance of David, who, having no food to satisfy himself and his followers on one particular emergency, took the loaves of show-bread, which were to be eaten by none but the priests alone, and satisfied the calls of nature with that. This was generally acknowledged as a justifiable act in David, because of the urgency of the occasion; and on the same ground the conduct of his Disciples was justifiable, as was his also in permitting it.

Our Lord next vindicated it on the ground of precedent: for, notwithstanding all the injunctions respecting rest on the Sabbath-day, the priests in the temple engaged in labor, to a very great extent, on every Sabbath, being occupied in slaying and offering the appointed sacrifices. They, notwithstanding they thus "profaned the Sabbath, were blameless," because the service of the temple required it.

In like manner, the Disciples, being engaged in his work, were blameless: for "He was greater than the temple;" and, consequently, was entitled to suspend the observance of the Sabbath, so far as his service required it; for "He was Lord even of the Sabbath-day."

In discoursing on this subject, I will,

***~~I. Confirm our Lord's assertion.~~***

Our blessed Lord did not so fully declare his Messiahship to the Pharisees as he did to some of a more candid disposition; as the Samaritan woman, and the man who had been born blind. Yet, on proper occasions, he was not backward to assert his superiority to all the sons of men. Jonah was a prophet; and Solomon a king; but he was, in every view, greater than either the one or the other of them. And, of all the structures in the universe, the temple was infinitely the most august and sacred: yet did he, without hesitation, declare himself to be greater than the temple.

In order to confirm this assertion, I shall not enter generally into the proofs of the divinity of Christ, but shall consider minutely the comparison here instituted between the temple and him: and, stating those things which most ennobled the temple, I will distinctly mark the superiority of Christ in every particular.

The temple then, with every vessel in it, was made after a pattern formed by God himself; and given to David, and to Solomon, for that end.

But the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ was himself formed by the very hand of God. He was formed, as no other person ever was, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit; as the angel had announced to the Virgin Mary: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore, also, that Holy One who shall be born of you, shall be called the Son of God."

Nor was it in his person only, but in his *offices*also, that he was pre-eminently the product of Divine wisdom and power. In him are combined the kingly, prophetic, and sacerdotal offices; all of which he executes, in a spiritual manner, over the face of the whole earth, yes, and in Heaven itself too; and will continue so to do, even to the end of time. It was in reference to him and his offices that the temple itself was formed, and all its ordinances were appointed. They were but the shadow, of which he was the substance: and consequently his superiority in this respect is fully established.

Again: the temple was richly furnished with everything which could conduce to the glory of God, or to the welfare of man.

The candlestick, the table of show-bread, the altar of incense, the censer, the ark of the covenant, with numberless other vessels, all of the purest gold, and of the most exquisite workmanship, distinguished this building far beyond any that ever existed upon earth. But *they were very faint shadows of his incomprehensible fullness and excellency*. In Him their respective uses were all combined. He was at once the *sacrifice*, the *altar*that sanctified it, and the *Priest*that offered it. He was "the light of the whole world;" and "the living bread, of which whoever eats shall live forever." He was the laver in which every child of man must wash both his person and his offerings. He was the ark, which contained in it the law, and was covered in all its exact dimensions by the mercy-seat; for, by his own fulfillment of the law for us, he rendered the exercise of mercy commensurate with the necessities of fallen man.

Here again, then, compare the shadow with the substance, and say whether the Lord Jesus Christ does not infinitely surpass the temple in the very things which constituted its chief grandeur.

But further: the temple had the Shechinah, the bright cloud, the symbol of the Deity, constantly residing in it. This was doubtless its highest glory. (I speak of the former temple, previous to the Babylonish captivity; and not of the latter, in which many of its principal ornaments were lacking.) But in the Lord Jesus Christ dwelt, not a symbol of the Deity, but the Deity himself, "even all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This explains that prophecy of the Prophet Haggai, that "the glory of the latter house should exceed the glory of the former." How could that be, it may be asked, when in the latter temple were lacking the Shechinah, the Urim and Thummim, and the fire that came down from Heaven?

The answer is plain: The Lord Jesus Christ himself came to the latter house: and his presence in it was an honor infinitely exceeding all that ever was conferred on the first temple; because he was not a symbol of the Deity, but the great God himself in an incarnate state, even "Emmanuel, God with us."

I add yet once more: the temple was the place of confluence to all the tribes of Israel, even to all who desired to have access to God, or to obtain blessings at his hands.

And where does every sinner in the universe go, but to Jesus? To him is every eye directed: "through him alone can any man have access to God," in him does every saint "desire to be found," and through him shall all blessings, temporal, spiritual, eternal—flow down in richest abundance upon all who believe in him. Indeed, in this respect his superiority is most amply marked: for all that he does, is by virtue of the "one offering of himself once offered," whereas the offerings in the temple, because of their inefficacy, were renewed from year to year. His grace also extends to sins which the law of Moses could not reach; and confers benefits which that was unable to impart; and endures, not for a year only, like that under the law, but through the countless ages of eternity.

To add anything further would be superfluous. The superiority of Christ to the temple is so evident, that, without dwelling any longer upon it, I will proceed to,

***~~II. Point out the peculiar interest which we have in it.~~***

Here again we go back to our text, that we may derive from thence as much as possible for the elucidation of our subject. The establishment of Christ's superiority to the temple shows,

***~~1. His right to command.~~***

That was the precise point at issue between him and the Pharisees. Had he a right to authorize a deviation from the letter of the Mosaic law? He affirmed he had. They themselves admitted, that the strict observance of the Sabbath was dispensed with for the service of the temple: and if He was greater than the temple, the same right was vested in him. Nothing less than divine authority could in any case supersede a divine command: and, if he were greater than the temple, a divine authority must reside in him; consequently, he exercised no other right than what strictly, and of necessity, pertained unto him.

Now, there are divine commands, which we also, under all ordinary circumstances, are bound to obey. We must yield compliance with the lawful edicts of the civil magistrate: we must "obey them, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." "Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

Yet, if the civil magistrate enjoins what is contrary to the command of Christ, or forbid anything which Christ has enjoined, we must obey Christ in preference to him. The Apostles, when forbidden to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, appealed to his very judges, saying, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

In like manner, we are commanded to love and honor our parents: and so important is that command, that it is distinguished from the rest, by being enforced, as the Apostle observes, with a special promise. Yet even that is superseded, when they exert their authority in opposition to Christ. Nay, more: strange as the injunction sounds, we are commanded even to "hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, in comparison of him; and on no other terms can we ever be acknowledged as his disciples." Of course, no one will be so absurd as to imagine that this declaration is to be understood in any other than a comparative view: for in any other view we are not authorized to hate an enemy, much less our nearest relatives.

Our duty to the Lord Jesus Christ is of paramount obligation, and supersedes everything that is opposed to it. The law of self-preservation is strongly binding upon us: but if fidelity to Christ requires the sacrifice of it, "not even life itself must be dear to us," we must be willing to lay it down at any time for his sake: and if, at the expense of our duty to him, we save our lives, then we shall lose them to all eternity.

This, then, must be a principle deeply fixed in our minds: That the authority of Christ is to rule us under all circumstances; and that nothing under Heaven is to be allowed to interfere with it. Men who cast off his yoke will indeed clamor against us, and express their indignation against us for not complying with their will. But we may safely leave ourselves in the hands of Jesus; who, as our Advocate, will plead our cause; and, as our Judge, will pass a sentence of approval upon us in the last day. He will then at least, if not before, vindicate our conduct, and "make our righteousness to appear as the noon-day."

***~~2. His sufficiency to save.~~***

To all who observed the institutions of the law in faith, they were effectual for the salvation of their souls. And who ever applied to Jesus in vain? Who ever relied on his sin-atoning sacrifice, and was confounded? What is there that shall be kept back from one who implores blessings at his hands?

Shall *pardon*be refused? No, "though his sins were red as scarlet or as crimson, they should become white as snow." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him from all sin."

Shall *peace*be denied to the believing suppliant? No, "being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God;" so that, instead of looking forward with terror to the eternal world, he shall even now "rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Shall *strength*for future obedience be withheld? No, "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for him;" and he shall be "able to do all things through Christ, who strengthens him."

Shall *glory*be deemed too good for him? No, the Savior, in whom he has believed, will judge him, and exalt him to a participation of his own *inheritance*, his own *kingdom*, his own *glory*.

The principal utensils of the temple, the lavers, the tables, the candlesticks, were, in the temple, ten times more numerous than in the tabernacle: and this marked the great superiority of the temple and its services to the tabernacle and the ordinances observed in it. And do I say too much, if I say that in Jesus our blessings are increased? Truly, they are increased, not tenfold, but a hundredfold: for, until he was glorified, they were sent forth only in slender portions: but from that time they have been poured out like a river.

***~~Let us then observe from hence,~~***

***~~1. How highly we are privileged under the Christian dispensation.~~***

Jesus came in person to the second temple, and thereby raised it above the first. And does he not come to his temple in our day? Yes, he does—not corporeally indeed, but spiritually, and with great power. He has promised that he would do so: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." And this he will continue to do: as he has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

Nor is it any disadvantage to us that he comes only in a *spiritual*way: for those who beheld him in person were stumbled at the baseness of his appearance; and could not conceive how one so poor and destitute and despised should possess the authority he claimed. But we have no such stumbling-block in our way. We know who he is, and what he is, even "the Mighty God, and the Prince of Peace." We also know what he can do: and that all which was done, under the law by God, in his temple, he can and will do in the midst of us. To us he will give his answers of peace; yes, "he will give grace and glory: and withhold no good thing from us" in time or in eternity. Let us know, then, our exalted privilege, and have our expectations enlarged, in proportion to the advantages we enjoy.

***~~2. With what delight we should attend the ordinances of our God.~~***

Never should we go up to the House of God without expecting to meet our Savior there. We should not go to public ordinances merely to perform a duty, but to enjoy a privilege; not to hear a preacher, but to meet our God and Savior. O, what a different appearance would there be in ordinances, if we all attended them in a befitting frame! What devotion would there be in our *prayers!* What reverential attention would there be to the *Word*delivered! What "showers of blessings" would be poured out upon our souls!

Remember, I pray you, brethren, that, when you come up hither, you come to meet your Lord, who is already waiting here to receive you. Be never satisfied, if you do not see him. If at any time his word be applied with power to your souls, acknowledge him in the gift: for it is through his power alone that the word is effectual for any spiritual good. Thus shall your worship here, prepare you for higher services above; and your acknowledgments of his goodness, be a prelude to your Hosannahs in the realms of bliss!

#1352

***~~The Compassion of Christ Towards the Weak~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:15–21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.15â21)~~***

"But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; And in His name Gentiles will trust."

ONE might gather almost as complete a character of Christ from the Prophecies, as from the Gospels themselves. Not only the great incidents relating to his life and death were foretold, but his spirit and conduct were most minutely delineated.

He had just withdrawn himself from the Pharisees who sought to destroy him; and had strongly enjoined his attendants not to make known his miracles. This conduct appeared strange to those who were expecting him to erect a temporal kingdom. But the Evangelist declares that these very things had been made the subject of prophecy many hundred years before. The passage quoted by him from Isaiah is recorded, not with literal exactness, but according to its true import. It declares,

***~~I. The commission given to Christ.~~***

***~~Christ was the Father's ambassador to our ruined world.~~***

However, in his divine nature, Christ was equal to the Father, yet, in his mediatorial capacity, he was the Father's servant. The office assigned him was to show the way of righteousness and salvation both to Jews and Gentiles; and for this he was qualified by an immeasurable communication of the Spirit to him.

***~~In this view the Father exceedingly delighted in him.~~***

The Father doubtless regarded him as his beloved for his own sake; but was peculiarly pleased with him as having undertaken the work of man's redemption. In him he saw, as it were, all his own perfections glorified, and the thrones of apostate angels occupied by sinners of the human race. Hence in triumphant exultation he declares his acquiescence in him, and calls every human being to "behold" him.

The prophet further specifies,

***~~II. The manner in which he should execute it.~~***

He was to accomplish his work,

***~~1. Silently.~~***

There was to be nothing in him ostentatious, contentious, or clamorous. Together with firmness and fidelity, he exercised continued gentleness and meekness. Would to God that many who bear a similar commission would learn of him to execute it in a similar way!

***~~2. Tenderly.~~***

The terms here used seem to be proverbial.

The former metaphor is taken from *reeds* which were used as musical instruments by shepherds, and which, when bruised, could no longer emit any melodious sound.

The *smoking flax*alludes to the wick of a lamp which, when the flame is extinct, produces an offensive smell.

Both of these metaphors fitly represent the state of a soul bruised under a sense of sin, and lamenting that its grace is nearly extinguished, while whole clouds of corruption are arising from it. But Jesus, instead of despising its low estate, will rather fan the spark into a flame, and cause the worthless reed to send forth melody that shall delight the ears even of God himself.

***~~3. Successfully.~~***

However gentle his exertions, he shall never ultimately fail. As his forbearance towards his enemies gave them a momentary appearance of triumph, so he sometimes delays his aid even to his most favored people; but he will at last prevail, and make his grace victorious in their souls.

To this description of the Savior the prophet naturally subjoins,

***~~III. Our duty towards him.~~***

Blessed be God, our duty is our highest privilege!

We are commanded to trust in him,

***~~1. For instruction.~~***

Jesus is both qualified and commissioned to enlighten the Gentiles; nor are there any so weak and ignorant but that he can make them wise to salvation. Let us then "not lean to our own understanding," but seek to be "taught of him."

***~~2. For acceptance.~~***

It is not merely in his individual capacity, but as the head of the elect world, that he is so pleasing to his heavenly Father. We therefore, if we believe on him, may be certain of acceptance through him; yes, *God will not behold a spot in the most polluted soul, if it be only washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness.*

***~~3. For victory.~~***

None have need to despond on account of their own weakness and corruptions: the "grace of Christ is sufficient," and shall prove so to all who trust in him. "Wherever he has begun the good work, he will carry it on unto the end."

***~~Application.~~***

***~~1. The text is addressed to all the Gentile sinners.~~***

How gracious is God in thus inviting sinners to "behold" his Son! And how powerful the recommendation that is this enforced by the example of God himself! But can anything be a stronger reproof to those, who, instead of choosing Christ, and being well pleased with him, have uniformly despised and rejected him? Say then, you ungrateful world, whom will you condemn: yourselves, or God? Still however, the invitation is addressed to you, "Behold my Son." O that you may behold him now to your joy, and not hereafter to your eternal damnation!

***~~2. But the words are more eminently suited to the weak and desponding.~~***

More consolatory declarations could not have been desired by man, or given by God. The lowest possible state of grace is here described in most appropriate terms, and an assurance given that it shall prove victorious in the outcome. Let the desponding soul then learn to "trust" in Jesus; and even in the midst of conflicts sing, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

#1353

***~~The Blind and Mute Demoniac Healed~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.22), [23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 12.23)~~***

"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said: Could this be the Son of David?"

IN establishing the Mosaic dispensation, God introduced it with many miracles. It might well be expected therefore that, when he should supersede that dispensation, and establish another in its place, he would confirm that also with miracles, so as to leave no doubt but that he was the author of "that which should remain, no less than of that which was to vanish away." Accordingly our blessed Savior wrought miracles without number, and appealed to them as substantiating his claim to divine authority: "Though you don't believe me, believe the works; that you may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." It should seem that, for the furtherance of this end, Satan was permitted to exercise greater power over the bodies of men, than was ever exercised by him either before or since: so that the divine mission of Jesus might be the more signally marked by his conquests over Satan.

In discoursing on the miracle before us, I shall show,

***~~I. What proof the Lord Jesus here gave of his Messiahship.~~***

There was a man whom Satan by his malignant influence had caused to be "both blind and dumb," and him did our Lord in an instant restore to the perfect use of his faculties, so that "the blind and dumb both spoke and saw." At this stupendous miracle "the people were all amazed," and the conclusion which they drew from it was, "Is not this the son of David?" Under the name and character of "the Son of David" the *Messiah*was expected: and from the miracle which they had seen, the people inferred, that Jesus must be he: yes, so undeniable did this inference appear, that they asked with confidence, "Is not this the son of David?"

This miracle was precisely of the kind that the Messiah was expected to perform. It had been foretold by the prophet, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, etc." And to such miracles as these our Lord himself referred in proof of his Messiahship. When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire of Jesus, "Are you he who should come, or do we look for another?" Our Lord replied, "Go and show John again the things that you do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them: and blessed is he who shall not be offended by me."

Indeed so wonderful was this miracle, and so evident, on Scripture principles, the truth deduced from it, that the envious Pharisees, in order to obviate the conclusion drawn from it, ascribed the miracle to a confederacy with the devil. But our Lord showed them, that, on their view of the matter, Satan would be subverting his own kingdom: but, as they could not conceive he would do that, it was clear that the kingdom of God must be come unto them.

Thus did our Lord by this miracle establish his claim to the Messiahship, and give ample ground for all the people to receive him as the appointed Savior of the world.

And have these wonders ceased? No, I feel myself authorized to declare,

***~~II. What corresponding proofs he is ever ready to give to us at this day.~~***

Satan has no longer the same power over the *bodies*of men that he once exercised. But he has as great power over their *souls*as ever, and

***~~We are spiritually in the same predicament with the man whom Jesus healed.~~***

We are, while in an unregenerate state, "both blind and mute." We are "blind." What is there which we see aright? What views have we of our duty, our interest, or our happiness? One would suppose that every rational being should see it his duty to love and serve his God; and his interest to secure the divine favor; and his happiness to enjoy the presence of God, and a foretaste of his eternal inheritance. But where do we find people acting in accordance with such views? Men's earthly pursuits appear to them of paramount obligation; and *all desire after heavenly things is swallowed up by their anxiety about the things of time and sense*. In vain does God tell them, that this world is only as "a broken cistern that can hold no water;" and that no solid comfort can be derived from any source but from God, "the fountain of living waters." This they will not believe, notwithstanding the experience of every day bears testimony to it. And whence is this unbelief, but from the influence of Satan upon their minds? Yes, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not."

So also are we "mute." Our tongue is spoken of by God as "our glory," because by that, more than by any other member, we are enabled to glorify him. But how is that member employed for God? We speak not to him in the exercise of prayer and praise, though our multiplied necessities and mercies call for these acknowledgments every day and hour of our lives. Nor do we in our converse with the world speak of God. Every other subject that can be thought of occupies our tongues rather than this, insomuch that among our friends and relatives it seems, as it were, to be banished by general consent. Still less do we speak for God. We see him dishonored on every side; but we dare not advocate his cause. If our own father or friend were so insulted, we would find somewhat to speak in their behalf. But for God and his honor we have no concern: we can see the whole world risen in rebellion against him, and never once bear our testimony against their impiety. And whence is this, but from the same Satanic influence? Yes, "our walking thus according to the course of this world is owing to that prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in all the children of disobedience."

But from this state our blessed Lord is ever willing to deliver us.

He is constituted "both Lord and Christ." He is exalted on purpose that he may give us the grace we stand in need of, and thus "destroy in us the works of the devil." He on his ascension to Heaven poured out the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he has promised to us also; and by his Spirit "he will open the eyes of our understanding," and "open our lips also that we may show forth his praise." This is the very office which he has undertaken to perform: He is "made Head over all things to the Church for this very end;" and "there is a fullness treasured up in him for this express purpose." No man has any need to be discouraged, as though he were beyond the reach of this mercy: he cannot be in a more hopeless state than the man who is spoken of in my text: and we are assured, that "the things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, our Lord will reveal unto babes." Let all then look unto him; the *blind*, that they may see, and the *mute*that they may speak; and not one shall be disappointed of his hope: for our blessed Lord has "counseled all to come to him for these blessings," and "no soul shall ever seek his face in vain."

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet under the power of Satan.~~***

But where shall I find these, or even so much as one of them? Are you among this unhappy number? No; if we will take your own word, we shall not find so much as one. But are there none among you that are destitute of a spiritual discernment, and whose whole conduct shows them to be blind as to all practical perception of their spiritual duties, their interests, and their happiness? Alas! we need not go far to find such as these; for on every side of us we see people living for themselves, and not for God; for time, and not for eternity.

I ask not then respecting your worldly possessions or your intellectual attainments. If you have not a truly spiritual use of your faculties, possess what else you may, you are in a far worse condition than the man whom Satan had rendered blind and mute. His wants might be supplied by others; yours cannot. His would cease at death; yours will never terminate: his might be far more than compensated by the acquisition of spiritual attainments; but what can ever compensate for the wants which you experience? Ten thousand worlds could not be to you any compensation for the loss of spiritual faculties and spiritual enjoyments. Then I entreat you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is as able and as willing to supply your wants as ever he was to heal those who were brought to him in the days of old.

***~~2. Those who have been delivered from Satan.~~***

Who that beheld that man's change of state did not cordially congratulate him on the mercy he had received? Yet was not the blessing conferred on him in any degree to be compared with that which they have experienced, whose eyes are opened to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and whose tongues are loosed to speak forth his praise. Dear brethren, so far as these blessings are enjoyed by you, you are restored to the happiness which Christ has purchased for you by his blood, the happiness which shall before long be perfected in glory.

Give honor then to the Lord Jesus Christ: and, when you see how many around you still remain both blind and mute—then stand amazed at the distinguishing mercy which has been given to you.

And now, need I tell you how to employ the faculties which have been thus renewed? Surely of yourselves you will feel, that they should be henceforth consecrated altogether to your God. "Get then your spiritual senses more and more exercised" on spiritual things; and let your one employment henceforth be on earth, what it will be before long without interruption be in Heaven, to behold the glory, and to show forth the praises, of your adorable Benefactor.

#1354

***~~The Necessity of A Decided Adherence to Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.30)~~***

"He who is not with me, is against me; and he who gathers not with me, scatters abroad."

TO inculcate a devotedness of heart to God, and to insist upon it as indispensably necessary to salvation, is generally deemed harsh and uncharitable: and certainly, if it were not required in Scripture, we should be exceedingly blame-worthy in so alarming and terrifying the minds of men: but we must speak what God has spoken, and deliver faithfully what he has commissioned us to declare.

To what purpose would it be for us to deceive our fellow-creatures? We might speak of candor, and prophesy smooth things, and lull men asleep in sin; but we could not invalidate the word of God, or reverse the sentence that he shall utter: the declaration of our Lord would still condemn both our hearers and ourselves: "If we are not with him, then we must be against him," and he will account us his enemies in the last day.

In considering this declaration, it will be proper,

***~~I. To explain it.~~***

***~~Taken by itself, it has no material difficulty in it.~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ is a Sovereign, who is at war with all the powers of darkness: and we, as his subjects, are bound to fight his battles. Among the subjects of earthly monarchs *no neutrality is admitted*: if their kingdom be invaded, all must unite to repel the enemy: neutrality in such a case would be treason. Now thus, whoever joins not himself to the standard of our Lord, to fight under his banners, and to oppose his enemies, is a traitor to his cause; "he is really against our Lord, if he be not for him."

As a laborer who has neglected to gather up his corn, has in fact wasted and scattered the property of his employer; just so he, whose duty it is to exert himself in gathering a harvest of souls for the Lord Jesus, if he neglects his duty, is really the means of alienating them the more, and of driving them farther from him.

But, when compared with a passage of an opposite aspect, a considerable difficulty arises from it.

Our Lord on another occasion used an expression apparently the very reverse of this: "He who is not against us, is for us." Now which of these assertions is true? for, in words, they plainly contradict each other: or, if both be true, how are we to reconcile them with each other? The true way to ascertain their meaning is, to consider the occasions on which they were spoken.

When our Lord uttered the words of our text, he had been arguing against those who imputed his miracles to a confederacy with Satan; and had shown, that as the whole aim of his life was to destroy the influence of Satan over men, Satan would never have aided him in such a work; he would rather have withstood him to the utmost of his power: and consequently, the miracle which Jesus had wrought in expelling Satan from the demoniac, evinced his power over Satan, and his determination finally to bruise him under his people's feet. From hence our Lord took occasion to observe that there must be the same determined hostility in his power against sin and Satan as he himself had evinced; and that, if any of them should make a truce with Satan even for an hour, they would instantly be considered as traitors to him, and be dealt with as his enemies.

But when our Lord spoke the words recorded by Mark, he had been reproving his disciples for presuming to forbid a man to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, merely because he did not associate himself with them: "Forbid him not," says our Lord: 'he is not a partisan of yours, it is true: but he is advancing my interests, as well as you; only he is doing it in a somewhat different way. His performing of miracles in my name is a proof of his faith in me, and of his concern for my honor: and therefore, though he may not have such clear views as you, or walk exactly in the way that you would have him—yet he is to be acknowledged as a friend of mine: he does nothing against me; and therefore must be considered as on my side.'

Thus the two passages, though apparently opposite, involve no contradiction whatever: the one shows us how to act towards the avowed enemies of Christ; the other, how to act towards his less conspicuous friends: the one forbids neutrality; the other forbids bigotry, or party-spirit.

Viewing these words then as a declaration that *neutrality cannot be endured among the followers of Christ*, we proceed,

***~~II. To confirm it.~~***

There is a twofold warfare, which, as Christian soldiers, we are to maintain; and to each of them does the declaration in our text apply. We must be decided and constant in our opposition to,

***~~1. The enemies of Christ within us.~~***

Among these we must number all our corrupt affections and propensities, which tend to the subversion of Christ's authority within us. Not one of these is to be spared, though it should be dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand. They are indeed exceedingly numerous, and have "strongholds" which are almost impregnable. They are also mustered and led on by a subtle adversary, "the prince of the power of the air, who works in all the children of disobedience." Still, however, we must not be discouraged, but must go forth against them, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We have *armor*, if I may so say, forged for us in Heaven, and fitted to every part that is vulnerable, except the back, which we are on no account to turn to our enemy. Clothed in this, we need not be afraid: with the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, we shall in due time be "more than conquerors." But we must never make a truce, or even parley with any of our enemies. "The filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit" must be opposed without ceasing, and without reserve. Every evil temper, every sensual inclination, all sloth, impenitence, unbelief, or whatever it be that "wars against the soul"—must be mortified and subdued; nor must we ever cease from our conflict until we have overcome, and are crowned with victory.

Now, if we be not thus resolute, we shall not only not advance the kingdom of God within us, but we shall weaken and destroy it. The work of grace within us is not like that of a painter or statuary, that may be left and resumed at pleasure, but like that of a ponderous stone rolled up a steep ascent, which will return, as soon as the force that impelled it is withdrawn. Relapses into sin tend exceedingly to impair the gracious principle within us; they harden the heart, and sear the conscience, and "grieve the Holy Spirit of God;" and if not speedily repented of, set us further from God than we were before our minds were first awakened: so true is it, that, if we "cease to gather with Christ, then we scatter abroad."

***~~2. The enemies of Christ around us.~~***

The whole world is, as it were, risen up in arms against our Lord and Savior; all of them saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Against them, therefore, we are to take part with our blessed Lord. We must protest against their maxims, their principles, and their conduct. We are "not to be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world." Instead of attempting to hold communion with them, which is impossible—we should "come out from among them, and be separate." The attempting to seek their friendship is an act of hostility against Christ himself. Let us not however mistake, as though religion required us to hate any of our fellow-creatures; we must love their persons, but hate their ways. This line of conduct is prescribed to all the followers of Christ: while they "glory in the cross of Christ," they must "by means of that cross be crucified unto the world, and the world be crucified unto them."

Now, if we draw back from this avowal of our sentiments and this decision in the cause of Christ, we rank ourselves immediately on the side of his enemies. "In forsaking his law, we praise the wicked," when rather, "by keeping his law we should contend with them." "We strengthen the hands of Christ's enemies," and in the most effectual manner promise them life, though every part of the inspired volume threatens them with death. Let us remember then that we must be faithful to our profession: we must show "whose we are, and whom we serve," we must "shine as lights in a dark world," and, "instead of being conformed to the world, we must, by being transformed through the renewing of our minds, prove, and exhibit to all around us, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The proper objects of Christian zeal.~~***

There is a zeal that is good; and there is "a zeal that is not according to knowledge." Of the latter kind was that which the Apostles manifested when they forbade a man to cast out devils, merely because he did not follow with them. The work itself was good; and its being done in the name of Jesus, gave them reason to believe that he was a believer in Christ, though he did not unite himself to them. Should they not then rather have rejoiced in the good that was done, though it was not done precisely in the way which they would have preferred?

Alas! the spirit which they indulged prevails in every age: men do not like to see the empire of Satan assailed, or the kingdom of Christ established—if it is not done by their own particular party, or by the means which they particularly prefer. They would rather that the good were wholly left undone, than that people, differing from each other in smaller matters, should unite together to effect it. *All this is the effect of pride, and envy, and bigotry*. Whatever such people may think, they will be reproved by Christ, even as the Apostles were. *The proper object of our zeal is the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon earth, and in our own hearts in particular.*To be zealously affected always in such a cause is a good thing: and I pray God that we may never relax our exertions in it to the last hour of our lives.

***~~2. The necessity of abounding in it more and more.~~***

We have observed, that men cannot continue stationary in the divine life: we must either advance or decline. Now it is not at our first conversion only that the words of our text are applicable to us, but at every period of our lives. The longer we have professed ourselves as the Lord's servants, the more necessity there is for firmness and decision. To become lukewarm, is the worst of states, the most offensive to God, and the most injurious to ourselves. We have this only alternative, either to maintain a warfare against all the enemies of Christ, or to make Christ himself our enemy: and can anyone doubt which he should prefer? If we provoke him to anger, "will our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us?" Let us then "fight a good fight, and act like men," then shall we "be approved of him who has chosen us to be soldiers," and reign with him in glory for evermore.

#1355

***~~The Sin Against the Holy Spirit~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.31)~~***

I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men.

THE sins of men have, in all the ages of the world, been the means and occasions of displaying the Divine goodness. It is through the fall of the first Adam, and the crucifixion of Christ, the second Adam, that we attain the knowledge of God's mercy, and see how the exercise of it can consist with the rights of justice. The wickedness of the Pharisees, to whom the words of our text were addressed, was exceeding heinous: yet was it an occasion of manifesting the most unbounded compassion of our Lord. He had cast out a devil, and thereby not only conveyed a rich blessing to the person whom he had healed, but had given an irrefragable proof of his own divine mission.

But the Pharisees, blinded by prejudice, imputed his miracle to a confederacy with the devil. Our Lord, instead of giving them up, as he might have justly done, to judicial blindness and impenitence, condescended meekly to reason with them on the subject, and then affectionately cautioned them against indulging so base a spirit; assuring them that all which they had said and done against him might be forgiven; but that if they should persist in this conduct towards the Holy Spirit also, and reject his testimony, they would cut themselves off from all possibility of obtaining mercy.

Our Lord's address to them leads us to consider the extent of God's mercy; and shows us,

***~~I. To what it will not extend.~~***

It is of great importance to ascertain correctly what is meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Many have thought that the sin against the Holy Spirit consisted in ascribing the miracles of Jesus to the agency of Satan. But this opinion is founded on a misconstruction of a passage in Mark's Gospel. The Evangelist's observation, "Because they said, he has an unclean spirit," was not intended to show what the sin against the Holy Spirit was, but to specify what the occasion was, which called forth so awful an admonition.

In that very place, the inspired writer contrasts the blasphemy against the Son of man, which the Pharisees now uttered, with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which they were in danger of uttering, when the Holy Spirit would be sent down from Heaven: and he observes that the former might be forgiven; but that the latter could not.

The sin against the Holy Spirit was the acting towards the Holy Spirit, as they now did towards Christ—it was the resisting of all the evidences of Christianity, so as deliberately to pour contempt upon the truths revealed by the Holy Spirit: and, the ascribing of his miraculous powers, and gracious influences, to the agency of Satan."

Why this sin in particular is excepted from the general offers of pardon, it is also of great importance to understand.

It is plainly declared to be unpardonable. But is not the mercy of God sufficiently extensive to cover this? Yes, doubtless; for it is infinite, as all his perfections are. Is there not then a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to atone for this? Yes, his death is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Must we then refer it to the sovereign decree of Heaven; and say, that God, in righteous judgment, has excepted this from the general proclamation of forgiveness? Perhaps this may be one reason: for John mentions "a sin unto death," for the forgiveness of which it is in vain to intercede. But the more substantial reason is, that the sin itself, in the very nature of things, excludes a person from all hope of mercy.

God has provided salvation for us through the blood of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit; and has told us that there neither is, nor ever will be, any other way of salvation for sinful man. Now if we despise this salvation, and account it only a devilish delusion—then what can be done? We must die, because we reject the only means of life. As a man who has taken a poisonous draught, may live, provided he applies a proper remedy, so a man who has committed the most deadly sins may nevertheless be saved at last, if he truly embraces the Gospel of Christ: but if he will not use the remedy provided for him, he must abide the consequences, and perish forever.

We must not however imagine, that every rejection of the Gospel is unpardonable; for that which is occasioned by an ignorance of its true nature, may be forgiven; but it then becomes unpardonable, when it is willful and deliberate, against the convictions of our conscience, and the dictates of an enlightened judgment. It then argues a mind given up to its own delusions, and sealed up under final impenitence; and therefore it cannot be forgiven, because it will never be repented of.

There being no other limit to God's mercy, it is easy to see,

***~~II. To what it will extend.~~***

This only excepted, every species and degree of sin may be forgiven. This blessed truth may be abundantly proved,

***~~1. From Scripture examples.~~***

If we look at *sins committed before conversion*, we shall see that every species of enormity has been pardoned. What horrible impurity had the Corinthians been guilty of! Yet they were washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Murders have in some instances been, not only committed, but multiplied: yet Manasseh, who, in addition to the most impious idolatries, had "filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents," was pardoned. The persecuting of God's Church and people also, though it is like the "piercing of the apple of God's eye," has been forgiven. Yes, Saul, the most furious of all zealots, was stopped in the midst of his outrages, and transformed into a blessed Apostle, in order that he might be an everlasting monument of the power and grace of Christ.

To sum up all in one; the very murder of the Son of God himself has been forgiven; and thousands of those who cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" were converted in answer to that petition of our Lord, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

We may extend our observation also to*sins committed after conversion*. Who can contemplate without horror the conduct of David; who, though an eminent professor and patron of religion, defiled the wife of his faithful subject, and, in order to conceal his crime, laid a plot to destroy him? Consider him, I say, murdering this man who was exposing his life continually for his sake, murdering also a multitude of other people together with him, involving another person in the guilt of all these murders as his instrument and accomplice, and making the very man, whose death he was contriving, the bearer of that letter, which was devoting him to destruction. Consider him moreover, when he had accomplished his purpose, blasphemously ascribing the death of all these people to God, then instantly taking the adulterous Bathsheba to live with him as his wife; and, after all, living at least nine months in utter impenitence, as though he had committed no crime at all!!

In an ignorant heathen, such conduct would have been inexpressibly vile; but in a saint of God, the man after God's own heart—who would conceive it possible? To believe that such iniquity was ever committed, seems almost a libel upon human nature. Yet even this, surpassing as it does almost the bounds of credibility, was forgiven, and that too, upon the very first motion of penitence in David's heart.

*Peter's sin*, if viewed in all its aggravations, was scarcely less than this: yet, even while he was committing it, our Lord looked on him with pity and compassion; and afterwards thrice repeated the commission, which restored him openly to his apostleship.

***~~2. From Scripture declarations.~~***

Consult we the *Prophets?* They speak strongly on this point, declaring that we are redeemed from all sins, even those of a scarlet or crimson die.

Ask we of the *Apostles?*They speak in terms of similar import, and contrast the Gospel with the law in this particular; that whereas there were some sins, for which there was no sacrifice appointed under the law of Moses, there is no iniquity whatever from which we may not be justified by the Gospel of Christ.

If we attend to the voice of *Christ himself*, we shall find him no less explicit: he assures us that whoever believes in him shall never die, shall never be cast out. Thus universally do the Scriptures testify, that "all manner of sin," yes, even the most horrid "blasphemies with which any man can blaspheme," (except the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) "shall be forgiven unto men."

It must however be remembered, that these declarations suppose that we repent and believe the Gospel; for, without repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, no sin whatever can be pardoned.

***~~Before we close, it will be proper to add,~~***

***~~1. A word of admonition.~~***

We hope and trust that there are not any in this day, who are guilty of the sin which is here declared unpardonable: but many who scoff at religion, and deride the influences of the Spirit, may be much nearer to the commission of it than they imagine. It will be well for all such people to pause and consider on what a *precipice*they stand—for they may do despite to the Spirit of grace until they have quenched his sacred motions, and provoked him to abandon them to their own delusions. The Lord grant that none of us may bring down on ourselves such a tremendous judgment!

**2. A word of consolation**.

Some are tempted to think that they have committed the unpardonable sin: but if it be true, that the commission of it is always attended with judicial blindness, and followed by final impenitence, then no one can have committed it, who is apprehensive that he has been guilty of it: because, instead of indulging such fears, he would go on glorying in his shame, and hardening himself in his iniquities. Let all such apprehensions then be put away; and let that other declaration of the text abide upon our minds for our comfort and encouragement under all the accusations of a guilty conscience. O let all of us avail ourselves of this gracious declaration, while yet the offered mercy lies within our reach!

#1356

***~~Idle Words to be Accounted For~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.35-37)~~***

"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every worthless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

THERE is not any plainer or more acknowledged truth, in relation to *natural*things, than that "a tree is known by its fruit." In *morals*, the same would be equally obvious, if we were equally unbiased in our judgment respecting it. But, if we speak of morals, we must not confine our attention to actions only: we must take also the words of men into the account; since by them the heart betrays itself, no less than by overt acts. The communications which proceed from the heart will, of necessity, correspond with the matters which abound in it; even as a stream will manifest the quality of the fountain from whence it flows. Our blessed Lord has determined this point; and grounded on it a most solemn declaration, that is of the utmost importance to every child of man: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every worthless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

To impress this declaration upon your minds, I will,

***~~I. Explain it.~~***

In explaining the Holy Scriptures, and especially such solemn declarations as that before us, the utmost possible care must be taken to avoid too strict an interpretation on the one hand, or too lax an interpretation on the other. Respecting the precise import of the passage before us, a variety of opinions have been entertained; some limiting it to the expressions which had been made use of by the Pharisees in the preceding context, while others extend it to the most innocent communications in social and domestic life. The former of these enervate the force of the declaration altogether: the latter make it an occasion of continual distress to their own souls.

Let us first endeavor to ascertain what is meant by the expression, "every worthless word".

I think we must confine the term to words which are in some respect evil: for it cannot be conceived that our blessed Lord should speak so strongly respecting words which were altogether innocent. Yet must the expression be very comprehensive, else such a declaration would scarcely have been made; since, respecting words that were palpably and grossly wicked, there could have been no doubt. I think, then, that we must comprehend under the term "worthless words,"  
first, all that are sinful in themselves;  
next, all that are sinful in their tendency; and  
lastly, all that are sinful in their source and origin.

The suggestions of the Pharisees respecting our blessed Lord were in the highest degree injurious to his character, and profanely impious towards God. And, as those were the immediate occasion of our Lord's declaration, we are sure that every expression which pours contempt on true religion, or inflicts any injury on man, must of necessity be numbered among the words which he intended to condemn. They bear confessedly, as all words that are false, or lewd, or profane, or scandalous, most evidently do—the stamp of sin upon them.

But there are many words which do not wound the ear by any positive offensiveness, which yet are evil in the sight of God, because of their tendency to taint the mind, or pervert the judgment, of those who hear them.

Among these I would rank all *flattering*words, which tend to puff up people with pride and self-conceit.

I should include also those facetious turns of wit which are calculated to convey to the mind ideas of an impure or licentious cast; such as the Apostle calls "foolish talking and jesting," and which he declares to be altogether unsuited to the Christian character, and displeasing to God.

Nor should I omit to mention eulogies on the world, its pleasures, its riches, its honors, of which you hear so much in every place and company, and which lead the youthful mind into an opinion, that the world, if attained, can make us happy. Thousands, by means of such conversation, are betrayed into error, and hardened in sin; and brought, without being at all aware of it, to the brink of ruin, yes, to everlasting destruction, both of body and soul, in Hell!

I must however go one step further, and say, that whatever indicates evil in the heart, must be regarded as coming under the comprehensive expression of my text. Whatever is the offspring of pride, or envy, or malice, or vanity, or folly, or indifference to piety; in short, whatever betrays a lack of a pious principle within us, must be denominated "worthless." I think this is the true distinction. It is not necessary that in every word a pious principle should appear; but in no word should the lack of a religious principle appear. There may be much that has no religion in it; there may be even what has not any kind of solidity in it, as the talking of a mother with her little child; which yet does not come under the description of "worthless," but everything that betrays a want of a pious principle in the heart, whatever be its aspect in relation to other things, is wrong, and offensive in the sight of God.

Now we are prepared to hear what the Lord has declared concerning it.

"Of every such word we must give account in the day of judgment." "There is not a word on our tongue, but God knows it altogether." "If the secrets of our heart will be made manifest" at the last day, much more will the words, by which they have found utterance, be scrutinized. They will be regarded as *evidences of the internal state of our souls*, especially so far as our words are evil: for it is but too true, that our words may be good, while yet our hearts are evil: but if our words are evil, there can remain no doubt whatever about the state of our hearts, from whence they flow. Making due allowance for this distinction, "by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned." Not that this distinction is necessary, as it respects God: for the words that are hypocritical are, in God's sight, among the most hateful that we can possibly utter.

It is only for the sake of avoiding misconception among men that I make this distinction. Men cannot know the heart; and therefore are constrained to hope well, wherever the appearances are favorable: but *God sees the heart itself; and will pass his judgment according to what he beholds there*. On the words, as far as they are indexes of the mind and heart, he will pass his judgment: but when the words have conveyed what was not in the heart, he will judge, not according to the appearance, but righteous judgment, according to truth.

Having endeavored to ascertain the true import of this declaration, I will proceed to,

***~~II. Point out the proper use to he made of it.~~***

The peculiar solemnity with which the assertion was made by our blessed Lord sufficiently shows of what vast importance it is. It was intended to operate forcibly on our minds: and it may well serve to direct us,

***~~1. In the choice of our friends.~~***

We are particularly cautioned by Solomon "not to make any friendship with an angry man, lest we learn his ways." And the same advice may well be given in reference to people who "set not a watch before the door of their lips." They will soon draw us into the same spirit with themselves; and, whether useful to us or not, in relation to worldly knowledge, they will never advance us in the knowledge of our God. They may, it is true, possess a talent in theology, as well as in other sciences: but they will never bring us to God, but will prevail rather to draw us from him, and to lower our habits of piety to their own standard.

Conversation, properly used, is a most valuable ordinance. In truth, "death and life are in the power of the tongue;" seeing that by its counsels, we may be stirred up to seek the Lord, or may be deterred from following the convictions of our own minds: so true is that assertion of Solomon, "He who walks with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

***~~2. In the regulation of our own fellowship with men.~~***

Speech is a talent that is to be improved for the Lord: and of it we must give account, as well as of any other talent we possess. If any man ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" I answer, *Yes*, you are; so far, at least, as not to let him wander out of the way, when you have an opportunity to set him right: and if you neglect to avail yourselves of the opportunity that is afforded you, then you are as much answerable for his blood, as you would be if you saw him on the brink of a precipice, and neglected to warn him of his danger.

"The tongue is a tree of life;" and you should freely dispense its fruits to those who are within your reach. In this view, the Psalmist repeatedly called his tongue "his glory;" for by that he could both exalt God in private, and commend him to others in public: and, consequently, if we allow our tongue to keep silence, or to prate about foolish things when we should be speaking for the Lord, we bury our talent in a napkin, and sink ourselves to a level with those who know not God. And must we not give account of such conduct to the Lord?

I say then, "Let your conversation be always with grace, seasoned with salt." It is not necessary that you should eat salt by handfuls, if I may use so homely an expression, or that you should be always talking of religion: but your speech should at all times be seasoned with salt; and your fellowship, even about the most common things, should be such as to show that *religion is the one spring of all your actions, and the governing principle of your whole lives*. In this way you will approve yourselves to God as good and faithful servants; and under that character will you be acknowledged by him in the day of judgment.

***~~3. In the forming of a just estimate of our character before God.~~***

Our actions will not suffice for this; but our words will. To have our outward conduct blameless is an easy thing, in comparison of what it is to have our words rightly directed for the glory of God and the good of men. *The heart will be pouring forth that which is contained in it.*And accordingly we find, that worldly characters, whether male or female, however exemplary they may be in their outward conduct, rarely speak anything but about the world. They have no disposition to converse about the things of God: they have no heart to praise the Savior, or to commend him to the love of their fellow-men. Perhaps, during the course of their whole lives, with scarcely any exception, their communications with others have been earthly and carnal; and in this respect they have far more resembled the ungodly world than the saints of God. But, if we bear in mind this declaration of our Lord, and consider its aspect upon us, we shall tremble for our appearance before him. Look well to it then, brethren, that "no corrupt communication proceeds out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers."

***~~Address.~~***

***~~1. Those who have been inattentive to their words.~~***

The generality say, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" But know, that "you are not your own; you are bought with a price," and all your faculties, whether of mind or body, are the Lord's; so that you are bound to "glorify him with your body and your spirit, which are his." I call upon you, then, to watch with all possible care against light and unprofitable conversation of every kind; and endeavor, with all earnestness, to improve your own minds for the purpose of instructing others, and to convey to all within your reach that knowledge which shall "make men wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

***~~2. Those who have endeavored to improve their speech for the good of others.~~***

This declaration of God is as consolatory to you, as it is alarming to the careless and ungodly world. Every time have you endeavored to speak for God—God has listened to it with pleased attention, and recorded it in the book of his remembrance, that you may "be justified" in his sight, and have a place assigned to you among the jewels of his crown. The saints, too, shall then bear their testimony also in your behalf. One will say, 'He taught me, when a child, the first principles of Christianity, and was, under God, the means of leading me to the knowledge of the truth.' Another will say, 'He visited me in the hour of sickness, and instructed me, and guided me into all truth: and to him, under God, I owe the salvation of my soul.' Thus, both from God and man, will you have most blessed testimonies at the bar of judgment, and receive a proportionable measure both of bliss and glory to all eternity.

#1357

***~~Jonah, A Type of Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:39–41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.39â41)~~***

He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."

UNREASONABLE and wicked men are ready to complain of want of evidence, when they neither attentively consider the means of conviction, that are afforded them, nor act agreeably to the convictions, that are already impressed upon their minds.

This was eminently the character of the Jews in our Lord's days. They had a right indeed to expect, that their religion, which had been confirmed by so many miracles, should not be superseded by any religion, which did not exhibit the same credentials. But the miracles wrought by our Lord were so numerous, so plain, and evident, that his enemies, unable to question the reality of them, ascribed them to the agency of Satan.

Yet the Jews still demanded of him a sign, and, to satisfy their incredulity, he must give them "a sign *from Heaven*." It is to people of this description that our Lord replies in the words before us; telling them, that no different kind of sign would be given them, until his resurrection; and, that the repenting Ninevites would in the last day condemn their obstinacy and unbelief.

The text naturally leads us to show,

***~~I. Wherein Jonah was a type of Christ.~~***

Whatever agreement there is between the histories of Jonah and of Christ, the leading points, wherein the former typified our Lord, are two:

***~~1. His miraculous restoration to dry land after having been three days confined in the belly of a fish.~~***

This was doubtless an amazing event; that he should be preserved three days in the belly of a fish, unhurt; and that, after so long a continuance in that situation, the fish, which seemed destined for his destruction, should be the instrument of his preservation! To this, under God, we must ascribe the efficacy of his word at Nineveh; for our Lord tells us, that, by this means, he was made "a sign to the Ninevites." What means they had of ascertaining the fact itself, we do not exactly know; but they evidently had not the smallest doubt respecting the truth of it; and therefore they received his message as coming immediately from God.

Now in this he was evidently a type of Christ. Our Lord having, like Jonah, been voluntarily delivered up to death for the salvation of others, was confined in the heart of the earth. The term of his imprisonment there was the same with that of Jonah's continuance in the fish's belly; yet he "saw no corruption;" and, at the appointed time, he burst the bands of death (of which it was not possible he should be held) and thus became a sign to the Jewish nation. On this he laid the whole stress of his Messiahship, while he was yet ministering among his countrymen; and, after the event had taken place, he gave so many, and such convincing evidences of the fact, as to leave no possibility of doubt respecting his divine mission. This therefore was made the very corner-stone of Christianity; and his sending down of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in consequence of his resurrection, was such "a sign from Heaven" as must leave unbelievers without excuse to all eternity.

***~~2. His successful preaching consequent upon it.~~***

The effect of Jonah's preaching stands perhaps unrivaled from the foundation of the world. The large and populous city instantly received the word, and, though Gentiles by nature, began to call upon Jehovah; so that, from the king upon his throne to the very meanest of his subjects, they all humbled themselves before him in sackcloth and ashes: nor did they cease from their cries, until the wrath of God was averted from them.

And must not this event lead our minds to Jesus, who is no less "a light to enlighten the Gentiles, than he is the glory of his people Israel?" His ministry among the Jews indeed was attended with small success, though ultimately "they shall be again engrafted on their own stock," but how rapid, how extensive, has been the effect of his word among the Gentiles! Many myriads have already turned from idols to serve the living and true God: and in due season the whole Gentile world shall flock to his standard, and "all flesh behold the salvation of God."

But notwithstanding this honor put upon Jonah, it will be proper to notice,

***~~II. His inferiority to him whom he typified.~~***

Though we are disposed to cast a veil over the infirmities of God's servants, yet the peculiarity of Jonah's character, no less than the very words of the text, requires that his inferiority to the Savior should be strongly marked. We may observe it,

***~~1. In his office and character.~~***

Jonah was indeed a prophet of the Most High God; but he had as great corruptions as could well consist with a converted state. The whole of his conduct, from first to last, indicated a proud, peevish, discontented, uncharitable, and rebellious disposition; so that it is even a great stretch of charity to believe that he had any piety at all.

But the blessed Jesus was free from every species and degree of sin; and was no other than the Messiah himself, even the very Son of God, "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Methinks, therefore, he did not arrogate much to himself, when he said, "Behold, a greater than Jonah is here."

***~~2. In his manner of executing his office.~~***

Jonah executed the prophetic office among the ten tribes; but we know nothing of his spirit, except from the book which bears his name. And here we see, that he did not enter on his office without great reluctance, fleeing from God, in order to avoid an embassy which he was afraid would be attended with personal danger or disgrace. When he was in the midst of the storm, which endangered the vessel wherein he was sailing, he, a professor of the true religion; he, a prophet of Jehovah; he, who was the occasion of the storm, was sleeping, while the heathen sailors were crying to their gods; and he was reproached for his supineness by the very heathens themselves.

After God himself had interposed to mark him as the cause of the storm, so that he could conceal his guilt no longer, he confessed his wickedness, and acknowledged to the crew, that the only way of saving the ship, was, to cast him overboard. This done, God prepared a large fish to swallow him; and constrained the fish to deliver him safely upon dry land. After this, we might hope, he had attained a better spirit; but alas! though compelled to deliver his message, he preferred his own honor before the salvation of a million souls; instead of once interceding for them, he waited with anxious expectation to see his word fulfilled, and even quarreled with God for extending his mercy to them.

How different was the conduct of our adorable Jesus! He willingly left the bosom of his Father, to become a messenger to our guilty world. So far from wishing to avoid disgrace or danger, he gladly submitted to the accursed death of the cross, and "gave his own life a ransom for many." Instead of sleeping while others prayed, he continued whole nights in prayer for those who were insensible of their danger; and, instead of grieving at the salvation of those who received him, he wept over the impenitence of those who rejected him. All concern for himself was lost in his concern for others. And his restoration to life, which was effected by his own almighty power, was made the means of more abundant and effectual exertions on behalf of those to whom he was sent. And the more his efforts were crowned with success, the more did he glorify God on the behalf of those who obtained mercy.

***~~3. In the success with which he executed it.~~***

Jonah prevailed to the outward reformation and temporal preservation, of one single city. But Jesus does, and will, prevail to the spiritual renovation, and everlasting salvation of a whole world. How exalted is he in this view, and how worthy of our highest praise!

***~~We may observe from this subject,~~***

***~~1. How certainly is Christ the true Messiah!~~***

The Ninevites knew for certain the divine mission of Jonah, by means of his miraculous deliverance from the fish's belly. How evidently then is "Christ declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead!" Let then every word of his, by whoever it be delivered, "be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God"

***~~2. How inexcusable are they, who continue impenitent under the preaching of the Gospel!~~***

Jonah simply denounced the vengeance of God against the Ninevites, without making them any offer of mercy, or even intimating, that there was any possibility that the sentence might be reversed; yes, and without so much as working one single miracle in confirmation of his word. Yet they, though heathens, trembled at the very first denunciations of God's wrath, and set themselves to repent and turn from their sins, upon the slightest hope that perhaps God might turn from his fierce anger.

How then ought we to seek the Lord, who have not merely temporal ruin, but eternal condemnation, denounced against us! Who, besides this, have promises of mercy also set before us, to encourage our repentance; and both the threatenings and the promises confirmed by ten thousand miracles! Surely "the Ninevites will rise up in judgment against us at the last day, if we continue obdurate" under such means as are used to reclaim us.

***~~3. How certainly may they expect mercy, who repent and believe in Christ!~~***

We have no reason to think, that the repentance of the Ninevites was genuine and abiding: it is more probable that it resembled that of Ahab, both in its nature and duration. Still, however, it was the means of preserving all of them from the threatened calamities. And shall not true repentance, accompanied with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, avail for the salvation of our souls? Will that God, whom Jonah reproached for the unbounded extent of his grace and mercy, "cast out any who come to him by Jesus Christ?" We need not fear: it is not a *perhaps*, but a *certainty*, that God "will save them to the uttermost." Let us then seek the Lord in his appointed way, that we may be monuments of his mercy to all eternity.

#1358

***~~The Relapsed Demoniac~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:43–45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.43â45)~~***

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

THOUGH the general scope of the parables is, for the most part, plain and obvious, it is often difficult to see the precise meaning of some circumstances contained in them. This is the case with the parable before us; the minuter incidents of which may possibly be considered as ornamental; but I think rather that they are essential parts of the parable itself. Its import, on the whole, suggests the following observations:

***~~I. Persons, once delivered from Satan, are again open to his assaults.~~***

Satan certainly has power over the hearts of men.

There is much ascribed to his agency in the holy Scriptures. He blinds the eyes of all unbelievers—and rules in all their hearts. Though he has not the same power over men's bodies as he once had, he evidently possesses their souls, and drives them to perdition.

But he often loses his dominion through the preaching of the Gospel. Paul was commissioned to turn men from the power of Satan unto God, and the weapon whereby he rescued them from his dominion was the Gospel. The same divine energy also attends it, when used by us. Though conversions are more rare than in the Apostles' days, they are not less real.

Yet they who have been delivered from him, are still open to his assaults. How often did he repeat his attacks on Peter! With what envious malice did he buffet Paul. How did he renew his attempts even on Christ himself! Thus he still watches for his opportunity to destroy us. Nor shall we be wholly out of his reach, until we are finally discharged from our warfare.

We had need therefore to watch against this subtle enemy; for,

***~~II. If we are a second time subjected to Satan's dominion, our last state will be worse than the first.~~***

***~~It is certain that Satan can never finally prevail against the elect.~~***

This is evidently implied in the character which is given of them. The promises of God also ensure to them the victory over him. Hence they are authorized to defy all the powers of darkness.

They, into whom he may return, are described in the text.

The true children of God desire to be ever "filled with the Spirit;" nor will they allow the things that please Satan to abide quietly in their hearts; but self-deceivers are satisfied, like Herod, with a partial change, and continue with their old affections and lusts unmortified. Judas, Ananias, Demas, no doubt retained their love of this world. Hence Satan found their hearts "swept" indeed, and "emptied" of gross sin, but still furnished for his reception. Wherever this is the case, he will surely, however expelled for a season, return before long with increased power.

***~~On his return to them their state will be worse than ever.~~***

The Holy Spirit will be grieved, provoked, quenched; and when once men are "beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ," their minds will be more closed against the truth than ever. Their consciences will be silenced, and made callous. Their evil habits also will return, and gain an irresistible dominion; and the deliverance, which they have neglected to improve, will fearfully aggravate their final condemnation.

***~~Inquire.~~***

***~~1. Whether you have ever yet been delivered from Satan.~~***

Perhaps many doubt whether they have ever been possessed by Satan; but this alone is sufficient to prove, that they are yet under his dominion. That usurper reigns in all until he is vanquished and expelled by Jesus Christ; and it is only in answer to fervent prayer, that the adorable Savior puts forth his power to drive him out. Examine then whether you have ever thus resisted Satan, and obtained deliverance from him through the power and grace of Christ.

***~~2. Be daily maintaining a strict watch against him.~~***

If he has been cast out of us, he is seeking an opportunity to return; nor can he be kept away, but by constant prayer and watchfulness. *Let us then guard every avenue of our hearts.* Let us implore the aid of our divine inhabitant. The exertion of our own powers in dependence on the intercession and grace of Christ, will ensure a successful outcome of the conflict.

#1359

***~~Christ's Regard to His Obedient Followers~~***

***~~[Matthew 12:46–50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.46â50)~~***

"While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

IT is not easy, engaged as we are in a variety of callings, to know at all times what is the duty of the present moment. Seasons may often occur when a tradesman may reasonably doubt whether he ought to be in his shop or in his closet: and it may sometimes be difficult to know exactly where to draw the line between the attentions due to earthly relatives and the higher duties of God's more immediate service. The example, however, which Christ has set for us, may be of considerable use in regulating our conduct on such occasions.

He was in a house teaching a great multitude of people who flocked around him: and his mother and his near kinsmen, apprehensive, perhaps, that he might provoke his enemies to destroy him, or that he would injure his own health by his incessant labors, endeavored to get access to him, that they might persuade him to suspend his exertions. Not being able to get near him because of the crowd, they called to him, and prevailed on the intermediate multitudes to inform him, that they stood without, greatly desirous to speak with him. On the message being delivered, our blessed Lord looked round about on his surrounding audience, and, stretching forth his hand towards them, made use of the extraordinary language of our text: in considering which, we shall show,

***~~I. In what light our Lord regarded his obedient followers.~~***

We are sure, that, in asking, "Who is my mother or my brethren," he did not intend to act towards them with any disrespect: he only intended to declare the infinitely greater respect which he had for practical piety than for any other thing whatever; and to show,

***~~1. That his obedient followers were the exclusive objects of his loving regard.~~***

Doubtless, as a man, he felt the ties of family, and (most probably too) the partialities of friendship: but as the Mediator between God and man, who was appointed to judge the world, he considered nothing deserving his notice but a conformity to the will of God. A *mere profession*of his religion was so far from recommending any person to his favor, that it rendered him tenfold the more hateful in his eyes, if it were not accompanied with a *suitable practice*. He compares such a person to a man building his house upon the sand which is sure to fall and overwhelm him in its ruins: and he assures us, that, in the last day, whatever zeal such a one may have shown even in propagating the truth itself, he will utterly disown him as unworthy of the smallest regard.

The person whom alone he will approve, is the conscientious and devoted servant of God, who does the will of God cheerfully, constantly, and without reserve.

The obedience of a slave, were it ever so extensive, would be unacceptable to him, because it proceeds not from love.

Nor, if we could conceive a person to obey from love, would his services be pleasing to God, if they were only occasional; because it would prove that sin retained an allowed ascendency over the soul.

Nor, for the same reason, could the most uniform obedience be approved by him, if there were so much as one single lust spared, or one single duty willfully neglected. An eye, a hand, a foot, retained in opposition to the line of duty, would occasion the whole body to be cast into Hell. But "whoever" is truly upright in doing the will, the whole will of God, "that person," whatever other recommendations he may want, shall certainly be an object of his peculiar regard: "Then are you my disciples, if you do whatever I command you."

***~~2. That there was no honor or happiness which he would not confer upon them.~~***

All are agreed, that, in a temporal view, the most honored and blessed of all the human race was the Virgin Mary. Yet far more honored, and more blessed, are all who cordially fulfill the will of God. This our Lord himself affirms: and, in the text, he seems almost to disclaim relationship to her, as it were, in comparison of those closer bonds which unite him to his obedient followers.

But it is not merely the names of brother, sister, mother, that we are to regard: we must consider what is implied in those terms: what ardent love to their persons; what constant attention to their wants; what a liberal supply of their necessities; what familiar fellowship with them at all seasons; what protection against dangers; and what glorious triumph he will give them over all their enemies. We must consider too, that when the relations that were formed by flesh and blood shall exist no longer, then shall these spiritual relations be still acknowledged, and all the blessings attached to them be continued through eternal ages.

This being a matter not of speculation merely, but of great practical importance, let us consider,

***~~II. The inferences to be deduced from it.~~***

And here we cannot but observe, that if Christ so highly regards his obedient followers, then should we,

***~~1. Honor them.~~***

The light of the godly has ever been so offensive to the lovers of darkness, that all possible methods have been used to veil its luster, if not to extinguish it altogether. Who needs be told that there ever have been, and are at this day, terms of reproach, whereby to designate the obedient followers of Christ; and that those who are most active and diligent in his service usually bear the greatest share of that reproach? Even people not wholly destitute of religious feeling, are yet often so awed by the fear of man, that they dare not own their respect for the godly, or even notice them as their acquaintance. They can hear the most eminent of God's servants calumniated, and never open their mouths in their defense; and they can even wish and long for their instructions, and not dare to put themselves in the way of receiving them.

But what a horrible impiety is this; that the very thing which so endears them to Christ, should render them odious to us: or that we should be ashamed to call them friends whom "Christ is not ashamed to call his brethren!" Little do such despisers think whom they despise; or such timid Christians, of whom they are ashamed. Paul had no idea that he was darting his shafts at Jesus, when he was persecuting, what he would call, some enthusiastic heretics: but Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" So it is now: they who receive his servants, receive him; and they who despise them, despise him. Beware then, lest you provoke the Lord to be "ashamed of you in the presence of his Father and his holy angels." And as Paul said to Timothy, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner," so would I say to you, Be not ashamed of the Gospel, nor of any of those who obey it: but, as Christ honors his people, so you must honor them, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. Be willing "to suffer affliction with them, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world."

***~~2. Seek to be of their number.~~***

Who would not wish that in the day of judgment Christ should say of him, That is my brother, my sister, my mother? What then must we do, in order to secure that blessing? Doubtless we must believe in Christ, and seek "to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but his." But though it is by faith, and by faith alone, that we are united to Christ, and made members of his family, yet must we be found doing the will of God, or else we can never be found in the number of his people. "The grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts—and to live righteously, soberly, and godly, in the world."

Is it asked, What is the will of God?

I answer briefly, first, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

Secondly, "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks; for this also is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Here are two things, a *holy*and a *heavenly*life.

All the lusts of the flesh must be mortified, all the evil tempers and dispositions subdued, and "the thoughts, as well as the actions, be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." This is a *holy*life.

But besides that, you must be brought into a state of sincere, and, as it were, habitual delight in God, praying to him for all you want, praising him for all you enjoy, and glorying in him as your God and portion for evermore. This is a *heavenly*life.

By these two things you will discover your relation to Christ: the family likeness, if I may so speak, will be visible upon you. Let these things then be found upon you; for on them all your salvation depends. Your *creed*will signify nothing; your *profession*will signify nothing; your *practice*will signify nothing, without these. In his family "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ, that is, the image of Christ upon your soul, is all and in all."

***~~3. Choose them for your companions.~~***

Very few people have any idea how much of their present welfare and of their eternal prospects depends upon their associates and friends. "He who walks with wise men shall be wise," says Solomon; "but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Again, "Make no friendship with an angry man, lest you learn his ways." For the same reason I would say, associate not with a proud man, a worldly man, a covetous man, a lewd man: for it is certain that "Bad company corrupts good character." We almost unavoidably drink in the spirit of our companions; we adopt their sentiments; we conform to their practice; we become cast into their mold. Of what infinite importance then is it that we should associate with those whose sentiments and conduct accord with the mind of Christ?

This was the conduct of the saints of old: David says, "I am a companion of all those who fear you and that keep your precepts." He calls them, "the excellent of the earth," and says, "that in them is all his delight." "He would not so much as know a wicked person." This is the conduct which befits the friends and brethren of Christ: for "what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness, or light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?" Come out, therefore, from among the ungodly world, and be separate from them." "Christ was not of the world, neither must you be," for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." If you will be the friends of the world, you must to all eternity continue the enemies of God! If you would ever be acknowledged by Christ as his brethren, "let his people be your people," his friends your friends, his brethren your brethren.

***~~4. Do them all the good in your power.~~***

It is the duty of a Christian to lay out himself in acts of kindness towards all, in imitation of Him who "went about doing good," and of Him who "sends rain on the evil and on the good, on the just and on the unjust." But still there is a special obligation upon him to seek the welfare of the Lord's people: "Do good unto all men," says the Apostle, "but *especially*unto those who are of the household of faith."

Let us suppose for one moment that among a multitude of people in distress we spied the Virgin Mary herself; can we doubt whom we should select as the first object of our attention? Is there one among us that would not gladly deny himself some little comforts to relieve her necessities? Should we not feel it our bounden duty to show kindness to one who was so nearly related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Behold, then, this we may do at any time. He tells us where we may find his mother and his brethren. Is there a pious person languishing in this cottage or yonder workhouse? "That same" is his brother, or sister, or mother. In ministering to such, you do, in fact, minister to Christ himself; as he has said, "Whatever you have done unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."

Search out then the pious few, wherever they may be found; and account it an honor to minister unto them. Are they hungry? feed them. Are they naked? clothe them. Are they sick or in prison? go and visit them. Are their troubles of a spiritual nature? "lift up the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to those who are of a fearful heart, Fear not; behold, your God will come and save you."

Sometimes perhaps your dearest friends may endeavor to dampen your ardor in these holy exercises; but beware how you allow yourselves to be diverted from such blessed employments. Doubtless there are other duties which demand a great portion of your attention: but while you are "diligent in business, be also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

#1360

***~~The Use and Intent of Parables~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:13–16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.13â16)~~***

"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear"

IT is certain that parabolic representations are, for the most part, obscure, and difficult to be understood. It may well therefore be a subject of inquiry, why our blessed Lord adopted that method of instructing his auditors, in preference to a plain undisguised declaration of the truth? This very question was agitated among his own disciples, who not being able to satisfy themselves respecting it, entreated an answer from himself upon the point. The reply which our Lord made to it is the subject of our present consideration. We shall,

***~~I. Explain the general import of the text.~~***

***~~The Jews in our Lord's time were extremely averse to receive instruction.~~***

Never were any people more blinded by prejudice than they: they heard our Lord only with a view to cavil at his word; and asked questions of him only that they might ensnare him; and though they were constrained to acknowledge that he spoke as never any man spoke, they would not receive his testimony. They saw his word confirmed by numerous and most stupendous miracles; and yet, instead of yielding to conviction, they were always asking for more signs. Rather than confess the hand of God in the wonders wrought by him, they ascribed them to the devil: and when that refuge failed them, they sought to destroy both him and Lazarus, lest his having raised the dead should induce the people to believe on him. The instant they saw the drift of his discourses, they accused him of opposing the law of Moses, and of blasphemy against God. In short, *they shut their eyes against the light, and determinately resisted all the methods used for their conversion and salvation.*

***~~They exactly accorded with the description long before given of them by the prophet.~~***

The words of the prophet in their literal sense, were an order to him to go and preach to the people, though he was apprised beforehand that they would not listen to him, or be converted by him. But they looked forward also to the times of the Gospel, and were a prophecy, that when Christ and his Apostles would preach to the Jews—the greater part of the nation being blinded by their own prejudices and passions, would determinately set themselves against the truth. In this sense the words were applied by Paul to those who rejected his ministry; and in this sense our Lord represents them as accomplished in his hearers.

It was this state of their minds that induced him to adopt the plan of teaching them by parables.

***~~The people shut their eyes against plain truths; and therefore our Lord taught them in an obscure way.~~***

But here arises a question; was the people's blindness the reason for our Lord's teaching them by parables? Or, was our Lord's teaching them by parables the intentional cause of their blindness? Did he so teach them because they were blind? Or did he so teach them, in order to make them blind?

Beyond a doubt, the former of these positions seems more consonant with the general character of our Lord. But the more obvious construction of his words seems rather to favor the latter sentiment.

The language of prophecy is sometimes exceedingly strong; and the prophets are said to do what they only foretell as certainly to happen; consequently, when *the prophecies are quoted, they are frequently to be understood in rather a lower sense than the words at first sight appear to bear*. Accordingly the prophecy as quoted by our Lord represents him as speaking to the people in parables, not on purpose to blind them, but with the lamentable prospect of their rejecting his message, and of their shutting their eyes, as if they were afraid of seeing the light, and of being converted by it.

Yet there is an objection to this solution, namely, that both Mark and Luke make our Lord speak directly an opposite language. But to this we answer, that neither of these evangelists expressly quotes the prophecy, as Matthew does: they only allude to it; and therefore may be considered rather as using the words in an accommodated sense. And indeed Mark's own declaration in verse 33 that "with many such parables he spoke the word unto them, as they were able to hear it," shows clearly, that what he before spoke in allusion to the prophecy, must be understood in a sense that can be reconciled with the declaration itself: for otherwise there would be an absolute contradiction between his two assertions. But they perfectly accord with each other, if we interpret the former as importing that our Lord spoke to the people in parables, that they might see (sufficient to instruct them) and not perceive (the lull drift of his discourses, which would make them only turn away from him in disgust) if perhaps he might (by this cautious method of instructing them) convert and save their souls.

Thus there was in this way of teaching, something *favorable*, and something *judicial*. The people set themselves against the truth; therefore our Lord withheld his plainer instructions from them: but he did so, not with a view to increase, but rather to remove, their blindness.

Having fixed the meaning of the text itself, we proceed, in answer to the Apostles' question, to,

***~~II. State more particularly our Lord's reasons for teaching by parables.~~***

In the whole of his ministry our Lord was influenced by benevolence. More especially in addressing the people by parables, he sought,

***~~1. To counteract their prejudices.~~***

They were determined to reject everything that opposed their prejudices or their passions, and on no account to admit the idea of a suffering Messiah. The only way therefore of bringing them to acknowledge any truth, was to present it to them in such a view that they should not discern its real scope. When they saw the bearing of any question that was put to them, they would not return an answer: but, when they could see no reference to themselves, they answered readily enough: and by this means they were often made to incriminate themselves before they perceived the tendency of their own acknowledgments.

As David in the parable of the ewe lamb condemned with most excessive severity a conduct somewhat similar to his own, and thereby pronounced sentence against himself, when he would have denied or extenuated his guilt, if it had been charged home upon him in a more open way; so, by taking them unawares, our Lord often succeeded in confounding, and sometimes in converting, those who would have rejected his testimony at once, if they had observed at first the full scope of his instructions.

***~~2. To prepare them for fuller instructions.~~***

Our Lord was willing to impart knowledge, if the people had been capable of receiving it: but it was necessary that they who had lived in such gross darkness, should be brought gradually to the light, lest they should be overpowered by too hasty a transition to the full radiance of Gospel truth. He told even his own disciples, that he had many things to say unto them; but was constrained to withhold them for the present, because of their incapacity to receive them: he thought it proper to educate them as children, that he might gradually inform their minds, and mature their judgment. And this was the intent also of all his public ministrations; he administered milk to the people as babes, that they might, when grown to full age, be nourished by the strong meat which he intended afterwards to set before them.

***~~3. To render them without excuse if they should reject his word.~~***

Had his instructions been unseasonably clear and full, the people might have cast some reflection on their teacher as injudicious. But when he so condescended to their weakness, "they had no cloak for their sin;" they were altogether without excuse; and it was manifest beyond a doubt, that the only reason of their rejecting him was that "they loved darkness rather than light." The judgments that were to be brought upon them, were such as never had been experienced from the foundation of the world: this opportunity therefore of filling up the measure of their iniquities was given to the people of that generation, that the equity of the Divine procedure might be more manifest in their destruction.

***~~Let us learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. The folly and danger of prejudice in those who hear the Gospel.~~***

Such is the force of prejudice that it will blind the eyes, and shut the ears, and make the heart impenetrably hard. Yet how many indulge it without being at all aware of their danger! They have taken up the notion that salvation by faith is injurious to morality, and that vital godliness is enthusiasm; and will receive nothing that militates against their preconceived opinions. But let the fate of the Jews convince us of the folly and danger of such conduct. *Let us seek from God that "honest and good heart," that shall embrace with readiness, and improve with care, whatever God has revealed in his word.*

***~~2. The need of wisdom in those who minister the Gospel.~~***

Much harm has been done to the interests of religion by an unguarded declaration even of the truth itself. *Men should be considered as having prejudices which may be increased by indiscretion, or undermined by a prudent exhibition of the Gospel.*Paul, though as far as any man from a lack of zeal, was peculiarly attentive to this duty; and has left us instructions respecting it for the regulation of our own conduct.

The end of the ministry is to convert and save the souls of men: and whatever is best adapted to that end, is most worthy of our pursuit. No one should conceal the truth through the fear of man; nor should anyone be backward to put a veil upon his face, when the brightness of it would defeat the end of his ministrations. *Zeal and prudence should be duly combined*in those to whom the care of souls is committed; and if in this respect we imitate our Lord and his Apostles, we may reasonably hope that we shall not run in vain, or labor in vain.

#1361

***~~The Sower~~***

**[Matthew 13:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.18-23)**

"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

*THE word of God, by whoever delivered, makes a different impression on different people*. When our Lord himself preached, his discourses did not carry conviction to all: nor did his Apostles find that all would receive the truths declared by them. Thus, in this day, *there is a great diversity of effect produced among the hearers of the Gospel*. Our Lord foretold that this would be the case in all ages of the Church. He compared "the word of his kingdom" to seed cast into different soils; and the fruits resulting from it, to the various produce of the different grounds. In unfolding the parable of the Sower, we shall be led to notice,

**I. The way-side hearers**.

There are two things wherein careless hearers resemble seed fallen by the way-side;

***~~They "hear the word and do not understand it".~~***

They attend upon the ordinances merely in a customary manner. They do not go to hear with a view to obtain benefit to their souls. Their minds are occupied about something they have seen or done, or are meditating some new plans of business or pleasure. Thus, though they hear the word, they scarcely give it any attention; or they attend merely to the style of composition and manner of delivery. No wonder then that they obtain no solid views of divine truth.

***~~They lose it without regret.~~***

"Satan" is more concerned with them than they are at all aware of. Like "the birds of the air," he hovers round them to "catch away the seed." The word is no sooner uttered, than he turns their attention from it; nor is it difficult for him, by suggesting other thoughts, to accomplish his purpose. He well knows that, if they truly "believe the word, they will be saved" by it; and that, if they hear it with attention and candor, they cannot but believe it. Hence he labors incessantly to divert their minds from it. If, after all, some scattered truths remain upon the mind, they are speedily "trodden down" by the incidental occurrences of the day.

These, it is to be feared, are by far the most numerous class of hearers. But there are some to whom the word seems not to come in vain:

***~~II. The stony-ground hearers.~~***

These, though equally hard as to their hearts, differ widely from the former.

***~~They "embrace the word gladly".~~***

Their affections, like a thin coat of earth upon a rock, "receive the word." The novelty of it, and their hope of an interest in it, delights their mind. *They are moved at the sufferings of Christ, or the promises of the Gospel, as they would be at any good news, or pathetic story.*"Immediately" they begin to make a profession of religion, and seem to surpass many who have been longer instructed in the way.

***~~But they "renounce it again speedily".~~***

They never were deeply convinced of sin, nor felt their need of Christ. *They embraced the Gospel, without ever seriously counting the cost.*Before long, they find that they have to endure "persecution for the word's sake," this, like "the sun" in its brightness, penetrates through the surface of their affections, and burns up the seed, which was "never rooted" in their understanding and will; then they renounce their profession as speedily as they had taken it up, and either "secretly decline" from the society to which they were attached, or "openly proclaim the disgust," with which their late pretensions have inspired them.

Nor are these the only people who disappoint the hopes of the sower:

***~~III. The thorny-ground hearers.~~***

These are a class who more nearly resemble that of true Christians; but though their profession is more specious than the previous two classes, their end is not more happy.

***~~They maintain a religious character to the end.~~***

They do not disregard the word like the way-side hearers, or cast away their profession like those of the stony ground. They maintain, for the most part, a uniform regard to the Gospel; they associate with the people of God in preference to all others; they worship God in their closet and family, as well as in the public assembly; nor do they live in any practices which are grossly inconsistent with their character.

But the fruit which they produce is not of a "ripened" kind.

They were never thoroughly purged from "the thorns" which were natural to the soil. "The cares or pleasures of this world" still continue to corrode their hearts. There is always "something which they desire" more than real holiness. Thus the nutriment of the soil is withdrawn by noxious roots, and the influences of the air and sun are "obstructed" by surrounding branches. Hence their fruit is never properly matured and ripened. Their *confessions*lack that tenderness of spirit that argues them sincere. Their *prayers*lack that holy importunity, which alone ensures success. Their *praises*lack that love and fervor, which alone can make them acceptable to God. The whole *obedience*of their lives is destitute of that divine energy, which results from the operation of God's Spirit.

All the seed however that is sown is not wholly unproductive.

***~~IV. The good-ground hearers.~~***

There is a most essential difference between these and the preceding characters.

***~~They receive the word with humility.~~***

All the other characters have the soil itself depraved; but these receive the word into "honest and good hearts." Not that their hearts are altogether free from human depravity; but they have an upright intention and desire to profit. They neither cavil at the word, nor endeavor to pervert its meaning. They wish to be instructed by it, and to fulfill whatever it requires.*In hearing it, they apply it as the word of God addressed to their souls*, and they (which is not said respecting any of the others) "understand it." *They see its import, taste its sweetness, and embrace it as suited to their case.*

***~~They improve it with diligence.~~***

They are careful to "bring forth the fruits" of righteousness. "Not" that all of them accomplish their wishes "in an equal degree." Splendid talents, extensive influence, or favorable occasions may enable some to distinguish themselves from others. On the other hand; poverty and seclusion may cause the light of others to be more obscured. *Degrees of grace*too, like a kindlier climate and a richer soil, make an abundant difference in *degrees of fruitfulness*.

Some, like Paul, have no delight but in adoring and serving God: they burn with love, not towards their friends only, but their most cruel enemies; and all their tempers, wishes, thoughts, are cast into the mold of the Gospel.

Others, though less eminent, are filled with zeal in their Master's cause: if they are not borne as on seraphs' wings, they run eagerly as in a race; and, though laboring under some infirmities, they bear much of their Savior's image.

Nor are they who are least fruitful satisfied with their attainment: they uniformly conflict with sin, and long to be holy as God is holy.

***~~Address.~~***

Let us "hear this parable," not to judge others, but ourselves.*Let us examine to which of the foregoing classes we belong.*What has been the disposition with which we have heard the word? What are the benefits we have received from the preached Gospel? Have we labored to treasure up the truth of God in our hearts? Has the word overpowered the corrupt desires which would obstruct its growth? And are we rising daily beyond the form, to the life and power of godliness?

Surely neither Christ nor any faithful "sower of the word" will account his toil repaid if he sees not this fruit of his labors. Let us not then be satisfied with being "almost," and not "altogether," Christians. If the word produces not its full effect, it will convey no benefit at all. If it destroys not the noxious weeds, the weeds will certainly destroy it. If it be not "a savor of life unto life—it will be a savor of death unto death." Whatever profession men may make, none but the good-ground hearers will be saved at last.

Let us now then guard against the devices of our great enemy. Let us watch that he take not the seed out of our hearts. Let us *harrow it in, as it were, by meditation and prayer*: and, however fruitful we have been, let us labor to abound more and more.

#1362

***~~Parable of the Leaven~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.33)~~***

"The kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

AS our Lord was not weary of multiplying his parables, so neither should we be weary of pondering them. There is indeed an inexhaustible variety in them; and in those which most resemble each other, there will be found a rich and instructive diversity. Scarcely any two are more alike than these two parables. But the parable of the *mustard seed*declares the extensive spread of the Gospel from small beginnings, andthe parable of the *leaven*declares its assimilating and transforming efficacy.

In tracing the PARALLEL between the parables of the mustard seed and that of the leaven hid in the meal, we shall find that they are,

***~~I. Assimilating in their nature.~~***

*Leaven*changes not the substance of the meal in which it is hid, but materially alters its qualities: it so impregnates the meal as to transform it, as it were, into its own likeness.

Thus does the Gospel affect those who receive it into their hearts: it makes us partakers of a Divine nature. It does not indeed essentially change either the faculties of the soul, or the members of the body; but it communicates to them a new life and power, a new direction and tendency. The Gospel is compared to a *mold* into which souls, when melted by Divine grace, are cast, and from which they derive a new and heavenly form. Hence, when converted by it, we are said to be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness; and the more this leaven works within us, the more are we changed into Christ's image, from glory to glory.

The same effect does the Gospel produce also in the world at large: wherever it prevails, it invariably brings men to the same mind, temper, and disposition:

all are rendered vile in their own eyes;

all are made willing to receive mercy through Christ alone;

and all pant after holiness, as the perfection of their nature and the summit of their bliss.

There is indeed a great diversity of parties and opinions respecting things of smaller importance; but in the fundamental points all are agreed, and, when upon their knees before God, have the most perfect resemblance to each other. Being joined to the Lord they are one spirit with him, and with each other. The same spirit pervades both the Head and all the members. Hence all true Christians of every place and every age are "one bread," being impregnated with the same heavenly leaven, and formed into one mass for the service of their common Lord and Master.

The resemblance further appears, in that both of them are,

***~~II. Mysterious in their operation.~~***

How, in the leavening of meal, the one substance acts upon the other so as to produce a fermentation, is a mystery, which the wisest philosophers are not able to explain. The secret energy of the leaven is discoverable in its *effects*; but the precise mode of its operation cannot be ascertained.

The same difficulty occurs in explaining the operation of the Gospel on the hearts of men: its truths have an energy that is not found in anything else. The word is living, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, penetrating the very inmost recesses of the soul. But how this leaven, as soon as it is put into the heart, begins to work, how it operates with such invincible power, and how it uniformly changes, as well the most guilty and obdurate hearts, as those which seem more likely to yield to its impressions—this is indeed a mystery.

The *effects*produced by it are evident and undeniable; but *how*it produces those effects so as to transform the vilest sinner into the very image of God, is known to God alone. On account of this mysterious property, our Lord compared the Gospel to the wind, which, though manifest enough in its effects, is in many respects inexplicable.

If the Gospel is so mysterious in its operation upon *individuals*, it must of necessity be so also in its operations upon the *world*at large. We pretend not to say how the simple doctrine of the cross should be made to triumph over all the prejudices and passions of mankind; but, from what we have already seen, we cannot doubt of its final success.

Lastly, they are both,

***~~III. Universal in their influence.~~***

Leaven, when it has begun to work, never ceases until it has leavened all the meal.

Thus does the Gospel also work in the hearts of men. It changes, not their outward conduct only, but the inward dispositions of the heart. Both body and soul are thoroughly renewed by it; not indeed perfectly as to the degree, but universally in all their members and all their faculties. Their members are made instruments of righteousness, and their faculties are filled with light and holiness. The man is made altogether "a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new."

Thus will the world also be regenerated by the grace of the Gospel. "Those who are now sitting in darkness and the shadow of death shall behold its light," and those who are abandoned to the most brutish lusts and ignorance, shall be transformed into the very image of their God. This leaven has long been put into the great mass of mankind: it has already raised a ferment throughout a great part of the world, and in due season shall "leaven the whole lump." Though its progress is but slow at present, it shall work until it has pervaded every soul, and "brought all nations to the obedience of faith."

***~~The parable, thus explained, is of signal use,~~***

***~~1. To rectify our judgment.~~***

Some think that they have the grace of God, while yet they have never experienced any change in their souls. While others, on account of the commotion raised there, are ready to despond, as though they were utterly abandoned by God. But both of these may see their error, if they will duly consider this parable.

To the *former*we could say, can leaven be put into the meal and no fermentation be produced? Just so, much less can the grace of God be in the heart and cause no commotion there. Be assured it will work as it did on the day of Pentecost, and cause you to cry out with earnestness, "What shall I do to be saved?" Yes more, if it does not *continue*to operate, if it does not gradually pervade all your faculties, and progressively change them into your Savior's image, you may be sure that the leaven of Divine grace has never yet been put into your hearts.

To the *latter*we would say, be not discouraged at the commotion in your soul; but be thankful for it. It is infinitely better to know our guilt and danger than to be lulled asleep in a fatal security. Your disquietude affords reason to hope that God has caused the heavenly leaven to blend itself with your souls. Give it time then to work. If it be of God, it shall stand; and the effects produced shall reveal the true cause from whence they sprang. O beg of God that it may work effectually, and that it may never cease until it has made you "perfect and complete in all his will."

***~~2. To reform our hearts.~~***

The true and uniform tendency of the Gospel has been abundantly manifest. It is incumbent therefore on everyone to ask himself. What reason have *I* to think that this "kingdom of God is within me?" What change has it wrought in me. What assimilating and transforming efficacy has it revealed?

There is, it is true, a leaven in the heart of natural men; but it is either a "leaven of malice and wickedness," or a "leaven of hypocrisy," whichever of these it be, it must be "purged out, that they may become a new lump." Their souls must be impregnated with a very different leaven, even that of grace and truth. Let us then "hide the word of God within us," that by its influence we may be renewed. Let our prayer be, Lord, "sanctify me through your truth." And "may the very God of peace sanctify us wholly, that thus our whole body, soul and spirit, may be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!"

#1363

***~~The Tares~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.36)~~***

"His disciples came unto him, saying: Explain unto us the parable of the *tares*of the field." (verses 24-30)

THERE is much in the Holy Scriptures which unenlightened reason cannot comprehend. Hence the proud and self-sufficient continue ignorant of many truths. But those who seek Divine teaching have more enlarged views. God can "reveal to babes what he hides from the wise and prudent." Nor will he leave any in darkness who pray for his Spirit.

The Apostles set us an example worthy of our imitation. Our Lord delivered many parables which none clearly understood. But while the Scribes and Pharisees stumbled at them, the more teachable Apostles entreated their Lord to explain their import. Both the parable of the tares and the explanation of it are contained in this chapter.

To elucidate it more fully, we observe, that *the members of Christ's visible Church resemble wheat and tares growing together:*

***~~I. In their present growth.~~***

***~~The Church, like a field in which different grains are sown, contains people of very different characters.~~***

Jesus sows much "good seed" in this wretched world: whatever use he makes of his ministers, the glory is his alone. But "Satan" is indefatigable in "sowing bad seed" in the Church: he takes advantage of the sloth and carelessness of Christ's servants, and raises up hypocrites wherever Christ raises his elect.

***~~These grow together to the grief of all who are truly upright.~~***

Faithful ministers carry their complaints to their Lord and Master; and from zeal for his honor would pluck up the tares: but God will not allow them to make this arduous attempt. *No man whatever is capable of distinguishing all characters.*Many, who have specious appearances, would be left by us as wheat; while many, who are inwardly sincere, would be plucked up as tares. From regard to these, God commands us to forbear. He allows us indeed, and commands us, to exclude the notoriously profligate; but he reserves to himself the office of judging the hearts of men. Until the harvest day therefore we must expect this mixture. Nor will it, in the outcome, prove injurious to the saints. They are now stirred up the more to watchfulness and prayer; and hypocrites themselves have the offers of grace and mercy continued to them.

The reproach occasioned by this will all be wiped away,

***~~II. In their future separation.~~***

***~~The day of judgment is the harvest.~~***

The angels are represented by our Lord as his angels; and these he will use as his reapers. He will endue them with wisdom to discern the characters of all, and will guide them infallibly in the execution of his will.

***~~Then the different characters shall be separated from each other.~~***

The "tares" are they who "offend," that is, by a false profession cause others to stumble at the ways of God; and they, who, making no profession, "commit iniquity" without restraint. All these shall be gathered first and "bound up in bundles." Thus will they, who have been partners in sin, be made partners in misery. Alas! what groups of profane people, formalists, and hypocrites, will then be bound together! May "our souls never be gathered with these;" but be "bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God!"

The "wheat" are "the righteous," who are renewed in the spirit of their minds: they too shall be gathered in order to receive their portion.

***~~What a wonderful, but awful separation will there then be!~~***

Among the tares, not so much as one grain of wheat will be found: nor among the righteous will there be left one ungodly person! The ungodly husband shall be torn from the arms of his compassionate wife, and the profane child from the bosom of his religious parent. God will show no respect to one rather than another. The wicked, stripped of their masks, will be consigned over to punishment; and the righteous, freed from mutual jealousies, shall unite in perfect harmony.

The awfulness of this separation will be more fully seen,

***~~III. In their eternal destiny.~~***

***~~The wicked will "first" receive the doom for which they are reserved.~~***

They will be cast, like worthless tares, into the furnace. However God pities them *now*, he will show them any mercy *then*. Not that the fire shall *consume*them utterly as it would natural tares: to prevent this mistake, the metaphor is intentionally changed. They will "wail" the mercies they have despised and the opportunities they have lost. They will "gnash their teeth" with anguish and vexation of spirit:  
against *themselves*(like a ruined gamester) for their folly;  
against *each other*, for having enticed each other to sin;  
against *God*with impotent malice—for so punishing their transgressions.

And this doom will be inflicted "first" in the very sight of the godly. *Thus will the godly see how great is the mercy which they have received.*

***~~The righteous will then receive the kingdom prepared for them.~~***

They, as wheat, shall be treasured up in the granary of Heaven. Not that they shall continue there in a state of inactivity. To correct this idea the metaphor here is also changed. God himself will not be ashamed to be called "their Father." They shall shine forth in his kingdom like the sun. Their splendor shall burst forth as from behind a cloud. They delighted to enjoy God—they shall now see him face to face. They longed to glorify God—they shall now have every faculty employed in his service for evermore.

***~~The most suitable improvement is suggested by our Lord himself.~~***

***~~1. Let the profane "hear".~~***

You can be at no loss to determine whether you are tares or wheat: your *conduct*will decide that point beyond a doubt. Are you willing to be daily ripening for the furnace? Know that, as you are at death, you will continue to all eternity.

But you may *now*be changed from tares to wheat. Though this change cannot take place in nature, it can in the kingdom of grace. Entreat the Lord then that you may become new creatures. All that are now in the granary of Heaven were once as you are; and you, if you will seek the Lord, shall become as they are.

***~~2. Let self-deceivers hear.~~***

It is in vain to think yourselves the Lord's people when you are not. Inquire whether you have been truly born again? See whether you differ from the world, and from your former selves, as much as wheat differs from tares. Be not satisfied with "a form of godliness," and "a name to live." The day of final separation is near at hand: let every day therefore be spent in earnest preparation for it.

***~~3. Let the upright also hear.~~***

The unavoidable mixture in the Church is doubtless a burden to you; and if you are not careful, it may also become a snare: but, without judging others, strive to approve yourselves to God. Speedily will the period of your happiness arrive. Look forward then to *death*, with composure and gratitude; regard it as the wagons sent to convey you home; and, until it arrives, be praying for the influences of the sun and rain. So shall you be gathered in due season as a shock that is ripe, and be transported with joy to your eternal rest!

#1364

***~~The Hidden Treasure~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.44)~~***

"Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

THE Gospel, as viewed in various lights, admits of various representations. It is generally set forth as small in its beginnings, but increasing in importance. But we must not therefore suppose it to be of small value. Our Lord sufficiently guards against this mistake by the parable before us. He shows us that the Gospel, even while hid from our view, is exceeding precious.

It will be proper to show,

***~~I. Why the kingdom of Heaven is likened to a "treasure hid".~~***

"The kingdom of Heaven" is an expression peculiar to the New Testament.

By it we are not always to understand Heaven itself; it is frequently used to signify *Christ's spiritual kingdom*; and it is so called, because it is the re-establishment of God's empire over the hearts of men, and because what is thus begun in *grace*will be consummated in *glory*.

***~~This may well be considered as "a treasure".~~***

There is no other thing so deserving of this name. Every one that is possessed of it may say with truth, "All things are mine." He is "blessed:  
with all spiritual blessings,  
in heavenly things,  
in Christ."

Every earthly pleasure is contemptible in comparison of it.

***~~But it is compared to a treasure "hid in a field".~~***

The mysteries of the Gospel were from eternity hid in the bosom of the Father. Neither men nor angels could possibly have devised them. *Who could have thought of bringing man back to God through the death of God's only Son? And of reducing him to a willing subjection by the operation of God's Spirit?* A finite mind could never have conceived such an idea: but these mysteries, though revealed, are still hid from the natural man. They still appear foolishness, and are a stumbling-block to many.

*Paul*, though so learned and religious, could not receive them in his unconverted state: nor would he ever have embraced them, if God had not opened his eyes. The *Apostles*, though instructed by our Lord himself all the time of his ministry, needed, after all, divine illumination: nor is divine illumination less necessary for us. To this very hour there is as much ground as ever for that devout acknowledgment. The "field" indeed, wherein the treasure is hid is open and accessible to all; but we shall perish for lack of it, unless God does for us as he did for Hagar. We must all adopt the prayer of David.

***~~Its intrinsic worth, joined with the difficulty of finding it, must render the acquisition delightful.~~***

***~~II. The emotions which a discovery of it will produce.~~***

The illustration given by our Lord is peculiarly apt. A man who should find a treasure, would have a conflict in his mind.

He would congratulate himself on his good fortune, and rejoice in his prospect of possessing so much wealth; but he would feel some dread of detection. He would fear lest another should see it before he had an opportunity of securing it for himself. He would cover it up carefully, if he could not then carry it away; and if by purchasing the field he could gain the treasure, he would gladly pay the price. In doing this he would use all the expedition and caution that he could; nor would he hesitate to sell all that he had, in order to complete the purchase.

***~~Thus is a man affected who finds the Gospel salvation.~~***

He is filled with *joy*at the glad tidings that he hears. He indulges a *hope*that he may be savingly interested in them. He anticipates the *happiness*of having his sins forgiven, and of being made an heir of the heavenly inheritance.

Still, however, he is not without many misgiving *fears*. He knows that Satan is watching to steal away the treasure; nor can he tell but that that serpent may beguile him. He sees too that the world may deprive him of his hope. Yes, he perceives in his own heart a proneness to despise the offered mercy. Thus is he agitated between hope and fear.

This effect was predicted by the prophets of old, and it was, on one occasion at least, experienced by the Apostles: but, in the midst of all he is determined, if possible, to possess the treasure. He undervalues everything that can stand in competition with it. He well knows that, whatever he pays for it, he can be no loser. He approves in his heart the conduct of *Paul*, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ!" He is resolved to follow the advice of Solomon to, "look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure."

***~~Application.~~***

The field, which contains this treasure, is near at hand. The owner invites all to go and seek the treasure: he promises that all who seek in earnest shall find it; yes, moreover, that all who find, shall retain it.

Let those then who have never found it, begin to seek. But let them adopt that prayer of the Apostle, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." The Holy Spirit alone can give success to their endeavors.

And let them bear in mind the misery of those who fail to gain Christ, the treasure.

If any have found it, let them hold fast the prize. Let them guard against everything that may rob them of it. Let them remember, it is not a small treasure, but an inexhaustible mine. Let them never regret any sacrifice they may make for it, but look forward to the complete enjoyment of it forever in Heaven.

#1365

***~~The Pearl of Great Price~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.45), [46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 13.46)~~***

"Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

MEN are not easily wearied with renewed prospects of gain. Advantageous bargains may be offered with the greatest frequency without fear of creating disgust. Our Lord well knew that a love of earthly things was deeply rooted in our hearts, and availed himself of that knowledge the more forcibly to impress our minds with better things. He repeatedly commended his Gospel to us under the figure of a great temporal acquisition. In its general scope this parable agrees with that which precedes it. But it suggests many thoughts that are new and important.

To elucidate it we may consider,

***~~I. In what respects the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a pearl.~~***

The comparison is not properly between the kingdom and a merchant, but the kingdom and a pearl. The kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom of grace established in the world; and it may be compared to a pearl as *enriching*. Some pearls are of very great value, and would be an ample fortune to a person who had nothing else.

***~~The Gospel kingdom also is of inestimable value to us,~~***

In *this*world.

It unfolds to our view the deepest mysteries, and gives a just comprehension of all spiritual things. It is said to contain "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; it must therefore greatly enrich its possessor.

The Gospel moreover imparts grace to the soul; nor can this grace be ever appreciated too highly. Our Lord tells us that it will make us truly rich. Through the Gospel also we obtain peace in our consciences. Who can declare the value of this to a heavy-laden soul? It surpasses all estimation, as well as all understanding.

In the *next*world.

The Gospel does not enrich us merely like other estates. We can hold earthly things no longer than this present life; but the benefits of the Gospel continue with us forever. We have a more ample possession of them in the next world. Then we shall have a glorious, and incorruptible inheritance, of which earthly crowns and kingdoms convey a very faint idea. What is spoken of the Christian's present portion may still more properly be spoken of that which he will hereafter enjoy. Well therefore might Paul represent the Gospel in such exalted terms.

***~~The Gospel kingdom may also be compared to a pearl as adorning.~~***

Pearls are considered as ornamental to the body; but infinitely more does the Gospel adorn the soul.

*It changes the life.*Even the most abandoned of men have yielded to its power, and that figurative representation has been realized by them.

*It purifies the heart.*The most inveterate corruptions have been mortified by it, and the most heavenly dispositions implanted in their stead.

*It transforms into the Divine image.*It finds men altogether "alienated from the life of God," and bearing the character of Satan's children: but it renews them in all their faculties, and restores them to the very image of their God. This effect is ascribed to it by Paul himself. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

How just then is that expression of the Psalmist! "For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation."

And with what propriety may the Christian exult with the prophet! "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

With such views of the Gospel we can be at no loss to determine,

***~~II. How it will be regarded by those who know its value.~~***

It is not possible for them to regard it with indifference:

***~~1. They will seek it with diligence.~~***

Merchants spare no pains in the pursuit of gain; much less will they who know the value of the Gospel. They will study that book wherein it is contained. They will seek instruction from those who are best qualified to explain its mysteries. They will cry to God for the teaching of his Spirit. Nor will they be satisfied with obtaining a superficial knowledge of the truth. They will follow the direction of Solomon and account its blessings a rich compensation for their trouble. "If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God."

***~~2. They will part with all for it:~~***

*Their carnal enjoyments.*It calls them to sacrifice their dearest interests, and to give up their nearest relatives for Christ's sake. Nor will they exclaim against this as "a hard saying." They will not act like the Rich Youth who forsook Christ. They will rather part with anything, however precious, or however necessary.

*Their self-righteous hopes.*There is nothing which men are more averse to renounce than their own righteousness: but a discovery of the Gospel will humble them. It will constrain them to use the language of the prophet. Every Christian will resemble Paul in this.

*Their very life itself.*The love of life is inherent in us all: but the Gospel teaches us to overcome it. It requires us even to hate our lives in comparison of Christ. A view of it will enable us to do this, and will cause us to say like the holy Apostle, "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith!"

***~~Questions.~~***

***~~1. What is the daily object of our pursuit?~~***

Are we seeking knowledge, wealth, pleasure, honor, etc. or the establishment of this kingdom in our hearts? Let us fear lest we never should obtain this invaluable pearl; and let us follow the direction of our blessed Lord.

***~~2. What have we parted with for the Gospel's sake?~~***

We are not persecuted now as in former ages; but every man is called to make some sacrifices. What then have we forfeited for the sake of Christ? If we were allowed to retain only one thing, what should that one thing be? Remember, God requires a single eye, and an undivided heart.

***~~3. If you have purchased this pearl, what are you doing with it?~~***

It is not to be locked up, as it were, in a cabinet. You must indeed keep it carefully as a rich treasure; but you must also wear it about you as an ornament. It should have the effect on you that converse with God produced on Moses. In this way you will commend it to the world, and will most acceptably comply with our Lord's direction. "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

#1366

***~~The Net~~***

***~~[Matthew 13:47–50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.47â50)~~***

"Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

MEN are forcibly impressed by similes taken from things with which they are well acquainted. Hence the various parables are suited to those classes of the community who are conversant in the occupations to which they relate. The greater part of them refer to the different employments of husbandry, because our Lord sojourned chiefly among people engaged in agricultural pursuits. But he was also frequently called to instruct *fishermen*; to whose more immediate use he adapted the parable before us.

In order to elucidate the text we observe that,

***~~I. A variety of people are gathered by the Gospel into the visible Church.~~***

***~~The Gospel is preached promiscuously to all.~~***

When a net is cast into the sea, the fisherman knows not what success he shall have: he may toil all the night and catch nothing; or may enclose a number that can with difficulty be drawn to shore. However skillful he may be in his trade, he is dependent wholly on the good providence of God.

Just so, the Gospel is published to all without any respect of persons. Nor can the preachers of it command success: if Paul or Apollos labor, it is God alone that can render their endeavors effectual to the salvation of men.

***~~There are however many, for the most part, brought by means of it to a profession of religion.~~***

Where nothing but morality is preached, the people all remain stupid and unconcerned about their souls. But where Christ is truly exalted, some will feel the constraining influence of the word, and be drawn out of the vain world to an attendance on the duties of religion. But of these there will be various kinds: some will go no further than the mere form of godliness; others will seem to enjoy somewhat of its life and power, while in reality they have no stability in the ways of God; or, though they persevere in their *profession*of religion, they do not *walk*worthy of their high calling. There will be others, however, who are truly upright before God, and who "adorn the Gospel of God our Savior in all things."

All these people will be collected into a visible Church; all will profess an attachment to the Gospel: and all will feel some kind of confidence respecting their final acceptance before God.

But,

***~~II. Of those that are so gathered, there will be an awful separation in the day of judgment.~~***

Fishermen will not encumber themselves with fishes that are worthless; nor will God receive to himself all that are gathered by the Gospel.

***~~There will be a separation made in the day of judgment.~~***

God makes use of men to collect people into the visible Church; but he will employ "angels" as his agents to "separate the bad from the good." Nor will they, when acting under the direction of the Most High, be liable to the smallest error. They will see with one glance of their eye, who have been justified in Christ Jesus, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. No fisherman can distinguish between the most different sorts of fish more clearly than the angels will, between the weakest of the saints, and the most refined of hypocrites. Not one that is truly good shall be cast away; nor one that is really bad be preserved.

***~~That separation will be inexpressibly awful.~~***

Here the parable was inadequate to convey the truth; and therefore our Lord added a further explanation of it. Fish that are cast away suffer no otherwise than in meeting death a little sooner than those that are reserved in vessels. But it is not thus with souls that are cast away; for they shall be "cast into a furnace of fire, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth forever". O fearful end! how inconceivably different from that of those who shall be treasured up in vessels as "fit for their Master's use!"

***~~Inferences,~~***

***~~1. How diligently should we attend the ordinances of the Gospel!~~***

Ministers are made "fishers of men;" and their one employment is to "catch men." (This, my brethren, is the office which I am executing for God at this very moment: I am laboring to catch your souls for God.) Now it is in the ordinances that they go forth to cast their net: and if people do not attend the ordinances, there is no probability of their ever being drawn to God. Let not any trifling matters then be allowed to detain us from the house of God; for we cannot tell the precise time at which God has designed to enclose us in his net. And what a loss would we sustain, if through absence we deprived ourselves of that benefit! Let us then not only come to the house of God, but beg him to instruct his servants how to cast the net in the most advantageous manner, benefit, and for his glory.

***~~2. How careful should we be not to rest in an unsound profession of religion!~~***

It is not every one who is gathered by the Gospel, that shall enjoy its saving benefits. Many there are who approve of the truth, and take pleasure in hearing it proclaimed, who yet shall never enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Let all men judge themselves by the marks exhibited in the Holy Scriptures. Let them inquire whether, if the separation were at this instant to be made, they would be found among the good or the bad; among those that are truly alive to God, or those who, though they "have a name to live, are really dead" before God. Let it be remembered that the net is now spread, and that we are now enclosed in it; and, though we do not immediately perceive it, the net is at this moment drawing to shore!

My dear brethren, I tremble to think how many of us will before long be irrecoverably cast into a furnace of fire, and with what bitter "wailings," and self-condemning "gnashing of their teeth," they will look back upon the warnings they have despised, and the opportunities they have lost. Speedily, speedily will the scrutiny be made; and then the *final separation*. May God of his infinite mercy prepare us all for that solemn day, by renewing our natures, and accepting us in his beloved Son; so that we may be numbered with the good, and be approved of our God forever and ever!

#1367

***~~The Householder~~***

**[Matthew 13:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.52)**

Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

IT is of importance to all, but especially to those who are to teach others, that they understand clearly the mysteries of the Gospel. An ignorant minister, like an empty cloud or a leaky vessel, disappoints those who expect consolation and refreshment from him. But a well-instructed Scribe or minister resembles a housekeeper or steward, who, having made good provision for the family, feeds them to the full. With this comparison our Lord gave his attentive and intelligent disciples a view of the office which would in due season be committed to them. The resemblance of every such *minister*to a *householder*may be traced in that,

***~~I. He is provided with all things necessary for the family over whom he is placed.~~***

A householder has the charge of providing for the family. He considers not only what is needed at the present moment, but what will be needed on future occasions; and he preserves for future use the productions of foreign climates, or of successive seasons. Thus every pious minister labors to provide for the Church of God.

***~~1. He makes himself acquainted with the needs of all his people.~~***

The Church, over which he is made an overseer, is God's family. To supply their returning needs is his peculiar duty. Hence he is led to reflect upon their various states. He contemplates:  
the *difficulties*and *dangers*to which they are exposed,  
the *trials*and *temptations*which they have to sustain,  
and the *consolations*and *supports*which they each need,  
and thus he endeavors to learn what will be most suitable to their respective cases.

***~~2. He lays up in store what he may afterwards bring forth for their use.~~***

*The Scriptures are the grand repository of sacred knowledge.* These therefore he searches with all diligence, and "treasures" up with care. But while he furnishes his mind with "old things," he is observant also of "new." What he daily sees, or hears, or feels, is added carefully to his stock. Thus his knowledge becomes enlarged by observation, and matured by experience; and his fund of information is suited to the necessities of all to whom he ministers.

In prosecuting his work,

***~~II. He dispenses seasonably to each according to their respective wants.~~***

A householder furnishes out of his store what is needed for daily use, and apportions to all the branches of the family what is suited to their respective stations. Thus a well-instructed minister conducts himself in the Church of Christ:

***~~1. He gives to all an agreeable variety.~~***

Though Christ and his salvation is the great topic of his discourses, he descends, on proper occasions, to many other subjects connected with it. He opens the mysteries of the "Old" Testament, and illustrates them by the "New" Testament. He declares what God has asserted in his word, and confirms it by appeals to acknowledged facts, and to the experience of all around him. And though "it is not grievous to him to repeat" the great truths of the Gospel, he endeavors continually to diversify them in his statements, and to give them an air of novelty in his illustration of them.

***~~2. He administers to each his proper portion.~~***

To those whose growth in grace enables them to digest strong meat, he explains the deep mysteries of religion, and the more hidden parts of Christian experience. To those who can only feed on milk, he contents himself with proposing simply the great doctrines of our fall in Adam, and our recovery by Christ, together with the life of faith in Christ Jesus. He considers the peculiar experiences incident to different states, and discriminates between that which is correct, and that which is delusive, in them all. He gives the cup of consolation to the drooping penitent, or doubting believer—but holds forth the waters of jealousy to those who are of suspicious character. Thus, neither disabled by ignorance nor kept back by sloth, neither bribed by affection nor deterred by fear, he "gives to each his portion of bread in due season."

***~~Inferences.~~***

***~~1. The vast importance of the ministerial office.~~***

If we had only to provide for the *body*, it were but a small matter; but the *souls*of thousands depend on those who minister in holy things. Well may we say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" May all who have undertaken the office of the ministry, have grace to qualify themselves for it with unremitting diligence, and to execute it with undeviating fidelity!

***~~2. The benefit arising from it to the Church.~~***

How ill supplied would every member of a family be, if each were left to provide for himself; and how injurious would such a distraction be to their respective callings! Much more would these inconveniences be felt, if there were no stated ministry. People are sadly ignorant of the Gospel, notwithstanding all their advantages: but, without a stated ministry, they would soon degenerate into very heathens! Let all then be thankful that the Master of the family has appointed stewards to make suitable provision for them. Let them pray that their ministers may be taught of God to teach others; and let them improve with diligence the ordinances dispensed among them.

#1368

***~~Christ Walking on the Sea~~***

***~~[Matthew 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.26-27)~~***

"And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

THE Christian's duties are often difficult and self-denying. Nevertheless he must do the will of God, and leave events to His all-wise disposal. Jesus ordered his disciples to go in a small vessel to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the multitudes, who had been fed by him. They, probably approving in their hearts the proposal that had been made to invest him with royal authority [John 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.15), were somewhat averse to leave him; but, being commanded to go, complied. In the discharge of their duty they were overtaken with a storm, which not only obstructed their progress, but endangered their lives. In this state they were greatly terrified; but they soon found that *the way of duty was the way of safety.*

In elucidating the miraculous interposition of Jesus on their behalf, we shall notice,

***~~I. The power he exercised—~~***

***~~He came to them walking on the sea—~~***

Jesus, after dismissing the multitudes, retired to a mountain to pray; and thus by his own example taught us all, and especially ministers, that, *however pressing our public business may be, we should redeem time, even from sleep, for the purposes of private devotion*.

In the meantime his disciples, driven from their course, were contending with the storm They were ordered to go over a small bay to Bethsaida; but striving against the winds which drove them nut to sea towards Capernaum, they were, after many hours, only a league from shore. But Jesus went to their relief; and, having no boat or attendants to convey him, walked to them upon the tempestuous waters.

***~~This he did from the purest and most benevolent motives—~~***

Had he been actuated by a vain ostentation, he would probably have continued walking on the sea, instead of going up into the ship, that the people of Capernaum also might behold him Besides, he had just refused to be made a king; but his disciples were to be his witnesses to the world; and, being very slow of heart to believe, they needed more abundant testimonies for their conviction. Now the walking upon the sea was known to be an indication of Divine power [Job 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.8). He therefore gave them this evidence on purpose to prove to them his Messiahship; and, by means of it, he wrought a conviction on their minds, which his other miracles had failed to produce [Mark 6:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.52).

The first effect produced by his appearance to them, leads us to notice,

***~~II. The fears he occasioned—~~***

***~~His disciples were extremely terrified at the sight of him—~~***

The day but just beginning to dawn, their view of him was very indistinct. They supposed him to be a spirit. They knew that it was an evil spirit who had raised the storm by which Job's family were destroyed [Job 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.12); [Job 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.19); and they possibly might think that such a spirit had stirred up this tempest, and was now coming to overwhelm them utterly. Filled with terror, they cried aloud; thinking him to be an object of dread, whom, if they had known him, they would have regarded as their most seasonable, most welcome deliverer; but the trouble was necessary in order to engage their more fixed attention to the miracle now exhibited before their eyes.

***~~Just so are the Lord's people frequently harassed by unnecessary fears—~~***

All are called to sustain some conflicts in the path of duty; and in the midst of trouble the mind is apt to faint. If our difficulties or dangers be great, we are prone to indulge despondency, and to increase by imaginary fears the calamities under which we labor.

How often has that been a source of trouble to us, which should rather have been an occasion of joy and gratitude! How often have we forgotten, that God is pledged for our support, while we continue in the path of duty; and that there are a thousand unforeseen ways in which he can appear for us, when we think him most unmindful of our state! But, however distressing our fears may be for a moment, we shall have reason to be thankful for them, if they are the means of impressing us with a more abiding sense of Christ's love and faithfulness; yea, they are often permitted, and even excited by him, for this very end.

These fears however were amply compensated by,

***~~III. The condescension he manifested—~~***

***~~He instantly dispelled their fears in the kindest and most condescending manner—~~***

He at first appeared as though he would pass by them; but, having tried them for a moment, he revealed himself unto them, and bade them dismiss their groundless fears. He moreover went up into the vessel to them; and immediately the ship was wafted to its destined port [John 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.21).

***~~Thus does he at this time also allay the fears of his redeemed people—~~***

Are they distressed by reason of fierce opposition? He reminds them that, with Him on their side, they have none to fear [Isaiah 41:10-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10-15).

Are they overwhelmed with heavy trials? His presence with them is urged by him as an abundant ground of consolation and encouragement [Isaiah 43:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.1-2); [Isaiah 43:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.5).

Are they desponding under an apprehension that they are forsaken by him? He gently reproves their unbelief [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31), and assures them of his unremitting care [Isaiah 49:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-15).

Whatever is the source of their discouragement, he bids them not to fear [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32); and commands his ministers to labor more especially in comforting their afflicted minds [Isaiah 35:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.4). Thus, by revealing himself to them, he removes their trouble; and, by his presence with them, carries them forward towards the haven of rest.

***~~Inferences—~~***

***~~1. There is no state in which Christ can not save us—~~***

Our difficulties may be greatly multiplied, and appear utterly unsurmountable; but "his hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." He who "made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over," and saved Jonah in the belly of a fish, can never be at a loss for means to deliver us. On the contrary, the greater are the obstacles to our salvation, the more will he magnify his power and grace in effecting it.

***~~2. There is no state in which Christ will not save us—~~***

He sees us when we little think of it; and is often nearer to us than we imagine. Our conflicts may be long; and he may suffer all our endeavors to be frustrated: but he will appear for us in some unexpected way; and his presence with us shall both alleviate our labors, and crown us with success. Only let us invite him into the vessel with us, and we shall gain in safety the desired haven.

#1369

***~~Peter Saved When Sinking in the Sea~~***

***~~[Matthew 14:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.30-32)~~***

"But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased."

MEN'S constitutional propensities are apt to betray them into many errors. Whatever are the natural frailties of any person, they usually form the weak part of his character even to his last hour. The force of them is no where more strongly exhibited than in the conduct of Peter. He was of a bold, forward, confident disposition. This led him on many occasions to act with indiscretion and often brought upon him a just reproof. In the passage before us he needlessly solicited a trial of his faith, and the experiment terminated in his shame.

The account given of it in the text, leads us to observe,

***~~I. That we should not unnecessarily expose ourselves to temptation—~~***

Peter doubtless was in part actuated by faith and love: but, in soliciting permission to display the grace of which he supposed himself possessed, he erred. There was no more occasion for him to venture thus upon the waters, than for any other of the Apostles to do it. And, in affecting this distinction above all his brethren, he betrayed a considerable measure of pride and vain glory: and, *in acceding to his request, our Lord chiefly designed to make him sensible of his own weakness*. In fact, this attempt to display his faith and courage, was overruled for the discovering of his cowardice and unbelief and of putting him to shame for his excessive conceit and forwardness.

Just so will God deal with us, if, under an idea of our ability to withstand temptation, we expose ourselves needlessly to its assaults. Who does not see the folly of *Dinah*in going to visit the daughters of a heathen people, and of subjecting herself to the temptation by which she fell?

Yet her example is followed by thousands among ourselves, who associate with ungodly companions, and frequent places of vain amusement, and expose themselves to temptations of various kinds, under an idea that they "can take fire in their bosoms, and not be burned!" But their folly will sooner or later be manifest, even as Peter's was. As then our Lord cautions us against worldly-mindedness by the example of Lot's wife, so would I caution all of you, my brethren, against self-confidence by the sad example of Peter.

On another occasion, Peter sinned yet far more grievously through a mistaken notion of his power to maintain his integrity. He went from mere idle curiosity to see the outcome of his master's trial in the hall of Pilate, and there he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. And what may result from an unnecessary exposure of yourselves to temptation, God alone knows. But I would put you all upon your guard, and say to every one among you, 'Remember Peter's infirmity, with the danger consequent upon it.'

But you may further learn from this history,

***~~II. That, if in the way of providence we are called to trials, we need not fear them—~~***

When Peter had once obtained his Lord's command to come to him upon the waters, he had no occasion for fear. If the water was made so firm as to sustain his weight, what reason had he to fear the waves? Hence our Lord justly reproved his unbelief, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" In this he has shown how weak we all are when we come into temptation.

Though we ourselves, both in body and soul, are living miracles, yet we forget the power that has hitherto upheld us, and are ready to tremble at the prospect of some overwhelming calamity, as though it were impossible for us to stand under it.

The Hebrews had seen all God's wonders in Egypt, and yet on every fresh occasion of difficulty they yielded to desponding apprehensions. And thus we also are prone to fear, whenever any heavy trial occurs. But if we saw an armed host behind us, and an impassable ocean before our face, we should not question for a moment the power or veracity of God, but say to the one, "Who are you, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain;" and to the other, "God will make the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over." All that we have to ascertain is, whether we are in the path of duty: and, if in that respect we can see the pillar and the cloud leading the way, we need not fear all that either men or devils can do against us. This was the experience of David [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3), and it should be ours. For it is certain,

***~~III. That whatever trials we may be brought into, the prayer of faith will be effectual for our deliverance—~~***

"Lord, save me!" cried Peter in his extremity: and the hand of Jesus, stretched out, saved him instantly from his peril. And where shall we find, in all the sacred records, one instance of any person calling upon the Lord in vain? The troubles of David were on many occasions exceeding heavy; yet did the prayer of faith procure for him deliverance from them all [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3). And thus shall it prove with us, if only, with the simplicity of Peter's affiance, we cry, "Lord, save me!" Let us suppose that we were, in a spiritual view, in the very predicament of Peter: let us suppose that, under loads of guilt and storms of corruption, we felt ourselves sinking into perdition; the Publican's prayer, uttered from the heart, should prevail to allay the storm, and to bring us in safety to the haven of eternal rest. Only let us not limit either the power or grace of Christ, and we shall "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation."

***~~Address—~~***

***~~1. To the presumptuous—~~***

No man, whatever he may have attained, is at liberty to expose himself to needless temptations. The injunction given to every child of man is, "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." To young people especially would I give this beneficial caution: 'To rush into temptation without necessity, is to tempt the Lord.' It is only while with all holy watchfulness we "keep ourselves," that we can hope effectually to be preserved by God.

***~~2. To the doubtful—~~***

The reproof given to Peter, "O you of little faith; why did you doubt?" is justly applicable to us, if, under any circumstances whatever, we yield to a desponding spirit. For, is not the Lord Jesus present with us? and is he not as able to save as ever! What if, with Jonah, we were "brought, as it were, into the very belly of Hell," could not the same power as restored him deliver us also [John 2:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.1-7)? Only take the promises of God for your support, and they shall never fail you: for "they are all yes and Amen in Christ Jesus [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20).

***~~3. To the confirmed believer—~~***

If in other respects you are walking uprightly, you bring much glory to your God. *There is nothing that honors God so much as faith, and nothing that dishonors him so much as unbelief*. Other sins pour contempt upon the law: but unbelief reflects upon the Lawgiver, as calling in question his veracity, or power, or love. Be then as lights in a dark world. The world looks only to second causes: you must show them that everything, even to the falling of a sparrow, is under the direction of the first Great Cause, who alone is worthy to be regarded with either fear or love. At the same time let your confidence in God be humble, without ostentation before men, and without unhallowed boldness before God. Then may you expect to be preserved from all dangers; and both the Church and the world will be edified by your example.

#1370

***~~Formal Worshipers, Hypocrites~~***

***~~[Matthew 15:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.1-9)~~***

"Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the *tradition*of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of *your tradition*? For *God*commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But *you*say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

IN the present day, there is very little of superstitious observance in the world, and still less of Pharisaic hypocrisy; except indeed in the Church of Rome, which is still unhappily a compound of them both. Yet these do exist even among Protestants: and the declaration, which in the first instance was delivered, not as a prophecy respecting future ages, but as a reproof to the Jews, in Isaiah's time [Isaiah 29:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.13), and which our blessed Lord afterwards applied as a prophecy respecting the people of his day; that declaration, I say, may well be considered as applicable to us, so far as our habits accord with those of the Jews in the two fore-mentioned periods. Let me, then, state to you, as it is my duty to do,

***~~I. In whom this prophecy is fulfilled—~~***

Granting that, in many things, we differ from the Pharisees, to whom our Lord applied these words, yet is the prophecy fulfilled at this day by,

***~~1. Those who satisfy themselves with mere formal worship—~~***

The house of God is, on the whole, well attended in this land: and in many private families is the worship of God observed. But where shall we find anything but a mere lifeless form? The very habit of persons in the public assembly shows, for the most part, that their souls are not engaged, and that the decent performance of an acknowledged duty is all that the worshipers have in view.

Hear the confessions: Do they resemble those of the poor publican? Do they indicate anything of real brokenness of heart and deep contrition, like that of the converts on the day of Pentecost?

Hear the petitions: How little fervor, how little importunity, how little of urgent pleading with God, do you observe!

Hear the thanksgivings: Are these such as should proceed from souls "delivered from the powers of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son?" Are the emotions of gratitude for the salvation of the soul such as the lame man, whom Peter and John healed, evinced for the healing of his body [Acts 3:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6-8)? Do the worshipers in our churches appear at all as if they were in close communion with God himself, and transacting with him the business of their immortal souls? Alas! *the devotions of the generality are no better than a solemn mockery*, an "honoring of God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him."

***~~2. Those who substitute the conceits of men for the commands of God—~~***

This obtains to a fearful extent in the Church of Rome, where pilgrimages, and penances, and burdensome rites of various kinds, are substituted for "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Among Protestants, also, the same evil obtains to a very great degree. *Every sect has its peculiarities, on which it lays a very undue stress*, just as the Pharisees did on washing the hands before eating, verse 2; and a violation of any one established order, or traditionary conceit, would be far more severely noticed than any departure from the commands of God. Let there be in any person a disposition only to disregard some characteristic dogma, or some peculiarity in liturgy of his own particular Church, and how many cautions will he receive against such unadvised conduct! While, if he neglects God and his own soul during his whole life, he shall never hear so much as one word of friendly admonition!

Nay, more; an occasional neglect of some established usage in society, or a deviation from the laws of fashion and politeness, will go further to sink us in the estimation of our neighbors, than a habitual violation of all the commands of God. This, then, shows us plainly, that a Pharisaic spirit still exists among us; and that the prophecy is fulfilled in our land, if not so extensively, yet as truly, as in the land of Judah, either in our Savior's day, or in the days of the Prophet Isaiah.

Such characters, then, still existing, let us inquire,

***~~II. In what light they are viewed by Almighty God—~~***

Our blessed Savior calls them "hypocrites." True, they are the last people in the world who suspect themselves of hypocrisy. On the contrary, they account religious persons hypocrites; and conceive themselves to be the only persons whose integrity is clear. But, however high they stand in their own esteem, they are hypocrites in the estimation of the heart-searching God. They are hypocrites,

***~~1. In their professions—~~***

They profess real sanctity; but they possess it not: they have not any one of those qualities of which real sanctity consists. They "have a *form*of godliness, but are altogether destitute of its power." If they say, 'We make no profession of religion,' then I ask, Do you not call yourselves Christians? Do you not demand Christian baptism for your children? And do you not expect Christian burial when you die? Then you do profess yourselves followers of Christ: and *while you show so little love to Christ, and so little resemblance to him, you are downright hypocrites*.

If a man were as disloyal to an earthly king as you are to our blessed Lord, and yet profess himself a loyal and devoted subject, you yourselves would assign to him the designation he would merit, and, in so doing, shall assume it to yourselves.

***~~2. In their aims—~~***

These persons would have it supposed that they aim at advancing the honor of their God. But, in fact, there is nothing further from their thoughts than this. Many seek only to maintain a good character before men: and those who are less actuated by worldly applause, yet think of nothing but satisfying their own minds, and forming for themselves some specious ground for self-delight and self-dependence. But as God said to the Jews by the Prophet Zechariah, "When you fasted and mourned, did you at all fast unto me, even unto me? And when you ate, and when drank, did not you eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves, [Zechariah 7:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.5-6)?"

So must it be said to those whom we have before described: they show, by their very best services, that they have no view beyond themselves: when, if they were really upright before God, they would, "whether they ate or drank, or whatever they did, do all to the glory of God, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)."

***~~3. In the whole of their spirit and conduct—~~***

They would be thought to possess a Christian spirit: but there are few, if any, in the world more proud, more uncharitable, or more intolerant than they. They hold in contempt those who differ from them, whether they be religious or profane: the godly, as possessing an unfashionable and contemptible religion; and the profane, as destitute of the very appearance of religion. As for those who are living near to God in the enjoyment of his presence and in the prospect of his glory, these Pharisaical persons can scarcely endure them. In their sight, all spiritual religion is no other than conceit and vanity and hypocrisy: and those who possess it are deemed "as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things," and, consequently, as worthy of universal reprobation. In every age of the world the mere formalists have thus persecuted the people of God; and have thus shown themselves, in the midst of all their pretended zeal for good works, "the children of the devil."

***~~See, then, brethren,~~***

***~~1. What need we have to examine our state before God—~~***

We may be extremely zealous about the impositions and enactments of men, while we ourselves are adverse to the commands of God: and we may greatly honor God with our lips, while our hearts are altogether enmity against him. Then let us judge ourselves by the word of God, and by the examples of the primitive saints: for if in our whole spirit and deportment we be not followers of Christ and of his holy Apostles, then whatever we may think of ourselves, we shall never be accepted by our God.

***~~2. What need we have to rise above the shackles of a formal, worldly religion—~~***

We have seen what the religion of carnal professors is: it is no better than hypocrisy; and as such it will be accounted in the last day. Nothing but vital piety will stand the test to which we shall be brought in that day. If, therefore, we be satisfied now with that which satisfies the world, we shall be grievously disappointed. If we will stand acceptable before God in the future judgment, "our doctrines" must be such as he has revealed, and our "worship" must be such as he will approve: for "not he who commends himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commends."

#1371

***~~The Faith of the Canaanite Woman~~***

***~~[Matthew 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.28)~~***

"Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is your faith; be it unto you even as you will. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

RETIREMENT is necessary for all; especially for those who minister in holy things; but on certain occasions it must be sacrificed to the pressing calls of duty. Jesus had retired to the country near Tyre and Sidon on purpose that he might enjoy some privacy; but this Canaanite woman, having heard of him, went to importune him on behalf of her afflicted daughter: nor was her intrusion, however unseasonable, displeasing to him.

In discoursing on the relief afforded her, we shall notice,

***~~I. The disposition and conduct of this distressed heathen—~~***

The commendation which our blessed Lord himself bestowed on her, naturally leads us to a minute investigation of her character. Behold,

***~~1. Her love—~~***

She considered her daughter's affliction as her own; and, when imploring relief for her, cried, "Have mercy upon me!" and knowing that there was One able to help, she sought him out with diligence, and applied to him with importunity.

We too, like her, may be deeply affected with the bodily disorders of our children; and may make application to physicians in their behalf. But, though we know the power of Jesus to heal disorders, and the utter inefficacy of all human means without his blessing—how rarely do we spread our needs before him in fervent prayer! Yes, when we see the souls of our relatives possessed by Satan, and are assured that none but Jesus can deliver them, we profess perhaps to pity them—but find no disposition to intercede for them at the throne of grace; or, if we occasionally put up a petition for them, we show by the coldness of our prayers how little regard we have for their eternal interests.

Alas! that a heathen woman should have so much greater concern for the *bodily*welfare of her child, than we feel for the *souls*of those who are most nearly related to us!

***~~2. Her humility—~~***

Nothing could express more sincere humility than her demeanor did on this occasion. She addressed our Lord in terms of most profound respect, and prostrated herself before him with the deepest reverence. And, when he, by-insinuation at least, compared her to a dog, she, instead of deeming it an insult, acquiesced in the appellation given her, and, with an ingenuity which nothing but the most sincere humility could have dictated, turned into a plea the name which seemed to convey nothing but discouragement: "True, Lord, I am a dog; yet as the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table, without being considered as robbing the children—so, if you grant me this one favor, it need not be any diminution of the mercy which you have treasured up for the Jews, in comparison of whom I am worthily esteemed a dog."

Thus should we also conduct ourselves in all our addresses at the throne of grace;

our posture should be humble,

our spirit should be contrite, and

our acknowledgments should be full of self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

***~~3. Her faith—~~***

Faith, as being the *root*of all, our Lord more especially commended. Indeed her faith was exceeding great: she beheld him as "the Lord, the Son of David," the true Messiah. She believed him *able*to effect a cure, when it far surpassed all human power; yes, she believed that he could effect it at a distance, and by a word only. She was no less persuaded of his *willingness*to grant her petition; and therefore she persevered in her request despite of all her discouragements. And, when our Lord declared that her request was granted—she departed with as full a persuasion that her daughter was delivered from the unclean spirit, as if she had seen the change accomplished before her eyes.

What an admirable *pattern*was she in this respect! It is thus that we also should approach him, not doubting either his *ability*or *willingness*to help us; and, when we hear his gracious declarations, we should trust in them with the fullest assurance that they shall be accomplished to us.

***~~4. Her patience—~~***

When first she besought our Lord, he took no notice of her.

When she followed him with her entreaties, insomuch that the disciples, merely to get rid of her, became her advocates, he refused to hear her intercessions, and assigned to them a reason which to them appeared unanswerable.

When she still, with increasing humility and fervor, urged her request, she also was repulsed, and that too in terms which might have been interpreted as reproachful and injurious.

Now persons in bitter anguish of mind are peculiarly susceptible of neglect, and much more of insult, especially from those of whom they had entertained a high opinion, and from whom they had expected a very different treatment. But, instead of being irritated, she endured all with the meekest submission. How different was her conduct, though a heathen, from David's under a far less disappointment, [1 Samuel 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.21-22), and determined to persevere until she should obtain her request.

Thus, when answers to prayers are delayed, we should continue urging our petitions, saying, "I will not let you go unless you bless me, [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26)." Nor should anything ever induce us to entertain hard thoughts of God, or to murmur at his dispensations towards us, seeing that we deserve nothing at his hands but shame and contempt.

While we admire the conduct of this woman, let us also contemplate,

***~~II. The behavior of the Lord Jesus towards her—~~***

***~~For some time he seemed to act in a manner unworthy of himself—~~***

Towards all others he showed himself kind and condescending, and ready to administer the relief they solicited. Yes, he frequently almost obtruded himself upon the notice of men, and urged them, as it were, to ask for blessings at his hands. Even to the most abandoned of all characters he displayed this readiness to impart mercy, [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); but towards this distressed suppliant he seemed destitute of all sympathy or compassion. He had indeed reasons abundantly sufficient to justify his conduct: he chose to *draw forth the faith that was in her heart*, and thereby to reprove the indifference of those who called themselves exclusively the children of God. By the delay too, he rendered the benefit more acceptable to the woman, and the woman herself a brighter pattern unto us.

In a similar way, and for similar reasons, he sometimes hides his face from us, and turns, as it were, a deaf ear to our requests; and, if we listened to the dictates of impatience and unbelief, we should be ready to exclaim, "What profit is there that we should call upon him?"

***~~But at last he answered her most optimistic expectations—~~***

He who had appeared so regardless of her cry, at last bore testimony to the greatness of her faith. How cheering must his commendations have been to her disconsolate spirit! And how has he shown to us, that there may be great faith even where we suppose there is little, or perhaps none at all; and that when we account no terms too humiliating whereby to express our vileness, he approves and even admires the graces that we exercise!

With this condescension in his manner of showing mercy, he manifested the greatest liberality in the favor he conferred: *he made her own wishes the measure of his gifts*. Nor will he show less kindness to us, if we call upon him with our whole hearts. "What do you desire that I should do for you?" is his address to every one of us: and when we have made known our requests, he will say to each, "Be it unto you even as you will."

With respect to *temporal*mercies, he will give or withhold as he foresees will be best for us: but in *spiritual*things he will do for us not only what we ask, but "exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think!"

***~~We may learn from hence, that,~~***

***~~1. There is no respect of persons with God—~~***

No man can say, God will not hear me, because I am not of the number of his elect: for we cannot tell who are, or who are not, the elect of God, any farther than we are enabled to judge by their respective fruits. There is no man of any nation, or any character, who shall not find favor with God, if he seeks it earnestly through the Lord Jesus Christ. Let secret things then be left to God; and let all, whether they account themselves dogs or children, seek a portion of that bread which came down from Heaven. So shall their souls be liberated from Satan's yoke, and experience the saving efficacy of the Redeemer's word.

***~~2. Persevering prayer will and must prevail—~~***

Never was there an instance wherein the prayer of faith failed of success. It has opened the windows of Heaven, [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18); and imposed, if we may so speak, restraints upon the Deity himself, [Exodus 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10-11); [Exodus 32:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.14). If we can only wait patiently upon the Lord, he will soon pluck our feet out of the mire, and "put a new song into our mouths, even a thanksgiving unto our God, [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3)." Let us then "pray, and not faint." Let us call upon the Lord, and "give him no rest until he arises" for our help, [Isaiah 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.7). Then shall we assuredly succeed at last, and find, that *his answers, however delayed, are given in the fittest season, and in the most perfect correspondence with our necessities.*

#1372

***~~Great Multitudes Healed~~***

***~~[Matthew 15:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.30-31)~~***

"Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel."

EVERY miracle which our Lord performed, suggests to us some peculiar subjects of profitable meditation. But we shall not now dwell upon any one act, however great or benevolent; our attention at this time will be fixed upon a more than ordinary exertion of omnipotence, the *working of miracles in a mass*, if we may so speak. We behold Jesus healing great multitudes of persons who labored under a variety of disorders; which circumstance may very properly lead us to inquire,

***~~I. What sensations must this exercise of divine power have excited?~~***

A more interesting spectacle cannot be conceived than that which was exhibited on this occasion. Consider the impression that must have been made,

***~~1. On the persons healed—~~***

It could not fail but that the persons who had been healed instantly, and without any painful operation, must be deeply affected with the mercy bestowed on them.

With what fixedness of attention must the **blind**, whose eyes had been opened, survey their benefactor! They would feel no disposition to gratify their curiosity by gazing on the wonders of creation: neither the meridian sun, nor the face of nature enlightened by it, would for one moment attract their notice. The restorer of their visual powers would engross their whole minds; nor would they turn their eyes from him for a moment, unless to wipe away the tears of gratitude and joy that would stream as from an overflowing fountain.

With what exquisite delight would the **deaf**listen to the voice of him who had unstopped their ears! With what insatiable avidity would they drink in the sound, while, with the teachableness of little children, they received his gracious instructions!

As for the **mute**, whose tongues were loosened, they would, by an involuntary and irresistible impulse, fill the air with acclamations and hosannahs, unless that the dread of interrupting the discourses of their Lord should awe them into silence.

The **lame**and **maimed**(many of whom perhaps had not only their strength renewed, but their limbs, that had suffered amputation were perfectly restored) how would they exult and leap for joy, clapping their hands in ecstasy, and glorifying the author of their mercies! We may be assured of this from what is recorded of the cripple whom Peter healed, [Acts 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.8).

Methinks the assembly would be like a choir of ten thousand instruments, whose notes were exceeding various, but all in perfect harmony!

***~~2. On the surrounding multitude—~~***

The spectators, many of whom were friends and relatives of those that had been healed, doubtless participated in the general joy. Their feelings however were probably less ecstatic, because their own personal interest was not so nearly concerned. But their *astonishment*at the wonders performed, their *satisfaction*in the success of their own labors, and their *sympathy*with those whose maladies had been removed, could not fail of exciting in their minds the most pleasing sensations.

When the wife or husband, the parent or child, saw the object of his warmest affections restored to health, and exercising with activity and vigor the faculties that had been renewed, surely he would lift up his eyes to Heaven with devoutest gratitude, or prostrate himself upon the ground in profoundest adoration. When, in addition to the mercy his relatives had received, he beheld others in like circumstances with himself, and every moment fresh *monuments of mercy*rising before his eyes, we may conceive him overwhelmed with the sight and lost in amazement!

***~~3. On Jesus himself—~~***

Could Jesus be an unconcerned spectator of the bliss he was diffusing? Could he, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, refuse to sympathize with this adoring multitude? It was one of his most common sayings, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, [Acts 20:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.35); and doubtless he experienced the truth of it on this occasion. Let us then consider the joy excited in the bosom of every individual that had been relieved; let us consolidate and compress it, as it were, into one mass; and then we may have some faint conception of what Jesus felt, while he was communicating such abundant happiness.

He would not fail to adore, with inexpressible, though perhaps hidden, ardor, his heavenly Father, for making him the channel of so many blessings. But Jesus' happiness would be widely different from that of those whom he relieved. His would be tempered with pity for their spiritual maladies, of which, alas! they had but little sense; and his praises would be mixed with prayers, that they might flock around him to obtain those richer benefits, of which their present cures were but imperfect emblems.

Not to indulge mere useless speculations on this exercise of divine power, let us inquire,

***~~II. What reflections should it suggest to our minds?~~***

If every separate miracle be replete with instruction to us, much more may this accumulation of miracles afford us matter of *useful improvement*.

***~~1. Let us seek healing from the hands of Jesus—~~***

It may be that our *bodies*are preserved in the unimpaired use of all their faculties. But are not our *souls*diseased? Have we no *intellectual*blindness from which we need deliverance? Do not our *tongues*need to be loosened, our *ears*to be unstopped, or our *limbs*to be invigorated—for the daily performance of our spiritual duties? Surely, if we will examine our hearts, we shall find that the people who thronged to our Lord, were not in a more pitiable condition than ourselves! Yes, we are incomparably more miserable than they, because the consequences of our disorders are so much more awful, and our desire for the removal of them is so weak and faint.

Let us seek a deep conviction of this truth. Let us, under a sense of our extreme wretchedness, apply to Jesus, and interest our friends and relatives in our behalf. Thus shall the predictions that were literally fulfilled by the miracles before us, receive their true, though mystical, accomplishment in the renovation of our souls, [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6).

***~~2. Let us on no account limit the power and grace of Christ—~~***

The hand which so easily and with such compassion, dispensed the blessings of health and strength—can surely with the same facility administer to our spiritual needs. Our lusts are so inveterate and our sinful habits so deeply rooted, as to destroy the remotest hope of ever rescuing ourselves from their dominion. But the power and compassion of Jesus are the same as ever. The lapse of seventeen hundred years has made no change in him. "His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear." Let us then guard against every unworthy, unbelieving thought. Let us be persuaded that he is "able to save us to the very uttermost;" and that "he will cast out none who come unto him."

***~~3. Let us glorify God with and for all the faculties we possess—~~***

Our bodily and mental powers are rich mercies from the hand of God, and should be exerted continually in promoting his glory. If our *eyes*have been opened to behold the light of his truth; if our *ears*have been unstopped, so that we can *hear*the voice of the good shepherd; if our *tongues*have been loosed to speak of his name; and if our *feet*have been strengthened to run the way of his commandments; it befits us to imitate the multitudes who surrounded him on this occasion. There should not be a cold heart, or an inactive member, throughout this whole assembly. We should all either be filled with admiration of his goodness, or, with ecstatic ardor, render him the tribute of incessant praise. Were we thus occupied, we should enjoy a very Heaven upon earth.

We cannot conceive a better idea of Heaven than if we set before our eyes this adoring multitude. Do we see Jesus encircled by them, every eye fixed on him, every tongue sounding his praises, every soul ascribing all its happiness to his power and grace? What is this but Heaven? Let us then resemble them, or rather far outstrip them, in our acclamations, forasmuch as our mercies infinitely exceed those which were enjoyed by them. This will be an improvement as beneficial to ourselves as it will be instructive to others, and honorable to "the God of Israel".

#1373

***~~Against Formality and Indifference~~***

**[Matthew 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.6)**

"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

EVERY object around us is capable of affording us much important instruction. Our blessed Lord took occasion from all the common affairs of life, and all the things that presented themselves to his view, to lead his disciples to the contemplation of heavenly things. It happened that his disciples had neglected to take with them a proper supply of bread; and consequently that they would be necessitated to procure some on the other side of the lake where they were going. In reference to this circumstance he bade them beware of a certain kind of leaven. They, not apprehending his meaning, supposed that his words were to be taken in a literal sense: but our Lord, bringing to their remembrance the miraculous supplies of bread which he had recently and repeatedly afforded them, showed them, that his caution had a spiritual import, and that it referred, not to bread, but to *certain pernicious doctrines*, of which they were to beware.

We propose,

***~~I. To show what Christ's warning refers to—~~***

If the characters of the Pharisees and the Sadducees is duly considered, it will appear that our Lord cautioned his disciples against,

***~~1. A formal, hypocritical religion (legalism)—~~***

The *Pharisees*laid a very great stress on forms; and multiplied them, not only beyond what the law of Moses prescribed, but even to the subversion of moral duties, [Mark 7:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.8-13). At the same time they were extremely negligent in matters of more importance, [Matthew 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.23). Amidst their high professions of religion, they sought only the applause of men, [Matthew 23:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.5-7), and their own temporal advantage, [Matthew 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14); [Matthew 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.25). With respect to real piety, they were not only destitute of it [Matthew 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.20), but adverse to it in the highest degree [Matthew 23:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.13); [Matthew 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.31) with [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50). Some few among them indeed were more upright, [Philippians 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.5-6); but in general they were proud, worldly, and hypocritical [Matthew 23:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.25-28).

And what is the religion of the generality among ourselves? Do not the greater part of those who appear to respect religion, rest in some outward observances?

They attend the public worship;

they go to the table of the Lord;

they read the Scriptures occasionally;

they say their prayers at stated seasons:

but their hearts are glued to the world; and they are more anxious to be *thought*religious than to *be*so, and to gain the applause of man than to secure the honor that comes from God.

Whether such a state can be acceptable to God, you judge, [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15).

***~~2. An indifference about all religion (liberalism)—~~***

The *Sadducees*were the free-thinkers of the day: they denied the resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul [Acts 23:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.8); and formed their notions of religion without any just regard to the Holy Scriptures. Whatever was contrary to their preconceived opinions, they ridiculed as enthusiasm [Acts 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.32). Their lives, as might be expected, were in perfect consistency with their sentiments: they lived, almost as much as the heathen themselves, "without God in the world."

Behold in them, as in a mirror, the present generation! The rich, the mirthful, the men of learning and philosophy, are too generally of this description. Though they have never searched the Scriptures for themselves, they are as confident of the truth of their sentiments as they could be, if they had labored ever so diligently to ascertain the mind of God. They laugh at all serious religion; and represent the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of a true Christian, as symptoms of melancholy, and as the offspring of a heated imagination.

Can we wonder that our blessed Lord cautioned his disciples against such a state as this? Or can any of us be too much on our guard against it?

The propriety of this caution will further appear, while we proceed,

***~~II. To assign some reasons for Christ's warning—~~***

We shall not insist on any reasons that were peculiar to the Apostles; but touch rather on those that are applicable to every age. The caution is necessary at all times:

***~~1. Because of our proneness to the evils which we are warned against—~~***

We need only notice the habits of all around us, from youth to manhood, and from maturity to old age; we shall then see to what every man is by nature inclined. *Pleasure*beguiles the earlier periods of life, and *care*corrodes our advanced or declining years. Nor is this peculiar to any time or place. In these respects, human nature is everywhere, and at all times, the same.

Some indeed are more inclined to Pharisaic pride, and others to Sadducean indifference: and it is common to see persons, after a life of dissipation, passing from one to the other of these states. But where do we find those who are of themselves inclined to unreserved piety? Who ever was by nature humble and contrite? Who ever by nature hated all kinds of sin, and delighted in the exercises of vital godliness? Instances of early piety, it is true, may be found: but their piety was the fruit of the Spirit, and not the product of unassisted nature.

Is not this then a reason why the caution should be given? Surely, if all our natural propensities lead to one or other of the evils against which we are cautioned, it befits us to be on our guard against them: nor can any expressions be too strong to warn us of our danger. The words of our text are very emphatic, and the parallel passage says, "He began to say to His disciples *first of all*, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy!" ([Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1)), that is, above all things.

***~~2. Because of the fatal tendency of the evils themselves—~~***

The nature of "leaven" is to ferment until it has pervaded and changed the whole mass into which it is put. And well may these errors be designated by such a name. We have seen already that the heart of man by nature is impregnated with dispositions adverse to true religion.

How do these dispositions operate? Do they not work incessantly, until they vitiate the whole man? Do they not blind our understanding, and pervert our will, and sensualize our affections, and cause every part of our conduct to savor of ungodliness?

Behold also in what manner they operate on those who turn away from the truth. For a season they have felt the influence of a better leaven, the grace of God: but, being drawn aside by temptation, they begin again to yield to their former corruptions: how soon do they lose all their spirituality of mind, and become formal in their devotions, and indifferent at least, if not also adverse, to all which they before esteemed and relished! Whoever has observed the rapid and melancholy change which is often wrought in professors of religion through the influence of this leaven, will see cause enough why every disciple of Christ should be cautioned against it.

***~~3. Because of their ultimate and eternal effect—~~***

What must be the outcome of a life spent in Pharisaic pride or Sadducean indifference, it is almost needless to suggest. But surely every man's own reflection should make him careful how he admits such leaven into his soul, or yields to its malignant influence: for *eternal happiness and eternal misery are too important to be trifled with!* The very word *eternity*is sufficient to make every man thoughtful and cautious.

We will now endeavor,

***~~III. To point out the means whereby Christ's warning may be rendered effectual for our preservation—~~***

Doubtless it is the Spirit of God only that can apply the word to our souls: and therefore we must above all things implore his almighty aid. But it may be useful to suggest some other hints for the carrying into effect the caution in the text.

***~~1. Get your souls deeply impressed with the principles of the Gospel—~~***

The Gospel is "the rod of God's strength," with which he has wrought the most stupendous miracles, and it is that which he delights to make effectual to our salvation. Indeed there is something in its fundamental principles which is admirably calculated to counteract the influence of this leaven. The Gospel declares to us our lost estate; and proposes to us a Savior, who bought us with his blood. Now who that is duly sensible of his guilt and danger, will yield to indifference? Who that discerns the fullness and excellency of Christ, will rest in any mere forms for his acceptance with God? Who, in short, that beholds the wonders of redeeming love, will harbor that accursed leaven that would rob him of all its benefits? Only let us come to God through Christ, and the love of Christ will constrain us to "purge out," as far as possible, every atom of "the old leaven."

***~~2. Be careful whom you choose as your associates—~~***

A man will, for the most part, drink into the spirit of his associates. Are they formal and worldly, or infidel and contemptuous? he can scarcely hope to escape the infection: "Evil company corrupts good character, [1 Corinthians 15:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.33)" and "a little leaven will leaven the whole lump, [Galatians 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.9)." If, on the other hand, his companions are living in the fear of God, he will be instructed by their conversation, and edified by their example.

The inference from this is clear. We need not to be often warned against exposing ourselves to the influence of a pestilential disorder. Why then should we not beware of the contagion of sin and sinners? Surely in proportion as the soul is of more value than the body, our circumspection in reference to spiritual things should exceed that which we use respecting the things that pertain to the present life. With the apostle then we say, "Come out from among the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17)," and let your associates be, like David's, "the excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight, [Psalm 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.3)."

***~~3. Endeavor to realize the thoughts of the future judgment—~~***

*In the last day everything will appear in its proper colors.* Vital godliness will then no longer be seen through the medium of prejudice: its light will shine out of obscurity; and its excellence will be universally acknowledged. Then too the *Sadducean scoffers*and *the Pharisaic formalists*will find how awfully they have been deluded. "Evil will no more be put for good, nor good for evil;" but the quality of every man's actions will be infallibly determined, and a suitable recompense will be given to him, either in the joys of Heaven or the miseries of Hell. What can ever influence us, if such a solemn consideration as this fail to put us on our guard?

Could we but keep alive in our hearts the expectation of that day, we would determine, through grace, to think and act for ourselves: we should "not follow a multitude to do evil;" but should take a decided part in the cause of Christ: we would not participate in "the leaven of error or hypocrisy, [Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1)," but eat "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, [1 Corinthians 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.6-8).

#1374

***~~Peter's Confession of Christ Rewarded~~***

***~~[Matthew 16:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.15-19)~~***

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven."

WHILE some are laying an undue stress upon the smaller differences which exist between Christians, others put all the Christian world together in one indiscriminate mass; thinking that those who are one in name, are one also in reality. But both of these parties are wrong; for the differences about Church government, and about some more abstruse doctrines of our religion, are of very little signification before God, and ought to be maintained by us with moderation and mutual concessions. Whereas those differences which respect our saving attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ are of infinite importance; they put asunder the various classes of Christians, and either prove or disprove their very title to the name.

Our blessed Lord has strongly marked this in a conversation which he held with his disciples. He asked them: What notions the *generality*of his professed followers entertained concerning him? To this they replied, that some supposed him to be John the Baptist; others, Elijah; others, Jeremiah, or some other of the ancient prophets risen from the dead.

Then he put to them the interrogation in our text, and inquired, Whom *they*supposed him to be? The answer which Jesus received on this occasion, was quite satisfactory to him, and met with tokens of his most decided approbation. This answer formed the great line of distinction between those who were merely *nominal*disciples, and those who were so in *spirit*and in truth.

In our further consideration of this passage we shall notice,

***~~I. Peter's confession of Christ—~~***

On many occasions had the disciples, either individually or collectively, acknowledged Jesus to be the true Messiah, [John 1:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.49), [John 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.27) and [Matthew 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.33). On one occasion in particular, they affirmed it with a more than ordinary confidence [John 6:69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.69); in the discussion of which passage, we have mentioned it only in a transient way. But this confession being so signally noticed by our Lord himself, we shall embrace this opportunity of considering it more fully.

Peter here justly represents the character of Christ:

***~~1. Christ's high origin—~~***

The term "Son of God" was understood by the Jews as of so high an import, that when Jesus claimed that title, he was considered as affecting an equality with Jehovah, and actually "making himself God, [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30); [John 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.33); [John 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.36)." In this sense Peter acknowledged him to be, not a mere man, but infinitely above all created beings, "Emmanuel, God with us," even "God over all, blessed for evermore." Peter knew that the Father at his baptism had borne witness to him by an audible voice from Heaven: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He had even been an eye-witness of such a manifestation of his glory, as had convinced him fully, that he was God; and at the same time he had heard precisely the same testimony to him from Heaven, which had been before given at his baptism. The remembrance of this was never effaced from his mind; insomuch that many years afterwards, he referred to it as affording to his mind a demonstration that Christ was possessed of more than human majesty and glory, [Luke 9:28-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.28-35) with [2 Peter 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.16-18). And on other occasions also we are assured, that his disciples "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

This part of Peter's confession then must be understood as equivalent to that declaration of another Apostle, that "the Father has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2-3)."

***~~2. Christ's divine mission—~~***

"You are *the*Christ!" The force of the article is here preserved. Jesus is the very person promised from the foundation of the world.

You are "the Seed of the woman who is to bruise the serpent's head."

You are "the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations are to be blessed."

You are "the Shiloh that was to come, before that the scepter should finally depart from Judah."

You are "the Son of David, that shall reign over his kingdom forever and ever."

You are He "of whom Moses and the prophets have written" so much, and in whom all that they have written shall be accomplished.

It is true, Lord, we have but a very indistinct knowledge of you at present; but we know enough to be assured, that you are "*the*Christ," the Savior of the world.

This is the full persuasion of all true Christians. As for those persons with whom others would identify you, they were but your servants, sent to prepare the world for your coming: they were as little meteors in their day; but you are "the bright and morning star," or rather, "the Sun of righteousness that is arisen upon us, with healing in your wings." In you we recognize both "the root and offspring of David," "David's Son and David's Lord." In you we acknowledge that Divine person, of whom God has said, "You are my Son; this day have I begotten you, [Psalm 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.7);" and of whom Daniel speaks, as "Messiah, the Prince, who should make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness, [Daniel 9:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24-25)."

Though our Lord knew beforehand what Peter's answer would be, he speaks of it as if surprised, and with peculiar approbation: which leads us to notice,

***~~II. The commendation with which it was honored—~~***

***~~Our Lord declares that no man could have such views of him unless he were taught of God—~~***

The prejudices of men were so strong in favor of a temporal Messiah, that no man could overcome them, unless he were enabled by the special assistance of God himself. And though the miracles of our Lord appeared to justify his pretensions to that office, yet his humble condition in life, and the universal rejection of him by the great and learned, were a stumbling-block which no man of himself was able to remove.

If indeed the Scriptures had been carefully examined, and compared with all that was accomplished in Christ, they were even then sufficient to establish the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ. But *no man had eyes to see this truth, until the veil was removed from his heart, and his understanding was enlightened by the Spirit of God*.

And thus it is at this day. We say not, that any man is to expect a new revelation, or to be inspired in the way that the Apostles were; this is not now to be expected by any man, the canon of revelation being completed, and God having made known all that is necessary for our salvation. But "our understandings (like those of the Apostles) must be opened, to understand the Scriptures;" nor until we are taught of God can we ever have that view of Christ which is exhibited in the text.

We may, it is true, obtain a *speculative*view of Christ's person and office from books and the teaching of men: but a *spiritual*and *practical*view of them, none but God himself can give us.

We notice in Peter's confession an acquiescence, an affiance, an exultation in the truths he utters: and that is the view which "flesh and blood cannot reveal unto us, and which can be revealed only by our heavenly Father." To this Divine agency the Apostles ascribed all their knowledge of Christ, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20); and they unequivocally declare that no human being can derive it from any other source: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.3)."

***~~He explains to Peter where he received such clear knowledge—~~***

Well might our Lord reply, "Blessed are you, Simon;" for blessed indeed he was, in having such views as these: he was blessed in them, whether we regard them as the means of obtaining the Divine favor, or as evidences of having obtained it. On such a knowledge of Christ all his prospects of eternal happiness depended: "Thus to know Christ is life eternal." But, inasmuch as the possession of it evinced that he had been taught of God, it showed that God had a favor towards him, and had "set him apart for his own" "peculiar treasure:" this very gift was to him a pledge of future blessings.

What then could constitute a man blessed, if this did not? or what can rob a man of blessedness, who is possessed of such views, and such desires? I ask not whether you are living in the enjoyment of temporal honors, or even of necessary comforts: if you resemble Peter, you are blessed, though you should be as poor and destitute as Lazarus himself. "Blessed are your eyes, if they see, and your ears, if they hear," these glorious, these heavenly truths!

But we are further called to notice,

***~~III. The distinction with which they were rewarded—~~***

What was here spoken to Peter referred primarily, but not exclusively, to him. The other Apostles united with Peter in the confession; and our Lord comprehended them also in the commendation and distinction conferred upon him: yet, inasmuch as Peter had manifested a pre-eminent zeal in so directly and confidently acknowledging Christ, he was honored in some respects with a peculiar and pre-eminent reward. Our Lord promised him,

***~~1. That he should lay the foundation of the Christian Church—~~***

Christ had before given to Peter the name of Cephas, which in the Syriac language is of the same import with "Peter" in the Greek: they both mean, "a Rock, [John 1:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.42)."

'Now,' says our Lord, 'you have acknowledged me to be the Christ; and I acknowledge you to be justly and deservedly named "Peter," nay, in reference to your name, I declare that I will build my Church on this confession which you have made. As far as we suppose Peter himself to be that rock, we must understand it as relating, not to himself personally, but to the *truth*he had uttered. Christ, personally considered, is the only true foundation on which the Church is built ([1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11).) Prophets and Apostles were such, only as proclaiming his word, on which mankind were to found their hopes. ([Ephesians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20).) It is possible that Christ might point to himself as that rock; (just as he did on another occasion, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21).) but still this truth, that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, is the one foundation of all our hopes. By "the gates of Hell" some understand "death;" and consider the expression as intimating, that though death cuts off individual believers, it shall never extirpate them from the earth: there shall always be a holy seed to serve the Lord. And even the persons who are removed by death shall rise again, and, having triumphed over death, shall reign with Christ in glory for evermore.

But we prefer the sense we have given to the words. The gates of cities constituted in a great measure their strength; and they were the places where public assemblies were held, and justice was administered. Hence "the gates of Hell" might well signify the power and policy of Hell. And though the power and policy of Hell will be exerted to destroy my Church, they shall never prevail, either against the Church itself, or against any individual that is founded on the truth which you have uttered, [Jeremiah 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.19).

The work is *mine*; "*I* will build it," but the foundation shall be that which is now laid by your confession of me. As long as your name shall be known in the world, you shall be remembered as a bold champion for the truth, and as having, even at this early period, laid the foundation on which my Church shall stand forever.

***~~2. That he should be a principal instrument in establishing and governing the Church—~~***

*Keys*were used as an emblem of power; and the person invested with them, had the control and management of the house or state committed to him. Hence of Eliakim, who was to succeed Shebna, the treasurer, in his high office, it is said, "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open [Isaiah 22:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.20-22)." A similar metaphor is used in reference to Christ, to whom the government of the Church is exclusively committed [Revelation 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.7).

'Now,' says our Lord, "I will give unto you, Peter, the *keys*of the kingdom of Heaven." We have not the smallest reason to believe that there was any exclusive power given to Peter; (nor, if there had been, is there any mention of its being transferred to the bishops and popes of Rome as his successors.) But there was a most honorable distinction conferred upon him, namely, that of opening the Church both to Jews and Gentiles; the former of which he did on the day of Pentecost; and the latter when, in consequence of repeated visions, he went and preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his company, [Acts 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.10).

Besides this, our Lord told him also that "whatever he should bind on earth should be bound in Heaven, and whatever he should loose on earth, should be loosed in Heaven." Though Peter, in his conduct, was fallible, and actually fell into both sins and errors, yet, as inspired of God to preach and write for the edification of the Church, he was infallible: and his word, whether it related to doctrine or discipline, has been a standard of truth in every age.

In this indeed the other disciples are united with him, [John 20:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.23), and to this hour, whatever is declared by them to be lawful or unlawful, to raise men to Heaven or to consign them over to perdition—is confirmed and ratified in Heaven, and shall be so to all eternity. And if any Church admits or expels members agreeably to their word: such admission or expulsion will be accompanied with a corresponding acceptance or rejection before the throne of God, [Matthew 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.18).

Such was the distinction conferred on this favored servant of the Lord: and in this was fulfilled that universal promise: "Those who honor me, I will honor."

***~~From this important subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. How to attain the knowledge of Christ—~~***

Reading and human instruction are good in their place; but they are not of themselves effectual unto salvation. We must have "the unction of the Holy One that must teach us all things:" or else we shall after all continue ignorant of the truth of God. It is "the Spirit alone that can guide us into all truth." Hence we are directed by Solomon to "lift up our voice for understanding: as well as to search for her as for hidden treasures:" and Paul prays for the Ephesian Church: "that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ: the eyes of their understanding being enlightened [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18)."

If therefore we would attain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding: or look to "flesh and blood to reveal it to us:" but pray unto God to "shine into our hearts to give it to us, 2 Corinthians 4:6."

***~~2. How to improve it—~~***

Let us be ready on all proper occasions to "confess Christ before men." How astonishing is it that any should be ashamed of Christ: ashamed to acknowledge him as their Lord and Savior! What is there to be ashamed of in loving him, serving him, rejoicing in him? Shall wicked men be so daring as to "glory in their shame," and shall we be so pusillanimous as to be ashamed of our glory? O let it never be! Let us like Peter, confess Christ; and then like Peter, we shall be confessed by him: and no sooner shall we say to him: "You are Christ: my Lord:" than he will say: 'You are Simon, my servant and my friend.' Even "before his Father and his holy angels will he acknowledge us" as his, and proclaim us "blessed."

***~~3. How to secure all the benefits dependent on it—~~***

We must expect opposition from earth and Hell; but he will be our support and defense. He has said that none shall prevail against us; and we have only to plead his promise and rest confidently on his word. Whom did he ever disappoint? "Who ever trusted in him and was confounded?" Who ever expected the written word to be accomplished, and did not find God true to his engagements? No, truly: what has been bound on earth, has been bound in Heaven, and what has been loosed on earth, has been loosed in Heaven. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail." In the midst of all our conflicts then we may begin the Apostle's triumphant song, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39)—and continue it in all our diversified conditions, until we commence "the Song of Moses and of the Lamb" in Heaven!

#1375

***~~Peter's Mistaken Tenderness Reproved~~***

***~~[Matthew 16:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-23)~~***

"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

IN nothing is divine wisdom more necessary than in judging what regard is to be had to times and circumstances: for, if we will not exert ourselves until every difficulty is removed, we shall scarcely ever act at all: and, on the other hand, if we precipitately attempt to effect at once all that may appear desirable, we shall often defeat our best intentions. Our blessed Lord intended to reveal himself fully to his disciples; but he would not do it at first, because they were not able to bear it: and when he had acknowledged himself to them to be the Messiah, he forbade them to divulge it; because he saw that the knowledge of it would lead the people to proclaim him king, and thereby stir up all the power of the Romans to destroy him. Nor were the Apostles themselves sufficiently instructed yet to represent that truth to others. They still thought of nothing but a temporal Messiah: and therefore, when our Lord began to predict his own sufferings and death, Peter would not hear of any such things; but presumptuously told his Master, that such events neither could, nor should, take place.

***~~I. The rebuke which this brought upon him, will be a profitable subject for our consideration—~~***

***~~His offence was certainly heinous—~~***

Our Lord had now spoken plainly and openly of his approaching death and resurrection. He had done so on purpose to counteract the erroneous expectations of his disciples, and at the same time to prepare their minds for the approaching events. We grant that such predictions must have staggered them exceedingly, considering what their views and expectations were: but did it befit Peter to contradict him, and to declare that such events should never come to pass?

He had but that instant before confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Why then did he not believe his assertions? Why did he presume to set up his own wisdom against that of his Divine Master? We give him credit indeed for expressing himself with tenderness and affection, taking him kindly and affectionately by the hand. Compare [Romans 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.1), but it became him to learn, not to teach; to submit, and not to dictate.

***~~In the reproof, the peculiar enormity of it was pointed out—~~***

Two things in particular our Lord specified as deserving the severest reprehension. One was, that he was casting a stumbling-block in his Master's way. Jesus Christ had come from the bosom of his Father to redeem mankind by his own precious blood. But Peter, through false tenderness, would have had him spare himself, and prefer his own personal ease to the salvation of a ruined world. He would have persuaded Jesus . . .  
to set aside all the counsels of the Father,  
to violate his own covenant engagements,  
to rescind all his own gracious purposes, and  
to leave mankind to perish in their sins—  
rather than submit to those sufferings which were necessary for the accomplishment of the great scheme of redemption.

What could Satan himself wish for, more than this? Hence our Lord was filled with indignation against him, and addressed him in the very terms in which he had once addressed the tempter in the wilderness: "Get behind me, Satan:" 'however much I respect you in general, I regard you in this matter, not as a friend, but as an adversary. This is the meaning of the word "Satan.": not as an Apostle, but as Satan himself, speaking in and by you: the tendency of your speech is to put a stumbling-block in my way: "you are an offence unto me!"

The other thing which our Lord condemned him for, was that he manifested a carnal and worldly spirit. God expects that his creatures should seek only his glory: and that personal considerations should be of no weight with them in comparison of that. But *men prefer their own ease and honor, and are content to glorify God only so far as they can do it consistently with their own temporal comfort*. 'Now,' says our Lord, 'you are "not savoring of the things of God, but of those that are of men;" and are wishing me to act upon these low and carnal principles, instead of on those high principles which befit my work and office.

In this view therefore, as well as in the former, you deserve no other name than that of "Satan." It is his great aim to banish from the world that supreme regard for God which men ought universally to feel; and you, in the advice you have given, have shown yourself to be under his influence, and have, to the utmost of your power, been furthering his designs. I would have you therefore, and all my other disciples, know that I am greatly displeased with you on this occasion.

Without dwelling longer on the occurrence itself, we shall proceed to observe, that,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from it is also peculiarly worthy of our attention—~~***

And here there is much that comes home to the business and bosoms of mankind. We may see in this little history,

***~~1. How to estimate the love of Christ—~~***

The sufferings which awaited Jesus were such as no finite creature could have borne: yet when entreated to shun them, he not only refused to listen to the advice, but reproved it with a severity that he never used on any other occasion. 'What! Spare myself? Avoid the sufferings that are necessary to expiate the guilt of men, and to satisfy the demands of law and justice? How can I leave mankind to perish in their sins? I cannot endure the thought: and I account him who suggests it to me as no better than Satan himself: yes, even the highly favored Peter appears to me in the light of that malignant fiend, when he would damp the ardor of my love to man, or discourage the execution of my plans for his redemption!'

View the answer in this light, and say, whether his "love was not such as many waters could not quench, neither could floods drown it?" Towards those who inflicted his sufferings we behold nothing but kindness. To the man that betrayed him, "Friend, why are you come?" To those who came to apprehend him, "Whom seek you?" To Peter, when denying him with oaths and curses, he spoke not a *word*, but gave him a *look*of pity and compassion. To his blood-thirsty murderers he also meekly submitted, praying and apologizing for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And, after all ranks and orders of men in Jerusalem had satiated their malice in destroying him, he commanded his "Gospel to be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

But when he was entreated to avoid those sufferings, his indignation was extreme; nor were any terms too strong to express it. Well indeed might it be said of his love, that "it surpasses knowledge." We admire the firmness with which Paul resolved to meet the sufferings that awaited him [Acts 21:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.11-13), but this was nothing in comparison of Christ's love to us.

***~~2. How to requite his love—~~***

On this our Lord insisted with peculiar emphasis. In the words following the text it is said, "Then Jesus said to His disciples: If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." [Matthew 16:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.24-25)

But another Evangelist informs us, that he called the people to him on this occasion, that they, together with his disciples, might hear what was so highly interesting, so universally obligatory, and so unquestionably right and reasonable, [Mark 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.34). He expatiated on the duties he required of all his followers, and declared, that all who would approve themselves to him, must deny themselves after his example, and be willing to lay down their lives for him, [Mark 8:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.35-38).

This at first perhaps sounds harsh: but if Jesus laid down his life for us, and was so intent upon it that he resented in the highest degree any suggestion that could be made against it, then what does he not deserve at our hands? *If he did that for us who were his enemies, what should not we be ready to do for him, our Lord and Savior? Truly, if we had a thousand lives, we might well sacrifice them all for him.*

Let us not then be ashamed to confess him, or afraid to suffer for him: but let us "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach," and "esteem the reproach of Christ greater treasures than all the riches of the world."

***~~3. How to act towards those who offer us their friendly advice—~~***

We have before shown how we are to act when menaced by the avowed *enemies*of Christ.

But how are we to act towards those who profess themselves his *friends*? I answer, Try their counsel, and examine carefully whether it savor of the things of God or of man. Bring it to the test of Scripture, even though they should be apostles, or even angels, who offer it. That persons in their general habits are pious, is no reason that we should implicitly follow their advice in everything; for the best of men are fallible, and liable to be biased by their interests or passions: and if Satan can gain them over to his interests, he will make especial use of them for assaulting the holiest of men. By Eve he assaulted Adam; and Job also by his wife; and our Lord himself by his favorite Apostle, Peter.

I say then, *Whatever advice be given to you, try it by the touchstone of God's word*. If it savors of carnal ease and worldly prudence, beware how you follow it. If, on the contrary, it evidently has the glory of God in view, beware how you reject it. The direction of God himself is, "Try the spirits, whether they are of God." "To the word and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them." "Prove all things and hold fast that which is good."

We grant that, in many cases, it may not be easy to discern between good and evil: and the affection of the adviser may blind our eyes to the sinfulness of the advice. But if we ourselves are habitually savoring the things of God, we shall have a spiritual discernment, which, like the senses of taste and smell, will enable us to perceive the noxious qualities of things, which in their outward appearance are good and wholesome. But it is the privilege of all to have God himself for their guide. Look therefore to him, and "he will direct your paths." "He will guide you by his counsel, until at last he bring you to glory!"

#1376

***~~The Extent and Importance of a Christian's Duty~~***

***~~[Matthew 16:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.24-25)~~***

"Then Jesus said to His disciples: If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

THE *precepts*of the Gospel are often considered as harsh and severe; but, if they were duly considered, there is not one of them which would not appear highly reasonable. Perhaps there is not a stricter precept in the whole Bible than this before us, since it plainly declares, that no man shall ever enter into Heaven, who is not willing to renounce everything in the world, yes, even his own life, for the sake of Christ. But can we think this too strict, if we observe the time and manner of its delivery? Our Lord had just foretold his own sufferings and death; and had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from subjecting himself to such miseries: and "then" it was, that he gave this injunction to his followers. In this view we may conceive our Lord as saying, 'Do I deny myself, and take up my cross, and even surrender up my life, from love to you? Then you do the same in obedience to me. If I do it willingly for your salvation, then surely you cannot hesitate to do it for my glory.'

This precept then leads us to point out,

***~~I. The extent of a Christian's duty—~~***

***~~To be Christians indeed, we must enter in at a strait gate, and walk in a narrow way.~~***

***~~1. We must deny ourselves—~~***

Since the first introduction of sin into the world men have cast off the love and fear of God, and have subjected themselves to the dominion of *self*. Instead of conforming themselves to the will of their Maker, and living wholly for his glory—they have made their own will, the principle of all their actions; and their own honor or interest, the end of all their actions. Christianity is intended to bring us back to the state from which we are fallen. The very first step towards our restoration is, to "deny self," and to restore God to the dominion of which we have robbed him. Our inquiries must henceforth be, not, What do I choose? Or, What will gratify self? but What does God command? And, What will glorify him? To "put off the old man," to "mortify the deeds of the body," to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" in a word, to deny *self*in all its actings, is the course, on which every Christian must enter, and which he must resolutely follow to the end of life.

***~~2. We must take up our cross—~~***

Every Christian must of necessity have some cross to bear: for though there will be seasons of comparative rest when the storms of persecution shall subside, yet, as long as there are any of "the serpent's seed" on earth, "the seed of the woman" will be treated by them as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things." But to this the Christian must submit: he must not expect to be above his Master, but be willing to suffer in conformity to his example. He must not indeed bring trials on himself by his own misconduct: but, if the cross lies in his way, he should not be solicitous to avoid it; but rather should take it up and carry it.

Nor, while he is bearing the cross, should he account it a heavy and insupportable load; but should glory in it, and "rejoice that he is counted worthy" to bear it. This too should be the daily habit of his mind, [Luke 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.23).

Let us view a malefactor bearing to the place of execution a part of the cross whereon he is shortly to be fixed. Hence we shall see the degraded state in which the Christian must be content to walk in the midst of an ungodly world. If he is regarded with even a shadow of respect, he must consider it as gain, for which he did not stipulate, and which he had no right to look for.

***~~3. We must follow Christ—~~***

While we profess to rely on Christ for our acceptance with God, *we must also follow him as our pattern and example*. In the whole of our conduct we must endeavor to "walk as he walked." Though we are not to do in all respects the very things which he did, yet we are to manifest in all things the same spirit and temperament. Like him, we must abhor sin even in thought. Like him, we must sit loose to all the things of time and sense. Like him, we must devote ourselves entirely to our God. Nor are we to draw back when persecution arises, but still to "follow our Lord outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.13)." Yes, if such a death awaited us as our Lord himself endured, we are not to shrink back from it, but to go boldly forward: the language of our hearts must be, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24)."

Doubtless these things are difficult: but we shall not be deterred from duty by any difficulties, if we duly consider,

***~~II. The importance of it—~~***

On our faithfulness unto death, our eternal salvation depends.

***~~It may be that we may be called to die for the sake of Christ—~~***

In the first ages of Christianity, martyrdom for the truth was common. And since its establishment in the world, thousands have been called to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ. Nor are we to conclude from the rest that we enjoy, that our faith and patience shall never be put to the test. Indeed, there are few, if any, real Christians, who are not on some occasions made to endure the fiery trial, and to approve themselves as pure gold, by sustaining, without loss, the action of the fire. At all events we must in the habit of our minds be "ready, not only to be bound, but even to die at any time, and in any manner, for the name of the Lord Jesus, [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13)."

***~~If, when called to suffer thus, we are found faithful, we shall be unspeakable gainers—~~***

We are assured, not only in the text, but in many other places, that, "if we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified together with him;" and, that "our light and momentary afflictions shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Now what do we *lose*, when this poor frail life is taken from us? Nothing, but a few days or years of uncertain, and, at the best, painful existence upon earth.

But what is our *gain*the very instant our spirit has taken its flight? Who can conceive the rapture with which the disembodied soul will enter into the presence of its God? Who can form any idea of its joy, when it shall hear this plaudit from the Savior's lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Will anyone *then*think he has endured too much for his Divine Master? Will any one *then*regret that he had not continued longer in this wretched world, and purchased a temporary ease at the price of eternal glory?

***~~If on the contrary we decline suffering, our loss will be inconceivably dreadful—~~***

We are plainly warned that "if we deny Christ, he will deny us;" and that "if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us." What then will a man gain by sacrificing his principles to his fears? He will protract the little space allotted for his natural life, and save himself from a few minutes of pain and torture: but he will forfeit all hope of eternal glory, and subject himself to the eternal wrath of an incensed God. It is but a few days at most, before he must resign the life which he is now so averse to part with. And what will his feelings be when the Savior of the world shall say, 'Depart from me, I never knew you. You had no regard for me. I told you long ago that if you would save your life by denying me, you would have no part with my faithful followers. These on my right hand "loved not their lives unto death;" but you were of "the fearful and unbelieving, and shall therefore take your portion in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!" [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)

Do not these considerations evince the importance of our duty? and should they not stimulate us to perform it in its utmost extent?

***~~Among the many reflections arising from this subject, we may observe,~~***

***~~1. How different a thing is Christianity from what is generally supposed!~~***

It is generally thought that the embracing of certain *religious tenets*, with a conformity to some *religious rites*connected with them, is sufficient to constitute us real Christians. But true Christianity is a practical thing; it enters into every part of our conduct; and must regulate us in every possible situation. It does not relax its demands on account of any difficulties we may have to encounter; but provides us strength to surmount them, and a glorious reward when we have overcome.

Let this then be fully known; that they, and they only, who, if put to the test, would be willing to die for Christ, are real Christians in the sight of God. Consequently, that they, and they only, will be saved in the day that he shall judge the living and dead. How insufficient are we for these things; and how earnestly should we seek of God that grace which we stand in need of!

***~~2. How vain are the excuses which men offer for their neglect of duty!~~***

*Everyone is ready to urge the difficulties which lie in his way as an excuse for disobedience to the divine commands.*But, what if our worldly interests are injured? What if we be called to "resist unto blood?" We must be steadfast and immoveable. The only question is, Shall we obey God, or man? Shall we regard our bodies, or our souls? Excuses serve but to deceive and ruin us. Let us then put them all away; for God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked.

***~~3. How excellent a directory is here given us even in the most difficult cases!~~***

We may sometimes find it difficult to discern the path of duty. What then shall we do to avoid error? Let us follow the injunctions here given us. Let us inquire, What would my natural inclinations lead me to; or, what would any unconverted person do in my circumstances? The very *reverse*of that is the line that I will pursue; for, while I deny myself, I cannot greatly err. Again, *What would the Lord Jesus Christ do in my circumstances?*That I will do; for I cannot do wrong when I follow him.

Such questions as these would tend more to remove our difficulties than all the abstract reasonings that could be brought forward; for, we shall always find that an upright heart is the best judge.

#1377

***~~The Worth of the Soul~~***

***~~[Matthew 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.26)~~***

"For shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

THE *precepts*of the Gospel oppose our natural inclination. They are also in many respects adverse to our worldly interests. The whole of Christianity is a system of self-denial. Hence none cordially embrace scriptural Christianity until they have learned to *take eternity into their estimate of present things*. Our Lord therefore, having prescribed the line of duty to be regarded by all his followers (verse 24) and having urged the observance of it from the consideration of eternity, enforces it yet further by these pointed interrogatories: "For shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" In order to elucidate the meaning of the text, we shall,

***~~I. Institute a comparison between the things which are here set in competition with each other—~~***

By "the world" we are to understand its pleasures, riches, and honors. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16)

***~~This world, if considered in itself, is vile—~~***

It is altogether *earthly*in its nature.

It is utterly *unsatisfying*in its use.

It is short and *transitory*in its continuance.

***~~If the world is considered as it has been estimated by the best judges, it is worthless—~~***

Abraham, though opulent, left *all*to sojourn in a strange land [Hebrews 11:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8-9).

Moses relinquished the splendor of a court, to participate the lot of God's people [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26).

Solomon, after much experience, declared the world to be mere vanity [Ecclesiastes 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 1.14).

Paul counted those things as dung, which he once thought were his gain [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8).

Christ himself despised the offered titles of royalty [John 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.15).

All true Christians resemble their Master in their contempt of the world [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16).

***~~The soul, on the contrary, if considered in itself, is noble—~~***

It is exalted in its origin, [Hebrews 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.9). The soul is capacious in its powers, eternal in its duration; and it is destined to everlasting happiness or misery. Already therefore its superior importance abundantly appears.

***~~Moreover, as estimated by the best judges, it is invaluable—~~***

Many have thought nothing too much to do or suffer for its welfare, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24), [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35). But that which most stamps its value beyond all possible calculation, is the gift of God's Son to die for it. Surely God would never have redeemed it at such a price, if it had not been of infinite value in his sight!

Such being the disparity between the value of the world and that of the soul, we are prepared to,

***~~II. See the result of the comparison—~~***

Let us suppose, for argument sake, that a man may possess the whole world. Let us suppose also that, after having possessed it for a while, he loses his own soul. What in the outcome "would he be profited?"

***~~Let us inquire concerning this in general—~~***

Would carnal enjoyments compensate for the loss of Heaven?

Would transient pleasures counterbalance an eternity of glory?

Would he have anything remaining to mitigate his pain? [Luke 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.24).

Would a momentary possession of the whole world be so high a gratification, that any reasonable man would be content to lose even his "physical life" for it?

How much less could it be a sufficient price for the "soul!"

***~~Let us inquire also more particularly—~~***

The questions in the text are strong appeals to our hearts and consciences. They bid defiance, as it were, to all the arts of sophistry.

Let the "lover of pleasure" then ask, what sensual gratifications, or vain amusements, will profit him?

Let the "lover of this present evil world" ask, what will his honors and preferments profit him, [Proverbs 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.4)?

Let the learned ask, what, even learning itself, the most excellent of all human attainments, will profit them, [Ecclesiastes 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.16)?

***~~We conclude with suggesting some interesting subjects of self-examination—~~***

Which have I more regarded hitherto, the world, or my own soul?

Which do I intend in future to prefer?

What will be my thoughts respecting them in the day of judgment?

What answer shall I make to Christ, when he shall call me to account for despising that for which he paid so great a price?

What would I not gladly give in exchange for my soul, if ever it should be lost through my present neglect?

And, if ever my soul should be saved, shall I not then account as dung all which I had lost in order to promote its salvation?

If these questions be duly weighed, we shall soon be like-minded with the great Apostle. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ!" [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8)

#1378

***~~Elijah's Advent in John the Baptist~~***

***~~[Matthew 17:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.10-13)~~***

"And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that *Elijah*must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist."

IT is desirable that the evidences of our holy religion should be candidly examined, and clearly understood. The three favored disciples, Peter, James, and John, had just been admitted to behold a most extraordinary vision of their Lord in a state of transcendent glory, and had received from Heaven this direct and audible testimony to his Messiahship, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear him." They had seen, also, Moses and Elijah on the holy mount with him, both of them in their embodied state, sent from Heaven to converse with him on the subject of his future sufferings and glory, [Luke 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.30-31).

Now, it had been foretold that Elijah should come as the forerunner of the Messiah, [Malachi 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.5); and an expectation of his arrival at that time very generally prevailed among the Jewish people. Yet the disciples were forbidden by their Lord to report what they had seen and heard, until all the other things which had been predicted respecting his death and resurrection should have been accomplished. The reasons of this prohibition the disciples could not comprehend; since, in effect, it prevented them from giving to the Jews a very strong testimony to the truth of their Master's divine mission. Hence they asked of their Lord an explanation of this matter: "Why, then, say the Scribes that Elijah must first come," when we are not at liberty to attest his advent? Here was a real difficulty; and it is felt no less by the Jews at this day than it was at that time; it being with them a very principal objection against the Messiahship of Jesus, that Elijah, who was foretold as his harbinger, has never yet arrived.

Let us then consider,

***~~I. The difficulty proposed—~~***

***~~Nothing can be more clear than that, if Christ is the Messiah, every prophecy concerning him must be fulfilled—~~***

Peter, affirming that "he and his fellow-Apostles had not followed cunningly-devised fables," appeals to this very evidence which he and they had been favored with, when, on Mount Tabor, they were made "eye-witnesses of Christ's Majesty, and heard from the excellent glory the voice which bore witness to him." But, aware that they might be suspected of having conspired together to propagate and maintain a falsehood in confirmation of some favorite system of their own, he appeals further to the "more sure word of prophecy," which never did, nor could, issue from men, (since it was delivered at such distant periods and places as to preclude a possibility of a conspiracy between the persons delivering the predictions,) but which proceeded entirely from the Holy Spirit of God, who, at many distant ages, stirred up and inspired holy men to speak the things which would afterwards, in due season, be brought to pass, [2 Peter 1:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.16-21).

This I judge to be the true scope and meaning of this difficult passage. And doubtless *prophecy*, taken in this view, is the strongest of all evidences, that the religion established by it, proceeds from God.

On the other hand, if there were so much as a single prophecy unfulfilled, that one failure would be sufficient to subvert all the fabric that was built on ten thousand prophecies; since God cannot but fulfill his own word, "nor can so much as a jot or tittle of it ever fail" of its accomplishment, [Luke 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.17). Hence, when all things relating to our Lord's death had been fulfilled, except the offering of vinegar to him in his extremity, he said, "I thirst:" and then, after tasting of the vinegar, "he gave up the spirit, [John 19:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.28-30)." We may assume it, therefore, as an unquestionable truth, that "the Scripture cannot in any single instance be broken, [John 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.35)."

But, in the instance before us, it seemed to the Apostles, as it does also to the Jews of the present day, that an important prophecy still needed to be accomplished.

We wonder not that the Apostles were unable to account for the prohibition which they had received, and which seemed to disappoint the reasonable expectations of the Jews. Nor do I wonder that the Jews at this day lay a considerable stress on this, as invalidating the claims of Jesus to the Messiah's office. I grant them all that they can desire; and willingly concede to them, that if this difficulty cannot be removed, they are justified in rejecting the Lord Jesus, and in looking for a Messiah yet to come.

But let us, for the removing of this difficulty, attend to,

***~~The solution given of it—~~***

Our Lord, in reply to his disciples, acknowledged that Elijah was certainly foretold as his harbinger, but affirmed that "he was already come," in the person of John the Baptist.

John was born in a supernatural way, of parents who were at an advanced period of life. And the Angel who announced his formation in the womb declared, that "he should turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God; and should go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to (with) the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, [Luke 1:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.13-17)." Now this distinctly applied to John the very prophecy on which the Jews founded their expectation of Elijah, [Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.5-6), and which our blessed Lord declares in my text to have been fulfilled in him.

Again: *In John was fulfilled all that Elijah was ordained to execute.*He bore the most ample testimony to Christ, as "the Son of God," "in whom all were to believe," and who by his atoning blood should expiate the sins of the world, [John 1:29-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29-34) with [Acts 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.4), and by his Spirit transform men into the image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness, [Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11). Thus he fulfilled the office which God, by the Prophet Malachi, had assigned to the Forerunner of our Lord, "Behold, I send my Messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me;" and thus showed himself a fit representative of that person whom the same prophet afterwards speaks of under the name and character of Elijah, [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1); [Malachi 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.5).

To this it is objected, and a strong *objection*it appears, that John, when interrogated by the Priests and Levites whether he was Elijah, distinctly declared that he was not, [John 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.19-21); from whence it is said, and with great appearance of reason, that, supposing him to have been Elijah, as our Lord affirms him to have been, he, by denying it, betrayed his office, and sanctioned the rejection of his Divine Master. But, as we cannot suppose that so good a man would have acted thus, we must believe what he says, and conclude, of course, that Elijah is not yet come.

But it must be remembered, that the Jews expected *Elijah the Tishbite*to come, and inquired whether John were he: consequently, John was right in denying himself to be that identical person: and the time for the fuller and more explicit development of this point was not yet arrived, their minds being not yet sufficiently prepared for it; as our Lord afterwards said, "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12)." But at this very time did John fully open his office as the Forerunner spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah; saying, "I am the voice crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Isaiah, [John 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.22-23)." And, if this declaration of his be compared with the testimonies respecting him by the Prophet Malachi, [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1); [Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.5-6), he will be found to have given the true answer to the inquiry of the priests, and that which alone, at that time, they were able to receive.

If it be still objected, that because neither Elijah in person came, nor did John ever bear his name, the prophecy has therefore not been fulfilled; I answer, that to speak of one person under the name of another whom he represents, is not uncommon, either in the Scriptures or in classic authors. Of the Jews, after their return to their own land, God says, "I will set up one Shepherd over them, even my servant David; and I will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them, [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24); [Ezekiel 37:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.24-25) and [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5), yet was it never supposed by the Jews that David was to come again *in person*to reign over them in that day; but only, that their Messiah should come under the name of David, by whom he was typically represented. Let this be conceded, as it must of necessity be; and the whole difficulty is solved at once: and we are prepared for that which we are next to contemplate,

***~~III. The inference to be deduced from it—~~***

***~~We say, then, without fear, that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world—~~***

To the testimony of John our Lord himself appealed, [Matthew 21:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.25-26), but "he had greater witness than that of John, even the works which he wrought, [John 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.33); [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36);" and to these he appealed, for the satisfaction of the messengers whom John sent to him, to inquire whether he were the Christ, [Matthew 11:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.2-6). He acknowledged indeed, that, under existing circumstances, there was some difficulty in receiving John the Baptist as the representative of Elijah: "If you will receive it, this is Elijah who was to come, [Matthew 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.14)." But that difficulty being removed, I will bear the same testimony to Christ as this Elijah did: "He is the Son of the Living God," even "Emmanuel, God with us, [Matthew 1:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21-23)." "He is that Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world:" nor is there a person in the world whose iniquities, though red like crimson, shall not, when washed in his blood, become white as snow, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18), [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1), [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)."

Moreover, if only we believe in him, "he will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire," even as he did the three thousand on the day of Pentecost.

Beloved brethren, think of all that you can need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity; and assure yourselves that you shall find it all in him: for there is "a fullness of it all treasured up in him;" and "out of that fullness shall you all receive," according to the utmost extent of your necessities or desires.

Nor would I have you discouraged by the reception which this testimony receives from an ungodly world. "John the Baptist's testimony was rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees, who said, He had a devil, [Matthew 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.18). [Luke 7:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.30)," yet was his testimony true.

The wise and mighty of this world may reject our testimony also: yet is it true; and it shall be found true before long, to the grief and shame of those who reject it, and to the unutterable comfort of all who truly and cordially receive it. Our testimony, in a few words, is this; "That God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he who has the Son has life, and he who has, not the Son of God has not life, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12)." And so far are we from wishing any one to receive it without inquiry, that we challenge inquiry from every living man; and pledge ourselves, that the more the evidences of this blessed truth are examined, the more satisfactory will they be found; and that *the more cordially the truth itself is embraced, the more influential will it become, for the comforting and sanctifying and saving of every believing soul.*

#1379

***~~Christ Paying the Tribute Money~~***

***~~[Matthew 17:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.27)~~***

"Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

THERE was nothing in the whole creation over which our Lord did not exert his sovereign authority. He not only overruled the spirits of men, but caused diseases and devils to flee at his command. The very beasts of the forest, [Mark 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.13), and the fish of the sea, were subject to his control, and yielded a ready obedience to his will. A most remarkable instance of his power over every living creature occurs in the passage before us. To elucidate it we shall,

***~~I. Unfold the circumstances under which he wrought the miracle—~~***

***~~A certain tribute was about to be demanded of him—~~***

This tribute was half a shekel—about fifteen pence of our money. It was originally to be paid by every one above the age of twenty, whenever the people should be numbered. It was called the ransom money, and an atonement for their souls, because it was an acknowledgment to God, that their lives had been justly forfeited, and were spared merely through his sovereign mercy. More was not to be paid by the rich, nor less by the poor, because the lives and the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God, and there is but one ransom-price for all. It was to be applied to the service of the tabernacle and temple, in which all classes of men were alike interested, and to the due support of which all should contribute, [Exodus 30:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.12-16).

***~~From this, Jesus had a right to claim an exemption—~~***

It is usual for kings to exact tribute, not from their own children, but of their subjects, and of the foreigners who trade with them. Now Jesus was the Son of God, and the heir of all things: he therefore was not liable to pay the tax; and this right of exemption he stated to Peter.

***~~But he waved his claim rather than give offence—~~***

Just as his claim really was, it was not likely to be acknowledged by the tax-gatherers. If insisted on, it might have given them occasion to represent him as indifferent to the temple service; and it might perhaps have been drawn into a precedent by those who were God's adopted children. He therefore chose rather to wave his right than by insisting on it, rather than to produce contention. He would "not give occasion to those who sought occasion against him," "nor allow his good to be evil spoken of." He would not do even a lawful thing, if it might prove an occasion of offence, [1 Corinthians 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.13).

***~~Not having money with which to answer the demand, he was constrained to supply his necessities by a miracle—~~***

In this miracle he revealed his OMNISCIENCE. His all-penetrating eye beheld what was passing in the very depths of the sea. He knew that there was a fish, with one particular piece of money in its mouth; that it should be in the precise place where Peter should let down his hook; and that, coming to the hook, it should instantly be caught. What greater proof of omniscience could he give? And *what in Heaven or earth can be concealed from him, who discovered these things with such infallible certainty?*

His OMNIPOTENCE also was evinced by it. It is not to be conceived that such improbable things should occur, if they had not been accomplished by the secret agency of his overruling providence; nor would he have risked the credit of his divine mission upon so trifling an incident, if he had not foreordained that it should exactly correspond with his predictions. *Can anything then be impossible to him, who could thus overrule the motions of a creature so distant from him, and apparently so independent of him?*Surely no miracle whatever could more plainly evince his eternal power and godhead.

From the miracle thus illustrated, we may,

***~~II. Found upon it some profitable advice—~~***

***~~1. Was the Lord Jesus thus poor? Let us learn contentment with our lot, however poor and afflicted it may be—~~***

The Lord's people are often most destitute and afflicted. But shall any one repine at poverty when he reflects on the condition of our blessed Lord? Though he was Lord of all things—yet he had no place where to lay his head, nor a piece of silver to pay his tax. Let all then be satisfied with their lot, however humble. *Let us not judge of God's love to us, by the outward dispensations of his providence.*Let us remember that, if God be our God, we are rich indeed, however poor our outward circumstances may be.

The state of Lazarus was infinitely better than that of his rich ungodly neighbor. Just so, the true believer, though visibly he should "have nothing, yet in fact, possesses all things." In fact, if we look at the state of our blessed Lord, we shall see, that the character most dignified on earth is that of a poor pious man: and he who best sustains it, is most conformed to the image of God's only dear Son.

***~~2. Did Christ, to avoid giving offence, pay a tax from which he was exempt? Let us not only pay cheerfully our just dues, but rather wave our strict rights, than, by rigorously insisting on them, give rise to clamor and contention—~~***

Our Lord submitted cheerfully to all the ordinances both of God and man; nor would he needlessly give offence by rigorously insisting even on his just rights.

Alas! how different is the conduct of many who profess themselves his followers! He paid a tax which was not really due, rather than contend about it. Whereas they clamor about the taxes which are legally due, and use every mean artifice to evade them. He paid notwithstanding he was constrained to work a miracle in order to gain the money, when he would have violated no law if he had withheld the tribute. While they, without any such urgent necessity, violate the most express commands of God, in refusing to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," and to "pay tribute to whom tribute is due." More especially, did he act thus in order "that he might not give offence?"

Let us avoid a contentious spirit; and, instead of joining in the clamor which ungodly men are ever raising against their civil rulers, determine ever to be found among them that are "quiet in the land." We cannot doubt how Christ would conduct himself if he were now living among us: let it then be seen that we, all of us, "walk as he walked."

***~~3. Did he, under the pressure of poverty, supply the necessities of himself and Peter by a miracle? Let us trust in him for a supply of all our wants in the time of need—~~***

To what situation can anyone be reduced, wherein Christ will not be able to discern and to supply his needs? Are we embarrassed with temporal distresses? The Lord can multiply our barrel of meal, or send us fresh supplies by a raven or a fish; nor though his interposition should be less visible, shall it ever be withheld from those who ask it. He requires indeed that we should be diligent in our lawful calling; and it is usually in this way that he will (as he did on this occasion) send us relief. The promise is sure to all, That, "if we seek him first, all needful things shall be added unto us."

Are our difficulties of a spiritual nature? He is at no loss to support and support us. He will surely strengthen us according to our day of trial, and show himself a present help in the time of need. Let all then trust in him, and say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I shall lack nothing." Let us remember that he has paid our redemption money: he has paid it at no less a price than his own blood. We may be sure, therefore, that he will give his Holy Spirit also to them that ask him, and that to the full extent of all our necessities.

#1380

***~~A Little Child~~***

***~~[Matthew 18:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.1-4)~~***

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."

DISPUTES of any kind among the children of God are most unfitting their holy character, more especially when they originate in a competition for pre-eminence. Yet such is the depravity of our nature, that we are prone to affect superiority and distinction even after we have seen the vanity of earthly things.

The disciples of Christ, as well from their condition in the world as from the example set before their eyes, seemed least exposed to such a temptation; yet even they repeatedly manifested an ambitious desire of worldly honors. They had been disputing who among them would be the greatest in that earthly kingdom which they supposed their Master was about to establish. Our Lord, knowing all which had passed in their hearts, interrogated them with respect to the subject of their conversation. But they, ashamed of it (as well they might be) remained silent. Finding however that all attempts to conceal it from him were in vain, they referred the matter to his decision. But their disingenuousness sadly appears, in that they propose the question to him only in a general way, as if they had felt no personal interest in it. Compare Mark's account, chapter 9:33–35 with verse 1 of the text. Our Lord did decide it; but in a way they little expected. He exhibited before their eyes an emblem of true greatness, and showed them,

***~~I. The nature of conversion—~~***

The *conversion*here spoken of means either a deliverance from that sin of which they were guilty, or a turning from sin in general. Our Lord's words may be understood either as a particular admonition to them, or as a general declaration grounded on this particular occurrence. Taking it in the more enlarged sense, it imports the becoming like a little child,

***~~1. In humility of mind—~~***

A little child is not filled with notions of his own greatness and self-sufficiency, but feels his dependence on others for support. Happy would it be for us if such were the habit of our minds towards God. But fallen nature is far removed from such a state as this. *We universally think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think*, and imagine ourselves possessed of whatever is necessary for our salvation. But in conversion our views are greatly changed. We are brought to acknowledge our extreme guilt and helplessness, and are made willing to depend on Christ alone for righteousness and strength. See Paul's views of these things before and after his conversion, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9) and [Philippians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.6-7).

***~~2. In teachableness of disposition—~~***

Man in his natural state is as prone to lean to his own understanding. Almost every one thinks he knows his duty; nor do those who confess their need of human instruction, feel any need of the teachings of God's Spirit. But in this respect also their views are altered as soon as they partake of converting grace.

As a little child is sensible of his ignorance, and ready to receive, without argument, the instructions given him—so the converted person, conscious that he knows nothing as he ought to know, desires to have the eyes of his understanding enlightened. He no longer disputes against the declarations of Scripture, but receives them implicitly, and looks up to God for that spiritual discernment whereby alone he can discover their truth and importance [Job 34:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.32), [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18).

***~~3. In indifference to the world—~~***

*The world is the great idol which man in his unconverted state adores; its riches and honors are the great objects of his affections and pursuits.* In this he is the very reverse of a little child. A small child has no solicitude about earthly distinctions; satisfied with the one object of his desire, he leaves others to contend for power and pre-eminence.

Thus it is with the Christian that is truly converted to God. He has one great concern which occupies his mind, one great prize which he is seeking to obtain. Whether he has much or little of this world he judges to be a matter of little consequence. He does indeed covet riches and honor; but it is the honor that comes of God, and the unsearchable riches of Christ. Excessive cares about earthly honors or wealth he leaves to those who have no inheritance beyond the grave, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

Having shown his disciples by this emblematic representation what conversion was, our Lord proceeded to declare,

***~~II. The importance of it—~~***

This he suggests in two different points of view:

***~~1. Without such conversion no man can be partaker of the kingdom of grace on earth, or the kingdom of glory in Heaven—~~***

Conversion is necessary before we can be truly admitted into the kingdom of *grace*on earth. We are indeed received into covenant with God in baptism; but it is *regeneration*that really makes us his children. We can never come to Christ as a Savior, until we feel our need of him; we cannot learn of him, until we be willing to be taught; nor can we ever glorify him, until we be dead to the things of time and sense. The gate is too strait for us; the way of admission is too humiliating. The laws of his kingdom are such that our carnal minds neither will, nor can, obey them, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7).

Nor can we ever partake of his kingdom of *glory*unless we experience this change. What could we do in Heaven even if we were admitted there? We should have no fitness for it, no dispositions suited to the enjoyment of it. The glorified saints all cast their crowns before the feet of Jesus, and prostrate themselves in deep humility, ascribing all their salvation to him. How could we unite with them, when we have never deigned to glorify him thus on earth? As for our worldly desires, what would we find to gratify them there? Heaven could be no Heaven to us, if our affections were not set on the things that are there, and our employments suited to the exercises of that blessed state.

***~~2. In proportion as we experience such conversion, will be our exaltation here and hereafter—~~***

Our Lord now plainly answers the question put to him. Let anyone point out to us the person that most eminently resembles a little child, and we will immediately point out to him the greatest person in the world. It is not worldly grandeur that constitutes a person great, but moral excellence. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor," whatever other advantages his neighbor may possess.

Even the *ungodly*cannot but admire those most, who are most truly humble. At the very time that they revile and persecute them, they revere them in their hearts, and have a secret wish that they themselves were like them.

And the *godly*invariably admire those most who are the greatest proficients in this grace.

The exaltation of such persons hereafter will certainly also be proportionably great. Perhaps there is not one in Heaven nearer the throne of God than he, who, when on earth, called himself "less than the least of all saints, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8)." Indeed God has repeatedly assured us that "he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

***~~We may improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. For conviction—~~***

How few are there who truly resemble a little child! By the generality of people, such a disposition would be considered as base and abject. But let it be remembered that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of our souls. If a conversion from one particular sin was necessary in order to the salvation of the Apostles, notwithstanding all they had experienced, how much more must conversion be necessary for us, whose sins are so multiplied, and whose attainments are so small!

Let us receive this declaration then as from the lips of him who shall judge the world. Let us apply to ourselves that solemn word, "You *must*be born again! [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3), [5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5), [7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.7)." And let us instantly seek that change which is so difficult in its attainment, and so important in its consequences.

***~~2. For instruction in righteousness—~~***

Have we been renewed in the spirit of our minds? Let us seek to be renewed more and more. The Apostles had forsaken all for Christ, and yet relapsed into the sin of worldliness and ambition. We never can become so childlike but that there may be room for farther advancement. Let the presence then of a little child be always a source of instruction to us. Let parents in particular, and all who have the care of children, learn from them. Yes, let them never look upon a child without learning from him what they are to be in the hands of God. Let every one of us observe his simplicity of mind, and unity of desire; and let us regard him as a pattern for imitation. This was the very mind of Christ himself, who, being in the form of God, humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant. Let the same mind therefore be in us that was in him, [Philippians 2:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5-6).

"Do you seek great things unto yourself? Seek them not! [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5)." "Mind not high things, but condescend to low things, [Romans 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.16)." "Whoever would become the greatest of all, let him make himself the least of all, and the servant of all."

#1381

***~~The Security of God's Children~~***

***~~[Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14)~~***

"It is not the will of your Father in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

OF all the images used in the Holy Scriptures for the representing of the Christian character, that of a little child is perhaps the most just and the most instructive. Its simplicity, its teachableness, its entire dependence on its parents for all things that are needful—render it a fit pattern for our imitation; so that our blessed Lord, when he would show his disciples the most exalted of all characters, "took a little child, and had him stand among them;" and declared, that the person who most resembled such a child was "the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, verse 4."

But, while the resemblance is to be traced chiefly in the dispositions of the mind, it will be found also in the utter incapacity of a child to protect itself, or to supply its own necessities. The state of God's children upon earth is one of great danger; insomuch, that they must of necessity perish, if God does not continually exert himself in their behalf. But, as helpless as they are, it is the purpose and determination of God that not one of them shall ever perish. In confirmation of this truth, I will endeavor to set before you,

***~~I. Their dangers—~~***

All the Lord's people are exposed to many and great dangers;

***~~1. From the corruption of their own hearts—~~***

They are by nature as depraved as other men, and as liable to commit every species of iniquity.

***~~2. From the temptations which beset them on every side—~~***

They have not a temptation, to the gratification of which they will not find incentives, wherever they go.

***~~3. From the assaults of their great adversary, the devil—~~***

He is justly represented as a serpent for subtlety, and as a lion for strength; and his efforts to destroy them are incessant: "As a roaring lion, he goes about seeking whom he may devour." And who can understand his wiles, or be sufficiently on his guard against his devices? He has all the powers of darkness also confederate with him, for the destruction of the Lord's people. And who would be able to withstand him, if Almighty God himself did not stand forth for their help? If left to his assaults, not any man could ever be saved.

***~~4. From the pernicious influence of false brethren—~~***

To these, especial reference is made in the preceding context verse 7. "It must needs be that offences will come:" some dishonoring the Gospel by their unholy lives; and others departing from it altogether. The effect of such examples is pernicious in the extreme: and, inasmuch as they prevail in every age of the Church, every one will be more or less in danger of being drawn to abandon the faith which has been so dishonored by them, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2).

But, in our text, we see,

***~~II. Their security—~~***

***~~1. God regards them as his especial property—~~***

It is this consideration which induces a shepherd to go in search of a sheep that he has lost. If there be only one out of a hundred that goes from the fold, he will search and inquire until he finds it. And to this he is stimulated by the consideration that it is his property, verse 12, 13. Now, God regards his "little ones" in this view. Even the lambs of the flock are not despised by him. "He has loved them with an everlasting love!" "He has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world;" and "predestined them to the adoption of children," and set them apart to be a peculiar people for himself. Hence he feels a special interest in them, and keeps his eye continually fixed upon them for good. He has given them from all eternity to his dear Son, to be his purchased possession: and they shall therefore be reserved as jewels to adorn his crown!

***~~2. He determines to preserve them even to the end—~~***

We are not to understand by the words of our text, that God has no ill design towards them; for he entertains not these against any man: "He wills not the death of any sinner, but that all should come to repentance and live." But, in behalf of "those who believe in Christ" for this is the description given of his little ones, he has a fixed purpose, that they shall not perish: "He keeps them by his power" for that very end, that they may not fall: and "he will never allow anyone to pluck them out of his hand, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)."

We must not however imagine that he will keep them without exertions of their own. No: it is by and through their own exertions that God will keep them. The Holy Spirit is said to "help our infirmities;" just as one man helps another, by bearing together with him a part of his burden. And, if we will not exert the powers which God has given us, we shall in vain look for aid on his part. I consider this sentiment as peculiarly important: because many, from an apprehension that God's promised agency will generate supineness in us, discard altogether the idea that God has undertaken anything for us. But God has assuredly engaged to "keep the feet of his saints," and to finish in them the work he has begun: but he will carry this into effect by calling forth our efforts to the uttermost. "His working in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure," is our encouragement to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling:" and, if we will not work for ourselves, we give a decided proof that the grace of God is not in us. If, on the other hand, we will "arise and work," we shall find that "God is with us of a truth," and that "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~See, then,~~***

***~~1. What our attitude should be towards "the little ones" of Christ's flock—~~***

We should "not despise them," either because they are his, or because they are but weak, verse 10; still less should we put any obstructions in their way: for "it were better that a millstone were hanged about our neck, and that we were cast into the depth of the sea, than that we should offend one of his little ones, verse 6." We should rather be like-minded with God himself towards them, and afford them every aid in our power.

***~~2. How we ourselves may be of their happy number—~~***

We have before said, that they are described by our Lord as "believing in him." If, with a sense of our lost and undone condition, we come to him, and seek acceptance through him, then may we be sure that we are his; especially if our faith proves itself as genuine, by its fruits. "Cleave, therefore, to him with full purpose of heart;" and rest assured that God will "keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

#1382

***~~The Efficacy of Social Prayer~~***

***~~[Matthew 18:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.19-20)~~***

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

GOD has mercifully provided for the peace and welfare of his Church, by appointing that disputes among his people shall be referred to arbitrators in the first instance, and, in the failure of that, to the decision of those who bear rule in the Church: and he has engaged to ratify in Heaven the sentence which they shall pass on earth. This supposes, indeed, that those who are appointed to judge, are men of real piety and strict integrity; and that they implore from him that wisdom which is profitable to direct and regulate their judgment.

He has also provided for their welfare, by encouraging them, individually and collectively, to spread their needs before him in prayer, assuring them, that they shall never apply to him in vain.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The promise here given us—~~***

A gracious answer to our prayers is here promised to us,

***~~1. Individually—~~***

Supposing that two persons, feeling deeply in their own souls their spiritual needs, agree to spread those wants before God in prayer, and to implore help from him; our Lord assures them that they shall obtain what they ask for, at the hands of a gracious God and Father. True indeed, each person asking for himself, is encouraged to expect from God a supply of all needful blessings. But a particular assurance is given where two persons unite in prayer; because, by the agreement which is entered into between them respecting the blessings they shall ask—there is a more ample acknowledgment of God's power and grace than is usually found in the petitions of a single individual, and at the same time a more enlarged exercise of faith and hope. Only conceive of them as agreeing respecting the extreme pressure of their needs, and the utter incapacity of any creature to relieve them—then, respecting the condescension and grace of God, who is both able and willing to supply all their needs—and, lastly, as encouraging each other to expect from God the fulfillment of all his promises—and you will see immediately what reason there is for them to expect an answer to their united prayers, beyond what there would be to the petitions of a solitary individual.

Of course, the promise here given can relate only to those things which, when bestowed, will promote the best interests of the petitioners, and the honor of Almighty God. But with this only limitation, they may "open their mouths as wide as they will, and God will fill them."

***~~2. Collectively—~~***

In the house of God we are to assemble "in the name of Jesus Christ;" that is, in obedience to him as our Lord, and in dependence on him as our Savior. The whole Church ought, from time to time, to assemble for prayer: but, even if there be only two or three in number, they shall not on that account lose the blessings which they implore. God will honor the ordinances of his own appointment, and confer on his waiting people all the blessings which they stand in need of.

Such is the *promise*of God to his Church and people. To estimate the promise aright, we should mark,

***~~II. The security we have for the performance of God's promise—~~***

The Lord Jesus assigns this as a ground of assurance to the suppliants: "It shall be done for them by my Father in Heaven: for, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Now, as the Shechinah, the bright symbol of the Deity, was in the holy of holies, and answers to prayer were obtained by the high-priest from it—so is Jesus ever in his Church, to give an answer of peace to his suppliant and believing people.

It is here supposed, that, whether individually or collectively, the suppliants draw near to God "in the name of Jesus Christ."

There is no access to God for any man, but through Him; nor is there any danger of repulse to "any man who comes unto God by him." God has said, that "not one such person shall ever in any wise be cast out".

***~~Jesus Christ himself is already there, to secure to his believing people an answer to their prayers—~~***

He has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world, [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20)." And he is in the midst of them, on purpose to bless them, [Exodus 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.24)." He is expressly empowered by the Father to hear and answer their petitions. He has said, "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13)." See, then, what security this affords us that our petitions shall be heard. He came down from Heaven for us. He assumed our nature, and died for us on the cross. He ascended to Heaven to intercede for us. He had all fullness committed to him for us, on purpose that we might receive out of it according to our necessities.

When, therefore, he hears us pleading the merit of his blood, and looking to him for the very blessings which he purchased for us, can we suppose that he will cast out our prayer? No: we may assure ourselves, that, as "he is in the midst" of his praying people, no prayer of theirs shall ever go forth in vain. Whether they be many or few, it shall make no difference with him: he will hear, and answer, and do for us "far beyond all that we can either ask or think".

***~~See, then,~~***

***~~1. With what pleasure we should attend the house of God—~~***

Were it proclaimed abroad, that, at a certain time and place, all who would come should assuredly meet the Lord Jesus Christ, in the very body that he possessed on earth—no church in the universe would be large enough to contain one half of the people who would be assembled together. Yet, what would it be to see him with our bodily eyes, in comparison of seeing him *by faith*, as we do in his house of prayer? Dear brethren, those who beheld him in the flesh, were not nearly so highly privileged as you, who "behold the glory of God shining in his face" through every page of his blessed Gospel. O estimate your privileges aright; and you will account the ordinances of the Gospel precious beyond the powers of language to express.

***~~2. What improvement we should make of social converse—~~***

We should endeavor, not so much to amuse, as to edify our friends. Do but think what is here promised, that "if only two be agreed respecting what they shall ask, they may obtain it by their united supplications; I almost wonder that, with our friends, we can find time to talk of anything but our mutual wants, or to occupy ourselves in anything but united supplications. At all events, we cannot but see what should be the daily habit of endeared friends, and especially of those who are united in wedded life. Dear brethren, know your privileges, and learn to make such an improvement of them as shall further and secure the eternal welfare of your souls.

#1383

***~~The Unmerciful Servant~~***

***~~[Matthew 18:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.32-35)~~***

"Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

MEN in general think themselves sufficiently instructed in morality; but, for the most part, their views of it are very partial and defective. The *duty of forgiving injuries*is universally acknowledged; but few are aware to what an extent it is required of them. Peter, though a good man, needed much instruction on this head. He thought the limits he assigned to this principle were generous and ample; but our Lord rectified his judgment by an explicit declaration, and pointed out the grounds of his duty in an instructive parable.

From the words before us we are led to consider the extent, the reasonableness, and the necessity, of Christian forgiveness:

***~~I. The extent of Christian forgiveness—~~***

Scripture does not forbid the execution of human laws, since magistrates are appointed of God on purpose to enforce them, [Romans 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.4); nor does it prohibit the just exercise of authority in parents or masters. But forgiveness must extend to all offences, however numerous, however heinous "Seventy times seven."

Christian forgiveness must proceed from a heart wholly divested of malice or resentment [Proverbs 24:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.29). We need not indeed restore to our favor one who continues unworthy of it, [Luke 17:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.3-4); or forbear to punish him while he continues to merit it. But we must pity the offender while we punish the offence; and seek, in inflicting punishment, both his and the public good. We must feel towards him as an affectionate parent towards an offending child. "From your hearts." We must feel disposed to pray for him, and to cover, rather than expose, his faults, [Proverbs 24:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.17-18); and we must earnestly desire to behold in him such a disposition, as may open a way to perfect reconciliation with him.

***~~II. The reasonableness of Christian forgiveness—~~***

Every man owes to God a debt that exceeds all calculation.

Nor can the debt which any fellow-creature owes to us, bear any proportion to that which we owe to God. Yet we all hope to obtain of God a free remission and forgiveness; yes, provided we believe in Christ, our debt is already cancelled. Should not then a sense of mercy received, incline us to show mercy? Should we "take a fellow-servant by the throat," when the great Lord of all has spared us? Should we rigorously exact a few pence, when we have received a remission of ten thousand talents? It would be base indeed not to act towards an offending brother, as God has acted towards us, when we were enemies and rebels.

N.B. The Jubilee commenced on the day of atonement, to show that men are then especially bound to exercise mercy, when they themselves have received mercy, [Leviticus 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.9).

***~~III. The necessity of Christian forgiveness—~~***

There is an intimate connection between the exercise of God's mercy to us, and ours to others. Though our forgiving of others cannot *merit*forgiveness from God, yet it will certainly be followed by it. On the other hand, an unmerciful disposition towards others, will be the certain means of excluding us from God's favor, [Matthew 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14-15), [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13). It will cut us off from the enjoyment of the mercy we seemed to have obtained.

The parable must not be understood to say, that God revokes mercy, when he has once really pardoned us. See [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29). [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12). In uttering the Lord's prayer, we shall even seal our own condemnation, [Matthew 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.12). Let us then, if we desire to find mercy in the day of judgment, forgive others, as we hope to be forgiven.

***~~Let us learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. How to obtain forgiveness for our own offences—~~***

We must not merely ask for patience in hopes of discharging our own sin-debt to God: we must rather acknowledge our inability to pay one single mite; and implore at God's hands a free and complete forgiveness. We must not however conclude from the parable, that there is no need of the mediation of Christ: it is through him alone that we can derive any blessings from God; but we must ask for mercy as a gift, instead of attempting to make any compensation for our own iniquities.

***~~2. How to obtain a forgiving temper towards others—~~***

If we know not what we ourselves merit at God's hands, we shall be ready to think much of any injuries which we receive from others. But if once we become sensible of the greatness of our debt to God, and of the obligations he has laid us under by the free offers of his mercy, we shall feel no difficulty in exercising forbearance and forgiveness. *Resentment cannot long dwell in the bosom of one who has tasted redeeming love.*Let it then be our study to obtain a thorough knowledge of our own depravity, and to imitate the longsuffering, which we ourselves so richly experience. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." [Colossians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-13).

#1384

***~~The Laborers~~***

***~~[Matthew 20:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.6-7)~~***

"And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'"

*THERE is a manifest sovereignty observable in the dispensations of God's grace to man. His ways are often unsearchable to us, and even extremely contrary to our natural expectations. Moral persons are often left to perish in their sins, while the most immoral have been made illustrious monuments of divine mercy.* And the richest rewards have in many instances been bestowed on those, who, according to human apprehensions, appeared the least likely to receive them.

A moral and exemplary youth had deliberately renounced all hopes of a saving interest in Christ, that he might retain his worldly possessions, [Matthew 19:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.21-22). Our Lord, in his improvement of this event, declared that many, who, like him, seemed to he first in respect to spiritual advantages, would prove last in respect to the benefit derived from them. But *none have any right to murmur against God, seeing that he may dispense his blessings as he will*. To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us. Compare [Matthew 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.30) with 20:16.

The part of it just read, suggests to us many important observations:

***~~I. The Gospel provides for men a daily and laborious employment—~~***

We need not speak of a Christian's work in general. We shall confine ourselves to the figure of a laborer in a vineyard—

A laborer must first clear his ground from briers and noxious weeds; he must then dig up the earth, and endeavor to fertilize it, [Luke 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.8). After that he must carefully select his plants, and put them into the ground; he has then to water them, and to prune the luxuriant branches, [John 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.2); and finally, he must keep up the fences that nothing enter to destroy them, [Isaiah 5:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.2-6); [Isaiah 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.3).

If the Christian's duties accord not with the laborer in a vineyard in respect of order, yet they are the same in substance; he must root out of his soul all earthly, sensual, and devilish affections. If his open gross sins be not mortified, no heavenly plant can grow within him; he must dig deep into the recesses of his heart, and not be satisfied with a slight and superficial work. *Without much meditation, and diligent self-examination, he can never know the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of his own heart*; nor must he expect fruit from the unimproved energy of the natural soil. He must get his soul ameliorated and enriched with the grace of God; he must apply to his Lord for plants of heavenly growth: above all he must be careful to possess "the plant of renown, [Ezekiel 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.29). This certainly refers to Christ. See [Ezekiel 34:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.23-24)." Without this, no other valuable plant will ever thrive "Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith." "Christ in us is the hope of glory." "Without him we can do nothing;" "through him, we can do all things". With Christ, humility, meekness, love, etc. will spring up, and flourish.

*Nor must he forget to water these plants with his prayers and tears.*However fruitful he is, he will find reason enough to weep for his unfruitfulness; he will also find many luxuriant branches which require to be pruned.

Lastly, he must remember that his adversary will be glad to spoil his labor; he must therefore fence every good desire with constant watchfulness, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12), [16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ephesians 6.16), [18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ephesians 6.18). This, it must be confessed, is a difficult and laborious task. It cannot be performed without much diligence and self-denial: but he who prescribes the duty will assist us to perform it, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), and, as it is fit, he informs us of our work before he hires us into his service.

Had the Gospel its full effect upon us, it would lead us to fulfill these duties as cheerfully as Adam wrought in cultivating the garden of Eden.

***~~II. However long we may have been idle hitherto, it now calls us to begin our labor—~~***

***~~The parable in its primary sense relates to the Jews and Gentiles—~~***

The patriarchs, together with Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, and Christ himself, had sought in their successive ages to engage the Jews in their proper work. Thus the Jews had been called, as it were, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours. The Gentiles, who had hitherto been overlooked, were now to be invited at the eleventh hour.

***~~But it may also be applied to individuals of every description—~~***

The occasion on which it was spoken relates equally to all, [Matthew 19:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.29); and persons of different ages or circumstances may fitly represent the different hours.

Some, like Samuel and Timothy, enter into the service of God in very early life. The hours are reckoned from six in the morning, that is, from sun-rise to sun-set; so that the third hour is early in the day, happy indeed are they; and thankful should they be for the grace that inclined their hearts.

Others have attained a considerable age before they begin their appointed work. What reason have they to bless God for having subdued their reluctant spirits!

But many are now arrived at "the eleventh hour." All who are far advanced in life are certainly of this description; they too, who are weak and sickly, are probably drawing to the close of their day: yes, there may be some whose day of grace is nearly terminated, while they are yet in full vigor both of body and mind. Surely all such persons may well conceive themselves to be addressed in the text.

***~~To us then is the invitation of the Gospel now sent—~~***

The Savior's voice to every one of us is, "Go into my vineyard." He justly expostulates with us, "Why do you stand here all the day idle?" Nor can any of us offer that excuse that might be justly urged by the Gentiles. We have received numberless calls to enter into the service of God, [Romans 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.21). If we delay therefore any longer we shall be utterly without excuse. We know indeed that those who dislike God's service, will find pleas enough for declining it: 'I must attend to my worldly business; I have a family to provide for,' etc. But have we provided an excuse that will be accepted in the day of judgment? If so, we may go on securely in our career of sin: but if not, let us not, by hardening our hearts, provoke God finally to exclude us, [Hebrews 3:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-11). It is in vain to urge, that we are incapable of performing the work assigned us. To the weakest person upon earth God will assuredly fulfill that promise, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25).

If indeed we attempt to serve him in our own strength, we must expect to fail; nor, if we only engage occasionally in his work, can we hope to succeed. Every intermission renders our task so much the more difficult. A vineyard long neglected will afford more trouble to the laborer; but if we regularly persevere in duty, our labor will be light and easy, [Matthew 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.30). Let us then be thankful that the invitation is sent to us at this late hour; and let the account once given of the Jews now be realized among us, [Luke 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.16).

That this invitation may not be slighted as others have been, we observe,

***~~III. To every one that will labor in earnest, the Gospel promises a suitable reward—~~***

***~~We must not suppose that the same reward will be given to all persons—~~***

The Jews had borne the burden of the ceremonial law; and the Gentiles, though delivered from that yoke, are made fully equal with them. This is the circumstance referred to in the parable, and which so offended the Jews, [Matthew 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.11), [15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 20.15). But to us there will be given a recompense according to our works, [2 Corinthians 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.10). Not that the reward will be bestowed for any merit that is in us, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27); [Romans 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.4-5); [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6). The happiness of Heaven will be altogether the gift of God for Christ's sake, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23), nevertheless God out of his infinite goodness will reward us in proportion to our labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8).

***~~To every one will be given "whatever is right," and equitable—~~***

If none shall have room to boast, so none shall have reason to repine. The lowest degrees of happiness shall infinitely exceed anything we could claim.*Every vessel shall be full; though all have not the same dimensions.*The word of God is pledged that not the smallest service shall be unrewarded, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58), [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42). We may rest assured therefore that we shall find his promise true, [Proverbs 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.18).

***~~Address—~~***

***~~1. To loiterers—~~***

What readiness would you not show if a great earthly recompense were offered you! And will you draw back when all the glory of Heaven is offered you? Would the devils and damned spirits regard the overtures of mercy as you have done? O think, how soon "the night is coming in which no man can work!" Think, how awful will be the doom of the wicked and slothful servant! and instantly begin the Lord's work, that you may at last receive his wages.

***~~2. To laborers—~~***

You serve the best of masters, and have the most honorable of all employments. Doubtless you see but too much reason to lament your unprofitableness. But God is not extreme to mark what is omitted or done amiss. If you really make it "your food to do his will," be of good cheer; the evening, when your labors will end, is fast approaching: then shall you be called into the presence of your Lord and Master; nor shall the least or most unworthy of you all be overlooked by him. Be not weary then of well-doing, for you shall all reap in due season, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9). To every one of you shall those delightful words be addressed, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" [Matthew 25:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.21)

#1385

***~~Children Vindicated~~***

***~~[Matthew 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.16)~~***

"Have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?"

THE wisdom of our Lord was very conspicuous in the answers he returned to cavilers. He was thoroughly conversant with every part of the sacred writings; and to them he appealed on every occasion. In his conflicts with Satan, he invariably had recourse to them, [Matthew 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.4), [7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 4.7), [10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 4.10); and when assaulted by men, he fought with no weapon which was not brought from that divine arsenal. Compare [Matthew 26:51-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.51-54) with [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39). Every passage which he adduced was as an arrow from a well-directed bow. This is well exemplified in the words before us.

Our Lord had just driven the traders and money-changers out of the temple; and had healed multitudes of persons who flocked around him for a cure. The children that were present, being struck with wonder both at his authority and benevolence, surrounded him with acclamations and hosannahs, and welcomed him as the Messiah promised to their nation. The chief priests and scribes, on the contrary, were filled with indignation; and remonstrated with our Lord, for suffering them to express such sentiments in his hearing: "Do you hear what these children are saying?" 'It is a disgrace to you to be pleased with the acclamations of weak, silly children; or of an ignorant and infatuated mob. Yes, these, who should have been the foremost to encourage early piety, were the very first to repress it. But our Lord repelled their objection by an unanswerable appeal to Scripture: "Have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise? The words used by David are, "You have ordained strength." See [Psalm 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.2). But our Lord quoted, as the Apostles after him frequently did, from the Septuagint Translation, and not from the Hebrew. The meaning, however, is the same in both: God manifests his strength, and glorifies his name, in using weak instruments to effect his purposes?"

Now, from these words I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. That the Scriptures are the standard by which everything must be tried—~~***

By them must all our sentiments be formed, and all our conduct regulated. The Apostles continually, in support of their doctrines, refer to them. It is a frequent expression of Paul, "But what says the Scripture?" And to that must our appeal also be made, on every occasion. Then, if our views or actions be blamed, we have at least a rule whereby they may be judged: and if they be in accordance with that rule, we need feel no concern, even though they are condemned by the whole world.

There are in the Christian system, and in the Christian life too, many things which, by an ungodly world, are accounted foolishness; and we must expect that those things will be disapproved in us. But, when blamed on account of those things, we should mildly reply, 'Have you never read such or such declarations in Holy Writ? You think my views of man's fall are too gloomy: but have you never read, "The carnal mind is enmity with God?" You think that I carry my religious zeal too far: but have you never read, "The love of Christ constrains us to live to Him who died for us, and rose again!" Thus always bring both yourselves and others to the Scriptures, as the only test of truth: for so has God directed us: "To the word and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20)."

In this way you will be able to show,

***~~II. That devotion, by whoever condemned, will be found conformable to that standard—~~***

The hosannahs of the children were most probably regarded as the effusions of weak and uninformed minds. And this is the construction which is still put on the conduct of those who endeavor to exalt the Savior, and who are, on this account, derided as enthusiasts. But look into the Scripture, and see the state of David's mind. Can anyone read the Psalms, and not wish to be in the same frame of mind with him, when he said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name?" In the New Testament it is written, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." In fact, there should not be an hour in the day, in which our souls should not be tuned for praise. And though we are not called to express our admiration and love in the same public manner as the children in the temple were, there should be in us the same disposition; yes, and in our secret chamber, too, the same exercise of it as we have seen in them. Nor, if a public testimony of our love to the Savior be called for, should we be either ashamed or afraid to give it. It is by praise that God is glorified, [Psalm 50:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.23). In Heaven, the saints and angels have no other employment than praise. It is our privilege, and duty too, to begin our Heaven upon earth.

For your comfort, also, will you find,

***~~III. That the weaker the instruments by whom his glory is advanced, the more is God glorified—~~***

We should have been ready to think that the praises of the Chief Priests would have been more to the honor of our blessed Lord: and at this time we are apt to imagine that the services of the rich and learned more exalt God, than those of the poor and ignorant. But the very reverse of this is more consistent with truth. For, if the wise and noble were most forward to honor the Savior, we would impute their conduct to natural principles: we would conclude that reason and education were the chief means of their conversion. But, when we see babes and sucklings well instructed in the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, we are constrained to ascribe the effect to grace alone, [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26).

Let none, therefore, think that they are incapable of glorifying God; or that "God will despise the day of small things:" for the prayer of the Publican and the mite of the widow were more acceptable to God than many longer prayers and richer offerings: and if only we "serve God with what we have, it shall be accepted by him, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12)." Four times does God tell his poorer worshipers to serve him with "such as they can get [Leviticus 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.21), [30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Leviticus 14.30-32)." In truth, "the weaker we are in ourselves, the more is his strength perfected in our weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)."

***~~Application—~~***

***~~1. Let parents labor to bring their children to Christ—~~***

Parents are apt to neglect their children under an idea that their minds are not sufficiently expanded to receive divine knowledge. But we read of many who were sanctified from their earliest infancy Samuel, Abijah, Josiah, Timothy, John the Baptist, and the instance before us is sufficient to encourage our most laborious exertions. Here we see the importance of the Sunday Schools.

Happy the parents of such children as those! and happy the children whose earliest years are thus devoted to the Lord! Let religious parents, in particular, look to it, that they spare no pains in instructing their children, and praying both with them and for them: for so has God commanded, [Ephesians 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.4), and they have his promise, that in due season he will prosper their efforts, [Proverbs 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.6).

***~~2. Let us, who are instructed in the Gospel, abound in praises to our blessed Lord—~~***

Those children had to oppose the example and authority of the Priests; and, of course, were very imperfectly acquainted with the character of our Lord and Savior: yet they praised and adored him with all their power. But we see Jesus as our incarnate God: we know the true end of his death as an atonement for our sins: we behold him risen, and exalted to the right hand of God, and ever living to make intercession for us. We, too, are urged by all possible motives to serve and glorify him.

How culpable, then, shall we be, if we neglect to honor him! and how will those children rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us, if we do not glorify him before the whole world! I call on all of you, then, to get your minds impressed with the glory and excellency of your Savior; and from henceforth, both in public and in private, to adore and magnify him with your most grateful acclamations.

#1386

***~~The Fig-tree Cursed~~***

***~~[Matthew 21:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.18-22)~~***

"Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?" So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

THE miracles wrought by our Lord were, for the most part, very different from those which had been performed by the great legislator of the Jews. Those by which *Moses*confirmed his divine mission were mostly fearful and calamitous; but those wrought in vindication of our Lord's authority, were all mild and benevolent, suited to the dispensation which he was sent to introduce. This, which we have now before us, may seem an exception.

That of sending the devils into the herd of swine was rather a permission to them to fulfill their own desire, than an actual miracle wrought by our Lord himself. Yet the injury done (if we may so speak) was small, since the tree was already barren; and the miracle, if it had been duly attended to, might have saved thousands from both temporal and everlasting destruction. We shall,

***~~I. Explain the miracle—~~***

***~~There is some difficulty with respect to the literal meaning of a part of this narration—~~***

The miracle, as related by Matthew, is easy to be understood; but Mark mentions, that "the time of figs was not yet, [Mark 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.13)." This has given occasion to infidels to represent our Lord as looking for figs at a season when, according to the Evangelist's own confession, there was no probability of finding any. But "the time of figs" refers to the time of gathering them; and as that time was not yet fully come, there was every reason to expect that the whole crop was yet upon the tree. The fruit of a fig-tree grows at least as early as the leaves; and therefore, as the foliage was luxuriant, there was ground to hope that the fruit also was abundant. This accounts in an easy manner for the disappointment experienced by our Lord; and shows how weak and frivolous are the objections urged by infidels against the truth of our holy religion. If the words, "And when he came to it he found nothing but leaves," [Mark 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.13), be included in a parenthesis, the sense of the whole will appear at once.

***~~Respecting the prophetical meaning of the miracle, all are agreed—~~***

The Jews had enjoyed every advantage of care and culture; yet they constantly disappointed the expectations of their God. They professed themselves indeed to be his peculiar people; but they brought forth no fruit that was suited to that relation. Now therefore God had determined to abandon them to judicial impenitence, and utter desolation. The speedy effect which followed from our Lord's denunciation against the fig-tree, intimated the near approach both of the spiritual and temporal judgments which were coming on the Jews. And the event answered the prediction. It was but four days before they filled up the measure of their iniquities by crucifying the Lord of glory; and but forty years before the temple and city were finally destroyed. Thus was the fig-tree made a warning to the Jewish nation; and a beneficial emblem would it have been, if they had regarded it as they ought.

Having explained all which is necessary to a just understanding of the miracle, we shall,

***~~II. Consider the declarations founded upon it—~~***

***~~The former declaration relates to his own more immediate disciples—~~***

Being now soon to leave the world, our Lord was studious to support and comfort his disciples. And the surprise which they expressed at the speedy destruction of the fig-tree, too clearly manifested their low thoughts of his power, and consequently their need of having their faith in him increased. On this account, as it should seem, he made a less obvious improvement of the miracle than he might otherwise have done; and turned that into a ground of comfort, which would more naturally have afforded an occasion of solemn admonition. The disciples, like himself, were to *work miracles in confirmation of their word*; and greater works than this were to be performed by them. He tells them therefore to exercise faith in God, and to proceed to the performing of the greatest miracles with the most assured confidence, that the effects predicted by them should instantly and infallibly be produced. Thus he prepared them for their future ministrations, and encouraged them to rely on the invisible agency of an Almighty God.

***~~The latter declaration may be understood in reference to the Church at large—~~***

This indeed, like the former declaration, may be taken in a limited sense: but it may also be applied to the great body of believers. It accords with many other passages that confessedly relate to all, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14). And what encouragement does it, in this view, afford us!

We need never despond on account of any difficulties. Not even mountains of guilt and corruption should cause us to say, There is no hope.*The prayer of faith shall bring Omnipotence to our aid.*Nor is there anything promised in the sacred oracles which shall not be given to the believing suppliant. The same almighty power that blasted the fig-tree, shall blast our enemies, and cause, if need be, the very mountains to leap from their bases, and be buried in the sea.

***~~From hence we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The danger of a fruitless profession—~~***

God expects his people to be fruitful in good works. Nor will he acknowledge us as his if we disappoint his expectations. Let us not then be satisfied with the fairest leaves of profession, without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.

Jesus is assuredly coming soon to inspect us all. He hungers, as it were, after our good fruits. Let us then study to bring forth such, that "our Beloved may come into his garden and eat with pleasure, Song of Solomon 4:16." And let us dread lest we provoke him to make our sin our punishment, and lest, being "filled with our own ways, [Proverbs 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 14.14)," our "nakedness appear unto all."

***~~2. The true source of all our fruitfulness—~~***

Jesus, in cursing the fig-tree, had nothing to do but to withhold his blessing from it; and instantly it was withered both in root and branch. Its power even to bring forth leaves had been derived from him. Thus, if his Spirit be taken from us, we shall become "twice dead, plucked up by the roots, [Jude 12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 12)." To him then we must give the glory of all the good that we have been enabled to do; for, "of him has our fruit been found, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8)," and "by his grace alone we are what we are." "We have nothing which we have not received." And to him must we look for strength to fulfill his will in future; for, "All our fresh springs are in him, [Psalm 36:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.9); [Psalm 87:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.7)."

***~~3. What exalted thoughts we should entertain of Christ's power—~~***

This was the peculiar improvement which our Lord himself made of his miracle. And alas! what need have we to be continually reminded on this subject! At every fresh difficulty we are ready to be discouraged, as though He were not able to deliver. And doubtless our unbelief often prevents him from exhibiting his wonders to our view, [Matthew 13:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.58). Has he not said that, If we believe, we shall see the glory of God, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40)? Let us then be "strong in faith, giving glory to God." Let us never limit the power and grace of Christ, but with unskaken affiance follow the direction he has given us, "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else!"

#1387

***~~The Two Sons~~***

***~~[Matthew 21:28-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.28-31)~~***

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you!"

INVETERATE prejudice is scarcely ever to be overcome by the plainest arguments. There is no action, however praiseworthy, which it will not condemn; nor any reasoning, however conclusive, which it will not obstinately resist. The best way to conquer it is by secret and indirect attacks. This method our Lord frequently adopted, when every other had been tried in vain.

The Pharisees, unconvinced by all our Lord's miracles, demanded by what authority he had presumed to purge the temple. Our Lord offered to satisfy their demand, if they would first inform him from whence John had derived his authority to administer baptism. They, aware of the drift of his question, and that in replying to it they must condemn themselves, declined giving him any direct answer. Our Lord, seeing their perverseness, changed his mode of dealing with them, and drew from them an involuntary acknowledgment of their guilt, by means of a less obvious, but well-adjusted, parable.

In opening the parable we shall,

***~~I. Compare the conduct of the two sons—~~***

***~~The first of them represented the state of those to whom John had preached—~~***

His father ordered him to "go and work in his vineyard." This command he peremptorily refused to comply with; but, on further consideration, "repented" of his misconduct, "and went." Thus many of the Baptist's hearers were of an abandoned character: they, by their lives, had showed an utter contempt for the will of God; but they were soon brought to a sense of their undone condition: they thankfully embraced the mercy which that faithful preacher announced to them, and submitted to his baptism in token of their sincere contrition.

***~~The second represented the Pharisees whom our Lord was addressing—~~***

He promised a ready and unreserved obedience to his father's will, but never truly engaged in executing the work assigned him. Thus the Pharisees professed much reverence and respect for God: they wished to be thought his dutiful and obedient children, but they would not really devote themselves to his service. What might suit their own inclination and redound to their own credit, they would do; but they would not enter into the vineyard which he required them to cultivate; they would not submit to the humiliating doctrines which John had preached, nor accept that salvation which was offered them by Christ himself, [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38), [48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.48).

There may be a further reference in the text to the rejection of the Gospel by the hypocritical Jews, and the reception of it among the idolatrous Gentiles.

***~~Both of them are just emblems of many living characters—~~***

There are many who have lived in the violation of all God's commands: the constant language of their hearts has been that of rebellion against him, [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4). But, by the grace of God, they have been convinced of their sin; they have deeply bewailed all their former iniquities; they have sought for mercy through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and have shown the truth of their repentance by the renovation of their lives.

Others there are, who have been sober and moral in their conduct: they profess to respect all the commands of their heavenly Father: but they rest in "the form, while destitute of the power of godliness;" they neglect the duties of "repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus;" they will not be prevailed on to look to "Christ for all their righteousness and strength." In short, "they are whole, and see no need of a physician:" hence, though amiable in themselves, they are "enemies of the cross of Christ."

The former manifested indeed at first the greatest impiety, and might justly have been dismissed forever from his father's house: but his subsequent repentance altogether altered his character; and his obedience arising from it proved him to have attained a becoming sense of his duty.

On the other hand, the latter was "a hypocrite in heart:" his fair promises only added to the guilt of his disobedience, and his continued violation of them constituted him a most worthless character.

Our Lord referred it to the Pharisees themselves to decide their comparative merits; they instantly gave their testimony in favor of the former: nor could prejudice itself withhold its assent in so clear a case.

Having determined this point, we shall proceed, in imitation of our Lord, to,

***~~II. Make some observations resulting from that comparison—~~***

The Pharisees did not immediately see for what end our Lord put to them that question—

But, by their answer to that, many important truths are established:

***~~1. It is not always the most moral person who is most likely to go to Heaven—~~***

Far be it from us to plead for wickedness of any kind. It is certainly better to be moral and sober, than immoral and profane. It is better to be a decent Pharisee than to be numbered with "publicans and harlots." But it is no less certain that *moral people are apt to pride themselves in their virtue; they cannot endure to be told that they deserve the Divine wrath; and, that they must be as much indebted to divine grace as the very vilest of mankind*; they think they may place some dependence at least on their own works; nor will they submit to the painful necessity of making "Christ their all."

But more *notorious*sinners are more easily convinced of sin; they see at once that they can have no righteousness of their own; and, when humbled for their iniquities, gladly embrace the Gospel salvation.

Thus it was with the different hearers of John the Baptist, [Luke 7:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.29-30) and [Matthew 21:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.32); and thus it was in the apostolic, and all succeeding ages, [Romans 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-32). Let us then endeavor to bear in mind that caution of Solomon, [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12), and thankfully accept mercy on the terms offered to us in the Gospel.

***~~2. The characters of men will not be determined by their words, but by their actions—~~***

In some sense indeed, it is true, that "by our words we shall be condemned or justified, [Matthew 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.37)," but *God will not be deceived by any fair promises or transient intentions*. We may say, 'I will go, Sir;' but he will inquire, whether we really go or not.

*Nor will he regard our professions of love and service, if in works we deny him.*It is the penitent and obedient son—not the hypocritical and deceitful son, that he will accept. Let none then rest in confessions of faith or promises of obedience. Let every one inquire, 'Am I now living for God in his appointed way? Am I more humble, more meek, more dead to the world, more exercised in spiritual things, etc.?' This is the test by which God will judge us in the last day. Let us then try ourselves by this rule, that we may know our true character; nor let us think ourselves right because we *once*appeared earnest in doing the Lord's will. Let us remember the plain declarations of God concerning us, [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21); [Ezekiel 18:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.21-22), [24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezekiel 18.24); and let us expect reward or punishment according to the verdict of his word and of our own conscience, [1 John 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.20-21).

***~~3. The most vile rebel against God, if he truly repents, shall be accepted by God—~~***

This is a most delightful and encouraging truth to a sincere penitent. It is ascertained beyond a doubt from the parable before us: it has been exemplified in numberless, and authentic, instances: Manasseh, [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13); the sinful woman, [Luke 7:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47); and it shall be realized at this hour to those who truly desire it. However open, heinous, or deliberate our offences have been, they shall be forgiven, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). The vineyard is yet open, and the command of God is, Go work in it. Let publicans and harlots hear the voice of God: let them be assured, that their past iniquities shall be no more remembered, [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12); and that everything they do for God shall be accepted of him.

If only they believe in Christ, and engage in his service, they need not fear. While unbelieving Pharisees shall be cast out—all true penitents shall find favor in God's sight. O that these blessed tidings may be welcomed as they deserve to be!

Let not any say, '*Tomorrow*I will regard my Father's command.' His voice to every one is, 'Go, work *today*in my vineyard.' None of us can tell what may be on the morrow. Let none then presume to defer this necessary work. God himself most solemnly cautions us against delay, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13), [15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hebrews 3.15). To every one of you therefore do we address the Apostle's exhortation, [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2). We pray God that you may not only say, 'Lord, Lord!' but do his will.

#1388

***~~The Marriage Feast~~***

***~~[Matthew 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.2-3)~~***

"The kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; but they were not willing to come."

INSTRUCTION and reproof generally irritate those who will not be reformed; but ministers must "speak plainly, whether men will hear or forbear." They must present the same truths in various shapes, if by any means they may win the souls of their hearers; nor should they be intimidated even by the most imminent dangers.

Jesus had spoken a parable that greatly offended the Pharisees: they even sought to take away his life on account of it: but he still persisted in his benevolent labors for their good, and repeated the same offensive truths in the parable before us.

In the parable he compares the kingdom of Heaven, or the Gospel dispensation, to a king who made a marriage for his son, and sent his servants to invite guests to the marriage-feast. This king was Jehovah: the wedding was between the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only-begotten Son, and his spouse the Church: and the feast instituted in honor of it, contained all the blessings of grace and glory. The Prophets and Apostles were sent forth in Jehovah's name to invite all the Jews to a participation of this feast: but their message was despised and their persons injured; so that God would now cease any more to call the Jews, and would send forth his invitations to the Gentiles, whom he would receive with all imaginable kindness, while he left the Jews to eat the bitter fruit of their folly.

Now, as we are the favored people to whom these invitations are sent, I will more distinctly open to you the parable in its different parts, and then execute the commission which is here assigned me.

***~~The union of Christ with his Church is often spoken of in the Scriptures under the figure of a marriage—~~***

By nature we are in the most deplorable condition. But he of his own sovereign grace sets his heart upon us, and prepares us for himself, and unites us to himself in the closest bonds, [Ezekiel 16:4-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.4-12). The espousals take place now in this world, [Jeremiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.2); [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2); the consummation will be in the world to come, [Romans 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 19.7).

***~~In honor of this marriage God institutes a feast—~~***

But who shall declare how rich this feast is? Truly it is a feast worthy of God, the God of Heaven, to provide, and worthy of his most favored creatures to partake of in the heavenly world. Already, whatever can conduce to:  
the enlightening of the mind,  
the rectifying of the will,  
the purifying of the affections,  
the strengthening, establishing, and comforting of the soul  
—is dispensed to us as a foretaste of that divine banquet.

The love of the Father,  
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

are imparted to us in the richest abundance. Wine and strong meat are ministered to adults, and milk to the new-born babes, insomuch that there is not a person in the universe who may not find that very food which he most delights, and which his necessities more particularly require.

***~~And now are his servants sent forth to invite us all—~~***

As Prophets and Apostles were sent forth in former ages, so are ministers appointed now to this very service, to call to the wedding all who have a wish to come; saying, "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

This, brethren, has been my happy office, which I have most gladly performed from the first instant that I came among you. I have not set forth the Gospel as a work to be performed, or a labor to be sustained, but as a feast to be enjoyed, "a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6)," "to satiate every weary soul, and to replenish, and exhilarate every sorrowful soul, [Jeremiah 31:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.25)." In calling you to be guests, we require of you no pre-requisites of goodness and worthiness for the meriting of this distinction: it is offered even to the very chief of sinners, provided they be willing to accept of mercy and all the other blessings of salvation as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. All is offered to you freely "without money and without price."

***~~But what reception has our message met with in the midst of you?~~***

Some, I am happy to say, have accepted the invitation, and are already partaking of the feast.

But the generality among you have acted as those in former days, who "made light of" the offered mercy, and "went to their farm and merchandise" as an employment better suited to their taste. Some, like the Jews in former ages, have spoken evil of the servants of the Lord, verse 6.

Others, who have treated the messengers with more respect, have yet shown the same indifference to the message, satisfying themselves with vain excuses, which nevertheless they must know can never satisfy God, [Luke 14:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.18-20).

Almost all desire to put off the day of espousal with the heavenly Bridegroom, as though it were rather an evil to be dreaded, than a feast to be enjoyed. If the listening to our invitation would suffice, they would be contented to go thus far on the Sabbath-day: but if they must come to Christ and sit down with him at the wedding-feast, they desire *to postpone it to some more convenient season, when the cares and pleasures of life shall have lost all their attraction*.

***~~And what must be the outcome of such conduct?~~***

Those who have reviled and persecuted the servants of the Most High God, will meet with a suitable recompense at his hands, verse 7. And those who have "made light of" their labor, will never be admitted "so much as to taste of this supper, [Luke 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.24)." It is a fact that those who do not now come to this feast, know nothing of God's pardoning love, nothing of the comforts of the Holy Spirit. They are utter strangers to all spiritual joy. They think all experience of heavenly communications, all manifestations of God's love, and all foretastes of his glory—to be no better than the dreams of a heated imagination.

What hope then can they have that they shall possess all the fullness of these blessings in the eternal world? In their present condition they have no capacity for the enjoyment of the heavenly feast, even if they were admitted to it. But they never can be admitted, nor to all eternity shall they ever "so much as taste" what the favored guests shall feed upon in the presence of their God.

***~~But let me once more endeavor to execute my commission—~~***

Once more in the name of Almighty God I invite you to come to the wedding-feast. And O, think who it is that invites you. It is God, and not man: the voice, though the voice of a feeble worm like yourselves, is as truly God's, as if it came in thunder, or in audible sounds from Heaven. And will you turn a deaf ear to him—to him who needs not you, and who invites you only that he may make you a partaker of his own blessedness and glory? Think also to what a feast you are called. In comparison of that, all that this world can give is but as the husks that the swine eat of.

Think yet further, how vain all your excuses are. What have you to do that can be put in competition with the seeking and securing the salvation of the soul?

Think too how bitter your regrets will soon be. Soon you will behold the company that is set down at the marriage supper: but you will behold them at an unapproachable distance, and these reflections will then irresistibly force themselves upon your mind: 'There I also might have been a happy guest, if only I would have accepted the invitations given me, and obeyed the call of Almighty God: but here am I, banished from the Savior's presence, and without a drop of water to cool my tongue. O! wretch that I am! I in vain look to rocks and mountains to fall upon me: they cannot perform for me that friendly office; they cannot hide me from the wrath of my offended God.'

Lastly, Think how painful must be both your state and mine in the day when I shall give up my account of my present labors. To save your souls from Hell is now the one object for which I minister, and for which I live. And in that day I must give an account of my ministry. But O! what an account will it be?

'Did you deliver my message to them?

Did you invite them to the wedding-feast?

Did you press and urge them as it became you?

Did you warn them of the consequences of declining my invitation?'

What answers must I give? I can say nothing which will not evince your guilt, and aggravate your condemnation. The Lord grant that such may never be the outcome of my labors; but that I may have you all as "my joy and crown of rejoicing in that day!"

#1389

***~~The Sin of Making Light of Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.5)~~***

"But they made light of it."

WE are apt to condemn the Jews as blind and obstinate, because they rejected Christ in spite of the clearest evidence in his favor. But we ourselves are more guilty than they, because we enjoy much greater advantages for understanding the Gospel than they did, and yet are as regardless of it as they were.

Our blessed Lord illustrated their conduct by a marriage-feast, to which those who were invited refused to come. The same invitation is sent to us; and we, no less than they, "make light of it."

To bring home a conviction of this upon our minds, we shall show,

***~~I. What are the blessings which we are invited to partake of—~~***

***~~God is here represented as having made a marriage for his Son—~~***

The figure of a marriage union is often used to represent the connection that exists between Christ and his Church, [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.14); [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19-20). He is the bridegroom, and the Church is his bride, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5); [Revelation 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.9). [John 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.29). And the connection is then formed, when the Church gives up herself to Christ as her head and Lord, and by faith becomes so united to him as to be one flesh, [Ephesians 5:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30-32), or, to speak more properly, "one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)."

***~~The feast prepared on the occasion contains all the blessings of grace and glory—~~***

There is nothing that can nourish or delight the soul, which God has not prepared for the bride on her union with Christ, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6). She instantly becomes related to him, and is considered in all things as his wife, an object of his affections, and a partaker of his inheritance. Let any one inquire, What is there that my soul can desire in time or eternity? and he shall find it all set before him, that he may freely and richly enjoy it.

***~~To a participation of this feast we are sent to invite you—~~***

In one view, they to whom we are sent, are the bride; but in another view, they are the guests. The commission God has given to his servants is, to "go out into the highways and hedges, and to bring in as many as they can find." To you therefore we come, declaring that no unworthiness on your part shall exclude you, provided you put on the wedding garment, which the Master of the feast has prepared for you. Accept the invitation; and all the blessings of salvation shall be yours. Pardon of sin, peace with God, strength for the Christian life, and whatever else can comfort the weary, and support the weak—shall become the daily, the everlasting food of your souls.

To evince how much our message is disregarded, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Who are those who make light of the invitation—~~***

Among the numberless classes that might be mentioned, two only shall be selected:

***~~1. Those who satisfy themselves with excuses for declining it—~~***

The persons mentioned in the context, excused themselves on account of their "farms or merchandise." But their pleas, however satisfactory in their own eyes, were not admitted by God. On the contrary, he declared them to be "unworthy ever to taste of his supper." Now what excuses has any man more urgent than these?

And if these were of no avail in their case, what right have we to think that the plea of worldly business will be admitted in *our*favor? If the prosecuting of our worldly business were really incompatible with the enjoyment of God, there can be no doubt which we ought to prefer. He was "a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, "sold all that he had and bought it." But our duties to God and to the world are by no means irreconcilable with each other: and therefore the resting in such vain excuses shows, that we make light of the salvation offered us.

***~~2. Those who do not accept it with all thankfulness—~~***

Blessings, like those set before us in the Gospel, ought to be regarded as of the first importance. Indifference towards them is a positive contempt of them. If a slave, whom we had ransomed at a great price, and to whom we offered liberty, and affluence, and honor, should express no gratitude, no joy on the occasion, should we not think that he "made light of" our offered kindness? But what bondage is so dreadful as that in which we are held by sin and Satan? Or what liberty is like that of God's children? Or what comparison is there between the riches and honors of this world, and those which are imparted to us on our union with Christ? If then our joy and gratitude excited by the Gospel salvation, be not in some measure proportioned to its value and importance, we cannot but be considered as making light of it.

Nor will this be thought a venial matter, if we duly consider,

***~~III. The folly and sinfulness of their conduct—~~***

But what words can sufficiently express this? for they make light of,

***~~1. That which is of the greatest possible value—~~***

Estimate the blessings of salvation either positively by the price paid for them, or comparatively by weighing them, as it were, in a balance against all other things—and then see what it is that they despise. Only consider, that every one of those blessings was bought with blood, with the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, a price infinitely exceeding ten thousand worlds. Is there no guilt, no folly in disregarding things of such inestimable value? Bring into competition with them all that the world can give; and it will be found lighter than dust upon the balance, yes, "altogether lighter than vanity itself." Well therefore does the Apostle put that unanswerable question, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great a salvation, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)?"

***~~2. That without which they can never be happy—~~***

The creature, at best, is but "a broken cistern:" in vain shall anyone go to it for solid happiness, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13). "There is not, there cannot be, any true peace to the wicked, [Isaiah 48:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.22)." Let any man try to make himself happy, while the guilt of all his sins continues to lie upon him, and he is in awful suspense about his eternal state; he may be thoughtless as a child, or stupid as a beast; but he cannot be happy. And if this be the case in the midst of all his gaiety, what will be his situation in a dying hour?

At all events, supposing him ever so happy in life and in death, how will he feel himself on his first entrance into the invisible world? Will he who made light of the marriage-feast on earth, sit down with boldness at the "marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven?" Will all those employments to which he was averse in this world, be at once his joy and delight, as soon as he passes into the world above? If he disregarded earthly things, he would have reason on his side; because he might be happy in God, even though he were destitute of everything else. But to hope for happiness without God is a desperate delusion; and consequently, to make light of the invitations of the Gospel is nothing less than madness itself.

***~~3. That which they are sure to value, when it will be gone beyond recovery—~~***

Here men are of very different sentiments; some accounting godliness the one thing needful, and others despising it as enthusiasm and needless singularity. But in the eternal world there is no such diversity of opinion. The saints in glory are fully confirmed in the judgment they had formed on earth; and the wicked in Hell are fully convinced of their error. The one know by their enjoyments how good it was to obey the heavenly call; and the other know by their sufferings, what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God." What then is it but madness to make light of that which we are so sure to value when there remains to us no longer any possibility of attaining it?

Let due weight be given to these considerations, and we shall need nothing more to convince us either of the folly or sinfulness of slighting the invitations of the Gospel.

***~~Application—~~***

It is to be feared that, after all, many will persist in their foolish conduct: but we would at least make one more effort to reclaim them; and beg of God to render his word effectual to their conversion.

Know that the marriage supper is now prepared; and we, as God's servants, come in his name to invite you to it. We invite you all: the rich, the poor; the old, the young; the moral, the immoral. We announce to you, that all things are ready.

Are you then not ready? If you say, "We have not a suitable garment;" we declare to you that the Master of the feast has provided garments for all his guests; and that you need only be clothed with the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and you shall instantly be acceptable in the sight of God. Put away then your excuses: receive thankfully the invitation sent to you: and begin to feast upon those spiritual provisions that shall nourish your souls unto life eternal.

#1390

***~~The Wedding Garment~~***

***~~[Matthew 22:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.11-13)~~***

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

THERE has ever been a diversity of characters in the Church of God. This, though much to be lamented, cannot be avoided. The very zeal which animates the ministers of the Gospel, has a tendency to produce this effect. Their charity prompts them to hope well of those who appear in earnest; and to admit to their communion all who "witness a good confession." Thus it was that "the wedding (in the parable) was furnished with guests;" but *he who searches the hearts will distinguish the hypocrites from others, and will deal with men according to their real characters.*

This being intimated in the text, we shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. What we are to understand by the wedding garment—~~***

The wedding-feast is intended to represent the blessings of the Gospel. The *garment*suited to the occasion must therefore import a *fitness*to partake of those blessings.

***~~In this view we may understand "the wedding-garment" as formed in part of the righteousness of Christ (justification)—~~***

Christ, by his own obedience unto death, wrought out a righteousness which is given "unto all, and put upon all of those who believe, [Romans 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.22)." This is the only righteousness whereby any man can be justified before God, [Romans 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18-19). Paul himself could find acceptance in no other, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9). It is in this that all the glorified saints are clothed, [Revelation 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 9.7); in fact, it constitutes their title to Heaven, [Revelation 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8).

And it is in this that all the saints on earth are clothed, preparatory to their ascending to Heaven, [Galatians 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.27). Hence the devout songs of those who have attained this gift: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels, [Isaiah 61:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.10)."

**But beyond all doubt it is chiefly formed of our own inherent righteousness** **(sanctification)—**

Moral qualities are often represented under the figure of a garment, [Psalm 132:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.9); [Job 29:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.14); [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5). By them chiefly we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ [Romans 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.14)." And they beyond all question form the garment which renders us acceptable guests at the wedding feast in Heaven, [Revelation 19:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7-8). In fact, it is holiness alone that constitutes our fitness for Heaven, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12); and makes us "worthy" to partake of all the felicity and glory of that blessed place, [Revelation 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.4).

I speak not of worthiness in a way of *merit*—that no man can have. But I speak of it in a way of *fitness*and *suitableness*, and every man must have it: nor without it can any soul ever enter into the Divine presence, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14).

***~~We must however be careful not to confound these two ideas—~~***

The righteousness of Christ is necessary to *justify*us before God. Our own inward personal righteousness is necessary to make us *fit*for glory. We must not *separate*them; for they cannot exist apart.

Neither, on the other hand, may we *confound*them: they must each be used for their respective ends. To disregard inherent righteousness would be downright antinomianism. On the other hand, to blend it in any degree with the righteousness of Christ for our justification before God, would be self-righteousness, and would make void the whole Gospel, [Galatians 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.3-4).

Food and clothing are equally necessary for our existence: but each has its proper office: neither can supply the lack of the other. So it is with *imputed*and *imparted*righteousness: neither can be dispensed with, nor can either occupy the other's place. To be accepted by God we must put on the righteousness of Christ; and to enjoy his presence, we must "put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)."

Such then being the wedding-garment, I proceed to show,

***~~II. The importance of it to every person—~~***

A person dressed in filthy and torn apparel would not be allowed to continue at the wedding-feast of an earthly monarch.

***~~Much less shall guilty and polluted souls sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven—~~***

The king, in the parable, was filled with indignation at the intrusion of the unworthy guest. He ordered him to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness. The room where the company was entertained being richly illuminated, the person cast out of it is said to be cast into outer darkness.

How awfully applicable to those who shall be cast out of Heaven! This fitly represents the vengeance that will be inflicted on all such *intruders*. They may come in for a while and join themselves to the Lord's people; but when the King himself shall see the guests, he will fix his eyes on them and will cast them out from the place they had so presumptuously occupied. They shall never dwell in the mansions of light and glory above; but take their portion in the regions of darkness and despair, and there bewail forever their irremediable delusions.

***~~Nor will their punishment in any respect exceed their guilt—~~***

The *intruder*, in the parable, could make no reply to the king's address He might have urged that being brought suddenly out of the highways he had neither time to borrow, nor money to purchase, a wedding garment. But this would have been to no purpose. Opulent persons had large wardrobes for the accommodation of all their guests. Lucullus, at Rome, was famed for having at least two hundred changes of clothing. No doubt, therefore, a proper garment would have been lent to him for the occasion, if he had chosen to accept it. He knew that he had disregarded the offer of a wedding garment; and presumptuously supposed that his own was good enough for the occasion. Thus he had poured contempt on the liberality and kindness of the king; and was therefore compelled by his own conscience to acknowledge the justice of the sentence passed upon him.

Who then among us shall expect to imitate him with impunity? To us has our Lord repeatedly offered a wedding garment. Thus has he often counseled to receive his robe of righteousness, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18). We have been invited to go to him for the influences of his Spirit, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39).

Shall we then expect admission into Heaven if we reject his offers? Or shall we accuse him of severity if he cast us headlong into Hell? Surely if we rest in anything short of *justification*by his sin-atoning death, and *renovation*by his Spirit—we shall stand self-condemned forever.

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. For conviction—~~***

As Christians we profess to have accepted the Savior's invitation; and to feast at his table here as a pledge of that richer feast above. But have we indeed received Christ as our righteousness, 2 Corinthians 5:21; [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)? Are we also renewed by his Spirit in our inward man [2 Corinthians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.16)? We may easily deceive those who minister to us here below; but "the King, who will come in to see the guests," can never be deceived. However specious a garb we may have prepared for ourselves, he will easily distinguish it from that which he has given to his redeemed people. Nor would he fail to discover the hypocrite, even if there were only one to be found in his whole Church. Surely then it it befits us to guard against self-deception. We may now obtain from him a fitness to feast with his chosen; but if we persist in our delusion, we shall find him inexorably severe.

***~~2. For consolation—~~***

Some perhaps are troubled on account of their past presumption; especially, that they have unworthily communicated at the Lord's table. Well indeed may such guilt fill them with compunction; but, however presumptuously we have acted in past times, we have no reason to despond. A wedding garment is now offered to all who see their need of it. Though we were of the poorest or vilest of mankind, it would not be withheld from us; nor, however many guests may come, will there be any deficiency of clothing for them all. Let all then accept the free invitation of the Gospel, and thankfully put on the garment which the Master of the feast has prepared for them. Thus, though unworthy in themselves, they shall be accounted worthy through Christ, and shall sit down forever at the marriage feast in Heaven!

#1391

***~~An Inquiry into Our Views of Christ~~***

***~~[Matthew 22:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.41-42)~~***

"While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying: What do you think about the Christ?"

Before a congregation where less critical accuracy is required, this subject may be treated thus:

***~~I. Propose the question—~~***

***~~What do you think about the Christ?~~***

1. Of his person (he is God, as well as man).

2. Of his sufferings (they were altogether vicarious and expiatory).

3. Of his glory (he is in Heaven as a public person, our Advocate, our Head, our Forerunner).

***~~II. Show the importance of it—~~***

***~~On our thoughts of him must depend—~~***

1. Our devotion to him (which will be proportioned to our admiration of his character).

2. Our interest in him (which can arise only from our knowledge of him, and our faith in him).

3. Our acceptance with him in the last day (if we have low thoughts of him now, he will have low thoughts of us then. [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38).)

THEY who are prejudiced against the Gospel, are ever studious to ensnare believers with captious, or, as they think, unanswerable questions. To such cavilers we should answer warily, and with meekness of wisdom: nor will it be unuseful, on some occasions, to propose to them in return some question, which shall lead their thoughts into a better channel. Our blessed Lord adopted this method after he had been successively interrogated by Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes: Master, what do you think of paying tribute to Caesar? verse 15, 17; of the resurrection of the body? verse 23–28; of the commandments? verse 35, 36. He returned to each a satisfactory answer, and silenced them at last by proposing to them a difficulty, which, with all their boasted wisdom, they were unable to solve.

Certainly the difficulty of reconciling these two characters of the Messiah was great (he is God, as well as man). Yet, if the Pharisees had been duly attentive to all the prophetic representations of the Messiah, they would have known, that there was to be in him a union of the most opposite states, of life and death, of sufferings and glory; and that, consequently, the humble state of Christ, at which they took offence, was no reason at all for their disbelieving his divine mission. To show them this, was the precise object of our blessed Lord in the question he put to them; and, in accordance with that design, I will show,

***~~I. That the discordancies of Scripture are no bar to our believing in Christ—~~***

***~~There are, no doubt, in Scripture, very discordant representations of the Messiah—~~***

Of his PERSON: He was to be the root—and yet the offspring of David, a little child, and yet the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6). [Matthew 22:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.43-45); [Revelation 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.16).

Of his RECEPTION in the world: He was to be an object of universal contempt and abhorrence—and yet to be universally admired and adored, [Isaiah 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3); [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7); [Psalm 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.6) with [Psalm 72:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.8), [10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Psalm 72.10-11).

Of his END: he was to die an accursed death—and yet to live forever and ever.

But the Pharisees noticed only those passages of Scripture which flattered their pride, and raised their expectations of temporal grandeur; and therefore they were "offended" at Jesus, whose condition in the world was poor and base, and, as they thought, irreconcilable with the office which he professed to bear.

***~~Yet these discordancies were no just reason for their rejecting of Christ—~~***

In fact, if these discordancies had not been found in him, he could not have been the Messiah predicted in the Scriptures. Their union therefore in him was rather a reason why the people should believe in him; since it fulfilled every part of the inspired records, and gave to him a claim which no other person ever did, or could, possess.

The *miracles*which he wrought were such a demonstrative proof of his divine mission as no reasonable being could withstand. And these miracles, taken in connection with the strict accomplishment of so many, and so apparently opposite, predictions; left no room for doubt on any rational and candid mind, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

But my text leads me further to show,

***~~II. That the union of these discordancies in Christ Jesus is the very foundation of all our hopes—~~***

If he had not been MAN, he could not have lived and died for us; as the Apostle says, "He was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man, [Hebrews 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.9)." On the other hand,

He must have been GOD, else nothing that he either did or suffered could have been available for our salvation.

Supposing him to have been a mere creature, his *obedience*could not merit anything for us: for, "all that he could do would be no more than his bounden duty; and, having done it all, he would be only an unprofitable servant."

Nor could his *sufferings*make any atonement for our sins: for there is no proportion whatever between the sufferings of one creature for a time, and the sufferings of countless millions of creatures to all eternity. However exalted the creature might be; his blood could no more be available for the salvation of the whole world, than the blood of bulls and of goats; of which; we are told; it is not possible that it should take away sins, [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4)."

Nor could his *intercession*be of any avail for us; seeing that he would have no effectual plea to urge in our behalf.

Nor, in fact; could his appointment to *govern*the world secure to us the blessings we stand in need of; since; without omniscience, he could not know all our necessities; nor without omnipotence, could he supply them.

***~~But being God as well as man, he is equal to the work he has undertaken for us—~~***

His duty gives an infinite value both to his obedience and his sufferings; insomuch that his *sufferings*were a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world; and his *obedience*formed a sufficient righteousness for the justification of all who should be clothed with it. His *intercession*too, founded as it is in the efficacy of his atonement; is sure to prevail in our behalf. While as Head over all things to his Church, he can supply out of his own fullness all who call upon him. In him, as God-man, there is such a sufficiency; that no man, however desperate his condition; has any reason to despond; nor, if with a penitent and believing heart he apply to Jesus has he any reason to fear. For Jesus "is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

***~~Application—~~***

In the parable of the Sower, our Lord said; "Take heed what you hear;" and; "Take heed how you hear." Thus, in reference to my text, I would ask;

***~~1. "What do you think of Christ?"~~***

Many alas! think not of him at all. Notwithstanding they call themselves Christians; Christ is as much banished from their conversation and from their minds; as if he had never come from Heaven for them; and never borne their sins in his own body on the cross.

God, as a Creator, is sometimes acknowledged, and sometimes under particular providences, as the Governor of the world. But Christ, as a Redeemer, seems quite forgotten: and the very mention of him under that character is sufficient to cast a damp upon all social hilarity; and to bring reproach upon his advocate as an unmannerly enthusiast.

But, beloved brethren, we should make ourselves acquainted with the character of Christ as revealed in the prophecies of the Old Testament; and as exhibited in the records of the New Testament. We should view him as "God manifest in the flesh," and "purchasing the Church with his own blood." We should view him in his *person*, *work*, and *offices*: for if we know him not as he is delineated in the Scriptures of truth, we can never truly believe in him, nor can we ever finally be saved by him. I charge you then, brethren, to inquire carefully what you think of Christ, and to compare your thoughts with the revelation of God in Scripture concerning him.

***~~2. How do you think of Christ?~~***

Do you think of him as you ought to think? Do you think of him with an application of him to your own soul? It is of very little use to entertain theories in your *head*, if you do not get them realized in your *heart*. You will never know him to any good purpose, unless you apply to him under all his characters for the mercies you stand in need of, and make him all your salvation and all your desire.

I ask yet further, Do you think of him with the *adoring gratitude*which he deserves at your hands? This is what God requires, and nothing short of this will constitute you Christians indeed. See how the redeemed honor him in Heaven: they are singing incessant praises to him as having "loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God and the Father! Yes, to him they ascribe all glory and dominion forever and ever." And such should be your state on earth; yes and such will it be to a considerable extent, if you are walking in any measure worthy of your high calling. Begin then this course, if you have not already begun it, and prosecute it with ever-increasing diligence. If you have, so will you be filled with unutterable and abiding joy, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8); so will you also be transformed into your Savior's image, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18), and be rendered "fit for the inheritance of his saints in light."

#1392

***~~Christ the Son and Lord of David~~***

***~~[Matthew 22:42-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.42-46)~~***

"What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" '? "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore."

THAT there are difficulties in the Scriptures, is certain: but they are greatly augmented by men's negligence in comparing the different parts of Scripture with each other, and their *indisposition to receive truths which oppose their pre-conceived opinions*. Had the character of the Messiah, as drawn in the writings of the prophets, been duly considered, the Jews would have seen that our blessed Lord corresponded with it in every particular; and that, whether he spoke of himself as God, or as man, as reigning or as suffering, he was the very person to whom all the prophecies referred, and in whom they were about to be accomplished. Among the many things at which they took offence in the discourses of our Lord, *that which most inflamed their wrath was his claim to an equality with God*. For this they often took up stones to stone him, [John 8:58-59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.58-59); [John 10:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30-33), and for this, at last, they put him to death, [Mark 14:61-64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.61-64) and [John 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.7). But our blessed Lord had left them wholly without excuse.

But a few days before they put him to death, while the Pharisees (who had labored by all possible means "to entangle him in his talk," but whom, by all his answers, he had confounded) were yet present with him; he, in his turn, put to them this question, "What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?" They, without hesitation, replied, "The son of David." This was right: to this the prophets all bear witness: and it was agreeable to the sentiments and expectations of the whole nation. Our Lord then asked them, why David, when speaking by inspiration from God, called him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool? If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?" Here was doubtless a difficulty: but it was a difficulty which, if they had understood the Scriptures, they might easily have solved. They, however, "were not able to answer him a word."

It is much to be regretted, that, even among persons calling themselves Christians, there are many who are at a loss to answer this question; and who, from their inability to reconcile the apparently opposite assertions, are led to doubt, or even to deny, the divinity of our blessed Lord.

That you may be established in this fundamental truth of our holy religion, I will,

***~~I. Solve the difficulty that is here proposed—~~***

***~~The difficulty, no doubt, was great—~~***

The Pharisees all acknowledged David as a prophet of the Lord: and they were all persuaded that in this psalm he spoke respecting the Messiah, whose future triumphs he predicted. Had they been able to say that those words were not inspired; or that they did not refer to the Messiah; or that our Lord had misapplied them in any respect; though they had not given a solution of the difficulty, they would, in a measure, have extricated themselves from it. But they could not: and it is of great importance for us to bear in mind, that on no occasion whatever did the Jews ever controvert the application which was made of the prophecies, either by Christ or his apostles; and that all the interpretations which have been suggested by Jews of later days, have been invented for the purpose of invalidating the arguments of Christians founded upon them; which arguments, upon a just interpretation of the Scriptures, they were not able to withstand.

They saw that David really spoke of one, who, at the distance of a thousand years, was to spring from his loins; and that yet he had called this very person his Lord and Governor. Had he said, 'The Lord said to my *son*, Sit on my right hand,' the sense would have been clear and easy: but how could he say, 'The Lord said to my *Lord*?' David himself was the greatest of all the kings of Israel; and yet he speaks of a person who should descend from him at a remote period; and of a person who, as the outcome proved, was the son of a poor carpenter, as his Lord.

***~~But, had they understood the Scriptures, they might have solved the difficulty with ease—~~***

They knew, and universally acknowledged, that the Prophet Micah spoke of the Messiah, when he said, "You Bethlehem Ephratah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2)." Now here the pre-existent state of Christ is clearly declared; declared, too, in terms that can refer to none but God himself, seeing that he alone is "from everlasting." This passage alone was sufficient to furnish them with the true answer.

But the Prophet Isaiah had spoken more clearly still; and had distinctly declared, that the person who was to be "a child born and a son given, was no other than the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" and that "the child that should be born of a virgin should be called Emmanuel, God with us, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14)." Thus their own Scriptures informed them that the Messiah must be David's Lord, according to his divine nature, (being indeed the Lord both of Heaven and earth;) while yet, according to his human nature, which he was to assume from the posterity of David, he was to be truly and properly David's Son.

In the New Testament, as might be expected, this truth is yet more abundantly confirmed. Our Lord himself spoke of his own existence previous to his incarnation; saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." Yes, he declared that "he had a glory with the Father before the world was;" and that "He and the Father were One." Very remarkable are those words which he addressed in a vision to the Apostle John: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty! [Revelation 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.8)." What can be conceived more expressly declarative of his Divinity than this?

To the same effect the beloved disciple himself speaks: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.…And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1), [14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

Paul also says, that "being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, (he emptied himself, or divested himself of all his glory,) and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7)." From these and other similar passages it is evident, that he is "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)," even "God over all, blessed forever! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." And thus you see that he is in truth both "the Root and the Offspring of David, [Revelation 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.16)."

The Pharisees, not understanding this, were unable to return an answer to our Lord: nor, as long as the world shall stand, can any man solve the difficulty, but by acknowledging the Divinity of Christ. If it be said, that the very passage that is cited by our Lord proves his inferiority to the Father, because it is the Father who "exalts him to his right hand, and puts all his enemies under his feet;" I answer, that, as man, and as Mediator, he was inferior to the Father; while, as God, he is equal with the Father, and altogether one with him. In his Mediatorial capacity he is doubtless indebted to the Father's agency; for who knows not, who acknowledges not, that, as Mediator, he is the Father's "servant," sent to do his will, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1). But if we are so blind as not to be able to distinguish, between his *essential nature as God*, and his *assumed office as Mediator*it is in vain to hope that we shall ever solve the difficulty in the text ourselves, or understand the solution of it which the Scriptures have afforded us.

I now come to,

***~~II. Show the importance of the truth which is thus elicited—~~***

This truth is at the very root of all our hopes, both in this world and the world to come: it is that on which depends,

***~~1. The virtue of his atonement—~~***

If the Lord Jesus Christ is a mere creature, what virtue can there be in his blood to atone for the sins of men? The Apostle tells us, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin." But, if the efficacy of the sacrifice depended merely on the arbitrary appointment of God, he might as well have appointed one creature to make atonement us another: nor was there any such difference between one creature and another, that, while it was not possible for the blood of one to expiate even so much as sin, the other should be sufficient to take away the sins of the world. On this supposition, there could be no force whatever in that argument which the Apostle, with so much confidence, addresses to us: "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14);" that is, if the blood of one creature avails for the smallest thing, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the greatest?

In the argument so stated, there is not only no force, but not even common sense; and the appeal will recoil on the Apostle, to his own confusion. But, admitting the Divinity of Christ, the argument is incontrovertible: for if the blood of any creature can effect the smallest thing, much more will the blood of the Creator, who is God as well as man, effect the greatest. Here the argument is clear, and the appeal is absolutely irresistible.

Know, then, what a foundation you leave for your hopes towards God. Know that Christ is a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the world;" that "his blood will cleanse from all sin;" and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."

***~~2. The efficacy of his grace—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ, in his exalted state, is appointed "Head over all things to the Church;" every member of which is to look to him for a supply of all his wants, both temporal and spiritual. But, if he is a creature only, how can he execute this trust? At the very same instant that you are crying to him for the relief of your necessities, there are millions of others spreading their wants before him in every quarter of the globe: and how can he attend to all? Omnipresence is the prerogative of God alone: a creature cannot be everywhere present at the same time: it is God alone that fills all things. So that, if he is not God, you have no assurance that he can help you under your difficulties, and afford you the desired relief. In what a distressing state would you then be left! And what painful anxieties must corrode your bosom! But when you know that he is God as well as man, your fears are all dispelled; for he can hear your every cry, and satisfy your every want. There can be nothing impossible to him, if he be "the Mighty God!" and consequently, while living by faith on him, you are assured that "his grace shall be sufficient for you," and that "no weapon that has been formed against you shall prosper."

***~~3. The glory and excellency of his salvation—~~***

On any supposition, if Christ is only a man, and has by any means effected our salvation, we are unspeakably indebted to him, and to God for him. But still, methinks, he is richly repaid, in having his sufferings for so short a time compensated with such a reward as the everlasting salvation of millions of the human race. But, if he be God equal with the Father, eternally happy and glorious in himself, and absolutely incapable of being rendered either more happy or more glorious by any acquisition of happiness to us—then what do we then owe him for all his inconceivable condescension and love?

It is this which constitutes the glory of redemption; the incarnation of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son; his substitution in the place of sinful man; his vicarious sacrifice upon the cross; his completion of salvation for us by his own obedience unto death; his ascension to Heaven as our fore-runner; his investiture with all power in Heaven and in earth, that he may perfect both *for*as, and *in*us, the work he has begun—this, I say, it is which renders the whole plan of redemption so wonderful, and which forms the one subject of adoration and thanksgiving among all the myriads of the redeemed in Heaven. Divest it of this, and you despoil God of his honor, and man of his felicity: for I hesitate not to say, that it is from these considerations, chiefly, that Heaven itself will derive its chief happiness.

***~~Let me, in conclusion, call your attention to the duties which this view of the Messiah necessarily brings with it:~~***

***~~1. Believe in Jesus with your whole hearts—~~***

If, as you have seen, he is indeed God as well as man, "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." You need not fear to cast yourselves entirely on him. Hear how this very thought is suggested by the Prophet Isaiah, speaking to us in the Messiah's name: "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)."

Hear, too, what encouragement he further gives you to repose all your hope and confidence in him: "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)." If Jehovah be your *righteousness*, who shall condemn you? and if Jehovah be your *strength*, who shall overcome you, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24) with [Romans 8:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-34)? Again then, I say, Cast yourselves on him; for "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and in Him shall they glory, [Isaiah 45:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.25)."

***~~2. Serve and glorify him with your whole souls—~~***

If he is David's Lord, no doubt he is yours also: and that he is worthy to be obeyed by you, it is needless for me to observe. My text calls me to notice, not so much his worthiness to be served, as your obligation to obey him. If you come to him as a Savior, you must also take his yoke upon you, [Matthew 11:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-29). This, I say, must be done: for the Father has pledged himself that "all his enemies shall be his footstool." Jesus is "seated at the right hand of God," and will assuredly prevail over all opposition; and those who bow not to the scepter of his grace will be "broken in pieces by him, as a potter's vessel, [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9)." See, then, that he be your Lord, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. See that your whole souls be subjected to his dominion, and that "every thought of your hearts be brought into a willing captivity to the obedience of Christ".

#1393

***~~Our Relation to Christ and to Each Other~~***

***~~[Matthew 23:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.8)~~***

"One is your Master, even Christ; and you are all brethren."

THE mind of man naturally seeks pre-eminence and power: and this was peculiarly the habit of the Scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day. The hatefulness of such a disposition he pointed out to them, and strongly guarded his disciples against it; showing them that the Messiah alone was to be regarded as the source and center of all authority; and that they, of whatever rank they were, were to consider each other as brethren.

Now, in treating this admonition, I shall consider it,

***~~I. With an immediate reference to the subject in hand—~~***

Two things our blessed Lord designed to teach his disciples;

***~~1. Not to seek pre-eminence for themselves—~~***

"Rabbi" was a title which conveyed the highest possible respect: and therefore it was so fondly delighted in by the Scribes and Pharisees. It, in fact, ascribed to the person so designated a very high degree of wisdom; such as justified him in dictating to others, and in having his sentiments propounded as a law.

But our blessed Lord would have it known that there is no wisdom which is not derived from him, nor any authority but what proceeds from him; and that therefore all must look to him, and him alone, as giving law to his people, and as regulating, in every respect, whatever relates either to their faith or practice.

***~~2. Not to usurp authority over others—~~***

As "Christ is the one Master of all," so is "Almighty God the Father of all." All, therefore, are fellow-servants in the same household, and "brethren" in the same family. There are, indeed, different offices to be performed by servants; but no servant is at liberty to exercise an independent authority: and so also are there different ages among brethren; but in their feelings towards each other they are not any of them to forget for one moment the relation in which they stand. Instead of domineering over one another, *those who stand the highest in authority should condescend to take the lowest place in the offices of love*, even as our blessed Lord himself did, when he washed his disciples' feet, verse 11 with [John 13:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.13-15).

But as this view of the words is rather for persons who take a lead in the Church, I shall proceed to notice them,

***~~II. In a more general and extended view—~~***

***~~"We have but one Master, even Christ"—~~***

O, brethren, think how "many lords have had dominion over you," and how grievously you have neglected the work which Christ has given you to do! Remember, I pray you, that as, in our families, every servant has his proper work assigned him, and is expected to perform it from day to day; so have you your proper office to perform in the family of Christ: and you should be able, at the close of every day, to say as Christ himself did, "Father, I have glorified you on earth; I have finished the work which you have given me to do".

***~~As for all our fellow-Christians, they are our "brethren"—~~***

Our Lord did not intend to forbid titles of distinction. It is of necessity that some should be addressed by the name of "Father," and others by the name of "Master." That which is here forbidden, is the seeking of such titles, as marks of high distinction, and as means of great authority. Humility is that which our Lord approves, and which is the proper fruit of Christianity in the soul. In a family, all are studious to promote the welfare of each other, and ready to make sacrifices for each other's good. This is the spirit which we should cultivate towards all the members of Christ's mystical body, yes, and towards every individual of mankind.

***~~Learn here, my brethren,~~***

***~~1. The sublime nature of Christianity, as forming the character of individuals—~~***

Christianity does not regulate the outward conduct only, but forms the habit of the mind to humility and love.

***~~2. The blessed tendency of Christianity, as contributing to the welfare of the community—~~***

What a world would this be, if all were brought to this standard of morals, this exercise of mutual kindness! Look at the primitive Church, and there you see it realized, [Acts 2:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-47). O that it might be realized among us; and that every one of us in our respective spheres might thus shine as lights in the world!

***~~#1394~~***

***~~Christ's Compassion and Man's Obstinacy Contrasted~~***

***~~[Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37)~~***

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

THE enmity of the human heart against God, visible as it is in all our conduct, is discoverable in nothing more than in the treatment which has been shown in all ages to his faithful servants. One might well expect that those persons commissioned by the Governor of the Universe to instruct and reform mankind, should be welcomed with every expression of love and gratitude. But historic facts precluded a possibility of reply to that pungent question of our Lord, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Nevertheless, God in infinite mercy, after a host of his messengers had in succession been cruelly put to death, sent his only dear Son, with indisputable credentials, with unparalleled authority, with infinite compassion. Yet not even his ministry was successful. The obduracy of man withstood all his kind solicitations; and constrained him, with his dying breath, to testify against his devoted country as self-ruined and self-condemned.

The words before us will naturally lead us to consider,

***~~I. The tender compassion of Christ—~~***

The simile by which our Lord illustrates his own tenderness, is admirably calculated to impress and edify our minds. It is familiar to all, and therefore intelligible to the meanest capacity: at the same time it gives us as just an idea of parental anxiety as any image can convey.

A *hen*, observing a bird of prey hovering over her young, instantly sounds an alarm, and calls them to her for protection. Thus our blessed Lord warned sinners in the days of his flesh: and thus he still warns them,

***~~1. By his Providence—~~***

All the dispensations of Providence, whether relating to the world at large, or to ourselves in particular, have a voice which may be heard with ease, and interpreted with certainty. Whether they be of a more painful or pleasing nature, they may alike be regarded as calls to turn from sin, and to seek our happiness in God. And if we had been as attentive to the dictates of reason as the chicks are to the impulse of their natural instinct, we should long since have turned at God's reproofs, "and been led by his goodness to repentance."

***~~2. By his Word—~~***

What are all the *warnings*, the *invitations*, the *promises*of the Gospel, but so many expressions of that tender regard which Christ bears to his people, [Proverbs 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.22-23); [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3); [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39)? Surely, if we are not more deaf than the adder, we cannot but acknowledge that in all these Christ is speaking to us, and entreating us to flee from the wrath to come. Moreover, whenever the ministers of the Gospel have spoken to us in the name of Christ, our adorable Savior has addressed us by their mouth.

***~~3. By his Spirit—~~***

There is no man so obdurate, but he has felt, and perhaps still occasionally feels, some convictions and remonstrances within his own bosom, some secret admonitions to repent and turn to God. We call these properly 'the voice of conscience;' but they are also the 'voice of Christ,' that "small still voice" whereby he invites us to seek his face. And in them, no less than in the written word, we have a demonstration of the concern which Christ has for the welfare of our souls, and of his solicitude to gather us under the shadow of his wings.

But these efforts, instead of being requited as they ought, afford us only an occasion of contemplating,

***~~II. The unrelenting obstinacy of man—~~***

In the midst of all these overtures of mercy, man continues insensible, and,

***~~1. Denies that any danger exists—~~***

The Savior beholds the *law*denouncing its curse against us, and *justice*unsheathing its sword to enforce its awful sanctions, and *Hell*opening to swallow us up quick, and the demons, as ministers of God's vengeance, ready to concur in executing upon us the punishment we deserve. Of these things he warns us: but we, like the inhabitants of Sodom, laugh at the impending judgments, and, because we do not see them with our eyes, deny their existence. How lamentable is it, that we should be more stupid and incredulous than the brute creation; and that our conduct, instead of being suited to the nobler faculties we enjoy, should be in perfect contrast with theirs!

***~~2. Contents himself with false refuges—~~***

When we can no longer deny the existence of danger, we then look out for such refuges as will be most congenial with our natural feelings, and will leave us most at liberty to follow our own ways. Many false refuges speedily present themselves to our view. Some repentance, some reformation, some alms-deeds, some religious observances—afford, as we imagine, ample security for our souls, while yet they require no great exercise of self-denial in fleeing to them. But*in choosing these refuges of lies, we renounce the Savior*. We turn from that adorable "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people must be;" and expose ourselves to inevitable, everlasting destruction!

***~~3. Prefers temporal and carnal pleasures to those which are spiritual and eternal—~~***

When the necessity of fleeing to Christ for refuge is not acknowledged, the vanities of the world are allowed to stand in competition with our duty to him, and are preferred before the security which he offers. Thus the Savior's calls are disregarded. The chicks, however occupied in picking up their food, will not disregard their parent's call: but sinful man is obstinately bent on the prosecution of some favorite pursuit; and the complaint in the text is fully verified, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

***~~Let us improve this subject in a way of,~~***

***~~1. Inquiry—~~***

Have *we*ever felt our danger of perishing, and taken shelter under our Redeemer's wings? We can be at no loss to answer this question, if only we will consult the records of our own conscience. The necessity of fleeing thus to Christ is plainly intimated in the image before us, and attested by innumerable other passages of Holy Writ. Know then, that if your own hearts condemn you, you have an evidence within yourselves that you are yet exposed to the wrath of God. O tremble at the thought, and flee without delay to the refuge set before you!

***~~2. Admonition—~~***

It is to little purpose to deny our danger. If the helpless chicks should disregard their parent's call, under the idea that the warning given them was the result of ungrounded fear, would their denial of the danger free them from it? Would not their presumption bring upon them the very destruction which they refused to shun?

Thus it will be with those who despise the Savior's voice. Their supposed security will be their ruin. Nor will they be at all more safe, if they content themselves with coming nearer to him in the ordinances, while they defer hiding themselves altogether under the shadow of his wings. It is there alone that they can find protection: and if they be not "found in him," then the "wrath of God will surely come upon them to the uttermost." Be thankful then, that, after so many calls have been despised, the *voice of mercy*is yet sounding in your ears.

***~~3. Encouragement—~~***

Whom is it that the Savior calls? The innocent, the good, the virtuous? No! but those who had imbrued their hands in the blood of all his martyred servants. And these he calls with tenderest compassion, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem:" to these he appeals, that he had renewed his invitations to them times without number, and that, *if they perish, they will be the sole authors of their own destruction*. "How often would I have gathered you, but you would not!"

Know then, beloved, that your former sins, however numerous or heinous, shall be no bar to your acceptance, if only you will flee to Christ. Over you he weeps, as he once did over the murderous Jerusalem; and he declares unto you, that "Whoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out." Remember that, if you perish, it will not be through any lack of willingness in Christ to save you: and that that very consideration, which is now so encouraging, will one day fill you with inconceivable anguish; "Christ would, but I would not!" O let not that reflection be allowed to embitter your eternal state; but now let your reluctance be overcome; and obey the voice that warns you only for your good.

#1395

***~~Caution Against Declension in Religion~~***

***~~[Matthew 24:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.12-13)~~***

"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he who endures unto the end shall be saved."

THESE words are a part of the discourse which our Lord held with four of his disciples in private, after he had retired from the Temple to the Mount of Olives, Compare [Mark 13:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.1-4) with [Matthew 24:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.1-2). Being in full view of the Temple, his disciples were struck with the magnificence of its appearance, and expressed to him their admiration of it: from whence he took occasion to foretell the speedy destruction of it, and to give them signs whereby they should ascertain the approach of the judgments which awaited their whole nation. At the same time he gave them instructions for their own support and comfort under all the trials which they themselves should endure previous to that time. He told them what evil treatment they should meet with from the enemies of his Gospel; and what difficulties they should encounter from his pretended friends. Their trials from *without*must be waved at present. Those from *within*we propose for our present consideration.

In the words before us our Lord suggests to his disciples,

***~~I. The danger of spiritual declension—~~***

Independent of the proneness of man at all times to backslide from God, there is a danger arising to us from the conduct of those with whom we stand connected. The bitterness of persecution, or abounding of corruption, may operate to abate our zeal in the service of our God; but the falls and offences of those who profess religion have a peculiar tendency to discourage the people of God; and it is to this, we apprehend, our Lord more especially refers.

***~~Such apostasies must be expected in every age—~~***

If we consult the Holy Scriptures, we shall find that, even in the apostolic age, multitudes who were once hopeful, declined from the ways of God, and made shipwreck both of faith and of a good conscience, [2 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.15); [2 Timothy 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.17); [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10).

And what is there to prevent a recurrence of the same evils? As long as the heart of man is so evil and so treacherous, it will ever be prone to start aside from God, even as a broken bow.

***~~Whenever apostasies do happen, they tend to quench the love even of the most established—~~***

Great disappointment is felt by all the members of the Christian Church: and every one feels a portion of that disgrace which the instability of any member brings upon the whole body. From the frailty of some, the fidelity of others begins to be questioned: evil surmisings arise: a coolness and distance are occasioned among the brethren: the communion of the saints is interrupted; and their associations for holy exercises are less frequented, or less enjoyed, [Hebrews 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.24-25). Divisions then ensue: each leader endeavors to increase the number of his partisans: and thus all that union and harmony which should characterize the family of Christ, is destroyed.

Hence arises also a coldness of heart towards God himself, and a loss of fellowship with him.

In a word, the almost inseparable effect of an irruption of iniquity into the Church of God is, that "the love of many at least, if not of all, will wax cold." One single "root of bitterness springing up, will trouble and defile many, [Hebrews 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.15)."

Such danger always existing, we proceed to suggest,

***~~II. A preservative against it—~~***

Two things are certain, namely:  
  
That on our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends.

That by our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured.  
  
The consideration of these two points will, under God, prove an excellent antidote against all the dangers to which we can be exposed.

Consider then, that

***~~1. On our continuance in well-doing our salvation depends—~~***

To this truth the whole voice of Scripture bears witness. We know full well that there are many promises made to the people of God; and that of those who have been given to Christ he will lose none. But it is a dreadful perversion of those promises, to think that we can be saved in any other way than that of "a patient continuance in well-doing [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7)." We must not attempt to make void the most positive declarations of Holy Writ, but must learn, like the Apostle Paul himself, to make them an incentive to unwearied watchfulness and diligence, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27); [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24); [Ezekiel 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.12-13); [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27), [38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hebrews 10.38-39).

***~~2. By our continuance in well-doing our salvation is secured—~~***

The promise in our text is absolute and universal: and throughout every part of Scripture God says to us, "Be faithful unto death; and I will give you a crown of life".

We need not disquiet ourselves about God's fulfillment of his promises: let us only attend to our own duties, and leave him to accomplish his own word in his own time and way. We shall find at last, that "not a jot or tittle of his word has ever failed".

The words of our text were fulfilled literally to every true disciple at the destruction of Jerusalem, when every apostate perished. A refuge was provided for the whole body of Christians at Pella, and a way was opened for their escape thither: and so it shall be in the day of judgment, when Christ's faithful servants universally, and they only, shall be saved.

***~~3. The consideration of these truths would be an effectual preservative against apostasy—~~***

Suppose iniquity to abound ever so much, what is that to us, except as a matter of grief and lamentation for the persons who commit it? Let the iniquity show itself in any persons, or in any degree, it is no reason that our love to God and man should wax cold: it should rather operate as a reason for us to stir up our love to a flame, in order to impede the progress of the corruption, or at least to prevent its assaults upon our own souls; as travelers in a wilderness kindle fires around them, in order to protect themselves from the assaults of ravenous and ferocious beasts. At all events, however much any persons may injure their own souls, and endanger their own salvation, it befits us to take care that they do not destroy or injure us.

***~~Address—~~***

***~~1. Let us above all things cultivate a spirit of love—~~***

This is the characteristic feature of all God's children: and the lack of it, whatever else we may possess, proves us to be only as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). A growth in love is the surest evidence of our growth in grace, [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4). By love, more than by anything else, is our establishment in the divine life secured, [1 Thessalonians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.12-13).

Let us then "take care lest any root of bitterness spring up in our hearts;" and let us daily "put on love, which is the bond of perfectness, [Colossians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.14)."

***~~2. Let us beg of God the assistance of his Holy Spirit—~~***

The consideration of our final happiness depending so entirely on our own continuance in well-doing, would be discouraging if we did not know, that God has promised to us the aids of his Spirit; and that "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us." See how graciously the Lord supported Paul, when all his Christian friends had forsaken him in his greatest extremity: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, [2 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16)." Thus shall you find him present with you in every hour of trial, and be made "more than conquerors through him that loved you."

#1396

***~~The Ten Virgins~~***

***~~[Matthew 25:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.10)~~***

"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut!"

TOWARDS the close of his ministry our Lord insisted much upon the vengeance which would in a little time be inflicted on the Jewish nation, and upon the general judgment which was to be typified by that event. He the rather dwelt on these subjects that he might keep up in the minds of his disciples an expectation of his future advent, and stimulate them to such incessant vigilance as might enable them to behold his face with joy.

In the passage before us he compares his final appearance to the sudden return of a bridegroom; and the state of mankind he compares to that of virgins who had been appointed to pay him the customary honors. He mentions two different descriptions of persons who had undertaken that office, and from whose character and end they might derive the most important instruction. We shall be profitably employed while we,

***~~I. Compare their CHARACTER—~~***

***~~There was much wherein the wise and foolish virgins appeared to RESEMBLE each other—~~***

Both of them professed to be waiting the arrival of the heavenly bridegroom. Both, while the bridegroom tarried, became unwatchful, and were overpowered with sleep. Both were alarmed at the sudden tidings of his approach, and instantly began to put themselves in a state of readiness to meet him.

This fitly describes the state of the visible Church, in which, the professed intentions of all are exactly similar. All believe that Christ will come again to judge the world; and profess to be waiting for his arrival. All too are apt to be off their guard, and to yield to slothfulness. As for hypocrites, they are immersed in the deepest sleep; and even the best of men are sometimes remiss; yes, their utmost vigilance may be almost called a slumber, when compared with that activity and vigor of mind which they ought ever to preserve.

The prospect of *death*and *judgment*is awful to persons of every description. As much as the bridegroom's arrival is desired, it is a solemn event to all; nor can the holiest of men look forward to it but "with fear and trembling." Often is his approach announced, when we, alas! are but little prepared for his reception: but all agree in preparing for him when he appears to be near at hand: even hypocrites "in their affliction will cry, Arise and save us!" and all, except the most obdurate reprobates, will feel a desire to meet him with acceptance.

***~~But notwithstanding this resemblance between the wise and foolish virgins, they widely DIFFERED from each other.~~***

The wise virgins had taken the precaution to secure oil in their vessels, that in case the bridegroom should tarry, they might have with which to replenish their lamps, and not be destitute of it in the hour of need. But the foolish virgins were contented with just so much as would enable them to make a fair show for the present; nor were they at all aware of the danger to which their shortsightedness exposed them. Hence when the cry was made at midnight, the wise virgins had only to trim their lamps, which, though burning dimly, were yet alight; but the foolish ones found their lamps extinguished; nor even knew how, or where, they should obtain a supply of oil. Instantly they requested the other virgins to impart to them of theirs; but were advised to go and procure it where alone it was to be obtained. The bridegroom however coming during their absence, the wisdom of the provident, and the folly of the improvident, were made apparent.

Now such is the difference that still exists between many professors of religion; many have really the grace of God in their hearts; these have seen the danger of an unconverted state, and have received that unction of the Holy One, which they stood in need of: they know how strict the scrutiny will be in the last day, and have therefore prayed, that the Holy Spirit might be shed forth abundantly upon them through Christ Jesus.

But others there are (would to God they were few!) who have taken up a profession lightly, and who are satisfied with having a *form*of godliness while they are destitute of its power. In an hour of alarm, they fly to the creature rather than to God. Even those who scoffed at religion in a time of health, will often send for a minister, or some godly neighbor, in a prospect of death; but there they stop, and find to their cost the inefficacy of these means. Had they applied to Christ in due time, they might have "bought oil from him without money and without price:" but the bridegroom's arrival finds them unprovided; and they are left to bewail the bitter consequences of their folly.

There being no further room for comparison, we shall now,

***~~II. Contrast their END—~~***

***~~1. The wise virgins who were ready, were admitted with the bridegroom into the marriage feast—~~***

It was customary for the virgins who came forth to attend the bridegroom, to participate the pleasures of the nuptial feast.

This gives a just idea of their happiness who shall be found ready at the coming of their Lord: they shall enter into the chamber where all the guests are assembled; they shall hear the bridegroom's voice, and enjoy the testimonies of his regard: the feast provided by God himself shall refresh their souls, while all the harmony of Heaven shall fill them with exquisite delight. Then all painful watchings and anxious expectations forever cease: no longer have they any corruptions to contend with, or any drowsiness to regret: their fears are dissipated, their hopes are realized, and their most enlarged desires are swallowed up in actual fruition.

***~~2. The foolish virgins who neglected their preparation, were forever excluded—~~***

No sooner was the bridegroom with his retinue entered into the house, than the door was shut. The door, which shut in the one, precluded all hope of admittance to the other. In vain did the foolish virgins come and cry for admission; all knowledge of them was disclaimed by the bridegroom, and they were left in "outer darkness."

Thus will it be to those who shall be called hence before they are prepared to meet their God: the door of Heaven will be shut against them; the supplications, which a little before would have prevailed, will now be disregarded: they honored not the Lord in their life—nor will he now honor or acknowledge them: they are cut off from all hope of joining that blessed society, or of tasting the heavenly banquet: nor will they merely suffer a privation of happiness; they will be consigned over to the punishment due to their offences, an exquisite, irremediable, eternal punishment.

***~~The improvement suggested by our Lord will properly close the subject—~~***

The grand scope of the parable, is to show us the need of watchfulness. The chief argument to enforce that duty, is the uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall come. And is there anyone, to whom we have not occasion to direct our exhortation?

You who, like the foolish virgins, have never yet obtained "the oil of joy and gladness," watch against self-deception. You may make a specious profession of religion, and take occasion from the infirmities of true Christians to think yourselves in as good a state as they. But it will soon appear who they are who have the grace of God in their hearts; and who have only "a name to live, while they really are dead."

Perhaps you think that you shall have time enough to provide oil when the bridegroom's approach shall be announced: but you know not whether you shall have any warning, or whether you shall be able to obtain it then, if you neglect the present opportunity. Be assured that, if the bridegroom comes, he will not wait for you, but will enter with those who are ready, and leave the rest behind him.

O think, what will you do if the door should be shut against you? how will you bewail your folly! Be persuaded now to improve your time. Apply for oil to him who "has the fullness of the Spirit," and will "give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him." Go not to the creature, no, not even to the ordinances, as though they of themselves could impart this blessing. Ministers and ordinances are, as it were, the *pipes*through which it shall be conveyed; but Christ, in his person and offices, is the one *source*of grace; and out of his fullness must you all receive, [Zechariah 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.12-14).

As for you, who, like the wise virgins, are endued with grace, still continue to "watch." You see from your own experience what need you have of this exhortation. Too often have you slumbered and slept already, and thereby exposed yourselves to many alarms. Henceforth "let your lamps be trimmed, your loins girt, and yourselves in actual readiness to attend your Lord." Then, at whatever hour he shall come, you shall have no cause to fear; you shall behold him with joy, and participate in his glory for evermore.

"What we say then to you, we say unto all, Watch!"

#1397

***~~The Talents~~***

***~~[Matthew 25:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.22-23)~~***

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

THE solemnities of the day of judgment were a frequent subject of our Lord's discourse. This was a topic well calculated to fix the attention of his hearers. The nearer he drew towards the close of his ministry, the more he insisted on it: nor can we too often dwell upon it in our minds.

The parable before us leads us to the contemplation of this solemn subject: it very nearly resembles the *parable of the Pounds,*[Luke 19:12-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.12-26). In both the parables a rich man going to a distant country committed a sum of money to his servants to improve for him, and on his return dealt with them according to the use they had made of it, rewarding the faithful and punishing the negligent. Yet are there some important points of difference between them. In that of the pounds all the servants had an equal sum committed to them: but they made a different improvement of them, and were therefore differently rewarded. In the parable before us, the sums committed to the servants were different; but their improvement of them was equal (each having doubled his deposit) and therefore their reward was equal also.

These points will furnish occasion for two important observations:

***~~I. God bestows gifts on every man according to his own sovereign will—~~***

***~~God is the source and author of every blessing we enjoy—~~***

To him we owe it that we were brought into the world of Christian parents, rather than of heathen parents. From him we have received all our bodily and intellectual powers. We possess nothing good, which we have not derived from him, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17).

***~~He dispenses extremely various gifts to various persons—~~***

The greater part of the world are left by him in gross darkness. To the Jews he has given the light of his revealed will. The light that just dawned on them, has visited us in its meridian splendor. But some in this Christian land are scarcely more instructed in the knowledge of Christ, than if they had no concern with him. Others again have had their eyes opened to behold his glory. Great was the diversity of gifts bestowed on the Christians of old, [1 Corinthians 12:5-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.5-12); and there is the same distinction made in the Church at this day, [Ephesians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7). Hence we are called "stewards of the manifold grace of God, [1 Peter 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.10)."

***~~These he bestows according to his own sovereign will—~~***

The rich man in the parable gave to "each according to his ability, verse 15." Thus while he acted sovereignly, he acted also wisely, and in this point of view only can that circumstance be applied. It is not true that God bestows the richest talents on the most able men, 1 Corinthians 1:26-27. Besides, the very abilities we possess are derived from him alone; and, if man's ability were the measure of God's gifts, man would have room to boast, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). God acts in all things according to his sovereign will, [Daniel 4:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.35), [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11). Nevertheless his will is guided by consummate wisdom.

These considerations are indeed humiliating to our proud hearts; but they are inexpressibly comforting to those whose talents are small, and whose afflictions are many. Let such persons weigh them well, and make use of them for the suppressing of envy and discontent. This is a little digression from the subject; or rather an application of it: but it is peculiarly proper in this place, in order to show that *the sovereignty of God is not a speculative point merely, but a practical, and most comforting doctrine*. We are all placed, like the different members of the body, each in the fittest place: and were our situations altered otherwise than God has ordained, the change would be to the detriment both of the individual member, and of the whole body. See [1 Corinthians 12:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.11-12), [18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Corinthians 12.18).

We may well be satisfied with his conduct in this respect; for,

***~~II. He will reward every man, not so much according to the talents he possesses, as according to his fidelity in improving them—~~***

***~~A man, endued with great gifts, will not be the more approved on that account—~~***

The mere possession of great talents does not alter our moral character. Judas was not at all inferior in knowledge to the other Apostles; nor was he less endued with a power of working miracles than they. All his opportunities of spiritual improvement were the same as theirs; but his heart was not changed by means of these privileges; nor was his person the more accepted of God on account of them. *On the contrary, the greater his privileges, the greater was his guilt in neglecting to improve them*; and he now surpasses others in nothing but shame and misery, [Acts 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.25). To this purpose are those warnings which our Lord gave to the cities of Judea, [Matthew 11:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.21-24); nor are those warnings inapplicable to those who hear his Gospel now.

***~~Nor will a person of the smallest talents be on that account overlooked—~~***

"God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the the heart, [1 Samuel 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.7)," He notices them that are of a broken and contrite spirit [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2). Few perhaps have been more destitute of gifts than Lazarus: yet how far better is his state now than the Rich Man's, [Luke 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23-24). The widow that possessed but two mites, was destitute enough; but the use she made of them was more acceptable to God than all the rich offerings of the opulent, [Mark 12:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.43-44). Thus, if we only improve what we have, we cannot fail of a reward. On the contrary, if we bury our talent, though it be but "one," we shall be punished for it.

***~~The Scriptures speak strongly upon each of these points—~~***

They plainly declare that there are degrees of reward and punishment, [1 Corinthians 15:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.41-42), [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21). Our Lord assures us, that the punishment of men will be proportioned to the light against which they have sinned, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48), and Paul affirms, that our services shall be accepted in proportion as they corresponded with our ability to perform them, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12).

***~~Inferences—~~***

***~~1. What little reason is there to envy those who have great talents!~~***

It is evident that *an increase of talent only increases our responsibility*. To many, the advantages they have abused are now their greatest torment; and what reason have we to think, that our diligence in serving God would be excited in proportion as our opportunities were enlarged? We all have too much reason to lament our past unprofitableness. Let us therefore rather improve what we have, than covet what we have not.

***~~2. How earnest should everyone be in trading with the talent committed to him!~~***

The time is shortly coming when we must give our account to God: and how awful will it be to be cast out as "wicked and slothful servants!" How will such characters weep and wail for the opportunities they have lost! On the contrary, how delightful to hear the Savior's plaudit! What a recompense, to "enter into the joy of our Lord!" O let every soul exert itself to the utmost in his service. Let none be discouraged because they can do but little for God. Many who condemn themselves as vile and faithless, shall hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servants!" And many, who are ready to tremble with apprehensions of his wrath, shall be made partakers of his felicity and glory.

***~~3. How little should we regard the attempts of the ungodly to repress our zeal!~~***

Men never condemn their own stewards for being too faithful or diligent: yet if any of the Lord's stewards labor to improve their talent, the world cries out against them as over-righteous. But "it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment." Let the world exclaim against us as hypocrites or enthusiasts, if the Judge of all do but account us good and faithful. His plaudit will abundantly compensate for the obloquy we endured. Let us then, every one for himself, "stir up the gift of God that is in us;" and let us exhort one another in the words of inspiration 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain!"

#1398

***~~The Day of Judgment~~***

***~~[Matthew 25:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34), [41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.41), [46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.46).~~***

Then shall the King say unto those on his *right*hand, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Then shall he say also unto those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

IT is scarcely needful in a Christian assembly to prove that there will be a Day of Judgment; because no one entertains a doubt respecting it: but to impress on our minds a consideration of the judicial process, and of the eternal consequences which will instantly ensue, is of the utmost importance. Taking for granted, therefore, that there is among us a certain and universal expectation of that day, we shall proceed to notice the description which the Judge himself has given of it, from its commencement to its termination.

Let us call your attention to,

***~~I. The preparatory solemnities—~~***

These are comprised under two heads:

***~~1. The coming of the Judge—~~***

Our blessed Lord is ordained to be the Judge both of the living and dead. It is of himself that he speaks, when he says, "The Son of Man" shall come, verse 31. As the Son of Man, he stood at the bar of Pilate: and, as the Son of Man, he will summon the universe to his tribunal. As the Son of Man, he himself was judged, condemned, executed. As the Son of Man, he will pass judgment on all, whether men or devils.

At his first advent he appeared in the lowest state of degradation, "a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people, [Psalm 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.6), but in that day "he will come with power and great glory," surrounded by myriads of his holy angels. The pomp and glory of his appearing will infinitely surpass either the luster of Mount Tabor, or the more terrific splendor of Mount Sinai, [Matthew 24:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.30-31), [2 Thessalonians 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.7-8). His throne will be erected in the air; and the *books*, both "the book of his remembrance," wherein the actions of men were recorded, and the volume of inspiration, whereby they are to be judged, will be opened before him, [Daniel 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.9-10) and in [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12).

***~~2. The summoning of those who are to be judged—~~***

"Before him shall be gathered all nations." Every creature, from Adam to the last of his descendants, shall appear in one vast assembly. Not one shall be absent: not one will be able to withstand the summons of the Almighty, or to elude his all-searching eye. "The great and mighty of the earth" shall then stand on a level with the poorest beggar, [Revelation 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.15). Every one shall appear in his own proper body, 1 Corinthians 15:38, 42. As for the difficulty of collecting the scattered atoms of every individual, atoms that have been transformed into ten thousand different shapes, this is no difficulty with God: he who created them out of nothing by a mere act of his will, can by a similar act of volition reunite the atoms that are necessary to constitute our personal identity: and he will do it "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet:" and when the dead are raised, then, and not until then, will he change the bodies of those who are alive upon the earth, that they also, together with those who are risen, may "meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17."

The whole human race being come into the presence of their Judge, he will proceed to,

***~~II. The trial—~~***

***~~There will be a strict inquiry into their respective works—~~***

There will be a strict regard of their relationship to Christ and his salvation, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16), [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3); and it will be ascertained by the *fruits*which they brought forth. If their faith was not productive of good works, it will be accounted only as the faith of devils.

But what are the fruits which alone will be considered as just evidences of our love to Christ? O that this matter were duly weighed among us! It will not be asked merely, Whether we transgressed the law by grosser acts of sin, such as immorality, or drunkenness, or theft, or perjury, or murder; but whether we were active in doing good to our fellow-creatures for Christ's sake? Whether we "fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick," and delighted ourselves in all offices of love to our fellow-creatures from a sense of love to Christ, and with a view to his glory: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." [Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-36)

Yes, on this will the salvation or condemnation of men depend! Mark it well, my brethren. It is not for formal religious duties or empty professions that any will be accepted, but for active, diligent, unremitted exertions in the cause of Christ. Nor is it for sins of *commission*merely that any will perish, but for sins of *omission.*Compare [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21) with [Matthew 25:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.25), [27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.27), [30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.30), [42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.42), [43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matthew 25.43).

***~~Then will they be separated according to their true characters—~~***

The characters of all will then be as easily discerned as sheep are discerned from goats; and they will be separated accordingly, "the *sheep*on the right hand of their Judge, and the *goats*on his left hand."

Then will be seen two wonderful sights:

1. The RIGHTEOUS, however separated from each other by trifling forms or various sentiments on earth, all united in one body, and perfectly of one heart and mind. Nor will there be so much as one hypocrite found among them: the *tares*which now grow among the wheat will all be plucked up: the *wolves*in sheep's clothing will all be detected; and the whole collective mass be holy, even as God himself is holy.

2. Then also will all the WICKED be standing in one vast congregation together. Those who had mixed themselves with the saints on earth will have the *mask*taken away, and be made to appear in all their natural deformity.

And those trembling saints who were accustomed to number themselves among them, will have had their integrity cleared, and their doubts removed: and all, whether righteous or wicked, will take their proper place, according as the evidence, adduced before their Judge, attested or disproved their piety.

The trial closed, the Judge will proceed immediately to,

***~~III. The sentence—~~***

***~~He will first address himself to those on his RIGHT hand—~~***

Among the reasons which might be assigned for his first pronouncing sentence on the righteous, the principal seems to be that they are to be his assessors in judgment, and to confirm the sentence which he will pronounce upon the ungodly, [Matthew 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.28).

But from the moment of their separation, what joy will fill every bosom! What praises will resound on every side! How delightful will be their anticipation of the felicity that awaits them! What smiles too will beam forth in the countenance of their Judge, when he shall turn towards them!

In his address to them, though he mentions their good works, in order to manifest the equity of his procedure—yet he traces up all their blessedness to the sovereign grace of him who had loved them "from before the foundation of the world." It was the Father who had chosen them from all eternity, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4), who had sent them a Savior; who in due time had called them by his grace; and who was the true source of all the blessings they enjoyed, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17). Hence he calls them, "You who are blessed of my Father." In bidding them to take possession of "the kingdom prepared for them," he marks very strongly the same idea: for he tells them to "inherit" it: by which he clearly intimates, that it was neither earned nor purchased by them, but attained through their adoption into God's family, and their consequent regeneration by the Spirit of grace.

Surely the sound of these gracious words must pour all Heaven into the souls of all to whom they are addressed!

***~~Then he will turn unto those upon his LEFT hand—~~***

But how is his countenance now changed! What anger, what indignation flames in his eyes! And what terrible displeasure is conveyed in his voice! The grounds of their condemnation are explicitly declared. They had neglected to serve him, and to do the things that were pleasing in his sight; and therefore they are bidden to "depart accursed." And it is worthy of observation, that they are not said to be cursed of his Father: no; though the saints owe their felicity to the election of the Father, the wicked do not owe their misery to any arbitrary act of reprobation: the righteous are blessed of the Father; the wicked are cursed of themselves. It is to their own neglect of duty that they must trace their eternal condemnation: they perish, not because there was any want of mercy in God the Father, or of merit in God the Son; but because "they rejected the counsel of God," and would not accept his offered salvation. In this respect the text exactly accords with [Romans 9:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.22-23), where the Apostle states that the vessels of mercy were prepared for it by God; but the vessels of wrath were fitted for it by themselves.

In this world they had said to God, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your ways, [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14)," and in that world their Judge will reply, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your souls: "I never knew you, you workers of iniquity."

The *place*into which they are to depart was not indeed prepared for them, as Heaven was for the saints: it was "prepared for the devil and his angels:" but as the wicked are partakers of their guilt, they shall be also of their punishment.

Then will come,

***~~IV. The execution—~~***

***~~The RIGHTEOUS shall be borne up into the regions of eternal bliss—~~***

On the pronouncing of the sentence, the heavens will be opened, and all the saints will ascend thither to take possession of their thrones. But who can conceive of the happiness of those who are admitted into the presence of their God; who are placed beyond the reach of sin or sorrow, and have an eternity of blessedness before them? What praises, adorations, and hosannahs will resound through all the courts of Heaven!

***~~The WICKED shall be cast down into the regions of eternal misery—~~***

We attempt not to describe their misery; for it surpasses the power of words to express, or of imagination to conceive: but this we assert, that it will be truly and properly *eternal*. It shall co-exist with the felicity of Heaven. The duration of Heaven and of Hell are equal: and if we limit the one, we must limit the other also. If any doubt the eternity of hell-torments, I ask, What shall ever terminate them? Will the *fire*that is kindled there be extinguished? or the *souls*that are cast into it be consumed? Or shall they be *purified*in the fire, and be exalted at a future period to the regions of bliss?

Not one of these things shall ever be: "The fire shall not be quenched:" "the worm of a guilty conscience shall never die, [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)." Instead of being improved by their misery, the sufferers will gnaw their tongues for anguish, and blaspheme that God who inflicts their punishment [Revelation 16:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.8-11). Besides, there is a *gulf*fixed between them and the saints in glory; so that none shall ever pass from the one place to the other, or experience the smallest change in their condition, [Luke 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.26).

How terrible will then be the state of the ungodly! How "will they call upon the hills to fall upon them, and the rocks to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb!" But, what they would not *believe*, they now *feel*to their cost; and shall feel, as long as God himself shall endure, even forever and ever!

***~~Inferences—~~***

***~~1. How important is it to be prepared for death and judgment!~~***

This is the time for preparation: the moment death arrives, our state is fixed forever: "As the tree falls, so it lies." What folly then is it to procrastinate, and to defer our preparation! If death would wait for us, and we could command the influences of the Spirit, and insure repentance at the last, there might be some reason for delay: but when we know not but that the next hour we may be summoned into the presence of our Judge, or that the grace we now despise shall never be offered us again—what madness is it to lose the present moment, and to trifle on the brink of such a precipice! Awake, brethren, from your stupor; and "prepare to meet your God!" Go to the Savior, while yet there is hope concerning you: and let it be the one concern of your lives to "flee from the wrath to come!"

***~~2. How important is it to form a just judgment of our own character!~~***

Suppose for a moment that we judge ourselves now with somewhat too great severity, what harm is done? We disquiet ourselves indeed a little more than is necessary for a few days; but we are stirred up to greater diligence and circumspection; and are stimulated to exert ourselves more earnestly for the securing of the eternal prize.

But what if we lean too much to the favorable side? It will be too late to remedy our error when once we pass into the eternal world. There is no repentance in the grave! It will be no excuse to say, "Lord, I was mistaken; I did not think so much strictness was necessary; I thought that such characters as I were safe, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23)."

Now, therefore, "judge yourselves, that you be not judged by the Lord." Inquire now, what is the tenor of your life. Do not be contented to examine whether you have committed any gross sin; but inquire whether you are running the Christian race, and striving to the utmost to glorify your God by all possible acts and offices of love. Examine particularly, whether all that you do is, not to purchase Heaven, but to testify your love to Christ. If you bring yourselves to any lower standard than this, you will deceive yourselves to your eternal ruin. But, if, after a strict inquiry into these things, "your conscience condemns you not, then you have a scriptural confidence towards God, [1 John 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.21)."

Though our alms-deeds in no way merit Heaven, yet loving the brethren is the mark of the true Christian. Remember that your love must spring from faith in Christ, and be exercised simply for his sake, and to his glory.

#1399

***~~The Importance of Charitable Exertions~~***

***~~[Matthew 25:35-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-40)~~***

"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

THE solemnities of the Day of Judgment can never be too attentively considered: and we have reason to be thankful that they are here so plainly set before us.

The coming of the Judge,  
the summoning of the universe before his tribunal,  
the separation of the righteous and the wicked, and  
the sentence that shall be passed on all the human race  
—are exhibited, as it were, in this passage before our eyes.

But there is one thing here specified, which is more peculiarly interesting to us, inasmuch as it either divests that day of all its horrors, or must cause us to look forward to it with inexpressible dread; I mean, the ground upon which the decision will be formed, and the doom of every individual be fixed.

That the whole of our principles and conduct will be taken into consideration, there can be no doubt; but there is one point which will be inquired into, and will be regarded as a certain evidence of all the rest, namely, our activity in doing good to our fellow-creatures for Christ's sake: and, according as we shall be found to have abounded, or been defective, in that—will our definitive sentence be passed. This is asserted by the Judge himself: and the terms in which he has expressed it lead me to show,

***~~I. The proper exercises of Christian benevolence—~~***

***~~Love is the distinguishing feature of a true Christian—~~***

"God is love;" and every one that is born of God, is "created anew after his image." *The natural selfishness of the human heart is subdued and mortified by the grace of God*; and "the new creature" desires to "live no more unto himself, but unto that Savior who died for him." "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?" is his daily inquiry. To requite the Savior he finds impossible: and therefore he looks out for others to be the representatives of his Lord, that through them he may manifest his sense of the mercies given unto him. He is not contented with cultivating devout affections in his heart, but endeavors to render them substantially operative towards man. In a word, he exercises faith; but it is a "faith that works by love."

***~~The poor and afflicted are the especial objects of that love—~~***

Doubtless love, in its most extended sense, comprehends much more than mere benevolence to the poor: but it is shown in this particularly; and, wherever it exists, will manifest itself in this in a more abundant measure. We have a bright example of this in the person of Job, [Job 29:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-16). So highly did he esteem these duties, that, if he had been remiss in them, he would have accounted himself deserving of the heaviest judgments, [Job 31:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.16-20), [22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.22).

The conduct of the first Christians is not precisely of the kind we are considering; nor is it of necessity to be imitated by us: but it proves to what an extent the principle of love will carry us, if occasion requires it at our hands, [Acts 4:32-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32-35). But the example of the Macedonian Churches comes home fully to the point; and shows us, that not even the deepest poverty, or the severest affliction, will preclude the exercise of self-denying kindness, when love has a proper rule over our hearts, [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4). We lay the more stress on this, because it was proposed for the imitation of the whole Corinthian Church; and because the formation of such a principle, and the production of such a conduct, is the main scope and intent of the Gospel. The particulars specified in our text attest this; as does also that saying of the Apostle, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

To such exertions we may well be stimulated, if we consider,

***~~II. The acceptableness of them to the Lord Jesus—~~***

***~~The Lord Jesus identifies himself with his afflicted people—~~***

He has sympathized with them in every period of the world. What was it but compassion that caused him to undertake the cause of fallen man? When Israel was in Egypt, he heard their cries, and pitied their sorrows, [Exodus 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.7). While they sojourned in the Wilderness, "in all their afflictions he was afflicted." In his state of humiliation, "he made himself poor for their sakes, that they through his poverty might be rich." And now, in his exalted state, he considers their cause his own.

Are they persecuted? *he*, as he told the persecuting Saul, is the person injured, [Acts 9:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4-5). "Whoever touches them, touches the apple of his eye."

Are they relieved? he tells us in the text, that every office of love shown to men for his sake he accepts, as shown to him. He esteems the poorest of his people as "a brother," and will acknowledge him as such before the assembled universe: or rather, he esteems him as a member of his own body; in the prosperity and happiness of which the Head is no less interested than the member itself.

What a fund has this one declaration laid up for them in every age of the world!

We cannot conceive any other thing which could have so forcibly interested the mind of man. *The obligations which we owe to Christ infinitely exceed anything which words can express, or imagination can conceive.*Were he therefore to command anything—the hope of pleasing him would be a strong incentive to his believing people to obey him: but when he declares, that he will accept as done for himself, whatever is done for others in his name—methinks the diligence of all in serving him should so anticipate the wants and wishes of mankind, as almost to banish misery from the world. But, though the greatness of human miseries, and the fewness of the Lord's people, preclude the hope of such an event as this—yet this one consideration, of administering to the Lord Jesus Christ in the person of his people, animates thousands to the most ardent zeal, and carries them through the most self-denying exertions.

If we need any further stimulus to such exercises, let us consider,

***~~III. The importance of them to ourselves—~~***

The outcome of the final judgment depends altogether upon them. In that day they will be brought forth,

***~~1. As an evidence of our state—~~***

As God has taught us to judge of the tree by its fruits, so will he himself do in the day of judgment. And, whatever may have been our *professions*of faith and love, he will judge of them only by the *fruits*which they have produced. The fruits after which he will inquire, and by which he will be determined, are those spoken of in the text. Where they are found, there must have existed a living faith and real piety, [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27); and, where they are not found, there must have been an entire absence of true love to God, [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17). By this test, therefore, shall every man be tried; and, according to this shall he stand or fall, [James 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13).

***~~2. As a justification of our sentence—~~***

The day of judgment is emphatically called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)" It is appointed, not so much for the awarding of happiness or misery to the sons of men, as for the display of God's equity in these decisions. Much is spoken in the Scriptures of God's having chosen men to salvation, and predestined them to the adoption of children: and, beyond all doubt, the whole glory of man's salvation must be given to him. But still he will evince to the whole assembled universe that there is an equity in his proceedings, and that *the destinies of all exactly correspond with their moral characters*. The labors of love, in which the righteous had abounded, are here produced; and those whom Christ here speaks of as "his brethren," are ready to attest the truth of his assertions.

On the other hand, the neglect imputed to the others is obvious: and though they attempt to extenuate their guilt, it is brought home to them in the most complete manner; nor have they one word to utter in arrest of judgment. Thus is the righteousness of God made manifest; "he is justified in what he speaks, and clear in the judgment which he passes, [Psalm 51:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.4)."

***~~3. As a measure of our reward—~~***

We must not imagine that men are saved on account of any merit of their own. It is not possible that their works of love should ever purchase so great a reward as will then be given them. Indeed, the surprise which they express, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" clearly shows, that they had not founded their hopes upon their own works. They had been redeemed to God by the precious blood of Christ; and in Christ they had trusted as the only Savior of the world. But God is pleased to notice the works which they had done for his sake, and to bestow on them "a reward of grace:" nor is even a cup of cold water, which had been given to a disciple for his sake, allowed to pass without an appropriate reward.

Hence we see that the more we abound in works of charity, the more exalted will be our happiness in Heaven. While, on the other hand, the more means and opportunities of doing good we have neglected, the heavier will be our condemnation to all eternity.

***~~We would further improve this subject—~~***

***~~1. For our instruction in general—~~***

If such are the particular objects to be inquired into in the final judgement, then how little prepared are most of us to meet our God! The generality think it sufficient if they do not occasion sorrow to others, though they never exert themselves diligently to relieve it. But let it be known and peculiarly marked, that the omission of these duties is of itself sufficient to condemn us; and that the sentence of condemnation that is here denounced against the wicked, refers, not to anything which they have done, but to what they have *left undone*.

I know, indeed, that all have not the same ability, or the same opportunity to relieve their afflicted neighbors: but have we availed ourselves of the opportunities that have been afforded to us? If we have, though our efforts have been few and weak, they shall be accepted; for "if there be in us a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not." But if we have not exercised charity to the brethren, then let us not deceive ourselves with vain hopes; for, "as unprofitable servants, we shall be cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

***~~2. In reference to the occasion before us—~~***

The charity for which we plead has a near affinity with that described in our text The particular objects of the Charity should be here stated.

We call upon you then to assist it, by personal exertions, if you can, but at all events by liberal contributions. What would you do if Christ himself were now present, and soliciting your assistance? Would you send him away unpitied and unrelieved? Would you not rather vie with each other, as to who should be most forward, and most liberal in his relief? Know then that he is present, and will accept at your hands whatever you do for him. Know also, that the harvest which you will reap shall be proportioned to the seed you sow, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6).

#1400

***~~The Fearful Prospect of the Impenitent~~***

***~~[Matthew 26:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.24)~~***

"The Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*

"KNOWN unto God are all his works, from the foundation of the world." But *the fore-ordination of God does not in any degree affect the responsibility of man. Man is altogether a free agent, in everything that he does, whether it be good or evil.* The Spirit of God may move him, or Satan may tempt him: but he does nothing without the concurrence of his own will. Hence, when Peter tells the Jews that our blessed Lord was "delivered up to death by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God," he still fixes the guilt of his death on them, saying, "Him you have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain. [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23)."

Just so, in the passage before us, our blessed Lord speaks to the same effect. It had been written of him, "My own familiar friend, whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lift up his heel against me. Compare verse 23 with [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9)." And, in reference to this prediction, our Lord says, "The Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*"

That we may make a suitable improvement of this awful declaration, I will,

***~~I. Show of whom this may be spoken—~~***

We must not confine this declaration to the person of whom our Lord spate; since it is equally applicable to a great variety of characters. It may be applied to,

***~~1. The TRAITOR who sells his Lord—~~***

To Judas the words are primarily applied. But are there no other persons who sell their Lord?

What is the conduct of the lewd voluptuary, the sordid worldling, the ambitious honor-seeker? Each of them says, 'Give me but my price, and I will sell my Lord.' Each of them, in his own particular way, acts the part of "Esau, who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew, [Hebrews 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.16)." Tell them, when in the pursuit of their respective objects, what a loss they must sustain; and they regard you not: the pleasures, the riches, the honors, which they desire, are, in their eyes, of paramount importance; and follow them they will, though they must sacrifice all hopes of ever enjoying the favor of God.

I must say, that these may kiss their Savior in the sight of men, but they are traitors to him in the estimation of God; and, as such, must expect to be made*monuments of his righteous indignation*. "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

***~~2. The INFIDEL who denies him—~~***

The Scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, notwithstanding all the miracles he wrought in proof of his Messiahship: and "their end was according to their works, [2 Corinthians 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.15)."

And are there not, at this day also, infidels who reject Christ, and, under an affectation of superior wisdom, pour contempt upon the Gospel, as a "cunningly-devised fable," deriding its *doctrines*as foolish, and its *precepts*as needlessly severe? These persons designate themselves *rational Christians*; as though "wisdom should die with them:" but they are the most irrational of all Christians; since they set up their own vain conceits above the inspired records, and their own wisdom above the wisdom of God. And shall it not shortly be said, in reference to them, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, and slay them before me!" Yes, "there remains for them no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, to devour them, [Hebrews 10:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-27).""It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

***~~3. The APOSTATE, who renounces him—~~***

We are told respecting those who, "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, are again entangled with them, and overcome; that their last end is worse than their beginning; and that it had been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to depart from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them, [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21)." And how many are there, at this day, who have "left off to be wise, [Psalm 36:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.3)," and "gone back to their evil ways, [Psalm 78:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.57)," and "turned again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22)."

Yes, there are, alas! many who "run well only for a season, [Galatians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7);" and, "under the influence of temptation," like the stony-ground hearers, "fall away." What, then, is their state? "They turn back unto perdition," and seal up themselves under the everlasting "displeasure of their God. [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)." "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

***~~4. The HYPOCRITE who dishonors him—~~***

None have a severer doom than persons of this description. To have the most dreadful portion is to "have our portion with the hypocrites, [Matthew 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.51)." To cry with pretended zeal, "Lord, Lord!" while we do not the things which he commands, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23), can answer no other end than that of deceiving our own souls. [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46). "Our hearts must be right with God," if ever we would be accepted of him, [Psalm 78:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.37), and *the retaining of a single lust, though dear as a right hand or a right eye, will plunge us into inevitable and everlasting perdition,*[Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30). The more distinguished our profession may be, the greater is our sin, if, "while we profess to know God, in works we deny him, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16)." "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

Concerning every one of these persons, so living, and so dying, it must be said, as of Judas, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

And shall I not now,

***~~II. Take up a lamentation over them—~~***

Our blessed Lord "wept over Jerusalem," which he saw devoted to destruction. And shall not "my eyes be a fountain of tears, to run down day and night, [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.1)." for so many of you as, I have reason to fear, are perishing in your sins? Alas! respecting multitudes, I must say,

***~~1. How awful are their delusions!~~***

All of these persons promise themselves impunity.

One thinks he is too noble to be called to account;  
another thinks he is too base to be noticed by God;  
another is so immersed in business, that he thinks he may be well excused;  
another thinks he too intelligent to be deceived;  
and *all*have a foolish idea that God is too good and too merciful to proceed against them.

But there is for every one of us a future state of retribution, when every one "shall receive at the hands of God according to what he has done in the body, whether it be good or evil." If it were not so, we might adopt at once the Epicurean maxim, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die."

But "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ!" and receive at his hands our doom in happiness or misery, to all eternity. Our foolish excuses will then avail us nothing. Our duty was plain; namely, to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," but we chose to prefer other things before it. We must therefore forever lose the blessedness we would not seek, and endure forever the misery which we would not avoid.

If men will not believe this now, they will surely be convinced at the very moment of their death. Then "they will know whose word shall stand, whether God's or theirs, [Jeremiah 44:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 44.28)." "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

***~~2. How bitter will be their reflections—~~***

Let us suppose a man "lifting up his eyes in the torments of Hell," and looking back to the means of grace which he once enjoyed, and the offers of mercy that were made to him in the Savior's name: how bitterly will he bewail his folly! how will he wish that he had been born a heathen; or rather, "that he had never been born at all!" We are told how such persons will be occupied in "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing their teeth," with impotent rage against God.

And what will they then think of the gratifications for which they sacrificed all the felicity of Heaven, and incurred all the miseries of Hell? How will they stand amazed at their folly and their madness! and what language will they find sufficient to express their feelings of self-reproach?

My dear brethren, I would that you would all place yourselves for a moment in the situation of a person at the first moment of his entering into the presence of his God; looking back upon the scenes which he has just left; and looking forward to the scenes on which he is about to enter, and which must continue without mitigation or end to all eternity. Could I prevail on you to realize for a moment that situation, methinks it would be impossible for you not to flee to the Savior, and lay hold upon him, and cleave to him, until he had pardoned your offences, and spoken peace unto your souls.

***~~3. How foolish must you be, if you will not improve your present opportunity of obtaining mercy!~~***

My dear friends, in the name of Almighty God I declare to you, that if only you will come to him in humble dependence on the Savior's merits, "not one of you shall ever be cast out." Nay, more; I declare, that God will seal his pardoning love upon your souls; so that, instead of wishing you had never been born, you shall be able, with most heartfelt delight, to say, "We thank you, O God, for our creation." Yes, indeed: this is an expression which none but a true Christian can fully utter: for all others, whoever they may be, must feel some secret misgivings in relation to their eternal state.

But the man who truly gives himself up to his God, can look forward to the eternal world with joy; knowing that he shall be received into the bosom of his Savior, and reign with him in glory for evermore.

Then I ask you, my friends, Why will you, after having lost so much time already, and having, for anything you know, so little remaining to you, why, I say, will you defer, even for an hour, that repentance which your state calls for, and that application to the Savior which he is so ready to hear? Gladly would I prevail upon you to go home and prostrate yourselves before the throne of grace, and to implore mercy of God in the Redeemer's name.

If you will not do this, what can be expected, but that the time shall come when you will curse the day of your birth, yes, and the day that you ever heard this faithful address! I tremble to think what a swift witness I must be against those who shall still harden themselves against these faithful admonitions. I tremble to think how soon many of you will be found in that state, when it must be said of you, *"It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*But some of you at least, I hope, will take warning before it is too late, and "lay hold on eternal life," before "the wrath of God shall come upon you to the uttermost!"

#1401

***~~The Lord's Supper~~***

***~~[Matthew 26:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.29)~~***

"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

THE great object for commemoration, under the Jewish dispensation, was the redemption of that people out of Egypt. Just so, that which ought to occupy our minds is the infinitely greater redemption which has been given to us, from all the miseries of death and Hell, through the mediation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The one was typical of the other, both in the means and in the end.

The deliverance of the Jewish first-born from the sword of the destroying angel was effected by the blood of the Paschal lamb sprinkled on the doors and lintels of their houses.

The deliverance which *we*experience is through the blood of God's only dear Son, shed for us, and sprinkled on us.

In remembrance of the former, the Passover was instituted, and the people ate the Paschal lamb.

In remembrance of the latter, the Lord's Supper was instituted; and we receive the consecrated bread and wine as memorials of the body and blood of Christ.

The latter of these ordinances supersedes the former; and will itself continue to the end of time in remembrance of our Redeemer's death. To enter fully into the passage before us, we must notice the Lord's Supper,

***~~I. As instituted by Christ—~~***

It was instituted at the close of the Paschal Feast, and with a special reference to the circumstances with which that ordinance was administered. But, without entering into minute particulars, which are more curious than useful, we may observe that *this Supper was instituted,*

***~~1. As a commemorative sign—~~***

Our blessed Lord was just about to suffer and to die for the sins of men. In order, therefore, that this mystery might never be forgotten, he broke the bread, in token of "his body given for men;" and poured out the wine, in token of "his blood shed for them;" and expressly commanded, that in all future ages this ceremony should be observed "in remembrance of him." It was to be a "showing forth of his death until he should come again" at the end of the world, to take all his redeemed people to himself, [1 Corinthians 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.26).

The one great end for which he died was also in this way to be made known to all succeeding generations. The redemption of mankind was the subject of a covenant entered into between the Father and the Son; the Son engaging to make his soul an offering for sin; and the Father engaging, that, when this would be effected, his Son would see a seed who should prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands; yes, "he would see of the travail of his soul, and should be satisfied, [Isaiah 53:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-11)." By the shedding of Christ's blood this covenant was ratified; and the cup which was administered in remembrance of it, was to be to all mankind a memorial, that, on the Redeemer's part, everything was effected for the salvation of men, and that all who would embrace the covenant so ratified should assuredly be saved. "The cup was the New Testament in his blood;" or, in other words, it represented the new covenant which that blood had both ratified and sealed.

***~~2. As an instructive emblem—~~***

The killing of the Paschal lamb was not sufficient; the people must feed upon it, in the manner which God himself had prescribed. So neither is it sufficient that by the breaking of the bread, and the pouring out of the wine, we commemorate the death of Christ. Were the ordinance merely commemorative, that would have answered the end: but it is intended emblematically to show forth the way in which we are to obtain an interest in the Redeemer's death. We must *apply*it, every one of us, to ourselves: we must feed upon it; and by so doing declare our affiance in it: we must show, that, as our bodies are nourished by bread and wine—so we hope to have our souls nourished by means of union and communion with our blessed and adorable Redeemer. Hence the command given to every one, to eat the bread, and to drink the cup. A more instructive ordinance cannot be conceived; since it shows, that it is by an actual fellowship with Christ in his death, and by that alone, that we can ever become partakers of the benefits which it has procured for us.

But my text leads me to notice the Lord's Supper more particularly,

***~~II. As still honored with his peculiar presence—~~***

When our blessed Lord said that "he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until he should drink it new with his disciples in the kingdom of God," he intimated, that there was to be at least some period when he would again hold communion with them in that blessed ordinance. In his life-time he did not: for, on the very day after he had instituted it, he was put to death. Nor did he at any time during the forty days of his continuance on earth, after his resurrection. For, though it is true that "he ate and drank with his disciples after he was risen from the dead, [Acts 10:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.41)," yet he never again partook of the Passover, or of the Lord's Supper; but merely ate and drank in order to show that he was not a Spirit only, but that he possessed a body that was capable of performing all the proper functions of the body. Nevertheless, he had, and ever will have, communion with his people in that ordinance; for he has said, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Again, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

***~~His kingdom, properly speaking, has now come—~~***

The Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, continually represent the Christian dispensation as the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom upon earth. This kingdom is called "the kingdom of God;" and it is that which the Father establishes, through the agency of the Holy Spirit. And this is the kingdom spoken of in my text: for, when Christ had accomplished the redemption of the world by his death and resurrection, then was all that had been typified in the redemption from Egypt, all that had been prefigured in the Paschal feast, and all that was shadowed forth in the Supper of the Lord, "fulfilled, [Luke 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.16); [Luke 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.18)," and, consequently, the time was come for the renewed manifestations of his presence in this sacred ordinance. True, indeed, corporeally he appears among us no more: but spiritually he does; and, according to his promise, "he comes to us and makes his abode with us, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21), [23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)" and "sups with us, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)."

***~~Now, therefore, does he execute what he gave us reason to expect—~~***

He truly, though spiritually, feasts with us, when we are assembled around the table of the Lord. It was not only because of the command that the ordinance should be observed, but on account of the blessing which they obtained in the administration of it, that the first Christians observed it every day, [Acts 2:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.42), [46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46), and for ages continued the observance of it on the Sabbath-day, [Acts 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.7). Though I am not aware of any express promise of a more than ordinary manifestation of the Savior's presence in that sacred ordinance, yet I believe that he does seal it with a peculiar blessing; and I will venture to appeal to the experience of many before me, whether he does not then more particularly "draw near to those who there draw near to him, [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8); and whether he has not again and again, in a more abundant measure, "made himself known to them in the breaking of bread, [Luke 24:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.35)." I think that of spiritual worshipers, there are few who will not attest the truth of these remarks.

But we shall not have a just view of the Lord's Supper, unless we contemplate it,

***~~III. As realized and completed in the eternal world—~~***

Then will the whole mystery of redemption be complete; and then will the kingdom of the Messiah, which is now established upon earth, "be delivered up to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all, [1 Corinthians 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.24), [28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Corinthians 15.28)."

***~~Then shall we spiritually renew this feast—~~***

Of that time our Savior spoke, when he said, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me; that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, [Luke 22:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29-30)." There we read, that "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are sitting at the table," with all the myriads of the redeemed, [Matthew 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11); and there is Lazarus leaning on his bosom, [Luke 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.23), exactly as John leaned on the bosom of the Lord Jesus at the Paschal feast, when this Supper was instituted [John 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.23), [25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.25); [John 21:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.20).

There shall all the redeemed of the Lord be in due time assembled; and the great work of redemption will occupy all their minds, precisely as it does when we surround the table of the Lord. There, at this moment, they are "singing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." [Revelation 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-10)

This, by its reference to the redemption of the world, may well be called "The Song of Moses and of the Lamb, [Revelation 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3)," and to all eternity will "this wine be new" to those who drink it; *the wonders of redeeming love being more and more unfolded to every admiring and adoring soul*.

And will the Lord Jesus Christ partake of it with us?

Yes, he will: "The very Lamb of God himself, who is in the midst of the throne, will feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes [Revelation 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.17)." Did he break the bread, and administer the cup to his disciples when on earth? So will he at the feast in Heaven, as he himself has said, "He will gird himself, and make us sit down to eat, and himself come forth and serve us [Luke 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.37)."

It is indeed but little that we know of the heavenly world: but this, at all events, we may say: He will appear there as "a Lamb that has been slain [Revelation 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.6);" and under this character will he be the light, the joy, the glory of all the hosts of Heaven, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23), administering to all, and glorified in all, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10).

***~~Upon this subject I would ground the following advice:~~***

***~~1. Get just views of this ordinance—~~***

Respecting those who profane it, as a mere qualification for civil offices, I say nothing. I leave them to God and their own consciences. They may be well assured I can say nothing in their favor: nor do I think that it is a light account which they have to give to Him who appointed the ordinance for other ends, which, alas! they altogether overlook.

But there are two mistakes which I would endeavor to rectify; the one is, that the ordinance, as an act, recommends us to God; and the other is, that no one should venture to observe the ordinance until he has made attainments of the highest order in religion. The first of these errors leads to the indulgence of self-righteous hopes; the second operates to the production of slavish fears. Respecting the sanctity of the ordinance, I would not say a word that should diminish the apprehension of it in the mind of any human being. But we should remember what it is, and for what end it was appointed. It is precisely what the Paschal feast was: and as every child of Abraham partook of that, so should every one who truly believes in Christ partake of this. In fact, the whole body of Christians did, for many ages, observe it. No one felt himself at liberty to neglect it: nor would any man have been accounted a Christian, indeed, if he had neglected it.

This then shows, that none who desire to serve and honor God should abstain from it. They should come to it, to express their gratitude to the Lord Jesus for what he has done for them, and to obtain fresh supplies of grace and peace at his hands. Yet no one should think that the performance of this duty has any such charm in it, as to recommend him to God, and to conciliate the Divine favor.

It is Christ alone that can save us: and, whether we seek him in this or any other ordinance, it is He alone that can reconcile us to God. It is not the act of praying, or the act of communicating at his table, that can form any legitimate ground of hope. It is on Christ, as apprehended by faith, that we must rely; and it is only so far as we exercise a simple faith in him, that we can justly hope for acceptance with our God.

Let the ordinance, then, be viewed aright. It is a memorial of the death of Christ, and a medium of communion with Christ, whose body and blood we feed upon in the sacred elements, and by whom we are strengthened for all holy obedience. Let the ordinance be observed in this way, and we shall find it a good preparative for Heaven, yes, and a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself.

***~~2. Seek to realize the great truths declared in it—~~***

Here you behold Christ giving himself for you. In the bread broken, and the wine poured forth—you behold his agonies even unto death, even those agonies which have expiated your guilt, and obtained the remission of your sins. O let the sight fill you with holy joy and gratitude; and let it encourage your access to God, even though you had a thousand times greater guilt upon you than ever was contracted by any child of man! The death of Christ was a propitiation for the sins of the world: and if every sinner in the universe would look to him, it would suffice to conciliate the Divine favor in his behalf, and to save them all, without exception. In a full confidence of this, take the sacred elements within your lips, and expect from God all those blessings which his dear Son has purchased for you.

***~~3. Look forward to the feast prepared for you in Heaven—~~***

Soon, very soon, shall you be called to "the supper of the Lamb in Heaven," and there see the Redeemer and his redeemed all feasting together in endless bliss. May we not well say, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of our God, [Luke 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.15)." Anticipate, then, this blessed day. Watch and wait for your summons hence: survey the glories that shall then encompass you on every side: and let it be your one endeavor now to get "the wedding garment," that shall qualify you to be acceptable guests at that table.

Remember, that "Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7)." Remember that even in this world it is your privilege to "keep the feast" from day to day. And be assured, that the more constantly and entirely you feed on Christ below, the better shall you be prepared for the nearest fellowship with him above, and the fullest possible communication of all his blessings to your souls!

#1402

***~~Christ's Apprehension~~***

***~~[Matthew 26:51-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.51-54)~~***

"And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" "

THE Christian is by profession a soldier: he is to fight a good fight, and to war a good warfare: he is not for one moment to lay aside his armor, or to make a truce with his enemies: nor is he to be satisfied with defensive operations; he must carry the war into the heart of the enemy's country, and attack his strong-holds: whenever he gains a victory, he must exercise no lenity; he must not spare one single foe; he must extirpate all without exception and without mercy: he must "hew Agag in pieces before the Lord."

But "the weapons of his warfare are not carnal:" his armor, whether for defense or assault, is all of heavenly temper; it is "the armor of God," in which he is clothed; and "the sword of the Spirit," with which he attacks his enemies. *If he is combating with a persecuting world, then especially must he be armed with love and patience.*

These indeed are not arms suited to our sinful nature: the fierce and vindictive tempers of men would lead them rather to repel force by force, as Peter attempted to do in defense of his Master. But Christianity disclaims such aid: it is neither to be propagated nor maintained by such means. Our Lord has declared that "those who take the sword shall perish with the sword:" and has shown us, by his own example, that we are rather to "possess our souls in patience;" and to conquer, not by shedding the blood of others, but by suffering our own to be poured forth with meekness and resignation.

These observations naturally arise from the reproof which our Lord gave to Peter, when, with well-meant, but unhallowed zeal, he had attempted to withstand his enemies with the sword. Our Lord tells him that such exertions were both unlawful and unnecessary: they were *unlawful*, because they were quite contrary to the spirit of his religion; and *unnecessary*, because, if he judged it expedient, he could in one moment have legions of angels sent to rescue him from their hands. But as, for the exemplifying of his religion, he forbade his disciples to fight; so, for the fulfilling of the Scriptures, he forbore to deliver himself, though he might have done it in a way that was both easy and legitimate.

We propose to show you,

***~~I. How easily our Lord could have rescued himself from their hands—~~***

***~~God has been pleased on many occasions to effect his purposes by the ministration of angels—~~***

Angels have been employed by him sometimes for the destruction of men, and sometimes for their preservation: and in either case they have always proved mighty and irresistible.

By the sword of an angel God *destroyed*the Egyptian firstborn both of man and beast, [Numbers 20:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.16) with [Exodus 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.23). Where the Lord who protected Israel is distinguished from "the destroyer" who smote the Egyptians. By an angel he smote seventy thousand of David's subjects, for the pride and creature-confidence which he manifested in numbering the people, [2 Samuel 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.16). By an angel he slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army in one single night, [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.36).

Nor have angels proved less mighty to *save*than to destroy. The Hebrew Youths were kept unhurt in the fiery furnace, [Daniel 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.28), Daniel was preserved in a den of hungry lions, [Daniel 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.22), the twelve Apostles were brought forth from a prison to which they had been committed, [Acts 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.19), and Peter, when chained and guarded in an inner prison with all imaginable care and safety, was, on the very night previous to his intended execution, liberated from his dungeon, and restored to the embraces of his praying friends, [Acts 12:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.8-10). These things are effected by the ministration of angels "who excel in strength."

***~~Of these our blessed Lord might have had any number to deliver him—~~***

He had given abundant proof indeed that he could, if he pleased, deliver himself: for on former occasions he had repeatedly withdrawn himself from his enemies, when they thought they had him in their power, [Luke 4:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.29-30), [John 8:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.59); and, but a few minutes before, he had beaten them all to the ground by a word, [John 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.6), showing thereby that he could as easily have struck them dead, after the manner in which the armed bands were smitten when they were sent to apprehend Elijah, [2 Kings 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.10), [12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.12).

But, if he had needed assistance, he could have had legions of angels for his support. He needed only to ask of his Father, and it would be done: above seventy thousand of those powerful beings Computing a legion at six thousand, "twelve legions" would be seventy-two thousand, would be with him in an instant: and if one single angel was sufficient to destroy a hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors in a single night, what could not such a host of them effect, if he chose to employ them in his service?

If then to deliver himself would have been so easy, it will be proper to inquire,

***~~II. Why he forbore to do so—~~***

***~~The Scriptures had spoken much respecting the Messiah—~~***

They contained not only many predictions relative to his death in general, but some which referred to the very circumstances in which he was now placed. It had been foretold, that he should be assaulted by a tumultuous mob, composed of Jews and Gentiles, [Psalm 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-3); rich and poor, [Psalm 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.12), [16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Psalm 22.16); that he should be betrayed into their hands by one of his own disciples, [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9), [Psalm 55:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.12-13) with [John 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18); that he should give himself up to them, when he had power to deliver himself from them, [Isaiah 50:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.5-6) that, instead of resisting them in any respect, he should go like a lamb to the slaughter, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7); and that his disciples, offended at his apparent weakness, should forsake him, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7) with [Matthew 26:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.31).

Now if these Scriptures were not fulfilled, one essential circumstance would be wanting to prove his divine mission.

Moreover, if he should persist in withstanding the malice of his enemies, the eternal purposes of his Father would be frustrated; the very ends for which he had become incarnate would be defeated; and the whole world would be left to perish, notwithstanding all he had both done and suffered for their salvation.

But these were evils greater in our Lord's estimation than ten thousand deaths; and therefore he would not for one moment delay the accomplishment of these Scriptures, when once the proper season for it had arrived.

***~~On this subject we may ground some profitable observations:~~***

***~~1. We can be in no trouble, from whence the voice of prayer cannot extricate us—~~***

Prayer, if it accords with the will and purpose of Jehovah, shall prevail as much for us, as ever it prevailed for any of the saints of old. However imminent our danger be, or however desperate our condition, the pursuing foe shall be diverted from his purpose, [1 Peter 2:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-23); or the voracious whale be forced to disgorge his prey upon the dry land, [John 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.10). Prayer would, if necessary, bring all the angels in Heaven to our support. *Prayer is, in a sense, omnipotent; for it interests the Almighty God in our behalf.*

O let us have worthy thoughts of the power and efficacy of prayer! And if Satan tempts us at any time to give up the contest, let us reprove him in the words of our Lord, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he will send me more than twelve legions of angels" to defeat your malice?

***~~2. We should be contented to go to Heaven in the way that God has marked out for us—~~***

Our frail nature is fond of ease. But *soldiers*are called to endure hardships: and this is the path marked out for us; it is "through much tribulation that we are to enter into the kingdom of Heaven." In this way our Lord himself walked: "though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered," and was at last "made perfect through sufferings." In these things he was our example, whose steps we are to follow, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21). Who are we then that we should be exempt from trials?

If we were to consider them as *punishments*, they are infinitely lighter than what we deserve: but if we consider them as a *furnace*to purify us from our dross, and as an *honor*conferred upon us to render us conformed to our Savior's image—methinks we should not withdraw ourselves from them, even if we had it in our power; but be incomparably more desirous of acquiring benefit to our souls than of enjoying any present ease in our bodies.

***~~3. Our Lord's solicitude about the fulfillment of the Scriptures in things relating to his sufferings, is a pledge to us that he will be no less anxious about their accomplishment in what relates to the salvation of his people.~~***

There are "exceedingly great and precious promises" given to the people of God. Our Lord himself has assured us that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hand;" that "no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper;" and that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly."

Now these "Scriptures cannot be broken;" "nor can one jot or tittle of them fail." We have a security for the accomplishment of them, not only in the veracity of God, but also in the government which Christ exercises over the world at large, and his Church in particular. "All things both in Heaven and in earth are committed unto him;" and all the hosts of Heaven are at his disposal. Will not he then be jealous for his own honor? Will not he who shuddered so at the thought of the Scriptures failing of their accomplishment in his own case, be equally anxious for the fulfillment of them in ours? Let us then humbly commit ourselves to him, assured that, however our enemies may appear to triumph for a time, they shall all be vanquished at last; and that, "having suffered with Christ, we shall also be glorified together!"

#1403

***~~Christ Forsaken by His Disciples~~***

***~~[Matthew 26:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.56)~~***

"Then all the disciples forsook him and fled."

NEXT to the presence of God, there is nothing so comforting in affliction as the *sympathy of friends*. The kind offices of those we love afford us tenfold pleasure in those seasons when trouble has depressed our spirits. On the other hand, *the unkindness of professed friends is a most painful aggravation of any sorrow which we may be called to endure*. The accumulated losses of Job were sustained by him with a holy fortitude and resignation: but, when he found that he was forsaken by his dearest friends, and that they from whom he might have expected pity became his vehement accusers, [Job 19:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.13-14), he could no longer suppress the painful feelings of his mind. It must also have been a bitter ingredient in our Savior's cup, that in the hour of his extremity he was abandoned by his own disciples, who were bound by every tie to follow him even unto death. We cannot even read the record in our text without a mixture of indignation and grief. It forces however upon our minds many profitable reflections, some of which will serve as the basis of our present discourse.

***~~I. How weak is the resolution of fallen man!~~***

Man, as originally formed by God, was capable of carrying into execution whatever his judgment approved or his will decreed: but it is far otherwise with us in our present state. Anyone who had heard the firmness with which the disciples expressed their determination to cleave unto their Lord, and "to die with him rather than deny him," would have supposed it impossible that their resolution should be shaken. But behold, in the time of trial they all forgot their vows, and fled from him with haste and terror. The intrepid Peter, the beloved John, the bold and ambitious James, [Mark 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.38-39), are as weak as the rest of their brethren.

The resolutions which we also form on particular occasions appear immoveable. How earnest are many, when lying on a bed of sickness, to redeem their time; and how determined, if ever they should recover, to devote the remainder of their lives to God!

Yet they are no sooner restored to health than they go back to their former habits and companions, and leave to a distant period the performance of their vows.

It is thus also with many after hearing an awakening sermon: they see how vain it is to render unto God a mere formal or hypocritical service; and they resolve that henceforth they will offer him an undivided heart.

But their hearts are not steadfast in the covenant which they make; and their lives are little else than a series of reformations and declensions without any solid improvement in the divine life.

***~~II. What great evils are even godly men capable of committing!~~***

That the disciples were godly men is certain; for our Lord himself had recently testified, that "they were clean through the word which he had spoken to them." But their conduct on this occasion was most base and shameful. What *ingratitude*were they guilty of in forsaking their Lord, when their presence might perhaps be of most essential service to him! Jesus had conferred innumerable benefits on them: and it was for them that he had exposed himself to these cruel persecutions. Yet how do they requite his kindness? They have a peculiar opportunity to render him most essential service. From their long and constant attendance on him, they above all were qualified to answer any accusations which might be brought against him; and by their united testimony might perhaps prevail against the clamors of his enemies. But they, occupied only about their own safety, refuse him the important aid which they were able to afford, and leave him unprotected in the hands of his blood-thirsty enemies.

The *unbelief*also which they manifested on this occasion was highly criminal. They had been repeatedly told by Jesus that, after his death and resurrection, he would meet them in Galilee. This was equal to a promise on his part that they should be preserved. Moreover, at the very time when he was apprehended, he said in their hearing, "If you seek me, let these go their way." This ought to have been regarded by them as a certain pledge of their security. But so completely were they overcome by fear, that they could not think of safety but in flight.

We do not mention these things to make any man think lightly of sin. Sin is a dreadful evil, in whoever it is found; but most of all in those who profess godliness. And we notice it in the disciples, only that we may put all persons on their guard against it.

and to make them sensible to whom they are indebted for the measure of steadfastness they have hitherto been enabled to maintain.

***~~III. How desirable it is to have right views of Jesus Christ!~~***

Our blessed Lord forewarned his disciples that their desertion of him would originate in their misconception of his character and office: "This night you shall all fall away because of me." They had seen their Divine Master controlling the very elements themselves: from whence they had concluded him to be the true Messiah. But, now they behold him bound, and led away by an armed band, they begin to think that all their former notions were false, and that the expectations which they had founded on his numerous miracles were delusive. Jesus seemed to them now to be like Samson after his locks were cut: he had become weak as other men. Hence they could no longer repose any confidence in him, but fled like sheep without a shepherd.

And is it not thus with the *ungodly*? Why do they despise Jesus, but because they know neither his power nor his grace?

Must we not trace to the same source also the desponding fears of the *contrite*. Surely, if they knew how able and willing Jesus is to save them to the uttermost, they would commit their souls to him without doubt or fear.

We may add also, respecting the *godly*themselves, that if they had brighter discoveries of his glory and excellency, they would be more ardent in their love to him, and more diligent in his service.

We may say of all, as of those who crucified our Lord, that "had they known him (more thoroughly), they would not have acted thus and thus towards him."

***~~From these reflections we shall be naturally led to suggest a word of,~~***

***~~1. Warning—~~***

Some take up a profession of religion hastily, because they do not expect persecution, and others because they do not fear it. But it befits us to guard against inadvertence on the one hand, and self-confidence on the other. Let not any imagine that it is an easy thing to be a Christian; or that they can truly follow Christ without having a cross to bear. We must all, in some measure at least, "drink of the cup that our Divine Master drank of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with:" and therefore we should "prepare our hearts for trials." To every one, therefore, that desires to be a Christian, we would say, "Count the cost!" "lest after having begun to build, you be not able to finish."

To those who are bold and confident in their profession, our warning must bear a different aspect: "Be not high-minded, but fear." Surely when we behold all the disciples, after such vehement protestations of fidelity, forsaking their Lord in his utmost extremity, we have reason enough to be "jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy."

While we "think we are standing firm, we should take heed lest we fall." We should maintain in our minds a constant sense of our proneness to sin; and cry daily and hourly to God, "Hold up my going in your paths, that my footsteps slip not." "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)

***~~2. Encouragement—~~***

The failure of such persons as our Lord's disciples might well cause us to despond, if we had not a firmer foundation to build upon than any resolution of our own. But we have the word and oath of Jehovah for our support: he has said, "I will never leave you; I will never, never forsake you." This promise was fulfilled to our blessed Savior, when he was deserted by all his friends, [John 16:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.32). It was accomplished also on behalf of the Apostle Paul, when he was in circumstances nearly similar, [2 Timothy 4:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16-17). And we also are warranted to expect the same Divine aid and consolation, whenever our necessities peculiarly require it, [Isaiah 43:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.2). Let us then, while we are weak in ourselves, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Only let our trust be in him; and then we need "not fear, though a host should encamp against us," or though earth and Hell should conspire to destroy us. "The grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us," "nor shall anything prevail to separate us from his love!"

#1404

***~~Our Lord's Condemnation by the Jewish Council~~***

**[Matthew 26:62-66](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.62-66)**

And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of Heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."

THE ungodly in their pursuits often manifest a diligence which may put to shame the lukewarmness of God's most zealous servants. Nor is it only in the gratification of their lusts that they display this ardor, but in their opposition to what is good. They feel themselves reproved by the blameless conduct of others, and would therefore gladly bring down all to their own level. Striking is that declaration of Solomon, "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall, [Proverbs 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.16)."

We have a solemn illustration of this in the conduct of the Jewish governors towards our blessed Lord at all times, but especially at the close of his life. The high-priest and Scribes and elders had been occupied in examining witnesses against our Lord until midnight: yet, apprehensive that they had not gained such information as would warrant them to condemn him, they assembled, even the whole Sanhedrin, as soon as it was day, [Luke 22:66](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.66), in the palace of the high-priest; and prosecuted their inquiries with redoubled earnestness, in order that they might effect his destruction without delay. The particular circumstances here recorded shall be noticed by us,

***~~I. In a way of illustration—~~***

In this trial of our Lord there are three things that require our attention;

***~~1. His examination—~~***

His enemies had endeavored to substantiate something against him by means of witnesses, but were defeated by the discordance of their testimony. The high-priest, therefore, had recourse to a method which his office authorized, [Numbers 5:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 5.19-21), and from which he had little doubt of success. He adjured his prisoner, in the name of the living God, to declare the truth upon oath, and either to avow openly, or plainly to disavow, his pretensions to the office of their Messiah. Now if this had been done in a spirit of candor, and with a sincere desire of ascertaining the truth, we think he would have been fully justified in resorting to the measure: for the question was of infinite importance to the whole nation, inasmuch as their everlasting salvation depended on their receiving him if he were indeed the Messiah, and rejecting him if he were an impostor.

The honor of God also was deeply implicated in it: and therefore it was right that he should exert his judicial authority to have the matter, which had so long agitated the nation, brought to a decision.

But there was in the mind of the judge a predetermination to condemn Jesus: and the adjuration had no other object than that of gaining from the mouth of our Lord himself a plea for effecting his destruction. And it is precisely thus that the inquiries of many about religion are made, not so much with a view to obtain useful information, as for the finding occasion against the Gospel, and against those who profess it.

***~~2. His confession—~~***

While the people clamorously brought all kinds of accusations against him, our Lord held his peace; but when the high-priest adjured him in the name of the living God, he could no longer keep silence; but plainly and unequivocally said, "I am" the Christ; "I am" the Son of God. See [Mark 14:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.62). But, to cut off occasion from those who sought occasion against him, he brought to their remembrance a portion of Holy Writ, with which they were well acquainted, and which they were expecting about that time to be fulfilled, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14). It was universally known that Daniel spoke of the Messiah; and that "the Son of Man" should establish a universal kingdom: and our Lord warns his enemies, that however they might despise him on account of the baseness of his present appearance, they would one day "see him coming in the clouds of Heaven," not only to punish Jerusalem, but to judge the world. This should have put them on their guard at least, and prevented that precipitate judgment which they were about to form: but the Scripture has no weight with men who are filled with prejudice; or rather, an appeal to it does but irritate them the more, and render them willing, though unconscious, instruments of fulfilling its predictions.

***~~3. His sentence—~~***

No sooner was this confession uttered, than the high-priest, to testify his abhorrence of what he called blasphemy, rent his clothes. This, though a common way of expressing grief or indignation among the Jews, was forbidden to the high-priest, whose august character was supposed to render him superior to all such transports of passion. Compare 2 Kings 18:37; [2 Kings 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 19.1) with [Leviticus 21:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 21.10). But, on this occasion, he who should have inclined to mercy was the first to condemn the prisoner, and to stir up the whole court against him. Little consideration is needed, when religion is to be opposed: clamor will easily supply the want of argument, and prejudice supersede will the necessity of proof: hence his assessors in judgment instantly adopted his sentiments; and all condemned Jesus, as a blasphemer, to suffer death.

How awful to behold a number of persons, possessed both of the magisterial and sacerdotal office, branding as a blasphemer God's only begotten Son, and, with malice truly diabolical, exclaiming, "He is guilty of death!" What must the heavenly hosts have felt, if they were spectators of this transaction! and how ought we to feel, when we consider that *we bear about with us the same evil dispositions, and, unless restrained by grace, would be as ready as they*to renew the same scenes. We may imagine indeed, that the peculiarity of their situation led them to wickedness which we are incapable of committing: but it is a certain truth, that *we in like circumstances would act as they did, if God did not interpose to enlighten and restrain our minds*. The haste and acrimony with which godly persons are calumniated among us, show clearly that we are actuated by the same principles as the Jews were, and, as far as occasion is afforded, are ready to tread in their steps.

Let us next advert to the history,

***~~II. In a way of spiritual improvement—~~***

In this view much instruction may be gathered from it. We may learn from it,

***~~1. To inquire after Christ—~~***

With what earnestness did the high-priest and elders pursue their inquiries; depriving themselves even of their rest, in order to acquire the information they desired! And are not we equally interested in the inquiry, "Whether he is the Christ, the Son of God?" Should we be content to take this matter upon trust, and not inquire into the grounds on which it stands, and the evidences which are adduced in its support? Or, having ascertained the truth of his Messiahship, should we not examine into the nature of his work, and office, and character? In our spirit, indeed, we cannot too widely differ from the Jews; but in our zeal and diligence we may well propose them to ourselves as objects of imitation. For what is there in the whole world that deserves our attention in comparison of this?

Paul "accounted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Nor let us imagine that the study of the Holy Scriptures is to be confined to ministers: it is a work equally necessary for all, though all cannot devote the same portion of their time to it. And it is a work to which all are competent, as far as is necessary for their spiritual instruction. To all then would I say, "Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Christ!"

***~~2. To trust in him—~~***

When we see our Lord sentenced to death without any fault whatever having been found in him, then we see what is to be our plea at the bar of judgment. This very circumstance of his having been condemned without cause frees us from condemnation. Having no sins of his own, his death was an expiation for our sin; and shall become effectual for the salvation of all who trust in him. To this agree the words of Peter "Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

Hence, while we confess ourselves to have deserved the deepest condemnation, we may point to him as our Surety and Substitute; and may say with the prophet, "He was wounded for *our*transgressions, and bruised for *our*iniquities; the chastisement of *our*peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." O that we may never lose sight of this blessed truth, which is the hope of all the ends of the earth! Let us contemplate it; let us glory in it; let it be the one labor of our souls to "live by faith in him, and to say continually, He has loved me, and given himself for me [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~3. To confess him openly—~~***

Our Lord well knew what would be the consequence of the confession that he made; yet would he not conceal the truth; and shall we be afraid to confess him? When he was not deterred by the most cruel death—shall we be intimidated by a reproachful name? Shall we not rather glory in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake? Yes; let us take up our cross cheerfully, and "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach." If persecution should menace us with its severest penalties, let us be ready to answer with the holy Apostle, "None of these things move me; neither do I count my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy," and fulfill my duty to my Lord. Let us remember, that as he "endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," so shall we also, "having overcome, be seated with him on his throne, as he sits on his Father's throne."

***~~4. Look forward to his second coming—~~***

Before long he will surely come again, according to his word; and "every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him."

But with what eyes will his *enemies*behold him then! How glad would they then be, if they could hide themselves from his presence under rocks and mountains!

Not so his believing people; they will rejoice and welcome his arrival as the commencement and consummation of all their joys. Thus says the prophet in [Isaiah 66:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.5), "Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "Your brothers who hate you, and exclude you because of my name, have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy!' Yet they will be put to shame."

And to the same effect, only in far more awful language, is the testimony of the Apostle Paul in [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-10); "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest," etc. etc. Look forward then, I say, to that day; remembering, that *tribulation is the way to the kingdom*, and that "all who have been partakers of his sufferings now, shall, when his glory shall be revealed, be glad before him with exceeding joy! [1 Peter 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13)." "Having suffered with him, you shall also be eternally glorified together [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17), [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)."

#1405

***~~The Indignities Offered to Christ in the Palace of the High Priest~~***

***~~[Matthew 26:67-68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.67-68)~~***

"Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, Prophesy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

THE sufferings of our blessed Lord were not confined to the garden or the cross; but were continued through all the intervening period without intermission. Those which he experienced immediately after his condemnation by the Sanhedrin, may be considered in a twofold view;

***~~I. As inflicted on him—~~***

We cannot read the account given us by the different Evangelists, without being filled with utter astonishment at,

***~~1. The impiety of his persecutors—~~***

In every civilized state condemned criminals are held as objects of compassion: when once the law is put in force against them, they are treated at least with outward decorum and respect; and everyone would wish rather to alleviate, than to aggravate, their sorrows. But in the servants of the high-priest, if not in some of the Council also, we behold the most savage barbarity, and the most wanton cruelty. To spit in the face of a person was the greatest indignity that could be offered him: and to pluck off his beard by force, must needs be attended with excruciating pain, Yet in this way, together with blows, did they *insult*and *torment*the victim of their malice.

To this cruelty they added the most horrid *blasphemy*. Our Lord was known to have professed himself the Christ; and to have shown himself "a Prophet, mighty in words and deeds." But they made the very offices which he sustained for our salvation a subject of profane derision: they blindfolded him, and then smote him with canes, and with their fists, saying unto him, "Prophesy unto us, Christ; Who smote you?" They had accused him of blasphemy: but another evangelist justly retorts the charge; and says, in reference to their present conduct, "Many other things blasphemously spoke they against him."

Who would have conceived that human nature should be capable of such atrocities?

***~~2. The meekness and gentleness of Christ—~~***

We are told in the foregoing verses, that "Jesus kept silent" amidst all the accusations of his enemies. The same conduct he observed under the aggravated trials that he now endured. Not an angry or vindictive word escaped his lips. How justly might he have vindicated his Divine character, by striking dead upon the spot the persons who so wantonly abused him! He might at least have dwelt more largely on the hint which he had suggested, when adjured by the high-priest to declare his real character, verse 64; and might have told them how he would resent and punish their impieties when they should stand before his tribunal. It might indeed be supposed that he uttered many things which are not recorded in this brief history; but, whatever he might say or do on other occasions, we are sure that, during the whole scene of his last sufferings, "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judges righteously."

But these indignities are to be considered in another view, namely,

***~~II. As bearing testimony to him—~~***

***~~The general agreement between our Lord's character and the prophecies concerning him, is a convincing evidence of his Messiahship—~~***

The circumstances which were foretold respecting him were so numerous, so minute, so improbable, and so contradictory, (if we may so speak,) that no one could have ventured to predict such things respecting an impostor; nor could they have been fulfilled in him by chance. None but God, who orders all things according to the counsel of his own will, could have foreseen them, or have secured their accomplishment: and therefore the things, so foreseen, and so accomplished, infallibly testify, that the person in whom they were accomplished was indeed the Christ.

***~~In these sufferings more especially we see a confirmation of all his claims—~~***

His trials, and his behavior under them, were both subjects of prophecy. Let Micah tell us how the Messiah was to be treated: "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek, [Micah 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.1)." Let Isaiah describe his conduct under that and various other indignities: "He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to those who plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame and spitting, [Isaiah 50:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.6). See also our Lord's own prophecy, [Luke 18:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.32)."

With these lights let me go and search for the Messiah. Where shall I find him? I go into the high-priest's palace: I descend into the hall among the servants; there I see the indignities done unto the despised Nazarene: I behold him smitten on the face with sticks, as well as with their fists. And this marks the accomplishment of Micah's prophecy, I see the inhuman wretches spitting in his face; while he endures all his sufferings with invincible patience. There, therefore, I recognize the Messiah, the Savior of the world; and falling down before him, I exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

***~~In this history we behold, as in a looking-glass,~~***

***~~1. How Christ is yet treated by an ungodly world—~~***

It is not any longer in the power of any to offer him the same personal insults that are recorded in the text: but as those who live in sin are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," so may they with equal justice be said to "spit in his face and buffet him:" and, while they imagine that he neither regards nor notices their impieties, they do in fact repeat the blasphemies of those who smote him, and say, "Prophesy unto us, Christ; Who is he who smote you?"

Let then the indignation which we feel against that blasphemous and inhuman rabble, be turned against ourselves: for, as often as we have violated his laws, and encouraged ourselves with hopes of impunity in sin, we have renewed the transactions of that awful day: and we have even more need to humble ourselves than they, inasmuch as we have professed to acknowledge him as our Savior, whereas they really thought him an impostor, who deserved all that they inflicted on him.

***~~2. How his disciples must expect to be treated—~~***

"The servant must not expect to be above his Lord: if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Indeed, as in the case before us, the very name by which God himself has designated them is used against them in a way of profane derision, and made a term of the most malignant reproach. We appeal to all, whether the children of God are not continually called in Scripture "the elect;" yet is there not in the whole language one single term that is so offensive to the world at large, or that is used with more bitter sarcasm than this. Yes; this is regarded precisely as the terms "Christ and Prophet" were by those persecutors of our Lord: and the same idea of presumption and hypocrisy is now attached to those who claim the former title, as was annexed to the pretensions of our blessed Lord to the office and character of the Messiah.

But as then the contempt poured on Jesus confirmed that very truth which it was designed to invalidate, so the reproach cast on God's elect at this day, is an evidence in their favor: our Lord himself declared, that "it should turn unto us for a testimony, [Luke 21:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.12-13)." Let us not then think it strange if we are called to endure fiery trials; but *let us expect to be conformed to our blessed Savior as well in sufferings as in glory*.

***~~3. How we are to conduct ourselves under such treatment—~~***

We should "arm ourselves with the same mind" that was in Christ Jesus. We should "possess our souls in patience," and "let patience have its perfect work." "Being reviled, we should bless; being defamed, we should entreat; being persecuted, we should suffer it." We should not either in word or deed avenge ourselves, but "give our cheek to the smiters" like him, [Lamentations 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.30), and commit ourselves to him who judges righteously; who will in due time "recompense tribulation to them who trouble us, and to us who are troubled, rest."

#1406

***~~Impenitence~~***

***~~[Matthew 27:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-5)~~***

"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself."

AS Jesus was by his own death to take away the sins of others, it was necessary, not only that he should have no sin himself, [John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.5), but that his innocence should be made to appear by every species of evidence that could be adduced to confirm it. Accordingly, it pleased God so to overrule events, that the witnesses brought against him should not agree in their testimony; that the very judge who was to condemn him should repeatedly pronounce him guiltless; and that even the wretch who betrayed him should, with very peculiar solemnity, attest his innocence.

We might from this circumstance proceed to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequent truth of the religion which he has established. But it is our intention to enter more deeply into the passage before us; and to consider, not merely the general result of Judas' confession, but the various characters delineated in the words before us.

And here we have a very striking *picture*of,

***~~I. The thoughtless sinner—~~***

Judas, it should seem, never thought that his Master would allow himself to be apprehended and put to death. He had often seen Jesus escaping in a miraculous manner out of the hands of his enemies, [Luke 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.30), [John 8:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.59), and confounding the people who came to apprehend him, so that they could not prosecute their purpose, [John 7:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.45-46), and therefore he expected that he would act in a somewhat similar manner on this occasion. It was in the hope of this that he was prevailed upon to sell and betray his Lord. Had he foreseen all the consequences that followed, it is probable he would not, at least for so small a sum, have subjected his Master to such miseries, and himself to such infamy and ruin.

And is it not thus with sinners in general? Do they not all proceed to gratify their own inclinations under the idea that no great evil shall arise from it, either to themselves or others? Had David the remotest thought that his numbering of the people would issue in the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects? Or did he, when sending for Bathsheba, foresee the murder of Uriah, together with about forty others; or the hardening of so many thousands, in that and every age, against the ways of God?

Let us come still nearer home: does the seducer consider what he is likely to bring upon the *young lady*whom he tempts from the path of virtue? Does he contemplate her shame and sorrow, or the inconsolable anguish of her parents; or the temporal and eternal ruin which she herself will bring on others? Does he contemplate her infamous life, her loathsome death, her endless misery? Ah! were he to have one glimpse of all the consequences of his conduct, we can scarcely conceive any man so abandoned as to purchase a momentary gratification at so high a price.

Does he also consider the consequences as they respect *himself*? Alas! he thinks of nothing but the indulgence of his lusts. *He considers the bait, without adverting to the hook.*He promises himself that nothing very calamitous shall result from his conduct. He trusts that through the mercy of God it shall pass unnoticed; or that he shall, by repentance, make compensation for it; or that he shall, by some other means, *enjoy the pleasures of sin, without experiencing its bitter consequences*. With these vain hopes he goes forward, until he finds, too late, that the evil results which he would not anticipate, he is not able to escape.

***~~II. The awakened sinner—~~***

Thoughtless as is the career of the wicked, they cannot always ward off conviction. Even Judas at last "repented." *What a different aspect had sin when his eyes were opened, from what it had when he was blinded by his covetousness!*The wages of iniquity, which at first promised him so much happiness, were now a burden to him, insomuch that he offered them to the chief priests again, and, when they refused his offer, cast them down in the temple with indignation and abhorrence. He proceeded further: he confessed and aggravated his sin; and strove to undo the evil he had committed; yes, and indirectly testified against the wickedness of the priests, who had conspired to shed, and tempted him to betray, the innocent blood of Jesus.

All this indeed proceeded only from a selfish terror, and from a vain hope of pacifying his conscience by these means. In the midst of all, there was no real contrition, any more than in Saul, [1 Samuel 26:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.21); or Pharaoh, [Exodus 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.27), there was no prayer to God; no faith in Christ. Though, therefore, he was *awakened*and terrified, he was far from being truly *converted*to God.

In him we may see the picture of thousands, both in ancient and modern times. Many will make restitution of their ill-gotten gain: many under a sense of guilt will confess some heinous crime; especially when the consequences of it far exceed their expectations.

We do not wish indeed to depreciate the value of such changes: but it is incumbent on us to declare that they are far from constituting true repentance. They argue an *awakened*, but not a *converted*mind. There must be, in addition to all this, a deep humiliation, a lively faith, and an earnest crying unto God for mercy. And if, like Judas, we do not hate sin, but only its consequences; if we confess to man only, and not to God; if we labor to expiate our guilt by restitution or reformation, instead of fleeing for refuge to the blood of atonement—we shall, like him, have no solid benefit from our repentance: our very sorrows will be only a pledge of Hell itself!

***~~III. The hardened sinner—~~***

While some are awakened to a sense of their guilt, others proceed in the commission of the most horrible iniquities without remorse or concern. The conduct of Judas in incriminating himself before those at whose instigation he had betrayed his Lord, should certainly have operated to suspend their proceedings, and to bring them to repentance. But they were bent on the accomplishment of their blood-thirsty purposes, and were alike deaf to the confessions of their agent and to the voice of their own conscience.

But shall we say that this was a singular case? Would to God that similar instances did not perpetually occur! Return to the case of *the seducer*. See him, when the unhappy victim of his wiles comes to him under the most insupportable agonies of mind, and calls on him for comfort and support; what answer so common as that given in the text? The obdurate wretch, forgetful of all the obligations of honor and conscience, replies in answer to all her complaints, "What is that to me? You look to that."

Thus it is also with those who tempt the inconsiderate youth to extravagance; and, having caught him in their net, demand their debts with unfeeling menaces and inexorable rigor. Perhaps in none is such conduct more manifest than in the gamester, who, having gained the property of his companion, discards all thought of his personal and domestic troubles, and, rejoicing over the spoils which he has gotten, says in his heart, "What is that to me? You look to that."

Numberless other instances might be adduced to show, how sin hardens the heart against the temporal distresses of those whom we ourselves have beguiled. And how are we affected by their spiritual trouble? Here, for the most part, our indifference rises to contempt; and, instead of being led by the penitence of our companions to follow their good example, we load them with opprobrious names, alike regardless of their sorrows and of our own safety.

***~~IV. The despairing sinner—~~***

There is a "repentance unto salvation;" but there is also a repentance which leaves room for everlasting penitence "a repentance to be repented of." Such was the remorse which Judas felt on this occasion. It carried him far, would to God that all were even as much affected with their sins as he! But still he stopped short of true repentance. Having no faith in Jesus, [John 6:64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.64); [John 6:70-71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.70-71), he abandoned himself to despair; and, to terminate the present agonies of his mind, he put an end to his existence.

Such despair is not uncommon; nor is it uncommon to behold it issuing in *suicide*. Indeed, it is a very principal device of Satan to urge men to this fatal act, because it most effectually secures his object—the eternal destruction of their souls. He first hides from them the consequences of transgression; then he represents to them their guilt as unpardonable; and then he suggests, that death will put an end to their sorrows.

This temptation is most strongly felt by those who have sinned against light and knowledge. "Putting away a good conscience, they are left to make shipwreck of their faith." And it seems a just and righteous retribution, that those who so ungratefully reject the counsel of God, should ultimately "perish in their own corruptions."

***~~Address—~~***

***~~1. Let us not condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it—~~***

How absurd would it be to bring the treachery of Judas as an argument against the truth of Christianity! Does Christianity encourage treason? Did even the traitor himself approve of his own conduct? If all the twelve disciples had been traitors, it would not have altered the nature of true religion: that is unalterably pure and holy: and *where its operation is effectual, it transforms men into the image of their God*.

***~~2. Let us guard against the love of the world—~~***

This was the root of Judas' apostasy. He loved money, and "was a thief from the beginning," and at last, from indulging in petty thefts, he was prevailed upon for gain to betray his Lord. Thousands of others also are, from the very same principle, yet daily erring from the faith, and piercing themselves through with many sorrows! [1 Timothy 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.10). Let us then beware, lest this "root of bitterness springing up, trouble, and defile, and destroy our souls." We shall find at last, that *to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls, is an unprofitable bargain*.

***~~3. Let us carefully improve the means of grace—~~***

The traitor enjoyed every privilege which man could possess: he had even been warned by Jesus respecting the very crime he was going to commit. Happy had it been for him if he had improved the warning! He would then have shunned the fatal act which precipitated him "to his own place." Happy also would it be for us, if we made a suitable improvement of the warnings and instructions given to us! We would then avoid every species of iniquity, and our feet would be guided into the way of peace.

#1407

***~~The Disposal of the Money Paid to the Traitor Judas~~***

**[Matthew 27:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.9-10)**

"Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me."

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me."

THE more we consider the *number*and *minuteness*of the *prophecies*, the more we must be convinced that Jesus was the person whom God had fore-ordained to be the Savior of the world. One can scarcely imagine it possible, that an uninspired person should venture to predict such remarkable circumstances, as the precise sum that should be paid for the Savior's blood, and the ultimate disposal of that money in the purchase of a potter's field; or that such predictions should be fulfilled by *chance*.

Matthew was more careful than any of the other Evangelists in adducing these proofs of Christ's Messiahship. But the passage cited by him as from Jeremiah, is to be found only in the prophecies of Zechariah. To account for this, many ingenious conjectures have been offered by learned men: but the most probable of them seems to be, either that the name, being abbreviated, was mistaken by some early transcriber, and from thence copied by others This might easily be, as the mistake would be only of one letter. In some copies the name is so abbreviated; or that, no name being mentioned by the Evangelist, an early transcriber inserted erroneously the name of Jeremiah in the margin, from whence it was afterwards incorporated with the text. Some Versions insert no name at all, but read the passage thus; "Spoken by the Prophet." Whatever way we take of solving the difficulty, the fact remains the same, that the peculiar circumstances in the text were foretold many hundred years before their accomplishment.

The words of the prophet, according to their literal import, record a transaction that took place between the prophet and the Jews. The prophet, as God's agent and representative among them, demanded, What value they set upon his labors? They despising both him and the Deity from whom he had received his commission, weighed for his price thirty pieces of silver: upon which, God, indignant at such an insult, ordered him to cast them away to a poor potter, who was at that time working in the temple. See [Zechariah 11:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.12-13). Under this figure God intended to foreshow how the Jews would undervalue the great Prophet whom he would send among them; and how the thirty pieces of silver, which they would pay as "the price of his blood," would be disposed of.

***~~That we may give a practical turn to our subject, we shall deduce from the different parts of it some important observations:~~***

***~~1. For how small a price do men sacrifice their interest in the Savior!~~***

God himself exclaims with astonishment, "The goodly price that I was prized at of them, [Zechariah 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.13)!" Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave, [Exodus 21:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.32), and yet that was (in the estimation of the Jews) the value of Jehovah's mercies, and (in the eyes of Judas and the Jewish rulers) of the Redeemer's blood.

But we, it may be said, know how to form a different estimate of these things. Would to God we did! But *there is no gain so small, no pleasure so transient, but we choose it in preference to Christ, and are willing to part with Christ rather than forego the gratification we desire*. Let sinners of every description attest (for indeed, however reluctantly, they must attest) this melancholy truth.

***~~2. How worthless will those things, for which we sold the Savior, appear to us, as soon as conscience begins to perform its office!~~***

Judas had pleased himself with the thought of enjoying his ill-gotten wealth: but scarcely had he obtained it, before he was far more ready to part with it than ever he had been to procure it. *Sin of every kind appears very different after we have committed it, from what it did under the immediate influence of temptation*. While solicited by our own corrupt affections, we imagine that the particular object of our desire (whatever it may be) will conduce greatly to our happiness: but *when we have swallowed the bait, then we begin to feel the hook*; and oftentimes would gladly restore, if it were possible, all the pleasure we have felt, provided we could at the same time get rid of the sting that it has left behind.

*And what will be our views of sin, when once we come into the eternal world?* How gladly would we then restore the thirty pieces of silver for which we have sold the Lord! Or, if through penitence and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained mercy, with what indignation would we receive a proposal to forego an interest in the Savior for some momentary pleasure, or some trifling gain! *Ten thousand worlds would then appear to us as of no value in comparison of that inestimable pearl.*

***~~3. Of how little avail will it be at the last day, to have rendered unto God a partial and hypocritical obedience!~~***

We blame not the priests for refusing to put into the treasury the money which Judas cast down in the temple: for if the price of a dog, or the hire of a harlot, were not to be presented to God, much less ought money that had been the reward of treachery, and "the price of blood." But we marvel at their hypocrisy, in that they could suborn false witnesses, and persecute unto death an innocent man, and yet profess the smallest reverence for God. Truly, while "they strained out a gnat, they swallowed a camel." They hoped perhaps to compensate for their oppression of Jesus by their gratuitous kindness to strangers. The field having been exhausted by the potter, and rendered unfit for cultivation or pasture, was probably worth no more than what they gave for it, and applicable to no better purpose than that to which they destined it.

Yet, if we know ourselves, we shall not greatly wonder: for we may find a transcript of this very thing in our own hearts. How many are there eminent for truth and honesty, who are yet habitually regardless of all the sublimer exercises of piety! With respect to the second table of the law, they are exemplary; but in their duties to God, they are altogether remiss. In the same manner, there are some who profess a great regard for the Gospel, who yet are defective in their adherence even to truth and honesty. Indeed there are very few, who do not notoriously fail in someone particular: so "deceitful, and desperately wicked, is the heart of man."

But it is certain that an observance of some duties will never procure us an exemption from others: "if we keep the whole law, and yet offend knowingly and habitually in any one point, we are guilty of all," and shall be dealt with as despisers of the Lawgiver himself. And as the name, "Akeldama," perpetuated the memory of the atrocious wickedness committed by the priests, verse 6–8 with [Acts 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.18-19), so shall the very endeavors we use to conceal our impieties stamp them at last with indelible and eternal infamy.

***~~4. How certainly shall every jot and tittle of God's word be accomplished!~~***

Little did the chief priests think of fulfilling the Scriptures: and little do the despisers of God and his Christ reflect, that they will one day be exhibited as proofs of God's veracity. But, as all the most contingent actions of men were infallibly foreseen, and not one single prediction, however improbable, ever failed of its accomplishment; so every promise and every threatening shall be fulfilled in its season, and the lot of men be fixed according to their true character. In this world, we see enough to assure us that God is true; but in the world to come, there shall be in all an irresistible demonstration of it: and every man, whether in Heaven or in Hell, shall be a living witness of his truth. The blessed shall inherit his promised mercies. The damned shall feel his threatened judgments. Let us consider then, that either our salvation or "damnation lingers not;" and that "the things spoken concerning us have an end."

#1408

***~~Pilate's Protest~~***

***~~[Matthew 27:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.24-25)~~***

"When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

IT was appointed under the law, that the animals offered in sacrifice should be without blemish: and, for ascertaining their fitness to be offered, the strictest scrutiny was made. In the various examinations which our blessed Lord underwent, there was an exact accomplishment of this type: and the testimonies given by all who were concerned in his death, seem to have been providentially appointed for the manifesting of his fitness for the great work he had undertaken, even the work of saving a ruined world by the sacrifice of himself.

His hour was now come that he would be delivered up to death: and Pilate, who had investigated every charge that was brought against him, and had already a great many times attested his innocence, now in the most solemn manner entered his protest against the procedure of his blood-thirsty enemies, and declared, that in putting him to death they would murder a just and innocent man; of which atrocious act they, and they only, would bear the guilt.

In reply to this, they said, that if he would only leave them to execute their purpose, they were willing to take all responsibility from him, and all consequences on themselves; "His blood be on us, and on our children!" Thus, even they, at the very time that they demanded his death, unwittingly acknowledged the truth of Pilate's assertions, and set their seal to this blessed truth, that Jesus was "cut off, not for his own sins," but for the sins of those whom he came to save.

Let us however take a nearer view of this subject; and distinctly consider,

***~~I. Pilate's vain protest—~~***

In some respects Pilate may be considered as having acted a bold and honest part; for

***~~This protest of his was very solemn—~~***

It would seem that the washing of the hands in token of innocence, was a custom not unknown to the Romans: and, among the Jews, it was prescribed by God himself; when murder had been committed by some unknown person, and those who, from their proximity to the spot, might be supposed to have had some knowledge of the transaction, were called to clear themselves, [Deuteronomy 21:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.6-7). By this significant action did Pilate proclaim his determination not to imbrue his hands in innocent blood; accompanying it with a solemn testimony in favor of the person accused, and an admonition to his enemies that they, and they only, must be answerable for his death.

Thus far we approve, and applaud his protest.

***~~But it was vain—~~***

In some cases, such a protest would have really acquitted him in the sight both of God and man. If the matter had been to be determined by a majority of voices, his conscience would have been clear. This was the case when Joseph, one of the Jewish council, was out-voted in the Sanhedrin; and God himself acquits him of any participation in their guilt, [Luke 23:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.51).

If the act had not been in itself sinful; and circumstances had occurred that rendered that necessary, which, under other circumstances, would have been inexpedient and improper; then his protest would have cleared him, even though he had done the act against which he protested. For this was the case of Paul, when he was compelled by the intrigues of false teachers to confirm his apostolic authority by an appeal to visions, of which it would otherwise have been inexpedient for him to boast, [2 Corinthians 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.1); [2 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.11).

But Pilate was a governor and a judge, whose duty it was, no less to protect the innocent, than to punish the guilty. He had no right to sacrifice the life of an innocent person to the clamors of a mob. He should have told them plainly, that he would rather sacrifice his situation, and even life itself, than be guilty of such horrible injustice. And, however menacing the rising tumult might appear, *he should have adhered to the path of duty, and risked all consequences*. In not doing this, he neglected his office; and, by consenting to their wickedness, made himself a partaker of it. It was to no purpose to enter a protest against the act, and then join in the commission of it. His saying, "I am innocent," did not make him innocent. On the contrary, we are assured, on infallible authority, that in the sight of God he is considered as a confederate with the very people whom he thus professed to condemn, [Acts 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27).

Nor less vain are many similar protests that are made among ourselves—

What is more common than to reply, in justification of ourselves, 'I must do so.' One says, 'I must be guilty of such and such frauds: it is not my fault, but the fault of the trade. One cannot carry on trade without it.' Another, while he conforms to the sinful customs of the world, urges a similar excuse; 'I must do so, else I shall incur the odium of singularity, and endanger both my reputation and interest. I acknowledge that the things are wrong, but I must do them.' Know then, that, if you must do them, you must also answer for them at the tribunal of God: and that, in that day, "not he who acquits himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord acquits, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The people's rash engagement—~~***

The guilt and punishment of murder were, among the Jews, expressed by "the blood of the murdered person being upon them, [Matthew 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.35)." By this imprecation, therefore, the people meant to relieve Pilate's conscience, and to pacify his fears; engaging, that the crucifixion of Christ should never be considered as his act, but theirs; and that the consequences of it, if any, should come, not on him, but on them and their children. But,

What a rash engagement was this!

What answer would it be to Caesar, if, being summoned to give an account of the injustice committed, and the dishonor brought thereby upon the whole Roman empire, Pilate should say, 'The people forced me to it?' Were not the people his subjects? and had he not the Roman soldiers at his command, to keep them in order? To what purpose was he entrusted with this power, if he did not exercise it? Would this promise, of taking the responsibility on themselves, remove it from him? Assuredly not: on him, and not on them, would Caesar's displeasure fall.

But, supposing they could protect him from Caesar's anger, could they heal the wound which this act would inflict upon his conscience? Would this *stern monitor*be silent at their bidding? No: its remonstrances would be heard in spite of them; and to his dying hour would the voice of innocent blood cry out against him.

Thus, as it respected him, their engagement was vain and worthless; but not so as it respected themselves. God held them to it, and made them feel the fearful responsibility attaching to it. But a few days elapsed, before they expressed their fears lest their imprecations should be answered, [Acts 5:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.28). And before that generation passed away, the Divine judgments came upon them to the uttermost; insomuch that the Jewish historian Josephus, who was himself a spectator of the fact, declares, that such multitudes of the captive Jews were crucified during the siege of Jerusalem, that 'there was not enough room for the crosses to stand upon, and wood to make them of.' Then was their request fulfilled: then was "the blood of Christ on them indeed, and on their children;" and, from that hour to the present moment, have they been "made an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations, [Jeremiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 25.9)."

And how much better are the engagements which many among us are ready to take upon themselves?

When we endeavor to prevail on persons to act against the convictions of their conscience, we are ready to laugh at their scruples, and to ridicule their fears; and with great confidence to pledge our words, that their compliance with our advice will be attended with no bad consequence whatever. But, when we have prevailed over their credulity, can we fulfill our word? Can we in many cases avert even the temporal consequences of their conduct? How much less can we silence the clamors of their guilty consciences! And least of all can we stand between God and their souls in the day of judgment!

But though we cannot fulfill our engagements to them, we must, together with them, answer for our conduct to God; and perish under the accumulated guilt of ruining their souls. "Their blood will be required at our hands!"

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. To discard the fear of man—~~***

You see how true is that declaration, that "the fear of man brings a snare, [Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25)." Had Pilate in the first instance withstood, as he ought, the clamors of the people, he would have never imbrued his hands in the Savior's blood. He might have fallen a sacrifice to their rage, it is true; but he would have had reason to all eternity to rejoice that he had died in such a cause.

And we would ask of you, What are *your*feelings now in reference to any sinful compliances you may have been drawn into, or any injuries you may have suffered in consequence of your non-compliance? Do you not even now see that it is better to regard God than man, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19)? Then "fear not man, who can only kill the body; but fear God, who can destroy both body and soul in Hell: yes, I say unto you, fear Him! [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5)."

Let the conduct of Levi be our pattern, [Deuteronomy 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.9), and the command of Jesus our rule, [Luke 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26-27).

***~~2. To maintain always a good conscience—~~***

God has given us a conscience to be his vice-regent in the soul. It may be said, that Paul sinned in following his conscience, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9). We answer, that he sinned, not in following his conscience, but in having such a misguided conscience. *We should by a constant study of the Scriptures, and by fervent prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, get our conscience enlightened and rectified.*If we neglect to do this, we are answerable before God for all the errors we run into. But still we must follow the light we have. We must listen to the dictates of conscience at all times, and follow them without reserve. Everything that it enjoins we must do, [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17); and nothing that it forbids, [Romans 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.22). If it even suggest a doubt, we must not proceed until that doubt be removed, [Romans 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.23). Nothing is more terrible than an accusing conscience, [Matthew 27:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.3-4). Nothing is more delightful than testimonies of its approbation, 2 Corinthians 1:12. Labor therefore with all your might to acquire a good conscience, and "exercise yourselves night and day to maintain it, [Acts 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.16)."

#1409

***~~The Indignities Offered to Our Lord~~***

***~~[Matthew 27:26-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.26-31)~~***

"Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified."

AT this season The Passion Week. we are naturally led to contemplate the sufferings of our blessed Lord. In general, we think it desirable to fix your minds on some one point; because that, if duly opened, will afford ample matter for one discourse: but now we will rather call your attention to this assemblage of facts; not so much for the purpose of elucidating each particular indignity upon him, as, from a collective view of them, to show you the Lord Jesus Christ,

***~~I. As the predicted Messiah—~~***

***~~There was scarcely an incident relating to his death which was not the subject of a distinct prophecy—~~***

It was foretold that he should be scourged. The Prophet Isaiah says, that "the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed, [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5)." And though the Psalmist appears to speak of Israel at large, yet I think he has also an eye to God's servant Israel, the Messiah, in particular, when he says, "The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows, [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3) with [Isaiah 49:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.3).

The various indignities of mocking and reproaching, and the spitting in his face, were also specifically mentioned: "I gave my back to the smiters, (where the scourging is again referred to,) and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting, [Isaiah 50:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.6)." And the Prophet Micah says, "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek, [Micah 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.1)." And, in reference to these things, the Psalmist says, "Reproach has broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none, [Psalm 69:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.20)."

His crucifixion was plainly declared in the erection of the brazen serpent in the wilderness, [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15); as was also the place where it should be carried into effect, by the burning of the sacrifices outside the camp, [Leviticus 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.12).

These things were also distinctly foreseen, and plainly predicted by our blessed Lord; predicted, too, as subjects of prophecy, which were assuredly to be fulfilled: "He took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go to Jerusalem; and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit on, and they shall scourge him, and put him to death, [Luke 18:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.31-33)."

***~~And these things were all literally fulfilled in him—~~***

His scourging is first mentioned in my text. But this was inflicted to prevent his crucifixion. Pilate hoped, by scourging Jesus, to pacify the anger of the Jews against him, and to move them to compassion towards him, [Luke 23:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.16); [Luke 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.22) with [John 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.1); [John 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.4); [John 19:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.6), so that the very mercy of his judge, no less than the fury of his persecutors, contributed to fill up the destined measure of his sufferings.

The various insults and indignities done unto him are next mentioned. And *where*were they inflicted? In the very hall of Pilate himself, and by the very soldiers who were under his command! The discipline maintained among the Roman soldiers was exceedingly strict: yet did they, under the very eye of the Governor, not execute his wishes, but go in direct opposition to them, to please and gratify the Jews: and thus they, voluntarily, and of their own mind, and in direct violation of their military duty, at the risk of being called to a severe account for it, go beyond the laws, and add punishments which the law did not prescribe, so that the Scriptures of the prophets might, unwittingly indeed on their part, be in everything fulfilled.

His crucifixion closes the scene. But that was not a *Jewish*punishment: it was a penalty inflicted only by the *Roman*law: yet, though the *law*by which he was judged was Jewish, the *punishment*inflicted on him was Roman. But so the prophecies had foretold: and it was not possible that one word of them should fail of its accomplishment. The Roman Governor, without whose authority it could not be executed, did all in his power to prevent it; but could not prevail. He would gladly have embraced the opportunity, which custom had sanctioned, of pardoning one of the prisoners: but the Jews chose rather to have a murderer spared, than Him; a murderer, whose guilt was fully proved, rather than Jesus, whom the judge himself, after the fullest investigation, affirmed to be innocent. *But so God had ordained; and so it came to pass.*

Behold, then, how clear and indisputable is his Messiahship! Things were foretold which had no relation to each other, and which, in the common course of events, were inconsistent with each other. But in him they all combined; and they came to pass, not through the well-adjusted efforts of friends to fulfill them, but through the unwitting agency of enemies, and through the very efforts which were made to prevent the accomplishment of them. I ask, then, with confidence, "Is not He the Christ? [John 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.29)."

Let us now view him in another light; namely,

***~~II. As our surety and substitute—~~***

***~~Having undertaken to save us, he must bear all the punishment that our sins had merited—~~***

Shame, and misery, and death, were our proper and deserved portion. Even in this world "the way of transgressors is hard," and "there is no peace to the wicked;" and the sentence of death hangs over us: and, in the eternal world, the wicked will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt! [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)."

Who can conceive the contempt and indignation that will then be felt against them by God himself, and by the saints who will sit with him as his assessors in judgment? The sentence that will be denounced against them in that day amply declares that point: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" As for the misery that awaits us, no finite imagination can conceive it, when we shall lie down in the lake of fire and brimstone, and spend a never-ending eternity in "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." In a word, the curse of the law [Deuteronomy 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.23), "the wrath of God," and "the damnation of Hell," which are the bitter ingredients of "the second death," are the sinner's doom!

***~~Now these sufferings, as far as was necessary for our redemption, he bore for us—~~***

Every mark of ignominy was upon him, both in his preparatory sufferings, and in his death itself, which was inflicted only on slaves, and which was declared by the Jewish law accursed. "Who ever beheld sorrow like unto his sorrow, [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12)?" Truly beyond any other person that ever existed upon earth was he despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, [Isaiah 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3)," "the whole nation despised and abhorred him, [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7);" and "his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men, [Isaiah 52:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14)." Finally, in his death, "he became a curse for us, that he might deliver us from the curse" to which we were doomed, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)."

Thus did he not merely die in our stead, "the just for the unjust, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18)," as a common victim in the place of the offender, but he fully discharged our debt in every particular; so that neither law nor justice can demand anything further at our hands.

Methinks we were lying, like Isaac, bound upon the altar, the knife being lifted up to inflict the deadly stroke, and the wood and fire prepared ready to consume us; but Jesus, as the *ram*caught in the thicket, undergoes the whole for us, and restores us to the bosom of our Father and our God. "By his stripes we are healed, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24);" and by his death we live forever, [1 Thessalonians 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.10).

Once more we may, in the midst of these sufferings, contemplate him,

***~~III. As our great example—~~***

***~~What he endured shows us what we also shall have to bear—~~***

"God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)," and our blessed Lord has told us, that, as men hated and "persecuted him, so they will hate and persecute us, [John 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.20)." "The servant cannot expect to be above his master: it is sufficient for him if he be as his lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household, [Matthew 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24-25)."

We may see therefore, in the universality, contemptuousness, and acrimony of his persecutors, what his followers must expect, even unto death. We are expressly told, that "we are called to the same, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21)," and, seeing that he has suffered for us outside the gates of Jerusalem, we must go forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.12-13)."

***~~It shows us, too, in what way we must bear it—~~***

In the whole of these sufferings, we hear not one word of complaint. No, truly, though "he was so oppressed and afflicted, yet opened he not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so opened he not his mouth, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7)." This especially is marked out for our imitation by Peter, "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judges righteously, [1 Peter 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21-23)." To this effect we are instructed by our Lord, and all his holy Apostles: instead of "rendering evil for evil unto any man," we must "love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44)."

Do not let this be thought impossible. It was done by Stephen, in the very hour of martyrdom, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60), and it was nobly carried into effect by Paul, throughout the whole of his ministrations: "We are made a spectacle," says he, "unto the world, and to angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things, unto this day, [1 Corinthians 4:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.9-13)."

Here you see *practical Christianity*: and, if you come from the hall where Jesus so meekly bore all his ignominious treatment, and learn "so to walk as he walked," you will not have beheld this sight in vain. "Consider then, I pray you, brethren, Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself;" that you, under similar treatment, may never be weary nor faint in your minds, [Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3)."

***~~Let me not conclude without further remarking on this subject,~~***

***~~1. How astonishing is the love of Christ to sinful man!~~***

Our blessed Lord, as I have shown, foresaw from the beginning all that would come upon him. Yet, instead of drawing back, he longed for the period even to be baptized with this bloody baptism, and was quite "straitened until it should be accomplished, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50). What manner of love was this! When shall we learn to estimate it aright? O, brethren, seek to comprehend its breadth and length, and depth and height! for it is by that, and by that only, that you can be filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

***~~2. How foolish must they be who do not seek those blessings, for the obtaining of which all these things Jesus endured!~~***

Who would believe that men professing to receive this record as true, and to hope for mercy through these very sufferings, should yet be as careless about *their souls*, as if they were of no value; and as indifferent about *eternity*, as if there were no future state of existence?

Look at the Savior, brethren, and reflect:  
Who he is;  
what he has done;  
what he has suffered; and  
for what end all these things have been effected.

Had your souls been of little value, would all these things have come to pass? Had the future state of existence been a matter of such indifference, would the Son of the Living God have suffered all this for you?

Go to the garden of Gethsemane;  
go to the hall of judgment;  
go to Mount Calvary;  
and learn the value of immortal souls. Go, I say, and learn the folly and madness of neglecting this Savior, through whom alone any person can be saved. I pray you beloved, be in earnest, while yet the sufferings of God's dear Son may avail for you. But if you will not seek after him, then think what your portion must be in the eternal world. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36)

#1410

***~~The Mocking of Christ upon the Cross~~***

***~~[Matthew 27:38-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.38-44)~~***

"Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing."

SOME, from idle curiosity, are fond of attending upon public executions; while others, from a commendable sensibility, could not prevail upon themselves to be present at such a scene. But there is no room for the one or other of these feelings, in the scene now presented to our view. Our corporeal senses can neither be gratified nor shocked: it is by faith only that we can realize the transactions of this day: but if we have faith, we shall "look on Him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as for a first-born son."

In general, the behavior of the condemned person is the chief object of contemplation; that of the spectators is never so much as thought of: it is taken for granted, that that behavior will be decorous, and suited to the solemn occasion. But, in the present instance, we wish particularly to notice the conduct of those who attended the crucifixion of our Lord: and we shall find that their treatment of him is replete with instruction in a variety of views:

***~~I. As an exhibition of man's depravity—~~***

Much of the wickedness of man appears in the arrest, the prosecution, and the condemnation of our Lord: but in no part of his history do we behold such a mass of impiety as in that before us. For all that preceded his crucifixion, there was a reason: it was deemed necessary for the safety of the state that he should be put to death: and, until they had accomplished that object, we do not wonder at anything they did to attain it. But when they had attained it, and there was no further occasion for their hostilities, we are surprised beyond measure that there was no relaxation of their resentment.

On all other occasions, the execution of criminals, however deservedly they suffer, calls forth a measure of compassion: but towards him the fury of all ranks of men raged with unabated force; and, *like dogs, they seemed eager to devour the prey*which they had already seized.

Had this ferocity been confined to soldiers, we might have supposed that it arose from their training and sordid habits. But "the Chief Priests, with the Scribes and Elders, and even the Rulers," all concurred in devouring the Lamb of God! They altogether forgot the demeanor which befitted their rank and office; yes, they lost sight of all the feelings of humanity; and encouraged by their example those atrocities which policy, no less than humanity, should have led them to prevent. Even the malefactors caught the infernal flame; and, unmindful of their own agonies, or shame, or approaching dissolution, united in vilifying the Son of God: accounting themselves so much his superiors, that they might justly make him an object of derision and contempt.

Whatever had been a ground of accusation against him, they now made a subject of profane ridicule. Three years before, he had, in reference to his own body, said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." This had been alleged against him, though not substantiated, as an evidence of his hostility to the temple: and now they cast it in his teeth, challenging him, if he were able, to do a much smaller thing, namely, to come down from the cross. His relation to God as his Son, and his power over Israel as their King, he was also called upon to prove, by descending from the cross: and even his affiance in God was deemed so absurd, that God himself was challenged by them to his assistance. All this too was attended with such outward expressions of triumph as corresponded with the malignant feelings of their hearts. But who would have conceived that even his most benevolent miracles should now be made a matter of reproach against him? Yet were even these brought forward, to give the keener edge to their blasphemies: "He saved others; but he cannot save himself!"

Now view this whole mass of savage cruelty, of base ingratitude, and of horrid impiety; view it as the offspring, not of one superlatively wicked individual, or of any particular class, but of a whole nation; and then you will be constrained to say, "Lord, what is man? Lord, what is man?"

The conduct of the Jews on this occasion is instructive also,

***~~II. As a trial of Christ's perfection—~~***

The sacrifices under the law being required to be without spot or blemish, they were examined with the greatest care, that their fitness to be offered might be clearly ascertained. Now as Jesus was to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world, it pleased God, that, previous to his being offered, he should undergo the strictest examination. Accordingly the severest scrutiny was instituted, and the result of every fresh examination was a stronger attestation of his innocence. But here we see him put into the hottest furnace, which must infallibly reveal the alloy or dross, if any such were found in him. The most eminent of mankind had been subjected to far less trials, and had discovered that they were but men—weak, sinful, and corrupt. *Moses*had "spoken unadvisedly with his lips;" *Job*had "cursed the day of his nativity;" and *Paul*had "reviled the Ruler of God's people."

But in Jesus there was not the smallest error or imperfection. Such was his *patience*, that "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously." He complains indeed by the prophet, "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness;" yet, as another prophet testifies, "He was altogether like a lamb led to the slaughter, and, like a sheep before her shearers, silent."

Such was his *forbearance*too, that when he might justly have called fire from Heaven to consume his enemies, as Elijah did, or caused the earth to open and swallow them up, as it did those who had rebelled against his servant Moses, he would not do it. Nor, on the other hand, would he, as well he might have done, accept their challenge, and prove his almighty power by descending from the cross. He knew that this would not convince them, even if he would do it: he intended also shortly to give them an infinitely stronger evidence of his Messiahship, (even that which he had so often promised them,) by rising from the dead; and he was determined that nothing should divert him from the work which he had undertaken to perform. He might well have said, "Seeing you reject me, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life," I relinquish my work, and leave you to the judgments which you have so richly merited [Acts 13:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.46). But he would not save himself, because he was bent on saving us; and "for the joy that was set before him," of delivering a ruined world, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," until he could say, respecting the whole of his work, "It is finished!"

Here then we have ample proof of his sinless character, and that he truly was, what it behooved him to be, "a Lamb without blemish and without spot."

There yet remains one other view in which their treatment of him is instructive; namely,

***~~III. As a proof of his Messiahship—~~***

The circumstance of his being crucified between two malefactors is declared by the Evangelist to have been an accomplishment of that prophecy, "He was numbered with the transgressors." But it was not only in what they *did*, that his enemies fulfilled the Scriptures; they fulfilled them equally in what they *said*; insomuch that, if they had been ever so desirous to conform to the prophetic writings, they could not possibly have fulfilled them more accurately or more minutely.

David, as a type of the Messiah, tells us how his enemies "wagged their heads" at him; and then specified the very words which the chief priests and elders used on this occasion, [Psalm 22:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.6-8). Now, if we consider how exactly this prophecy was fulfilled, and that there were a thousand years between the prophecy and its completion, we shall see that the most casual circumstances of our Lord's humiliation, no less than those which were more plainly determined, attest beyond a doubt, the truth of his Messiahship.

Let it not be thought, that the notice of these things is a needless repetition. It is by an appeal to prophecy that the Apostles prove the divine mission of their Lord; and therefore, the more fully we mark the accomplishment of Scripture in him, the more abundantly shall we be confirmed in the faith of the Gospel.

***~~Let us then learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. To believe in his name—~~***

It is not a mere assent to the history of the Gospel that we mean to recommend, but a belief in Jesus as the Savior of sinners. Many consider his death as nothing more than a confirmation of his doctrine; but if he died only to confirm his doctrine, his descent from the cross would have been a stronger confirmation of it than his death. It was as an atoning sacrifice that he died; and therefore his death was indispensable for the completion of his mediatorial work: and it is in this view that we call upon you to believe in him. Consider all this contempt and ignominy as endured for you, as "the chastisement of your peace," and as the appointed means of rescuing you from "everlasting shame and contempt".

***~~2. To follow his steps—~~***

Our Lord has taught us to expect the same treatment which he himself received. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." How then on such occasions should we behave? We answer, That he has purposely "set an example for us, in order that we should follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21-23);" and that therefore, whatever we may be called to endure, we should "possess our souls in patience, [Luke 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.19), [James 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.4)." "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing, [1 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.9)." This is the express command of our adorable Savior, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44), and the nearer we can resemble him, the more will he be glorified in us.

I know that we are apt to plead our weakness and irritability as an excuse for our impatience: but this is no excuse—it only shows how unlike we are to our blessed Lord, and how much we need both his mercy and grace. Paul was a man of like passions with us; and he tells us how he conducted himself on such occasions; "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat, [1 Corinthians 4:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.10-13)." Let us remember then, that "the grace of Christ is equally sufficient for us;" that "through his strength we can do all things;" and that the greatest "ornament we can have on earth, is that of a meek and quiet spirit, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4)."

#1411

***~~The Supernatural Darkness~~***

**[Matthew 27:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.45)**

"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land."

IT might well be expected that the crucifixion of the Son of God should be accompanied with circumstances of a peculiar nature; sufficient, when properly understood, to remove the offence of his cross, and to distinguish him from all others who would suffer the same kind of death. *The whole creation is at God's command, and ready, in any manner that he sees fit, to display his power*. The *sun*in particular has been made his instrument for that end. In the days of Joshua, it suspended its course for the space of a whole day, [Joshua 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.12-13). In the days of Hezekiah, it reversed its natural course, and went backwards ten degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz, [2 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.11). And now, at the death of Christ, when risen to its meridian height, it veiled its face in darkness.

The sixth hour corresponded with our noon. How far the darkness extended, whether over the whole earth, as some think, or over the land of Judea only, as our translators thought, we do not take upon us to determine; though we incline to the latter: but, whether more or less, it could not proceed from a natural cause. It could not be an eclipse, because the moon at that time was at the full: and even if it had been an eclipse, it could not have been total for more than a quarter of an hour; whereas this continued for the space of three hours. It was manifestly a miraculous darkness, produced by the almighty power of God, and that too for ends worthy of a divine interposition. It was,

***~~I. An attestation to our Savior's character—~~***

It was ordained by God, that every species of testimony should be given to his Son, in confirmation of his claims as the true Messiah. The particular kinds of testimony were, many hundreds of years before, made the subject of prophecy: and they were almost all of such a nature, as to be independent of his own followers, and consequently incapable of being brought to effect by any concerted plan of theirs. The miracle now exhibited was of that kind: for the whole creation could not have produced such a change in the face of nature: and as it could not be counterfeited, so neither could it be denied: it carried its own evidence along with it.

That this darkness was foretold, we cannot doubt, [Amos 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 8.9). The prophet Joel most indisputably refers to it, [Joel 2:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.30-32), for an inspired Apostle quotes his very words, and declares, that those words related to events which were to happen at that precise period, for the express purpose of attesting the Messiahship of Christ, [Acts 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.16); [Acts 2:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.19-21).

Behold then a proof which cannot reasonably be doubted. True it is, that the Jewish historian does not record the fact: but we well know how averse he was to mention anything that tended to the honor of Christianity, and therefore can account easily for his omission of so extraordinary an interposition of the Deity in confirmation of our religion. But the fact itself is undeniable: and if the three days' darkness in Egypt was a convincing testimony from God to the mission of Moses, so was this mid-day midnight to the Messiahship of Christ.

***~~II. An emblem of his sufferings—~~***

"Darkness" is often used in Scripture as a figurative representation of affliction, [Isaiah 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.30); [Isaiah 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.22); [Ezekiel 32:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 32.7-8).

But it was peculiarly proper as an emblem on this occasion. Our blessed Lord was under the *hidings of his Father's face*, and in the depths of dereliction cried, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" *His sufferings were such as no finite imagination can conceive*. The torments which men inflicted on his *body*were small, in comparison with those which he now endured in his *soul*. All the hosts of Hell were, as it were, let loose upon him; as He himself says, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53)." Above all, the wrath of God was now poured out upon him, as the Surety and Substitute for guilty sinners; according to that declaration of the prophet, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)."

Under such circumstances, what in the compass of created nature could so fitly represent his sufferings as the event before us. Compare [Micah 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 3.6-7) with [Psalm 22:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.1-2), where the image as applied to the false prophets corresponds with the fact as exemplified in our Lord. Hear the description given of those sufferings by the prophet David, [Psalm 88:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.3); [Psalm 88:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.6-7); [Psalm 88:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.14); [Psalm 88:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 88.16); and no wonder "the sun went down over him, and the day was dark, when he had no answer from his God."

***~~III. A prognostic of the judgments that would come upon his enemies—~~***

These were spoken of by Moses and all the prophets; and that too under the image which we are considering, [Isaiah 13:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 13.9-11); [Jeremiah 15:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.1-3); [Jeremiah 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.9).

The prophet Amos, in a fore-cited passage, connects the calamities which they should endure with the very event which prefigured them, [Amos 8:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 8.9-10). Our blessed Lord also foretold them in language not dissimilar, [Mark 13:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.24-26); [Mark 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.30). And how solemnly have these predictions been verified! Surely from the foundation of the world there has never been an instance of any nation suffering such various, accumulated, and continued calamities as they. The darkness of their minds too, no less than the wretchedness of their condition, shows to what an extent the wrath of God is upon them: for a veil is upon their hearts, thicker than even that which obscured the meridian sun. O that at last the veil might be taken away, and that the light of God's countenance might be once more lifted up upon them!

***~~Though this subject may appear unconnected with practice, it may be justly improved,~~***

***~~1. For the humbling of the impenitent—~~***

How awful does the insensibility of man appear, when we see even the material creation more affected, as it were, at the death of Christ, than they! It is a fact, that many who have heard of the death of Christ times without number, and who profess to believe that he died for their sins, have yet never once *mourned for those sins which nailed him to the accursed tree*. Were they to hear of the slightest accident that had befallen their friend or relative, or any trifling loss which they themselves had sustained, they would be affected with it. But the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory is heard of by them without any emotion, even though they themselves were the guilty causes of his death.

But let such ungrateful people know, that if ever they be brought to a just sense of their sins, they will "look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)." The Lord hasten this penitential season to every one of us, [Jeremiah 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.15-16).

***~~2. For the comforting of the afflicted—~~***

It is not uncommon to find persons deeply distressed on account of the hidings of God's face. And we acknowledge that they have cause to be distressed; because it is the most afflictive of all events, and because it never takes place but for the correction of some evil in them. Our blessed Lord, though he had no sin of his own, had evil enough upon him, even the sins of the world: and Job, though in some sense he was "a perfect man," had much to learn, and much to attain. Yet let not any one despond, as though the cheerful light of the sun should no more appear: but let those who "walk in darkness and have no light, learn to trust in the Lord, and to stay themselves upon their God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10)," and then "their light shall rise in obscurity, and their darkness be as the noon-day."

***~~3. For the encouraging of all—~~***

Reviving are those words of the Apostle John, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shines, [1 John 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.8)." All that was obscure in the death of Christ is now made plain; and, blessed be God! the whole mystery of Redemption is now exhibited before our eyes. Yes, on us "the Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in his wings." But as we know not how long the light shall continue with us, let us "walk in the light while we have it, lest darkness come upon us, [John 12:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35)." If anything in the dispensations either of providence or of grace be dark to us at the present, let us contentedly say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter;" and let us wait in patience for that world, where "our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; but the Lord will be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended, [Isaiah 60:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.20)."

#1412

***~~Signs Attendant on Our Lord's Death~~***

***~~[Matthew 27:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.51)~~***

"Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split!"

THE incarnation and death of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son are facts so incredible, that nothing but a concurrence of the most unquestionable proofs can justify us in believing the Scripture report concerning them. But God has been pleased to give us proofs equal to the occasion.

The *birth*of Christ was attested by a multitude of angels, who were sent from Heaven to announce and celebrate the event: and the *death*of Christ was attested by a variety of signs and wonders, which could not fail to impress all whose minds were open to conviction. The miraculous darkness for the space of three hours at mid-day has been already noticed: and we have now to notice two other phenomena: the earthquake, and the rending of the veil. We may suppose indeed that these two events might happen without any particular interposition of Providence to effect them, or any particular end to be answered by them: but such a construction is altogether precluded, both by the prophetic declarations respecting them, and by the light thrown upon them in the New Testament. It shall be our endeavor at this time,

***~~I. To illustrate these phenomena—~~***

These, like the miraculous darkness, may be considered as testimonies from God to the truth of Christ's Messiahship: but we shall direct our attention to them rather as signs, or emblematic representations of mysteries at that time accomplished. In this view let us notice,

***~~1. The earthquake—~~***

This had been predicted by the Prophet Haggai, [Haggai 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.6-7); [Haggai 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.21), and though we might have justly regarded the expressions used by him as designating only some great political convulsion, yet we have reason to think that they had a literal accomplishment in the event before us. It must be remembered, that, at the giving of the Law, "the whole of Mount Sinai quaked greatly, [Exodus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.18), [Psalm 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.7)." Thus at the termination of that dispensation, and the introduction of the Christian dispensation, a similar miracle was wrought: "the earth quaked to its very center; and the rocks were rent asunder:" and we are warranted by an inspired Apostle to declare that that phenomenon shadowed forth the abolition of the whole Jewish economy, and the establishment of Christianity in its place, [Hebrews 12:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.26-27).

It is observable, too, that the Apostle lays all the stress on one particular word of the prophet; (a word which superficial readers would have overlooked;) and shows, that it was intended by God himself to foretell, and to explain the earthquake which we are now speaking of.

The tabernacle and all the things belonging to it were "made" by the hands of men, and therefore were not intended to continue beyond a certain period: but, under the Christian dispensation, everything is spiritual and of Divine origin, and consequently is destined to endure forever: the removal of the former, therefore, and the establishment of the latter, being fixed in the Divine counsels, they were predicted by the prophet, and expressly marked in that one word which the Apostle so correctly notices; "This word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken, may remain."

What obligations do we owe to God for the light which the New Testament reflects on the Jewish writings, and for the confirmation which it receives from them! No uninspired author could ever have discovered such mysteries in so obscure a passage; nor can any one who beholds this inspired exposition of it, withhold his admiration of the unfathomable depths of God's wisdom and knowledge.

***~~2. The rending of the veil—~~***

This was not a mere accident arising from the earthquake, but an appointment of God for the fuller manifestation of his own purpose and grace.

There were two veils in the temple; the one separating the holy place from the outer court, and the other separating the holy place from the holy of holies. This latter veil was for the purpose of screening from the view of men the ark and the Shechinah glory, that bright symbol of the Deity. This was the veil that was "rent in twain from the top to the bottom:" and the rending of it denoted three things:  
first, That the rending of Christ's body was the means of bringing us near to God;  
next, that the mysteries which had hitherto been hid in God were now fully revealed;  
and, lastly, that a new way of access to God was now opened for all people.

Christ speaks of his own body as being typified by the *temple*, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21), and well he might do so, since "in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." But as opening a way for our admission to the Divine presence, it was more particularly typified by the veil; the rending of which marked the violent nature of his death, and the blessed effects resulting from it. This is declared by an inspired Apostle, who, speaking of our having "a way consecrated for us through the veil," adds, "that is to say, his flesh." And this accords with innumerable assertions of Holy Writ, which declare that "Christ has made peace for us by the blood of his cross," and that, whereas we were once "alienated from God, and enemies to him in our minds by wicked works, he has now reconciled us to him in the body of his flesh through death, [Colossians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20-22)."

Moreover, the mystical intent of all the types and figures was now exhibited in the clearest view. As the veil on the face of Moses intimated that the Jews could not discern the end and reason of the ceremonial law, and "the taking away of that veil in Christ" enables us to "behold, as in a looking-glass or mirror, the glory of the Lord;" so the rending of the veil shows us, that all the ends of the ceremonial law were fulfilled in Christ, and that to us is given the substance of what the Jewish Church possessed only in types and shadows.

If we do not now comprehend the glorious designs of God in the work of Redemption, it is not because he has interposed a veil to hide them from us, but because we have a veil upon our own hearts, which we have not desired him to take away. It must be our fault, I say, and not his; for from that hour in which Christ died upon the cross, and especially from that hour when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost to reveal him unto men, "the face of the covering that had been cast over all people was destroyed, and the veil that had been spread over all nations was taken away, [Isaiah 25:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.7-8)."

But that which was most fully and most immediately intended by the rending of the veil, was to open for all people a free and personal access to God, so that they might obtain all his blessings for themselves, without the intervention of carnal sacrifices, and an earthly priesthood. To show to men that no such access was allowed to them under the law, was the use and intent of the veil, [Hebrews 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7-8), "But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing." And to make that way open both to Jews and Gentiles, was the design of God in rending the veil, [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-20) with [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18). This further appears from the time when the veil was rent: for it was at the time of the evening sacrifice, when the priests were in the holy place, trimming the sacred lamps, and offering incense before the Lord. They, of course, must have beheld the interior of the sanctuary; and therefore had in themselves an evidence that God had opened for them a new way of access unto his throne. This is called "a new and a living way;" *new*, because it never was revealed before; and *living*, because it would secure eternal life to all who should come in it. Whereas, if even the high-priest himself had presumed to enter through the veil on any other than the day of atonement, or in any other manner than that prescribed by the law, he would have been struck dead upon the spot, or have been put to death as a presumptuous transgressor. But now every person in the universe may come to God, and find acceptance with him at his mercy-seat: if only he takes the blood of his great Sacrifice, and bring it by faith to the throne of God, he shall find that there no longer exists any difference between "Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female, but that we are all one in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.28)."

Such is clearly the import of these phenomena: we now come,

***~~II. To show the improvement we should make of them—~~***

Here we might suggest many things; but for brevity's sake we shall confine ourselves to two which are particularly suggested by the holy Apostle. We should,

***~~1. Receive and honor the dispensation which God has introduced—~~***

Consider the nature of that dispensation which preceded it; how dark, how unsatisfactory, how burdensome!

Compare with it the dispensation under which we live, a dispensation of light and liberty, of peace and joy.

See the two contrasted by the Apostle in [Hebrews 12:18-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-24); and then hear him declaring the abolition of the one, and the establishment of the other, and prescribing our duty in reference to that which we are privileged to enjoy, [Hebrews 12:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25-29). Note also the argument with which he enforces an obedient attention to it: He reminds us of the judgments which fell on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, for refusing to comply with God's former appointments, which were carnal and earthly, and appeals to us respecting the impossibility of our escaping, if we disregard those which are spiritual and heavenly, since God, at this time, no less than formerly, is to those who offend him, "a consuming fire! [Hebrews 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.29)." Comply then with the commands of God, and "receive not the grace of God in vain."

Only remember wherein the main difference between the two dispensations consists:

The one consisted altogether of forms and shadows; the other contains the substance.

In the one, the sacrifices were beasts of the field, and the priests who offered them were guilty creatures like ourselves. In the other, Christ is our Sacrifice, and our great High Priest; and in his mediation and intercession must be all our salvation and all our hope.

The earthquake shook the whole legal fabric, and removed it all, so that the Church is liberated from all its observances. In like manner must all legal principles be removed from us; and the freedom granted to the Church must be realized in our hearts.

In a word, we must be "new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things must pass away, and all things must become new."

***~~2. Avail ourselves of the liberty which he has conferred upon us—~~***

God invites us all to come to him without fear: He says, "Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you".

But here is the difficulty. To be outward-court worshipers is easy enough: but to get within the veil, to approach God as seeing him that is invisible, to pour out our souls before him, to ask with a full assurance of obtaining whatever we stand in need of; to live in the habit of such fellowship with him as enables us to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;" this requires continual watchfulness and unintermittent exertion. Yet this is the state to which we ought to aspire.

The Apostle, after having, in a fore-cited passage, told us that we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a High Priest over the house of God;" adds, "Let us draw near with a true heart; in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22)." This is the glorious privilege to which we are brought. None need to stand at a distance: the golden scepter is held out equally to all; and "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." We are all, without exception, "a royal priesthood;" he who "has loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, has also made us kings and priests unto our God, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9), [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)." Let none then stand at a distance as unworthy to approach him, but let us go even to his throne, and "open our mouths wide that he may fill them".

***~~#1413~~***

***~~The Guarding of the Sepulcher~~***

[Matthew 27:62-66](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.62-66). Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the Chief Priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, You have a watch: go your way; make it as sure as you can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

*THE enmity of the human heart against God will never cease to operate, until the heart itself be changed by divine grace.* One would have hoped that, when so many wonders had been wrought during the crucifixion of Christ, when the whole multitude that were spectators of it smote their bosoms with grief, when the Centurion and others of the heathen soldiers were constrained to attest his innocence, and to proclaim him to be the Son of God; and, lastly, when they had seen some of their own body, even members of the supreme council, paying the most marked respect to his dead body, and committing it to the tomb with funeral honors; one would have hoped, I say, that the malice of the chief priests and Pharisees would have somewhat abated.

But they were still restless: not content with having put him to death, and thereby destroyed, as they imagined, all his influence in the world, they pretended to fear that his disciples would come and take him from the tomb, and spread abroad a report that he had risen from the dead. They certainly had no reasonable ground for such a fear: for, to what purpose could it be for the disciples to carry on such a delusion, when they could not gain anything by it but misery in this world, and destruction in the world to come? But the chief priests wanted to pluck up by the very roots this *dangerous heresy*, as they esteemed it; and to prove to all that Jesus was an impostor. For this purpose they determined to secure the tomb until the time of his predicted resurrection should be passed; and accordingly made their application to Pilate, for such assistance as they judged necessary.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The precautions they used to secure the tomb—~~***

They remembered that Jesus had repeatedly foretold his resurrection on the third day; and they well knew, that, if the report of such an event should be circulated and credited, it would confirm his influence to such a degree that they should never be able to subvert it. They conceived that they had been guilty of a great error in suffering Jesus to live so long: and, if now they should leave it in the power of his disciples to practice a deceit by stealing away the body, and affirming that he was risen, their "last error would be worse than the first."

They therefore, notwithstanding it was the Sabbath, went in a body to Pilate, to request that measures might instantly be taken to defeat any such plot. Yes, though they had often been filled with indignation against Jesus for performing acts of mercy on the Sabbath, they themselves felt no hesitation in violating the sanctity of it, in order to accomplish their malignant purposes.

In their address to Pilate, they designate our adorable Lord as a "deceiver," whose imposture they are determined to detect. They branded him with this ignominious name, well knowing the influence which such appellations have in influencing the decisions of timid or ungodly men.

Pilate acceded to their request, and gave orders that a guard of soldiers from the castle of Antonia should be at their disposal. These therefore they placed around the sepulcher: and, lest any collusion should exist between them also and the disciples, they put a seal upon the stone that closed the sepulcher; and thus secured themselves equally against fraud and violence. The disciples could not overcome an armed guard; nor could the guard connive at their taking away the body without being immediately discovered.

Let us next consider,

***~~II. The advantage derived from thence to the cause of Christ—~~***

Not all the disciples together could have devised a plan that should render such benefit to their own cause as this did. It is true, that Christ's frequent appearances after his resurrection might remove all doubt from the minds of the disciples; but still, if no precautions had been used to secure the tomb, there would ever remain some plausibility in the assertion that the disciples had stolen away the body, and that some other man had impersonated him in his various appearances, and thereby deceived the multitude.

But behold, the enemies of Christ themselves destroy all foundation for such a conceit: and the very means they used to subvert the religion of Christ, have established it on a basis that can never be shaken. By the placing of a guard, the Roman soldiers themselves became witnesses of his resurrection; they immediately declared the event to the chief priests and Pharisees, who gave them large sums of money to conceal the matter, [Matthew 28:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.11-15); and thus the priests themselves, even the whole Sanhedrin, became witnesses of the same. They were forced to invent some story to justify their continued rejection of Christ; but the idea of the whole guard (it is thought of sixty soldiers) being asleep at once, when the penalty of death was annexed to that offence, and the disciples being able to remove the large stone from the door of the sepulcher, and to take away the body without so much as waking one of the soldiers, is too ridiculous to obtain the smallest degree of credit. That this should be done, too, and no one of the soldiers be called to an account for it, when their neglect had, on this supposition, defeated the most ardent wishes of the Jewish rulers, is inconceivable, especially when we know what was the state of the rulers' minds at that time.

Now we can easily conceive what would have been the effect, if Jesus had not risen, and the Jewish rulers had been able, at the expiration of the third day, to bring forth the body, and to show it to the people: they would thus have proved indisputably that Jesus was an impostor, and would have destroyed in a moment all the influence of his name. But their defeat has established the truth of our religion beyond a possibility of contradiction: Yes, we desire no better evidences of its truth, than those which the Roman soldiers and the Jewish Sanhedrin have this unwittingly afforded us: so that we may well say, "Their last error was worse than the first." For, if their forbearance gave Jesus an opportunity of propagating his religion, this device of theirs proved to demonstration the fact on which his religion rests; and has thereby precluded all excuse for their obstinate unbelief.

We would now suggest,

***~~III. Some general deductions from the subject—~~***

Truly this is a triumphant subject to the Christian: for though we cannot but mourn at the idea that our blessed Lord should be treated with such indignities, we are constrained to triumph, when we see how all the efforts of his enemies were overruled for the manifestation of his glory. But there are two thoughts in particular which we would suggest as arising from this transaction:

***~~1. How vain are the counsels of ungodly men!~~***

Doubtless the chief priests and Pharisees exulted in the hope that they had now attained complete success: but their devices were turned to their own confusion. It was thus throughout the whole history of our blessed Lord, and especially in the diversified events of his last hours: his enemies plotted together, and executed all their malignant purposes against him: but behold, in all that they did, they unwittingly "fulfilled the Scriptures, [Acts 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.27)" so that not one word of all the prophecies was left unaccomplished.

In one sense they were Satan's agents; for it was "he who put it into their hearts" to reject and crucify their Messiah: but in another sense, they were instruments in the hands of God, to execute the things which "his hand and his counsel had determined before to be done, [Acts 4:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.25-28)." Thus also it has been with all who have conspired against the Lord in every age: he has invariably "disappointed the devices of the crafty," and "taken the wise in their own craftiness, [Job 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.12-13)."

Two objects his enemies always have in view; the one is, to injure his people, and the other is, to defeat his cause. But they are made, against their will, to advance the interests of both. In the history of Job we are informed, how Satan exerted himself in every possible way to ruin that holy man: but, after all his efforts, he only rendered Job the more exalted monument of grace, and augmented the happiness which he labored to destroy, [Job 42:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.9-10) with [James 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.11).

In like manner, the enemies of the Church have been uniformly baffled in all their attempts against it. They put to death that eminent disciple, Stephen; and raised a persecution against the whole Church, so that none except the Apostles, dared any longer to continue at Jerusalem: but the effect of their persecution was, to destroy one preacher, and to raise up a thousand in his stead! [Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.1); [Acts 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.4).

At another time, having directed their hostility against the Apostle Paul, they prevailed so far as to get him confined in prison for two whole years. What a deadly blow must this, as we should think, have given to the Church! yet Paul himself tells us, that it "turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel;" since many in Caesar's palace, who would otherwise have never heard the word, were brought to the knowledge of it; and multitudes, when they saw his faith and patience, were stirred up to tread in his steps, and "to preach the word without fear, [Philippians 1:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12-14)."

Thus it ever has been; and thus it ever shall be: for Solomon tells us, "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord! [Proverbs 21:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.30)." On the contrary, however "many devices there may be in the hearts of men, the counsel of the Lord, and that only, shall stand, [Proverbs 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.21)." "The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder," which would not subserve his purposes, "shall he restrain, [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10)."

***~~2. How happy are those who have God on their side!~~***

While the Jewish rulers were plotting together for the utter subversion of Christianity, the disciples were unconscious of their machinations, or overwhelmed with despair. But God is the friend of all his people, "an ever-present help in the time of trouble." He is pleased to characterize himself by this very name, "The Savior of those who trust in him, [Psalm 17:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.7), [Jeremiah 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 14.8)." He permits indeed his enemies to triumph for a season; but he warns them of the fearful outcome of their conspiracies against him, [Isaiah 8:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.7-10). As far as they prevail, they ascribe all their success to their own wisdom and power: but he reproves their folly, and visits upon them those very iniquities which he has rendered subservient to the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels, [Isaiah 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-7); [Isaiah 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.12); [Isaiah 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.17).

As for his own people, he encourages them to put their trust in him, without allowing themselves to be alarmed at the menaces of their enemies, or harboring any fears about their ultimate success, [Isaiah 8:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-14). What their happy state should be, we see in the actual experience of David. He contemplates God in the character of an Almighty Protector, [Psalm 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.2); and, when urged by an alarmist to indulge desponding fears, he nobly replies, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in Heaven, [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4)." He even appeals to the whole world, what cause he can have for fear, while he has such an Almighty Friend for his support, [Psalm 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.1).

Such is the privilege of all his people: if "they believe in him, they shall not make haste through unbelieving fears, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16); on the contrary, "their very thoughts shall be established, [Proverbs 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.3)." In a word, they shall, though beset with enemies on every side, be preserved as in a royal pavilion, and have such an inward sense of the Divine presence as shall comfort them under every trouble, or rather screen them from trouble, and fill them with joy unspeakable and glorified [Psalm 31:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.20).

#1414

***~~The Resurrection~~***

***~~[Matthew 28:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.6)~~***

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

AMIDST all the indignities offered to our blessed Lord by the Jewish nation at large, there were some friends who sympathized with him, and desired to manifest towards him all the respect and love which their circumstances would admit of. He had now been put to death, and was committed to the tomb without any of those distinctions which were customarily attendant on an honorable interment.

Some women, therefore, to whom he was dear, brought, very early after the Sabbath, spices, with which to embalm his sacred body. They knew not, indeed, how they would be able to execute their intentions; seeing that a great stone had been placed at the door of his sepulcher, to prevent any one from getting access to the body, to remove it. They came, however, to the sepulcher; and, to their great surprise, "saw the stone rolled away from the sepulcher, and an angel sitting upon it. The angel's countenance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." At this sight, they were greatly alarmed: but the angel speedily composed their minds; saying, "Fear not: for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, but is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Now, believing that you all desire to testify your respect to the Savior this Easter-Day, I would say to you, Come to the sepulcher, where he was deposited, and from whence he rose; "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Come, I say, and see there,

***~~1. A witness for him—~~***

Behold, that empty tomb witnesses to you, in most decisive terms,

***~~1. The truth of his mission—~~***

On his resurrection had our blessed Lord rested the whole of his claims to credibility as the appointed Messiah. At the very commencement of his ministry, he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19)." This was not understood at the time: but, by his enemies, it was brought against him as a charge at the close of his life; and, after his resurrection, it was recollected by his friends as a prediction of the event which had actually taken place.

At another time, when urged by the unbelieving Pharisees to give them some greater sign than they had already seen, he told them, that "no other sign would be given them than that of the Prophet Jonah; for, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, [Matthew 12:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.38-40)."

On several other occasions, also, he spoke of his resurrection as the destined evidence of his Messiahship, [Luke 24:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.6-8), and this was the foundation of all the precautions that were used against an imposition which might be practiced by his disciples. It was feared that they might come by night and steal away the corpse, and then say that he was risen from the dead: and, to prevent it, the tomb was sealed with Pilate's seal, and guarded by a band of soldiers. This was a wise precaution: for, if the third day should pass away, and he be found in the grave, he would be proved an impostor at once; and all his influence would die away. But he rose at the appointed time, and thereby demonstrated that he was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. This is what Paul has plainly affirmed: "He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4)."

Come then, I say, and inspect the tomb; and learn from that, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world!

***~~2. The sufficiency of his mediation—~~***

The Lord Jesus undertook to expiate the guilt of a ruined world, and to redeem them to God by his blood. Under the sins of men he died. But who could be sure that his atonement had prevailed for the end for which it had been offered? He had mediated, it is true: but who could tell that his mediation had been accepted? How could that point be satisfactorily ascertained? His resurrection proved it beyond a doubt.

If a man, who has undertaken, as a surety, to pay a debt, be liberated from prison, you conclude, of course, that he has fulfilled his engagement: his discharge is an evidence that the creditor has no further claim upon him.

So, when we see Jesus raised from the grave, to which he had been committed for the sins of men, no doubt can remain upon our minds but that he satisfied all the claims of law and justice in our behalf.

The two *goats*which were offered on the day of atonement, and the two *birds*that were offered at the cleansing of the leper, exhibited this mystery in a striking point of view, [Leviticus 16:15-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.15-22); [Leviticus 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.4-7). The dying goat represented his death; and the scape-goat, which bore away the sins of all Israel, his resurrection. The living bird, too, that was dipped in the blood of the slain bird, and was let loose into the air, for the perfect cleansing of the leper, suggested the same blessed truth; that "Christ would die for our offences; and that he would rise again for our justification, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)." Had he not risen, we had been yet in our sins, [1 Corinthians 15:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.17);" but, seeing that "he has both died and risen," we may defy all our enemies; and say with confidence, "Who is he who shall condemn me? [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34)"

In this tomb, also, you may see,

***~~II. A pledge to us—~~***

Yes, truly, it is a pledge,

***~~1. Of Christ's power to raise us to a spiritual life—~~***

The resurrection of Christ is set forth in the Scriptures as a pattern of that which is to be accomplished in all his followers; and by the very same power too, that effected that. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul draws the parallel with a minuteness and accuracy that are truly astonishing. He prays for them, that they may know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places! [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20)." And then he says, concerning them, "God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ, Jesus [Ephesians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4-5)."

Here, I say, you see Christ dead, quickened, raised, and seated in glory; and his believing people quickened from their death in sins, and raised with him, and seated too with him in the highest heavens.

The same thing is stated also, and the same parallel is drawn in the Epistle to the Romans, where it is said, "We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, [Romans 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.4)." But can this be effected in us? I answer, Behold the tomb! Who raised the Lord Jesus? He himself said, "I have power to lay down my life, and power to take it up again, [John 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.18)," and he has further said, "Because I live, you shall live also, [John 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32)."

We may be assured, therefore, that, "if we bear about in our body the *dying*of the Lord Jesus, the *life*also of Jesus shall be made manifest in our body, [2 Corinthians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.10)," if "we be *dead*with him, we shall also *live*with him: for as, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but, in that he lives, he lives unto God; so may we confidently reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 6:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.8-11)." "Being planted in the likeness of his death, we are perfectly assured that we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection, [Romans 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.5)."

***~~2. Of his determination to raise us to eternal life—~~***

Frequently did our Lord say, respecting his believing people, "I will raise them up at the last day, [John 6:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.40); [John 6:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.54)." And, in raising up himself, he has given us a pledge that he will resurrect us. For he did not rise as an individual person merely, but as the Head and Representative of all his people; as it is written, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who slept, 1 Corinthians 15:20." The first-fruits, you know, sanctified and assured the whole harvest: and precisely so does his resurrection assure ours: for, "if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, He who raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in us, [Romans 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.11) and [2 Corinthians 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.14). Indeed this shall be effected by our Lord Jesus Christ himself: for, while he was yet upon earth, he declared, that "all who were in the graves would hear the voice of the Son of God, and would come forth; they that have done good, unto a resurrection of life: and they that have done evil to a resurrection of damnation [John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28-29)."

***~~Address—~~***

***~~1. To the unbelieving rejecter of the Gospel salvation—~~***

You do not believe in Jesus, except as a prophet, a man like unto yourself; who died, indeed, as an example, to confirm his word; but never rose to carry on his work; nor is a Savior to us any more than Moses himself was. Come, then, and inspect the tomb where he was interred: "Come, and see the place where the Lord lay." Tell me, Who removed him thence? Will you adopt the story which the priests invented, and the soldiers were bribed to circulate, that the disciples came by night and stole him away? What! were all the soldiers asleep, when the penalty of sleeping at their posts was death? And if they were asleep, how could they tell what was done? And how did it happen that Jesus, for the space of forty days appeared to various disciples, and at last ascended to Heaven in the presence of five hundred brethren at once?

Some of his disciples, at least, were incredulous enough: Thomas would not believe unless he could put his hand into the print of the nails in his hands and in his feet, and thrust his hand into his side: How came he and all the rest to be persuaded? and how came they to attest the resurrection of Jesus at the peril of their lives, yes, and to lay down their lives in support of that testimony?

If you can believe that these things were done in support of a direct falsehood, from which they themselves could derive no imaginary benefit, you believe what is infinitely more incredible than the very fact which you deny. You may condemn credulity in others: but you yourself are the most credulous of all your fellows. Inspect the tomb of Jesus, and view it with any measure of candor, and you can no more doubt his resurrection than any other fact in the Bible: and, believing that, you must believe all which either Prophets or Apostles have said concerning him.

***~~2. To the humble seeker of a crucified Savior—~~***

To you I will say, as the angel did to the women, "Fear not, for you Seek Jesus who was crucified." The Roman soldiers, who guarded the tomb, had ground enough to fear. The earthquake might well appal them: and the bright angel strike them dead with terror. But nothing have you to fear: for the Savior, even that "LORD, who lay" in the grave and is risen, is your Friend, your Forerunner, your Advocate and Intercessor. He is gone "to appear in the presence of God for you, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)," and has thereby given you an assurance that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

Moreover, when you reflect on the state to which he is risen, you may well have comfort in the prospect of your own death; for you yourself shall rise, like him, and partake of that very glory which he himself possesses. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, [1 Thessalonians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.14)." To you, even the most violent death is but a sleep, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60), and in the morning of the resurrection you shall awake, and "be caught up to meet your Lord in the air: and then shall you be ever with the Lord."

You drooping saints, who are either lamenting the departure of others, or trembling at the prospect of your own, dry up your tears, and "comfort one another with these words! [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.13-18)."

#1415

***~~The Apostles' Commission~~***

***~~[Matthew 28:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.18-20)~~***

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."

THE Apostles spoke and wrote in a most authoritative manner. They issued commands, promises, and threats, in the name of God. We therefore naturally inquire, by what authority they acted. The passage before us gives a most satisfactory account.

In unfolding to yon these words of our Lord, we will consider,

***~~I. The commission which he gave to his Apostles—~~***

***~~This commission was very plain and express—~~***

Jesus, as *God*, possessed all power equally with the Father; but as *Mediator*, he received his power from the Father. He received it, partly, that by means of it he might execute his mediatorial office, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2); and, partly, as a reward for executing it, [Philippians 2:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8-11). This power extended over Heaven and earth. Less than this would not have sufficed for the ends for which it was given; but by this he is enabled to overrule everything for the accomplishment of his own purpose. Nor is it at all diminished by the lapse of ages. It shall indeed cease to act at the last day, [1 Corinthians 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.28); there will not then be any occasion for the exercise of it. But until all the members of the Church are glorified, Jesus will exert this power for their good; and his authority will be the hope and consolation of them all.

It was upon this that he founded the commission he gave to his Apostles. He had formerly sent them to instruct the Jews; he now extends their commission to the Gentiles.

They were to teach all nations. As they were to baptize men in the name of the sacred Trinity, no doubt they were first to make known the persons and offices of the holy Trinity. They were to declare "the *Father*, as our offended, but reconciled, God and Father. They were to make known "the *Son*," as the sinner's advocate and sin-atoning sacrifice. They were to set forth "the *Holy Spirit*," as the enlightener, comforter, and sanctifier of God's elect.

They were to baptize their converts in the name of the sacred Three. Having proselyted men to the Christian faith, they were to initiate them into covenant with God by baptism. But though they first taught adults, and then baptized them; they reversed this order with respect to infants. They took care, however, that in all cases the doctrine they preached should be recorded in the baptismal rite; and that every Christian should either expressly or virtually acknowledge it.

They were also to instruct their hearers in *practical religion*. It is evident they were not to be merely moral preachers. They must of necessity insist much on the offices of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but they were also to inculcate every moral duty, and to enforce every obligation, whether toward God or man.

***~~II. This commission being so arduous, he added a promise for their encouragement—~~***

The Apostles might well have been discouraged from attempting to execute so difficult a service. They were, in themselves, poor, base, and illiterate. They had to propagate principles new, strange, detested. They had to oppose the lusts and prejudices of mankind. They had to bring men from sin to a life of holiness and self-denial; and this, not only without human aid, but in opposition to all the power and policy of the world. They could not therefore but feel themselves unfit for such a task: but our Lord gave them a most encouraging promise.

When Moses declined the service to which he was called, God promised to be with him, [Exodus 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.15), thus Christ engaged to support his disciples in their work. *He assured them of his presence to direct, assist, and uphold them; and to give efficacy to their labors.*To this promise he called their particular attention, "lo!" nor will he fail to accomplish it to the end of the world. Nor was the affirmation added to it without, peculiar energy. "Amen" may be considered as an affirmation or a petition: in either view it should not be overlooked. The promise it confirms, was the solace of all the Apostles; and has been the support of all succeeding pastors. Let every one then add "Amen," as importing both his wish and affiance.

Let us now mark,

***~~III. The bearing which this commission has on us at the present day—~~***

The Apostles were inspired of God to declare what no uninspired man could know; and were empowered by God to work miracles in confirmation of their word. In these respects ministers of the present day cannot for a moment be considered as on a par with them. But, so far as regards the message which we are to deliver,

***~~We have the very same commission with them—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ has had, in uninterrupted succession, servants to make known his name to all the different generations from the apostolic age to the present day: and all who have been called by him to the work of the ministry, have had the same message to deliver, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

In particular, we are to make known the offices of the sacred Three in the economy of redemption; setting forth the *Father*as the Fountain from whence it flows: (for it was from the love he bore to man that he gave us his only dear Son to save us [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16),) and exhibiting his *Son*, his co-equal, co-eternal Son, as our Mediator, through whose obedience unto death our peace with God is obtained: and setting forth the *Holy Spirit*as the Agent who applies to our souls all the blessings which Christ has purchased for us. This mystery, I say, we are to unfold with all possible clearness and energy: and we must insist upon it as the only foundation of a sinner's hope.

At the same time we must require of men to obey the commands of God, and must admit of no other standard of holiness than that which God has given us in his word.

To address ourselves to this work in our own strength were folly and madness. But,

***~~We have also the very same encouragement as they—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ will be with his Church and people "even to the end of the world:" and every faithful minister may expect from him all needful direction and support. He will "give testimony to the word of his grace, [Acts 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.3)," and will clothe it with power divine, that it may effect that for which he has sent it, [Isaiah 55:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.11). However weak in itself, it shall in his hands "be living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)." It shall be as "a hammer or a fire that breaks the rock in pieces, [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29)." In dependence on him therefore we go forth, expecting assuredly, that, notwithstanding the weakness of those who deliver it, "it shall be the power of God to the salvation of those who hear it! [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

Were it not for this encouragement, no man possessed of reason, would presume to undertake the office of a minister: but depending on Christ's promised aid, we do hope that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

**CHARLES SIMEON'S DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARUES**

**The Gospel of MARK**

***~~#1416~~***

***~~The Scope of Our Lord's Ministry~~***

***~~[Mark 1:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.14-15)~~***

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

THOSE Christians who have taken up religion lightly, and have not the root of divine grace within them, will, as soon as persecution threatens them, be ready to renounce their holy profession; while those who have been influenced by a truly Christian principle, will be intimidated by nothing. When Paul was imprisoned at Rome, some were ashamed of his chain and forsook him: but others "waxed confident by his bonds, and were much more bold to speak the word without fear, [Philippians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.14)." This is the true spirit of Christianity, and agrees with the example which Christ himself has set for us.

John was cast into prison for his fidelity in executing the ministerial office. But no sooner did our Lord hear of his imprisonment, than he went into Galilee, where John himself had been preaching, and bore testimony to the very truths which John himself had maintained. The scope of John's ministry had been, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand, [Matthew 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.1-2);" and the instant that this holy man was precluded from any further discharge of his ministry, our blessed Lord insisted on the same awakening topic, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: Repent, and believe the Gospel."

To elucidate this important subject, we shall show,

**I.** **What is the *kingdom*here spoken of—**

The terms used respecting it in our text, sufficiently show what we are to understand by it:

***~~1. It is the kingdom of God—~~***

Every kingdom may be considered as His, inasmuch as he is the founder of all the empires upon earth: "he pulls down one, and sets up another." But this is his in a more eminent manner. It is an empire which he raises over the *souls*of men: it is erected, not by means of carnal weapons, but by an invisible and spiritual influence which he exerts over their minds, whereby he "brings them into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)." It is not an empire determined by any particular boundaries, but spread over the face of the whole earth. *His laws are written in the hearts of his subjects, and reach to the thoughts and desires, as much as to their outward actions.*"It comes not with observation" and pomp, as other kingdoms: it is seated altogether "within men," and consists in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, [Romans 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.17)."

His *subjects*have peculiar privileges, such as no other people upon earth can partake of: but these are altogether of a spiritual nature, and invisible to carnal eyes.

Their *King*is ever with them; every one of them has access to him at all times: and all that he possesses is theirs.

His *power*is incessantly put forth for the protection and support of every individual among them; he orders everything for their good, and is ever occupied in giving them spiritual blessings; giving them a peace which passes understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

In short, it is frequently called "the kingdom of Heaven;" as it well may be, seeing that it is an exact counterpart of that which is in Heaven, and differs only from that in its measure and degree. If only we conceive of God reigning among his saints and angels in Heaven, it will help us more than anything else to understand the nature of his kingdom on earth: the laws of both realms, yes, and the privileges too, are the same: holiness is the law both of the upper and the lower realm, [Ezekiel 43:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 43.10-12); and happiness in God is their one great privilege. The two are allied to each other as the acorn and the oak: *grace*is glory begun; and *glory*is grace consummated.

***~~2. It is a kingdom which was at that time to be established—~~***

The prophets had spoken clearly of a kingdom which was to be erected by the Messiah at an appointed period, [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44), [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14); and it was generally understood, not only among the Jews, but among the Gentiles also, that the time was nearly arrived. What the Samaritan woman said, "We know that the Messiah is coming," may be considered as the public voice at that time.

Now our blessed Lord says respecting it, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand:" and he commanded his disciples to declare the same; and in the event of their message being despised, he bade them declare with increased vehemence to the very people who should reject them, "Be sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come near unto you, [Luke 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.9), [Luke 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.11)."

This then decidedly shows, that the kingdom here spoken of was the Messiah's kingdom, even that which, in name at least, is established among us: in name, I say, because "all are not Israel who are of Israel," "nor is he a Jew who is one outwardly." It has before been observed that this is a spiritual kingdom; and the subjects of it are spiritual subjects.

This leads us to show,

***~~II. What we must do in order to become subjects of it—~~***

We have no need to emigrate from one country to another in order to place ourselves under the dominion of Christ. There is a way appointed for all to have their names enrolled among his people; and that is,

***~~1. To repent—~~***

Every one that has violated the holy laws of God, ought to be deeply humbled for his iniquities. This is an indispensable requisite for our admission into the Redeemer's kingdom. An impenitent sinner, whether his sins have been more or less heinous, cannot possibly be numbered with his subjects. Such a man hates the laws by which they are governed; he will not yield to the authority which they obey: he even despises the privileges which they consider as their most inestimable treasure: whatever therefore he may call himself, he is, in fact, an enemy, a rebel, a traitor; and as such he will be considered by that King to whom he has professed allegiance. In order to become "a fellow-citizen with the saints," he must himself become a saint. Until then, he is accounted "a stranger and a foreigner, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19)."

***~~2. To believe the Gospel—~~***

Repentance is necessary to prepare men for the kingdom; but it is faith which actually introduces them into it. The Gospel sets forth Christ, not merely as "a Prince, but as a Savior also." It represents him as having borne our sins in his own body on the cross, and as having made thereby a full and perfect satisfaction to God for them. It assures us also of a complete reconciliation with him, the very moment that we embrace its glorious truths. On our believing its testimony, we begin to see the Lord Jesus in his true character: we no more account him a hard Master, but one whose service is perfect freedom. We then long to have our very thoughts subjected to his dominion, and our whole souls made obedient to his will. Thus we become enlisted under his banners, and entitled to all the privileges of his subjects. In short, by *repentance*we cast down the weapons of our rebellion; and by *faith*we devote ourselves to him as his peculiar people.

***~~This subject furnishes us with abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. Of examination—~~***

Should it not be an object of anxious inquiry with us all to ascertain whose subjects we are? There are but two who divide between them the dominion of the world: Satan is the God of this world, who has usurped a power over all mankind: but of these, Jehovah, the Creator of all things, has a few, whom he has rescued and redeemed from his tyrannical sway. If we belong to Christ, God has brought us "out of the kingdom of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Inquire then whether such a change has taken place? Inquire whether you have deeply repented of your past subjection to Satan, and whether with humble gratitude you have fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel? Can you appeal to God that you have returned to him as a base rebel, acknowledging your desert of damnation, and imploring mercy solely in the name of Christ? Can you appeal to him, that you yet daily, and hourly as it were, give up yourselves to his service, desiring to live, and, if need be, to die, for him? O consider the importance of these inquiries, and the proneness of your hearts to self-deceit! And pray to God to instruct you by his Holy Spirit, that you may know, before it is too late, whose you are, and whom you serve.

***~~2. Of humiliation—~~***

Be it granted that we are the Lord's: still what cause for shame have the very best among us, when we think how little love we bear to our heavenly King, and how little zeal we have manifested in his service.

The subjects of earthly monarchs will go to the very ends of the earth to preserve and to extend their territories. Life seems of no value to them, in comparison of the honor of their, prince: to die in his cause appears an object of ambition rather than of dread: and the smallest testimony of his favor is deemed an ample recompense for all the dangers and difficulties that can be endured.

Ah! who does not blush at the consideration of these things? If called to preach his Gospel to the heathen, who does not demur, and ask a thousand questions, which show that *our own ease is of more importance in our eyes than his honor?*Even a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name, or some little sacrifice of worldly interest, are often sufficient to deter us from embracing opportunities of exalting him. Whose conscience does not reproach him as shamefully deficient in duty to the best of Kings, and in gratitude towards the greatest of Benefactors? Truly when we consider what sovereign mercy, what almighty power, and what unbounded grace have been exercised towards us—we may well mourn and weep on the retrospect of every day, and at the review of every hour.

***~~3. Of thankfulness—~~***

We ought not to compare ourselves with others for the purpose of fostering self-preference and pride; yet we may well take occasion from the state of all around us to admire and adore that grace which has caused us to differ from them. For though, in the view of our high attainments, we have need of humiliation; yet, in the view of our high privileges, we have cause for most exalted joy: and if we felt as we ought, our every act would be obedience, and our every word be praise.

Nor is there lacking abundant cause of thankfulness even to those who are yet in rebellion against him. What reason have they to bless his name, that he has not yet said, "Bring hither those my enemies who would not have me reign over them, and slay them before me!" What a blessing should they account it that his Gospel is yet sounding in their ears; and that they may yet, if only they will repent and believe the Gospel, be partakers of his kingdom and glory!

People are apt to think us harsh and severe when we call them to repentance: but we call you to repentance and faith, not as duties, but as privileges. What a privilege would those who are now in Hell account it, if they could have one more such message delivered to them from the Lord! Know you then, beloved, that "this is the accepted time:" I pray God, you may find it also "the day of salvation."

***~~#1417~~***

***~~The Leper Healed~~***

***~~[Mark 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.45)~~***

"However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction."

THERE is certainly a great similarity between many of our Lord's miracles: but there are in every one of them some circumstances that distinguish them from others; and these open to us a wide field for appropriate and useful observations.

There are different accounts of *lepers*healed by the power of Jesus. The text informs us of one whose manner of applying for relief, and of discovering his gratitude towards his benefactor, were very peculiar.

To elucidate the words before us we may inquire,

**I.** **What "the *matter*was which he so published and blazed abroad"—**

***~~A man came to our Lord to be cured of the leprosy—~~***

The leprosy was a disorder which none but God could cure, [2 Kings 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 5.7). The man who was infected with it believed our Lord's ability to heal him, but he knew not the marvelous extent of his compassion: hence he doubted his willingness to bestow so great a blessing. He submitted himself however to the will of this divine Physician, and with deepest humility implored his sovereign help He came kneeling to him, falling on his face, and beseeching him. Compare [Matthew 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.2) with [Luke 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.12).

***~~Our Lord with infinite condescension granted his request—~~***

He was not extreme to mark the weakness of the leper's faith; but, "moved with compassion," gave him the desired relief. As a prophet of God he could touch the leper without contracting any defilement: he declared that the disease should vanish at his command, and instantly, by a touch, imparted soundness to the disordered body.

He however accompanied the mercy with a solemn charge—

***~~II. What was the injunction given him respecting it —~~***

***~~Our Lord directed him to go to the priest, and present immediately the accustomed offerings to God—~~***

The priests were appointed judges in all leprous cases. They were authorized to pronounce a man clean or unclean, according to certain marks laid down in the law of Moses, [Leviticus 13:1-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.1-46). When a man was acknowledged to be clean he was to present his offerings to God, [Leviticus 14:2-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.2-32). This therefore our Lord enjoined the the leprous man to do. In doing it he would exact from the priest himself "a testimony" to the truth of the miracle that had been wrought, and would give abundant evidence that the person who wrought it was not an enemy to the Mosaic law; yes, he would show that the worker of this miracle was no other than the Messiah himself.

***~~He charged him also not to divulge the matter to anyone until he should have performed this service—~~***

The injunction given our Lord was as solemn and strict as possible, verse 44. Jesus might be actuated in part by desire to avoid all appearance of ostentation. It is possible also that he might wish not to give umbrage to the state by increasing the number of his followers; but chiefly he was solicitous to guard against the malice of the priests. He well knew that they, from their enmity to him, might be induced to deny the cure, and thus they would both cast a reflection upon him, and deprive the man of the liberty to which he was now entitled. Hence with such solemnity and authority did he enjoin the leper to "say nothing to any man."

This charge however the leper did not sufficiently regard—

***~~III. What were the consequences of his disobeying that injunction—~~***

***~~The man could not refrain from "publishing the matter" to all around him—~~***

He felt in his body a consciousness of perfect health; and, as might well be expected, his soul was inflamed with gratitude to his merciful Benefactor: he never thought what reasons there might be for the prohibition. It is probable he thought the injunction proceeded only from modesty, and the more he supposed it to proceed from this principle, the more would he be anxious to spread his Benefactor's fame. To offer his appointed gift he went instantly, and with great gladness; but he knew not how to check the ardor of his love and gratitude; nor can we wonder that he overlooked the command given him. We mean not however to justify his disobedience: for the word of God utterly condemns every deviation from the Divine will, [Deuteronomy 27:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.26); but the leper's disobedience most assuredly sprang from a good principle; nor can we doubt but that the indulgent Savior, who well knew his motives, would readily pardon it.

***~~Though evil consequences ensued, yet were they overruled for good—~~***

Our Lord's fame spread with great rapidity through all the country. Hence he was much inconvenienced by the multitudes who flocked around him; nor "could he any more openly enter into the city by reason of them." He was forced to seek for solitude and retirement "in desert places:" but the multitudes who came were desirous "to hear" his word; and occasion also was afforded by them for the working of many other miracles, [Luke 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.15). Thus great benefit accrued to the bodies certainly, and we trust also, to the souls, of many.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Are there any here who feel themselves infected with the leprosy of sin?~~***

The *corruption of our hearts*is often set forth under this figure of *leprosy*: nor is there one among us who is not infected with it. Indeed so fatally has it spread, that we may well apply to ourselves that loathsome description in [Isaiah 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5-6), "Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." And, in reference to this very disorder, exclaim with the prophet in [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5), "Woe is me, I am undone!"

Let not anyone however who feels the infection, hope to heal himself: the disorder bids defiance to every hand but God's. Come then to Jesus, the almighty, the only, physician of souls: come to him, like the leper, with the deepest humility, and reverence; nor doubt his willingness, any more than his power, to heal you.

Ask yourselves why he came from Heaven? Was it not to seek and save the lost? Why was the fountain of his blood opened, but for sin, and for impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1)? Let then the declaration he has made, encourage every one among you, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37). However polluted you are, he will condescend to touch you, and by his sovereign power will remove the guilt and pollution of your sins.

***~~2. Are there, on the other hand, any who hope that they have been healed of their leprosy?~~***

There is no injunction upon you to conceal this matter from the world: you are rather commanded to make it known to all around you. He said to the demoniac, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you, and has had compassion on you, [Mark 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.19)." And thus also he says to you. Not that spiritual blessings should be a subject of ostentatious boasting, [Proverbs 25:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.27); [Proverbs 27:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 27.2);" but it never can be wrong to comply with that ardent exhortation of the Psalmist, [Psalm 105:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 105.1-3); or to perform that very duty, for the promoting of which the mercy was given, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). Let every one then adopt the language of the blessed virgin [Luke 1:46-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.46-48).

But let there be also a conscientious regard to the commands of Jesus. Whether we see the reasons for them or not, we must punctually observe them. Thus will Christ eventually be magnified in our contact, and sinners will be most effectually encouraged to flock unto him.

***~~#1418~~***

***~~The Paralytic Healed~~***

**[Mark 2:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.8-12)**

But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

WE cannot wonder that such multitudes attended the ministry of our Lord, or that his occasional retirements from labor were so often interrupted. But it is indeed astonishing that so many should continue hostile to so benevolent a person; and that he should persist in doing good, when his words and actions were so constantly perverted, and made grounds of accusation against him.

Having retired to a house in Capernaum, he was soon encompassed with a crowd: among them were many Scribes and Pharisees who came only to cavil, [Luke 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.17). Our Lord, however, neither intimidated nor angered, proceeded in his work; and took occasion even from their cavils to display more eminently his power and glory. Being accused of blasphemy, he confirmed his word by his works, and multiplied his mercies to some as the means of convincing others.

The particular circumstances referred to in the text lead us to consider,

***~~I. The authority he exercised—~~***

Whatever miracles our Lord performed, he wrought them by his own power.

***~~A man was brought to him to be healed of the palsy—~~***

So afflicted was the man, that he was deprived of all use of his limbs. His friends, who bore him on a bed, or couch, could not get access to Jesus, verse 3, 4. They would not however relax their endeavors to obtain a cure. They went by another way to the top of the house, and broke open the lattice, and then let the man down into the midst of the room where Jesus was. Their houses were scarcely ever above one or two stories high. Their roofs were flat, and guarded on every side with a balustrade, [Deuteronomy 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 22.8); thither the inhabitants used to retire for exercise, 2 Samuel 11:2; for conversation, [Matthew 10:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.27); for meditation and prayer, [Acts 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.9). There were two ways of access to the top; one from the inside, by a lattice or trap-door, [2 Kings 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.2); the other by steps on the outside, [Mark 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.15).

Having easily ascended to the top, they forced open the lattice which was fastened within, and let down the man through the tiling ([Luke 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.19)) with which the roof was paved on all sides of the lattice.

Nor did Jesus take offence at his intrusion, as though he were an unwelcome guest. He, on the contrary, beheld their solicitude with approbation, and richly recompensed "their faith," which had urged them to such benevolent exertions. We read not indeed of any particular request made by the man or his friends; but the very sight of such misery was sufficient to call forth our Lord's compassion.

***~~Jesus healed not his disorder, but authoritatively forgave his sin—~~***

All that the man thought of was a restoration to bodily health; but the divine Physician in an instant healed his soul. The disorder had probably been sent by God as a punishment for sin; and Jesus removed his sin as incomparably the greater evil. Yes, he spoke to the man in the most affectionate and kind terms, and gave him a comfortable assurance that his iniquities were forgiven. How must the helpless dying man rejoice in such tidings! Surely, after this, he would scarcely wish to have his life prolonged; at least, he would desire it only that he might glorify his Lord and Savior.

***~~But this exercise of divine authority excited the indignation of the Pharisees—~~***

It is possible that they might manifest in their countenances the reasonings of their hearts: but Jesus needed not any external proof of their thoughts. He "knew in his spirit" everything that passed within their minds. They inwardly condemned him as guilty of "blasphemy." Nor was their reasoning defective, if the application of it had been just. Certainly none but God has any authority to forgive sin; and any mere creature that should assume it, would be a blasphemer. But their objection, in this instance, was altogether unfounded.

Jesus, having claimed the power of forgiving sin, immediately stated,

***~~II. His vindication of it—~~***

Our Lord was ever willing to satisfy those who desired information; and, by multiplied proofs, to leave determined infidels without excuse.

***~~He now stated a criterion whereby they might judge of the validity of his claim—~~***

When Jehovah's deity was questioned, his servant Elijah proposed a mean of determining the controversy between him and Baal, [1 Kings 18:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.21-24). Thus our Lord condescended to submit his pretensions to a trial. He appealed to all whether the healing of the paralytic would not be an evidence of divine power? and whether he, who by his own authority could restore man to health, were not equally able to forgive his sin? This was as just a criterion as could possibly be proposed. If Jesus were not God, he could never by his own power heal the man. Nor, if he were a blasphemer, would God work such a stupendous miracle to confirm his blasphemies. Thus his claims to divine authority were brought to the test; and every person present was made a competent judge of their truth or falsehood.

***~~According to that criterion, he immediately vindicated his divine authority—~~***

He commanded the man to arise, and take up his couch, and go home. Instantly he, who before could not help himself, was restored to health; and, in the presence of all, went forth with his couch upon his shoulders. Thus were the enemies of Jesus effectually put to silence; yet none understood the full extent of the conclusion to be drawn from the miracle. They still viewed Christ only as a "man" acting by a delegated authority, [Matthew 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.8); whereas they should have acknowledged him to have been truly God. They all however "glorified God" for the marvelous displays of his power; and confessed that they had never before seen such stupendous works.

***~~Learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. The power and grace of Christ—~~***

When Jesus sojourned on earth as a poor man, he had power to forgive sin, and often exercised that power unsolicited, uncontrolled. He even subjected himself to the charge of blasphemy rather than he would conceal his right. Has he then less power or compassion now that he is enthroned in glory? or, now that he is exalted on purpose to exercise that power, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31), will he neglect to exert it? *Will he who bestowed mercy unasked, cast out our petitions?*Let us then present ourselves before him with all our miseries and needs. Let us try, by all possible means, to get access to him. Let us break through every obstacle that would defeat our endeavors; and let us approach him with an assurance of his power and willingness to save. Sooner shall Heaven and earth fail, than he reject one such a believing suppliant, [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.22).

***~~2. The benefit of affliction—~~***

If the paralytic had never been disordered, he had never been brought to Jesus. Had he never come to Jesus, his sins would never have been forgiven. Would he not then rejoice, does he not rejoice even to this very hour, that God ever sent him that affliction? Would he not number that affliction among his richest mercies? Thus many of us would never have thought of Jesus if we had not known trouble; but *through temporal afflictions we were brought to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings*. Let those then, who have experienced this, give thanks to God, [Psalm 119:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.71); [Psalm 119:75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.75); and let those who are now in trouble, seek chiefly the remission of their sins, [Psalm 25:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.16-18).

***~~3. The efficacy of intercession—~~***

Many of us, alas! have friends whose souls are dead in trespasses and sins: their faculties are altogether destitute of spiritual motion or sensation; but we may bring them by faith into the presence of the compassionate Jesus. He will be pleased, rather than offended, with our intrusion; nor shall our labors of love be without many good effects. Little do we think how many thousands have been converted in answer to the entreaties of God's praying people; and who can tell but that God may fulfill to us that promise [James 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.15). Who can tell but that, as an answer to "our faith," we may see our friends healed of their sins, and triumphing in their blessed Savior! We are sure, at least, that our "prayers shall return into our own bosom." Let us then improve our knowledge of the Redeemer's grace, and exert ourselves, that all around us may participate in his saving benefits.

***~~#1419~~***

***~~The Whole and the Sick, the Righteous and Sinners, Described~~***

***~~[Mark 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.17)~~***

Those who are whole have no need of the physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

*THERE is no action, however benevolent, which cavilers may not censure.*Every part of our Lord's conduct was worthy of his divine character; yet was he constantly "enduring the contradiction of sinners," etc. He was now conversing familiarly with tax collectors for their good. This was condemned by the Scribes as unfitting a holy person, if not also as giving countenance to sin. Our Lord vindicated himself on principles acknowledged by them.

His words contain,

***~~I. A generally established maxim—~~***

Persons desire not a physician unless they be sick.

***~~This is true according to its literal import—~~***

A person in health wishes not for any medical assistance: he would refuse it if it were offered to him; he would not submit to any regimen that should be prescribed. But those who are diseased are glad to hear of a skillful physician: they will cheerfully put themselves under his direction; and they will follow his prescriptions that they may obtain a cure.

***~~It is more particularly so in a figurative sense—~~***

There is an analogy between sickness and sin: this is a disorder of the soul as that is of the body. A person unconscious of his sinfulness desires not a Savior; nor will he comply with the self-denying directions given him. But one who feels his lost state longs earnestly for a cure: he delights to hear of Christ, and to make application to him; nor does he esteem any injunction too severe, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3).

This being acknowledged, our Lord proceeds to make,

***~~II. An application of it to his own conduct—~~***

The physician's office leads him to converse with the sick. Just so, our Lord's work required him to maintain an fellowship with sinners.

***~~There are many who conceive themselves to be "righteous"—~~***

None are absolutely and perfectly righteous. None by *nature*, [Job 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.4); [Job 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14). None by *practice*, [Romans 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10); [Romans 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.12); [Romans 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.23), but many suppose that their sins are neither great nor numerous. Such were the Scribes and Pharisees whom our Lord addressed, [Luke 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.9); [Luke 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11); and there are many of this description in every age, [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12).

***~~Such persons were not so much the objects of our Lord's attention—~~***

He "willed indeed that all should come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9," but he knew that they would not receive his offers; they saw no need of the salvation which he came to accomplish; their pride and prejudice unfitted them for receiving it. He therefore bestowed less labor in calling them to repentance.

***~~But there are many of a more sincere disposition—~~***

They are not really more heinous "sinners" than others, but they are made sensible of their guilt and danger. Such was the tax collector at whose house our Lord was, and such are to be found in every place.

***~~To call these to repentance was the great object of Christ's ministry—~~***

These were prepared, like thirsty ground for the rain; to them he was a welcome messenger; they rejoiced to hear that repentance could profit them; and our Lord delighted to encourage their hopes [Luke 4:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-19).

Thus did his conduct accord with the dictates of reason, and with the great ends of his mission.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. The danger of self-righteousness—~~***

Men feel of themselves the danger of gross *sin*; but they cannot be persuaded that they will suffer anything by *self-righteousness*. But a person who, under dying circumstances, denies his need of help, as effectually destroys himself, as if he drank poison or plunged a dagger to his heart. Deny not then your need of the heavenly Physician; nor think to heal yourselves by any self-righteous methods. You must resemble the tax collector, if ever you would enjoy his lot, [Luke 18:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.13-14).

***~~2. The folly of unbelief—~~***

We are apt to make the depth of our misery a reason for despondency; but the doubting of the Physician's power will be as destructive to the soul, as the denying of our need of him. O behold the remedy!

Are you sick? [Jeremiah 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.22).

Are you sinners? [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15).

Are you lost? [Luke 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.10).

Christ suits his promises to your state; He addresses himself to each, [John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.6); nor shall any suppliant be disappointed, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37).

***~~#1420~~***

***~~The Use and Benefit of the Sabbath~~***

***~~[Mark 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.27)~~***

"And he said unto them: The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

*IN nothing is the force of prejudice more strongly seen, than in the blame cast by the world upon the followers of Christ for the most trifling offence, while the greatest enormities of ungodly men are allowed to pass without any censure whatever.* Nor is it only for a real deviation from duty that they are condemned, but for the smallest departure from rules, which have their foundation in nothing but human policy or superstition. The disciples of our Lord had been attending the Synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and, being hungry, [Matthew 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.1), they plucked some ears of corn as they passed through the corn-fields, and ate it.

This was an act which God himself had particularly specified as lawful, [Deuteronomy 23:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 23.25); and therefore the Pharisees could not condemn it: but the law forbade men to do any servile work upon the Sabbath-day; and therefore the Pharisees, being determined to find fault, construed the plucking and rubbing a few ears of corn as a reaping and threshing of the corn; and inquired with indignation, Why they presumed to do so on the Sabbath-day; [Matthew 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.2) with [Luke 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.1-2). But our blessed Lord vindicated their conduct: he showed that works of necessity or mercy might be performed, as well on the Sabbath as on any other day. He reminded them of David's conduct in eating the holy bread, which was forbidden to be eaten by any but the priests and their families: he had never been censured for it either by God or man, because he was impelled to it by unavoidable necessity.

He reminded them also of the priests in the temple, who performed very laborious work in killing, flaying, and consuming the sacrifices, yet incurred no guilt thereby, because they were serving God: and from these precedents he showed them that the disciples were not worthy of blame, since what they had done was in attending upon Him, and from a necessity imposed by the imperious calls of hunger. The sanctity of the Sabbath he acknowledged; but informed them at the same time, that, where the observance of it militated against the welfare of man, its authority was superseded; for that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

From this declaration of our Lord, we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. The end for which the Sabbath was instituted—~~***

The appointment of the Sabbath did not take place until the whole work of creation was complete: therefore man, who was created on the sixth day could not be made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath as far as man was concerned, must be made for him. But, without laying any stress on the priority of man's existence, we may confidently affirm, that the Sabbath was instituted for the benefit,

***~~1. Of individuals—~~***

It is no small privilege to men that God has appointed them a day of rest, wherein they are to cease from the cares and labors of this world, and to attend to the concerns of another world, [Exodus 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.12), [Deuteronomy 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 5.14). We know by experience how worldly occupations affect the mind; how powerfully they draw us from God, and impede us in the pursuit of heavenly things; and there is reason to fear, that if no such appointment had existed, we should, long before this, have been immersed in heathen darkness: we should have been satisfied with the things of this life, and not thought of inquiring after anything beyond.

But on every return of this sacred rest, we are reminded, that there is a God whom we must serve, and that there is an eternal portion which it behooves us to secure. We are led to take a retrospective view of our past lives, in order to see what we have done for our souls, and what prospect we have of attaining that happiness for which we were created, and for which we were redeemed.

In short, this appointment of a Sabbath affords exactly the same occasion for advancing the welfare of our souls, as the permission to labor on the six other days does for the advancement of our temporal interests. As, on the six days, we devise and execute plans for the acquisition of wealth, so, on the seventh day, we are occupied in attaining higher degrees of faith and holiness. And as, in the one case, we frequently cast up our accounts in order to see what progress we have made, so, in the other case, the periodical leisure that is afforded to us, enables us to ascertain with precision the state of our souls before God.

Who then has not reason to be thankful for an institution which is so replete with benefit to his soul? Well might God number it among the highest obligations which he had ever conferred upon his people, the Jews, [Nehemiah 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.13-14), [Ezekiel 20:12-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.12-20); and well may we number it among our choicest blessings.

***~~2. Of the whole community—~~***

Had no specific time been appointed by God, none could ever have been agreed upon by men: no day would have suited the convenience of all; nor could human authority have prevailed to establish a law that should be universally and irrevocably obeyed. But God having fixed a day, the whole race of mankind is bound to yield obedience to his command: so that all who acknowledge his authority, wake up on the Sabbath with the same views, the same desires, the same purposes; all feeling in themselves an obligation to keep it holy, and all conscious that the same feeling pervades the Lord's people in every quarter of the globe.

In respect to this, there is no difference of rank or station. The rich man sees that he is to lay aside both his cares and pleasures, in order to attend to the concerns of his soul. The poor man also sees, that though he may be, as it were, a slave on other days, on this day he is the Lord's free-man. Indeed the poor have very peculiar cause for thankfulness on account of the Sabbath; for the rate of wages in every country is calculated by the amount that is necessary to support a man and his family; and that is given to a man for six days' work, because God has commanded him to rest the seventh. But, if no such command had been given by God, the poor would have been required to work the seven days without any augmentation of their wages: in this respect, therefore, the poor are peculiarly benefitted.

But indeed the whole community being thus set at liberty for heavenly pursuits, and means of instruction being provided for all, such instruction too as they would not very readily receive in private, all meet, as by common consent, in the house of God, and there offer their united sacrifices of prayer and praise. From thence all return to the bosom of their families, to diffuse a kindred spirit in their domestic circles, and thus to advance the temporal, no less than the eternal happiness of themselves and others.

Doubtless the degree in which these ends are promoted, must depend on the dispositions of the persons themselves; those who have no desire after spiritual blessings, will make no improvement of the opportunities afforded them: but they whose minds are spiritual, and whose situations in life preclude them from devoting much of their time to religion on other days, will now unite in social exercises, and in heavenly converse, with tenfold pleasure; and their hearts will burn within them, while they speak of the things which God has done for their souls.

Nor will these persons he contented with seeking good to themselves; they will endeavor to do good to others: they will think whether there be not some ignorant neighbor whom they can instruct, or some afflicted neighbor whom they can comfort. On this day the poor is on a par with the richest: his time is his own, to spend for God, either in a way of personal improvement, or for the edification of those around him.

Suppose then the Sabbaths to be thus employed, who can calculate the good accruing from them to all ranks and orders of men; to the rich and to the poor; to the man in health, and to the man immured in prison, or languishing on a bed of sickness; to those who are advanced in years, and those who are just entering on the stage of life?

If, from these views of the Sabbath, we are made sensible of its value, let us consider,

***~~II. The manner in which it should be improved—~~***

It is not intended that we should be in bondage, as the Jews were; and much less that we should bear such an intolerable yoke as the Pharisees imposed on their disciples: yet we are bound to venerate the Sabbath, and to keep it holy. God has enjoined that duty with very peculiar solemnity; "Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath-day." In what manner we should keep it holy, the text will inform us: we should keep it,

***~~1. With a grateful sense of our privilege—~~***

God, in infinite love and mercy, has made this day on purpose for us: he knew how much such a periodical season of reflection would conduce to our happiness, and therefore appointed the observance of it even in Paradise. To us, who are so corrupt and sinful, and are immersed in the cares and pleasures of an ensnaring world, this institution is still more important: and therefore, when we wake on a Sabbath morning, our first thoughts should be, "This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! [Psalm 118:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.24)." On rising from our beds, we should shut the door of our minds against the intrusion of worldly thoughts, and should set ourselves to the contemplation of heavenly subjects. We should invite our God to come and take possession of our souls, and to banish from thence every imagination that may interfere with his service, or retard our spiritual improvement. We should consider what great objects are to be attained that day; what innumerable sins to be lamented; what great and precious promises to be embraced; what communion with God the Father, and with the Lord Jesus Christ to be enjoyed; what grace, and mercy, and peace to be brought into the soul; what victories to be gained; what glory to be secured.

Methinks, on retiring to our closet, we should say, 'Now, vain world, begone! Let nothing belonging to you interrupt me for a moment. Welcome, precious Bible, you inestimable treasure! Let me now unfold your sacred pages, and obtain an insight into your mysterious truths. And, O my God, "shine into my heart, to give me the light of the knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ!"

In short, precisely as a carnal man embraces with avidity an occasion of worldly gain, and uses with energy the means of accomplishing his desire, so should we regard every Sabbath with increased joy, and improve it with augmented diligence.

That this is really the proper way of sanctifying the Sabbath, we are sure; since it is the very way prescribed by God himself: nothing of a temporal nature should (any further than is absolutely necessary) be admitted into our minds; but our whole delight should be in the God of our salvation, [2 Corinthians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.15), [Isaiah 58:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.13-14).

***~~2. With a humble sense of our responsibility—~~***

If God has instituted Sabbaths for our good, they are a talent of which we must give an account to him. And O what a solemn responsibility have we incurred by means of them! A person that is seventy years of age has had no less than ten years of entire Sabbaths! What might not have been done in that time, if they had been properly improved? When therefore the Sabbath arrives, though we should welcome it as a blessing, we should welcome it with fear and trembling: lest, when designed for our good, it should only aggravate our final condemnation.

We should pray to God to raise our minds to the occasion; to spiritualize our affections; to draw near to us in our secret retirement, and to reveal himself to us in the public assembly. We should bear in mind, that without Him we can do nothing: and that it is His presence and His blessing alone that can render any means effectual for our good.

And when we come to the close of the Sabbath, we should inquire diligently, how far the designs of God's love and mercy have been accomplished in us, and how far we have been forwarded in our preparation for the eternal Sabbath. It is this mixture of "joy and trembling" which we ought to cultivate, as the most desirable of all frames; contented to wait for unmixed joy, until all our dangers and responsibility shall be for ever past.

***~~We cannot conclude without adding a word,~~***

***~~1. Of reproof—~~***

As for those who make scarcely any difference between the Sabbath and other days, but follow their business or pleasure in a shameless manner, we shall leave them to the reproof of Nehemiah, [Nehemiah 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 13.15-16), only warning them that their present gains or pleasures will but ill repay them for the loss of their souls.

Our present subject leads us rather to notice those who detain their wives or servants at home, in order to provide them a more delicious meal. How different was the conduct of Christ and his disciples! They had been so occupied in holy exercises, that they had even omitted to make the necessary provision for the calls of nature; and were contented to satisfy their appetite with a little barley rubbed out of the ears which they gathered along the way. It should seem that they were regardless of bodily indulgence, when they were called to attend to the concerns of their souls. O that we would learn of them, and imitate their self-denying piety!

True it is, as we have said before, that works of mercy and necessity may be done; but it is equally true, that an attention to the soul is a work of the greatest mercy, and of indispensable necessity.

***~~2. Of encouragement—~~***

Though the alleged violation of the Sabbath was the pretext for condemning the disciples, the real cause was their adherence to Christ. Thus, if some sacrifice of time or bodily comfort be made in order to serve our God, the proud Pharisees, who hate the light, will inveigh against us as violating some duty either to God or man; when, if we spent our time in any other way, they would find no occasion of offence at all. But, if we be treated thus, let us remember who suffered in like manner before us; and let us comfort ourselves with this reflection, that, though man may condemn our piety, our God will both approve and reward it.

***~~#1421~~***

***~~The Man with the Withered Hand~~***

***~~[Mark 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.5-7)~~***

"And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him."

THE exercise of benevolence is, in itself, calculated to excite universal admiration; but it is far from producing that effect on those who are blinded by prejudice or obstinacy. They whose conduct is reproved by it, will rather take occasion from it to vent their spleen the more. This our Lord uniformly experienced from the Pharisees. A remarkable instance of it is recorded in the text. Let us,

***~~I. Consider the circumstances of the miracle—~~***

***~~The Pharisees, observing our Lord's intention to heal a man who had a withered hand, questioned his right to do so on the Sabbath-day—~~***

Wishing to accuse him of inconsistency, or a contempt of the law, they asked him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day, [Matthew 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.10). Our Lord showed them, that it was lawful, [Matthew 12:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.11-12). He then asked them, whether, while they condemned him for doing so benevolent an action on the Sabbath, they were more justified in indulging murderous purposes against him on the Sabbath, verse 4. This seems the true import of this question. They, unable to answer except to their own confusion, "held their peace." Though convinced of their unreasonableness and impiety, they would not confess it.

***~~Our Lord beheld their obstinacy with indignation and grief—~~***

As meek as our Lord was, he was susceptible of anger; yet that anger was not like the passion that too often agitates us. It was perfectly just and righteous. Sin was the object against which it was directed; and, while he was angry with the sin, he mourned over the sinner. Hereafter indeed his anger will be unmixed with any pity; but now it is, as ours also should ever be, tempered with compassion towards the offending person.

***~~Not intimidated by their malice, he proceeded to heal the withered hand—~~***

He bade the man stand forth in the midst of all. Surely such a pitiable object should have engaged all to interest themselves with Christ in his behalf. He then ordered him to stretch forth his hand. The man, notwithstanding that he knew his inability to do it of himself, attempted to obey, and, in the attempt, received an instantaneous and perfect cure.

***~~Having thus more than ever exasperated his enemies, Jesus withdrew from their rage—~~***

One would have thought that all should have adored the author of such a benefit: but, instead of this, the Pharisees were "filled with madness, [Luke 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.11)."*Alas! what wickedness is there in the human heart!*They joined immediately with the Herodians in a conspiracy against his life. The Herodians and Pharisees differed so widely both in their political and religious sentiments, that they hated each other exceedingly. But what enemies will not unite against Jesus? [Luke 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.12); but our Lord's hour was not yet come; he withdrew therefore from their power, and thus defeated, for the present at least, their efforts against him.

Having thus touched upon the principal incidents in the miracle, we shall proceed to,

***~~II. Deduce from it some practical observations—~~***

***~~My first observation refers to our blessed Lord who wrought the miracle—~~***

Did our Lord in defiance of the rage of the surrounding Pharisees discharge his office boldly, yet, when he saw their murderous designs, withdraw himself? Then it may be observed, that, though we are never to decline any duty through the fear of man, yet are we at liberty to avoid the storms which we cannot allay.

Nothing is more clear than the duty of dismissing from our hearts altogether the fear of man. "Fear not man who can only kill the body; but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell, [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5), [Isaiah 51:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.7-8), [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13). Indeed so obvious is this duty, that it commends itself even to the most prejudiced and embittered mind, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19), [Acts 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.29). Not life itself is to be of any value in our eyes in comparison of a faithful adherence to this principle: we must be ready to lay down our lives for Christ's sake, if ever we would be approved of him in the day of judgment, [Matthew 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.38-39).

But this does not forbid our prudently withdrawing from scenes of danger, provided we can do it without making any compromise of our fidelity to God. The seventy whom our Lord sent out to preach his Gospel, were told, that, "if they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to another, [Matthew 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.23)." And Paul, when the Jews of Damascus watched the gates night and day in order to destroy him, was let down by the wall in a basket, in order that he might escape their murderous rage, [Acts 9:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.23-25). On many occasions our Lord himself withdrew from those who sought his life. And when Paul would have gone into the theater at Ephesus, the disciples kept him from his purpose, because they knew that he would instantly be put to death by his blood-thirsty enemies, [Acts 19:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.30-31).

The truth is, that life is a talent to be improved for God, and is not to be carelessly thrown away. We must be willing to sacrifice it, if called to do so in the providence of God. Neither a fiery furnace, nor a den of lions must so intimidate us, as to cause any violation of our integrity. But if, consistently with fidelity to God, we may preserve life, our duty is rather to preserve it for God, than to throw it away by a needless exposure of it to dangers which we cannot withstand.

***~~My next observation relates to him in whom the miracle was wrought—~~***

Did the man with the withered hand, in compliance with the Lord's command, stretch out his hand, and in that act experience the healing of it? Then we, however desperate our condition be, should endeavor to execute the commands of God, and in that act expect his blessing on our souls.

Doubtless we are in ourselves as impotent as the man with the withered hand. But are we therefore at liberty to sit still without making any effort to save ourselves? If that man who labored under a natural infirmity had refused to make the effort which our Lord enjoined, he had in all probability lost the cure which, in making the attempt, he obtained.

How much more then shall we be left to rue our folly, if we, whose impotence is only of a moral nature, decline using the means which God has ordained! It is our duty to repent: it is our duty to believe in Christ: it is our duty to surrender up ourselves unreservedly to God. And if, when called to these exertions, we excuse ourselves by saying that we are not able, we shall provoke Almighty God to withhold from us the blessings which we so greatly need, and which he is ever ready to bestow upon us. He has told us, that "his Spirit shall help our infirmities." But how will he help us? Not by moving us without any cooperation on our part, but by taking hold of the opposite end of a burden, and bearing it together with us, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26).

Very remarkable is that answer which Jehovah gave to his people of old. The Church prayed, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." The Lord answered, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem." "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion, [Isaiah 51:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.9); [Isaiah 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.17); [Isaiah 52:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.1)." God does not need our efforts; but he requires them; and when they are put forth in obedience to his commands, and in dependence on his grace, he will "perfect his own strength in our weakness."

I call upon you all then to repent of sin, to flee to Christ for refuge from the guilt and power of it, and to consecrate yourselves unreservedly to him.

I readily acknowledge, that you are not of yourselves sufficient for these things: but "the grace of Christ is, and shall be, sufficient for you," if, in dependence on his promised aid, you will address yourselves to these all-important duties. "Be workers together with God;" and he will never allow you to work in vain. I grant, you are spiritually asleep; I grant, you are spiritually dead: but I say with confidence, "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light, [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)."

My last observation is, that if, like this man, you have experienced the mighty working of Christ's power, you must, throughout the whole remainder of your lives, *show yourselves living monuments of his power and grace*.

Wherever he went, he was a witness for Christ. And such must you be. You must let it be seen that he both does and will renew the powers of a withered soul, and infuse into it such energies as shall bear the stamp and character of divinity upon them. And one such witness, if he provokes hostility in some, will afford the greatest possible encouragement to others.

The Sabbath-day is now the time that our Lord especially selects for the communication of his blessings to the souls of men. But the generality are content with an attendance on outward ordinances, without expecting any peculiar blessing from them. Let it however be seen in you that "his word is living and powerful," and, that to those who receive it aright, it "is the power of God to their salvation."

***~~#1422~~***

***~~Christ's Love to His People~~***

***~~[Mark 3:31-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.31-35)~~***

"Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

Another on nearly the same words ([Matthew 12:46-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.46-50)) has occurred before. But on a comparison of the two they are so exceedingly different, that without altering a word in either, they are both presented to the public, in hope that both of them may be profitable, as illustrating different modes of treating the same text.

IT is common for persons to feel an undue degree of solicitude for the bodily welfare of their friends, while they have little anxiety for the spiritual and eternal welfare of mankind at large. Hence, if a minister be in danger of impairing his health by his exertions, they are ready to say to him, "Spare yourself," but, if thousands be perishing all around them for lack of knowledge, they are not so ready to stir him up to increased activity and diligence.

The near relations of our Lord were under the influence of this partial regard, when "they went out to lay hold on him, and said of him, "He is beside himself;" or, as it might rather be translated, "He is out of his mind, verse 20, 21." It should seem that it was with that view that they called for him at this time: they were afraid that he would sink under the weight of his continued labors. But he felt, that both health, and life too, were well sacrificed in such a cause: and therefore he disregarded their message, and turned it into an occasion of expressing the greatness of his regard for his obedient followers.

From this declaration of our Lord, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. The character of those whom Jesus loves—~~***

This is expressed in few, but comprehensive words; "They do the will of God." But what is this will? It includes two things:

***~~1. They believe in Jesus Christ—~~***

This is eminently the will of God, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23), [John 6:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.29); and until this be done, nothing is done to any good purpose: the persons remain, and ever must remain, objects of his wrath, [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18), [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). This therefore they do in the first place: And they do it humbly, renouncing utterly every other ground of hope: and thankfully adoring God from their inmost souls for such a refuge.

***~~2. They seek after universal holiness—~~***

This also is the will of God, [1 Thessalonians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.3); nor are the loudest professions of attachment to Christ of any avail without it, [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21). And, this also they do. And they do it unreservedly, accounting "no commandment grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3)," and in a progressive manner, never thinking they have attained, while anything remains to be attained, [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14).

We pass on to consider,

***~~II. The regard Jesus bears towards them—~~***

Our Lord gives them the preference to his nearest relations, as such; and honors them with the most endearing appellations of brother, sister, mother. Now from this we must understand, that,

***~~1. He bears the tenderest affection towards them—~~***

We naturally expect the warmest affection to exist between persons so closely allied to each other. But the love that is found among earthly relatives is but a faint image of that which both Christ and his Father feel towards all their obedient followers, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21).

***~~2. He will give them the most familiar access to him—~~***

His mother and his brethren were all this time without, while Jesus and his attentive followers were within the house: and, though solicited by his own mother, he would not go out to her, because it would deprive them of the instructions which they were anxious to receive. And who can tell what gracious communications Jesus will grant to those who serve him in spirit and in truth? They shall never seek his face in vain: they shall never call for him, but he will answer them, Here I am. Compare [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23) with [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9); [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24).

***~~3. He will order everything for their good—~~***

Any man that is not devoid of principle will consult the good of his family, when the management of their affairs is committed to him. And will not Jesus, who is constituted "Head over all things for the express benefit of his Church, [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22)," be attentive to the interests of his obedient people? Will he not supply all their needs, mitigate all their sorrows, and overrule all things for their eternal good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

***~~4. He will own them as his in the last day—~~***

Suppose him in that day surrounded by the whole assembled universe; and many who were once related to him in the flesh, or who once professed themselves his followers, calling upon him, and saying, 'We want a nearer access to you; "we have eaten and drunk in your presence; we have cast out devils in your name, and in your name done many wonderful works;" we are your brethren, your sisters, your nearest and dearest relatives.' Methinks he will then renew the same gracious declaration that is contained in our text, "Who is my mother, or my brethren?" And then, "stretching out his hand towards his obedient followers, he will say, Behold my mother, and my brethren: for whoever did the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How reasonable are the terms on which Christ proposes to acknowledge us as his disciples!~~***

Some imagine that Jesus requires that all who would be his disciples should apparently cast off all regard for their nearest friends and relatives, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). But nothing is really farther from his intentions, than to encourage, either by this declaration, or by that in the text, any disrespect to our parents: on the contrary, we are commanded to honor our parents; and are told by the Apostle, that "that is the first commandment with promise."

But when our love or obedience to earthly parents stands in *competition*with our obedience to Christ, then we must resemble Levi; in commendation of whom it is said, "He said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children, [Deuteronomy 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.9) with [Exodus 32:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.26-28)."

And shall this appear harsh or unreasonable? See what Jesus has done for us: He knew not his mother and his brethren in comparison of his believing and obedient people: and shall we prefer our earthly relatives to him? If he has so loved us, who are altogether polluted, and deserve nothing but evil at his hands, how much more should we so love him, who is altogether lovely, and deserves infinitely more love at our hands than eternity will be sufficient to express!

***~~2. What encouragement have we to comply with these terms!~~***

In complying with the terms which Christ has proposed, and adhering to him in opposition to the will of earthly friends, we may possibly incur their displeasure, and feel to the uttermost of their power the effects of their resentment: they may frown upon us, disown us, disinherit us. But "when father and mother forsake us, the Lord will take us up." His express promise is that for one father, mother, brother, sister, house, or estate we lose for his sake, we shall even in this life receive a hundred fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, houses, and estates, [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30). Does any one ask, How shall this be accomplished? We might answer, that it is abundantly verified in the regard shown to us by the Lord's people: but, independent of that, we say, the Lord Jesus will give *himself*to us, and be to us more than ten thousand relatives, or ten thousand worlds.

Let anyone say, whether the love of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the glory of Christ, do not compensate a hundred-fold for all the creature-love, and all the temporal advantages, that we can lose for him? Let the determination then of Joshua be ours; that whatever course others may follow, and whatever obstacles they may lay in our way, "we, with God's help, will serve the Lord."

***~~3. How unlike Christ are they, to whom a compliance with these terms is odious!~~***

*None are so odious in the eyes of the ungodly world as the true, faithful, determined Christian.*The generality, instead of loving him in proportion to his advancement in piety, will despise him; and will make his high attainments, not only the occasion, but the measure, of their contempt. They will be ashamed to acknowledge a pious character as a relation, or friend, or even as an acquaintance. They would rather be seen in public with an infidel or debauchee, than with one who was eminent for his love to Christ.

But how unlike to Christ are they; when the very thing which endears them to him, renders them odious in their eyes! Surely it will be well for such persons to consider what Christ's views of them must be? for if the godly are so precious to him because they are godly, surely the haters and despisers of godliness must for that very reason be most hateful in his eyes. Accordingly he has told us, how he will resent the contempt shown to his people; and that "it were better for a man to have a millstone hanged about his neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of his little ones to sin, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6)."

***~~#1423~~***

***~~The Growing Seed~~***

***~~[Mark 4:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.26-29)~~***

And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

THERE is a rich variety in the parables delivered by our Lord. Almost everything around him was made a vehicle of divine knowledge. Agriculture in particular afforded him many illustrations of his doctrines. He dwelt on that subject the more, because it was so adapted to his hearers.

In the passage before us he compares the kingdom of God to seed springing up in the field. This comparison is applicable to the erection of his visible Church in the world; but we shall consider it rather in reference to *a work of grace in the soul*.

There is a resemblance between seed in a field, and grace in the heart,

***~~I. In the manner of their growth—~~***

In the parable of the Sower, our Lord comprehends those characters who receive not the word aright. In this parable he confines himself to those characters that are truly upright. The growth of grace in their hearts resembles that of corn in a field, in that it is,

***~~1. Spontaneous—~~***

Seed, when harrowed into the earth, is left wholly to itself. The gardener "sleeps by night," and prosecutes his labors "by day," without attempting to assist the corn in the work of vegetation; whatever solicitude he may feel, he abstains from such fruitless endeavors. "The earth must bring forth the fruit of itself," or not at all. There is a principle of life in the corn which causes it to vegetate; nor is it indebted to anything but the kindly influences of the heavens, [1 Corinthians 15:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.38).

Just so with divine grace when sown in the heart of man. We do not mean that any man naturally and of his own will, lives to God; this is contradicted by the whole tenor of Scripture [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7); but grace is a seed which has within it a principle of life, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23). Hence Christ, from whose fullness we receive that grace, is said to live in us, and to be our life. [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20), [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4); it operates by a power inherent in itself, and is dependent only on Him who gave it that power, 1 Corinthians 15:10. The exertions of ministers, however unremitted, cannot make it grow, [1 Corinthians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.6-7); it must be left to the operation of its own native energy, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14); it will then put forth its virtue, through the invigorating beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the refreshing showers of the Spirit of God.

***~~2. Gradual—~~***

Seed does not instantly spring up in a state fit for the sickle. It passes through many different stages before it arrives at maturity.

Thus also, in a work of grace, "the blade, the ear, and the full corn," arise in regular succession. A Christian in his earliest attainments wears a different appearance from what he ever did before; he is not less altered than a grain of wheat when it puts forth "the blade;" he feels himself a sinful, helpless, and undone creature; he cleaves to Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Savior, and shows by his whole deportment that he has been quickened from the dead. But still he is prone to entertain self-righteous hopes, and too often yields to unbelieving fears. Hence, though sincere at heart, his attainments are but small, [Hebrews 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13).

In process of time he shows himself solid and hopeful as "the ear:" his knowledge of self is more deep, and his views of Christ more precious; his dependence on the power and grace of Christ is more simple and firm. Hence, though his conflicts may be more severe, he is more able to sustain them; nor is there any part of his conduct wherein his profiting does not appear. To this effect is John's description of the young men who are in an intermediate state between children and fathers, [1 John 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.13-14). After much experience, both of good and evil, [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14), he becomes like "full corn in the ear."

Though his views of himself are more humiliating than ever, he is not discouraged by them; he only takes occasion from them to live more entirely by faith in Christ: there is an evident ripeness in all the fruit that he brings forth. Above all, he lives in a nearer expectation of "the harvest." He sits loose to all the concerns of this present life, and longs for the season when he shall be treasured up in the garner, 1 Corinthians 1:7, [2 Corinthians 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-4).

***~~3. Mysterious—~~***

The most acute philosopher "knows not how" the grain vegetates. That it should die before it springs up, [1 Corinthians 15:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.36), and then so change its appearance as to put forth the blade, etc. is a mystery that none can explain.

Just so, the operations of grace in the soul of man are also inexplicable. We know not how the Spirit of God acts on the powers of our mind; we discover that he does so by the effects; but how, we cannot tell.

In this view our Lord compares the Spirit's agency to the *wind*, the precise point of whose rise or destination we are unable to ascertain, [John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8); nor is the mysteriousness of these changes, which we see in the natural world, ever made a reason for disbelieving them; neither should the difficulty of comprehending some things in a work of grace render us doubtful of its reality.

This resemblance, already so striking, may be further seen,

***~~II. In the end for which they grow—~~***

***~~The seed grows up in the field in order to the harvest—~~***

The gardener in every part of his labor has the harvest in view; he fertilizes, and ploughs, and sows his ground, in hopes of reaping at last. In every successive state of the corn he looks forward to the *crop*, [James 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7), and "when the harvest is come," he "immediately puts in the sickle."

***~~In the same way, grace springs up in the souls of men to prepare them for glory—~~***

God, having from the beginning chosen his people to salvation, orders every the minutest incident for the accomplishment of his own purpose, [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14), [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). All the dispensations of his providence concur for this end; all the operations of his grace are adjusted with the same view. The first infusion of a principle of life into our souls is in order to our eternal happiness. All the ordinances, whereby that life is preserved, are for the same end: for this, the word distills as the dew, and the clouds drop fatness; for this, the very things which seem for a time to retard its growth, are permitted: the gloomy chilling influences of temptation and desertion, are overruled for its final good.

When the soul is ripe for glory, "immediately will the sickle be put in:" when we are fully fit for the mansion prepared for us, God will receive us to it. Then will Christ, the great gardener, rejoice in the fruit of his labors, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11); the ministers also, who labored under him, will rejoice together with him, [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20); and that promise which our Lord has given us shall be fulfilled, [John 4:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.36).

***~~This is a rich source of comfort to ministers, and of encouragement to their people—~~***

Ministers, like the gardener, are scattering the seeds of God's words; but, through impatience, are often ready to complain that they have labored in vain. They forget that the seed lies long under the clods before it vegetates, and that much of their seed may spring up, when they have ceased from their labors: they are often discouraged by the drooping aspect of their people: they would wish them to grow up to a state of perfection at once, and to attain to ripeness without the changes of succeeding seasons; but it is by such changes that they are brought to maturity, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5). Well therefore may ministers prosecute their work with cheerfulness. Leaving events to God, they should follow the direction given them in the word, [Ecclesiastes 11:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.5-6), and expect that the promised success shall in due time attend their labors, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11).

People also, of every description, may receive much encouragement. They often are ready to doubt whether "the root of the matter is indeed in them:" because their progress is not so rapid as they could wish, they are apt to despond. It is right indeed to examine whether we be really endued with life; nor should we rest contented with low degrees of growth. Whatever joy we feel in seeing the blade, we should grieve if it made no progress. Thus we should never be satisfied without going on unto perfection. But let us wait with patience for the former and the latter rain. Let us expect a *variety of seasons*as well in the spiritual as the natural world: let us commit ourselves to God, that he may perfect us in his own way. Thus in due season shall we be fit for the granary of Heaven, [Job 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.26); the sickle shall then separate us from all our earthly connections; and we shall be carried in triumph to our appointed eternal rest!

***~~#1424~~***

***~~The Grain of Mustard-seed~~***

**[Mark 4:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.30-32)**

Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds1 of the air may nest under its shade."

"VERY excellent things are spoken of you, city of God." There is nothing either in Heaven or earth which may not well serve to shadow forth your excellencies. Our Lord had already illustrated the nature of his kingdom by a great variety of most instructive parables; and now stretches, as it were, his invention, in order to find other similitudes whereby to make it more fully understood. But choosing, as he always did, to bring his illustrations from things most obvious and familiar, he compares his Church and kingdom to a grain of mustard-seed. We shall,

***~~I. Illustrate this comparison—~~***

"The kingdom of God" means, in this as in a multitude of other places, the visible kingdom of Christ established in the world, and his invisible kingdom erected in the hearts of men. We must illustrate the comparison therefore,

***~~1. In reference to the Church of Christ in the world—~~***

The mustard-seed is the smallest of all those seeds which grow to any considerable size: and such was the Church of Christ at its first establishment in the world. It consisted at first of our Lord and his twelve disciples; and even after our Lord's ascension, their number was only one hundred and twenty. Soon however it spread forth its branches. As the mustard-seed, notwithstanding its smallness, grows up (in the eastern countries) into a tree of some magnitude, so did the Church, notwithstanding its unpromising appearances, extend its limits with astonishing rapidity. In the space of but a very few years, it filled, not Judea only, but the whole Roman empire.

Nor is it yet grown to its full dimensions. It will in the latter days overspread the whole earth. All the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. And as Jews and Gentiles have already taken refuge under its shadow, so shall the people of all nations and languages in God's appointed time. This by the spirit of prophecy is beautifully described as passing exciting great astonishment in the church itself. [Isaiah 49:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.18-21).

***~~2. In reference to the grace of God in the heart—~~***

Grace, when first implanted in the soul, is often very small, showing itself only in some glimmering views, slight convictions, good desires, faint purposes, and feeble endeavors. But in process of time it grows in every part; it shoots forth its roots into the soul, and becomes stronger in all its branches. The *faith*which was weak, is confirmed. The hope that was languishing, is made lively and abundant. The the love that was but cold and selfish, displays itself with purity and fervor. And all who come within the sphere of its influence, receive rest and refreshment from its beneficial shade, [Hosea 14:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.7). Indeed its full growth cannot be seen in this world. For that glorious sight, we must ascend to Heaven, where every tree of righteousness flourishes with unfading beauty, and exhibits in the brightest colors the power and efficacy of the Redeemer's grace!

Such being the import of the comparison, we shall now proceed to,

***~~II. Improve it—~~***

The parts of our improvement must necessarily have respect to the different views in which the parable has been explained.

We shall draw from it therefore some observations;

***~~1. For our encouragement respecting the Church at large—~~***

It is to be lamented that infidelity and profaneness have overrun the world; and that this tree which the Lord has planted, has been greatly "wasted and devoured by the wild beasts of the field, [Psalm 80:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.8-13)." But still the stock remains, nor shall it ever be rooted up. It shall yet "shoot forth its roots downward and bring forth fruit upward, 2 Kings 19:30." At various seasons the Church has been contracted within very narrow limits; yet has always been preserved. In the days of Noah and of Abraham, the branches were cut down, and nothing remained but the mere stem; yet it put forth fresh branches, and extended them far and wide. So shall it do yet again, until at last it covers the whole earth. Where there is nothing now but idolatry and every species of wickedness, there shall one day be "holiness to the Lord inscribed upon the very bells of the horses, [Zechariah 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.20)." Let us then water this tree with our prayers and tears. Let us help forward its growth by every means in our power; and look with confidence to that period when all the nations of the world shall come and sit under its benign shadow.

***~~2. For our consolation under personal doubts and apprehensions—~~***

From the smallness of our spiritual attainments we are sometimes ready to doubt whether the little seed of grace in our hearts will ever grow up to any use or profit. But *there is not a saint in Heaven whose grace was not once comparatively weak*. All were once "as new-born babes;" nor was it until they had learned many humiliating lessons, that they attained to the age of young men and fathers, [1 John 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12-13). Thus in the natural world, the largest oak was once an acorn, and the largest mustard-tree was once a little and contemptible seed.

Why then should any despond because of present appearances? Why should not we hope that in process of time our graces shall be strengthened, and our wide-extended branches be filled with fruit? Our God assures us that he does "not despise the day of small things, [Zechariah 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.10);" why then should we? Let us trust, and not be afraid. Let us look up to Heaven for the congenial influences of the sun and rain: nor doubt but that God will accomplish the work he has begun, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6); and "fulfill in us all the good pleasure of his goodness."

***~~#1425~~***

***~~The Gadarene Demoniac~~***

***~~[Mark 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.16-18)~~***

"And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region. And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him."

THE miracles of our blessed Lord were certainly intended in the first instance to attest the truth of his divine mission; in which view he himself frequently appeals to them. But they were also *intended to shadow forth the benefits which he was to confer on the souls of men.*In both these points of view the miracle before us is deserving of the most attentive consideration.

True it is that infidels have attempted to reduce this miracle to a mere curing of a man of an epilepsy or falling sickness. But it is evident that devils were expelled from him by the power of our Lord, since it was by them that the herd of swine were impelled to rush into the sea. A single man, or two men (for Matthew tells us there were two, [Matthew 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.28); though Mark notices only one, as being by far the greater monument of our Lord's power,) could not drive twenty swine into the sea, and much less two thousand, of which number this herd consisted, verse 13; and this destruction of the swine consequent upon the expulsion of the devils from the poor demoniac, showed how great a deliverance had been effected for him, and how entirely all the hosts of Hell were subject to the control of our blessed Lord.

To enter into these events aright, we should consider them,

***~~I. As they occurred on that occasion—~~***

We notice,

***~~1. The miracle wrought—~~***

Satan at that time had great power over the bodies of men: and a whole "legion" of devils had at that time occupied that poor unhappy man, whom they endued with a strength wholly supernatural; insomuch that no chains or fetters could confine him, verse 3–5. But at the command of Jesus they came forth and left their captive at perfect liberty. Fearing that Jesus would send them instantly into the abyss of Hell, which is, and for ever will be, their appropriate abode, the devils requested permission to enter into the herd of swine; and, having gained permission, they instigated the whole herd to rush down into the sea, where they were all destroyed. Probably the devils hoped by this to incense the owners of the swine against the Lord Jesus; and in this they succeeded altogether according to their wish.

***~~2. The effects produced—~~***

The effect upon the Gadarenes, to whom the herd belonged, was, to make them all, even the whole city, [Matthew 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.34), anxious that our Lord should *leave*both the place and neighborhood. One would have supposed indeed that the mercy given to the demoniac should rather make the Gadarenes anxious to *retain*our Lord, that they might obtain similar mercies at his hands: but a concern for their temporal interests swallowed up every other consideration, and united them all in one request, that Jesus "would depart out of their coasts."

But how different was the effect upon the man whom Jesus had delivered! He followed Jesus to the ship, and entreated that he might be permitted to wait upon him as a constant follower and attendant. And, when Jesus, for wise and gracious reasons, forbade that, and told him rather to go home to his friends and relatives, and tell them what mercy God had given unto him, he went home, and with fidelity and gratitude proclaimed to all around him the benefits he had received from his adorable Benefactor, verse 20.

But, not to dwell on the events which then took place, I wish you more particularly to view them,

***~~II. As renewed yet daily before our eyes—~~***

Of these things we may be well assured:

***~~1. Satan has still a most dreadful power over men—~~***

He no longer, I apprehend, possesses, as he once did, the *bodies*of men: but he has not one whit less power than he had over their *souls*. See to what an extent the whole race of mankind are subjected to his control. All men without exception are risen up in rebellion against God. Nor will they submit to any restraint either from reason or conscience. Every one follows his own will and his own way, even to the great injury of all around him, and to the certain destruction of his own soul. Tell men of their fearful responsibility to God, and of the terrors that await them in the eternal world, and "they make light of all," and say, like the devils in this poor demoniac, "What have we to do with these things?" or as Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that we should serve him? We know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice."

Not even this poor demoniac acted a more insane part than the generality around us. He wounded and destroyed his *body*: but these, in all that they do, wound and destroy their immortal *souls*. so true is that declaration of Solomon, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; madness is in their heart, while they live; and after that they go to the dead, [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3)." And all this is by the instigation of the devil, who is "the god of this world," and "works in all the children of disobedience, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4), [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)."

***~~2. But Jesus still exercises the same sovereign power over him—~~***

Truly the word of the Lord is yet living and powerful, nor can all the powers of Hell withstand it. We see the effect, as visibly as ever the Gadarenes did, of the word going forth in the ministration of the Gospel. Are there not even here present some who have "passed, as it were, from death unto life, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14)," and have "been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13)." The Prodigal Son shows us what a change takes place in the soul when once it is enabled to recover itself out of the snare of the devil, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26), and to assert its liberty. And if in him we behold all the madness of a life passed under the influence of the devil, and all the blessedness of a life consecrated to the service of the Most High God, then may we behold the same in many, I trust, among ourselves, who have, by the preached Gospel, "been turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)."

***~~3. But still is there the same enmity against the Savior in the hearts of ungodly men—~~***

When the power of divine grace is seen in the deliverance of sinners from the bonds of Satan, we should naturally suppose that all who behold the change should rejoice in it, and desire to become partakers of the same benefits. But the very reverse of this is found true in every place: and, as in the instance before us, an opposition to the Savior is raised, and persons of every description unite in a desire to expel him from their coasts. In this, Herod and Pontius Pilate will unite, [Luke 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.12); in this will both Jews and Gentiles concur, [Acts 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27); in this will gentle women be found in league with "lewd fellows of the baser sort [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50); [Acts 16:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.39); [Acts 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.5)." The desire of all ranks and orders of ungodly men are in perfect harmony on this subject; they all with one voice exclaim, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of your ways! [Job 21:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.14)."

***~~4. Still however on the part of those who have experienced his saving benefits is there the same desire to glorify his name—~~***

To commune with the Savior, to enjoy his presence, to fulfill his will, and to obtain richer communications of his grace, are the leading desires of all who have been delivered by him from the power of the devil. Whatever be their situation in life, they will be "as lights in a dark world, [Matthew 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14), [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15)," and will so "make their light to shine before men, that all who behold them shall glorify the name of Jesus, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)." They feel themselves bound to stand up as witnesses for him, that he is that "stronger man, who alone can bind the strong man armed, [Luke 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.22)," and deliver from his bonds the vassals whom "he had led captive at his will."

From a sense of gratitude to his heavenly Benefactor, he will, like this liberated maniac, commend him to all around him, saying with the Psalmist, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul, verse 20 with [Psalm 66:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.16)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have never yet been dispossessed of the devil—~~***

It is humiliating to reflect on the state of our fallen world, of which "Satan is the god," and we all without exception are his subjects. To all who live in sin of any kind it may be said, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do, [John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42)."

"What have we to do with you?" was the one voice of all the devils in the man that was possessed by them: and all of them cried, "Torment us not." And is not a similar apprehension expressed by men at this day, when the Lord Jesus Christ is, as it were, introduced among them, "Speak not to us of him; do not make us melancholy?" Does not the whole tenor of men's lives show, "whose they are, and whom they serve?"

It is not necessary that men should rush headlong into all manner of iniquity. Sin, whether of a more heinous or more specious kind, equally shows under whose influence they live, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8); [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10), and that they need to "be turned from idols to serve the living God."

Satisfy not then yourselves, my brethren, with some good feelings and some general acknowledgments. The devils acknowledged Jesus as the "Son of the living God; and they deprecated his wrath; and yet were they devils still! You must go much further than this if you would be partakers of Christ's kingdom and glory. You must be made "new creatures in Christ Jesus," and must evince the reality of this change by a corresponding and visible deportment.

***~~2. Those who have been made monuments of Christ's power and grace—~~***

See what unbounded mercy has been given unto you. See in the fate of that entire herd of swine what is the final destiny of all the vassals of sin and Satan. O bless your God for his distinguishing grace. And now, while you confess your obligations, arise to the duties imposed upon you.

To that liberated man the Lord Jesus said, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you." And this he says to every one of you. Not that you are to do this in a way of boasting and self-delight. God forbid, but you must do it in order to commend the Savior to all around you, and, if possible, to bring them also to a participation of his saving benefits. And be attentive also to the whole of your life and conduct, that you may "adorn the doctrine" which you profess, and constrain all to glorify Him who has done such great things for you.

***~~#1426~~***

***~~Jesus Heals a Woman~~***

***~~[Mark 5:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.25-29)~~***

"Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction."

THE miracles of our Lord afford much useful instruction. They were not perhaps always intended as types; but they afford a just occasion for spiritual observations.

To improve the miracle now before us, we observe,

***~~I. Sin has introduced many lamentable evils into the world—~~***

*Sickness and pain and death are the effects of sin.* If our first parents had not sinned, these things would never have existed. The infirmities of the weaker gender are especially noticed in this view, [Genesis 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.16). Deplorable was the condition of the woman mentioned in the text, but incomparably worse effects have proceeded from sin: our souls are altogether diseased in every part. The prophet's description of the Jews is applicable to us, [Isaiah 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5-6). Our own confession is but too just a picture of our state "There is no health in us," and, if we should die in this state, we must surely perish, [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9).

***~~II. We are prone to rest in carnal methods of removing them—~~***

The woman had employed many physicians, and had spent her substance on them without any benefit. We blame her not for using all possible means of relief: but she had looked no higher than to the creature for help. This conduct incensed the Lord against good King Asa, [2 Chronicles 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.12); and in every age it provokes the eyes of his glory.

In spiritual things we generally act the same part. Under slight convictions of sin we rest in purposes of amendment. If guilt lies heavy on our souls, we flee to duties, and hope by them to compensate for past neglects, [Micah 6:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 6.6-7). Not but that it is right to use the means of salvation: but we should look through the means to the Savior, and expect mercy, not for our diligence, but for his name's sake, [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-32). Unless we do this our labor will end in disappointment.

***~~III. However desperate our disorders are, the Lord Jesus is able to heal them—~~***

The woman's disease had baffled all the art of medicine; but she hoped to find relief from the Lord Jesus. Nor was she disappointed in her application to him: there went virtue out of him and healed her instantly.

The same power will he exercise over the diseases of the soul. The most heinous sins may be purged away by his blood; the most inveterate lusts may be subdued by his Spirit, [1 Corinthians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.11). A whole cloud of witnesses have testified of this truth Manasseh, David, Solomon, Paul, etc. See [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16); nor are there lacking many living monuments of his power and grace.

***~~IV. The more we honor Jesus by faith, the more will he bless and honor us—~~***

Greatly did this diseased person honor Jesus by her faith. She had heard of his unbounded power and benevolence towards others: she trusted that he would exercise them towards herself. Nor did she at all stagger through unbelief. Jesus therefore determined to bless and honor her. His inquiries were made, not for his own information, but to bring her into notice, and to propose her as a pattern for the encouragement of others. He not only conveyed, but expressly confirmed, her cure, and dismissed her with the endearing appellation of "daughter."

Thus will he testify his love to all who rely upon him. How gloriously did he reward the confidence of the Hebrew youths, [Daniel 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17); [Daniel 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.25); [Daniel 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.27). Nor shall any put their trust in him in vain. Their sins, however numerous, shall surely be forgiven, [Matthew 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.31); their difficulties, however great, shall surely be overcome, [Mark 11:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.22-23).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who are unconcerned about their spiritual maladies—~~***

We all are sensible that we are sinful creatures, and profess an intention to seek forgiveness: yet for the most part we defer this necessary work. If our *bodies*were disordered, we would apply to the physician; we would even spend our substance in procuring his aid, and this, with only an uncertain hope of obtaining relief.

But we account the smallest labor too much for our *souls*. We will not apply in earnest to our Almighty Physician, notwithstanding we could not fail of success in our application, and should be sure to obtain healing "without money and without price." What strange infatuation possesses impenitent sinners! What extreme folly is it to prefer the transient welfare of a perishable body, before the eternal welfare of an immortal soul! Let the conduct of this woman put such persons to shame, and let them instantly avail themselves of the Savior's presence.

***~~2. To those who desire to have their disorders healed—~~***

Man is ever prone to seek help in the creature first. The Jews of old did this to their own confusion, [Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.13); and God has declared, that all who do so shall fail of success, [Jeremiah 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-6). Let us then be convinced that the sinner's help is in God alone, and that all others are "physicians of no value." Let us never question the power or willingness of Christ to save. *Let us make our way to him through all difficulties and obstructions.*Let us stretch out our hands with humble boldness and confidence, nor doubt but that virtue shall proceed from him to heal our souls.0ol

***~~#1427~~***

***~~Prevalence of Unbelief~~***

***~~[Mark 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.6)~~***

"And He marveled because of their unbelief."

ONE would suppose, that those who had the fullest opportunity of knowing the Lord Jesus from his earliest infancy, would have been the first to embrace his salvation, when once it was openly proclaimed to them. But the very reverse of this was the fact. The circumstance of their knowing his family connections was a ground of offence to them; so that they were more averse to receive him than others were who had never possessed these advantages. We are not to suppose that this excited real surprise in the bosom of our Savior; because he knew, from the beginning, that "a Prophet has no honor in his own country. But, as *the inspired writers always speak of him as if he had been affected as other men are*, we are told in my text, "He marveled because of their unbelief."

A similar effect is generally produced wherever Christ is preached. His Gospel is but too generally despised by those to whom it is more immediately sent; and it is more sought and valued by those who are somewhat remote from the sphere of its stated ministration. In fact, there are but few, in any place, who embrace it with their whole hearts. In proof of this, I will show you,

***~~I. What unbelief prevails among us—~~***

I grant, that if the *name*of Christianity alone was sufficient to make us Christians, then we all are Christians. But the slightest observation of what is passing either around us or within us, is sufficient to convince us,

***~~1. How few regard the Lord Jesus Christ with the veneration he deserves—~~***

As to the bowing of the *head*or knee at the mention of his name, many will do that, who never bow their *hearts*to his will, or yield obedience to his commands. If from our inmost souls we regarded him as "Emmanuel, God with us," how would we fear before him; admiring his person, adoring his love, and magnifying his grace! See how the Cherubim before the throne conduct themselves, while incessantly they proclaim his praise, [Isaiah 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.1-3) with [John 12:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.41). So would it be with us in our daily walk before him, if our faith were such as it ought to be. We would veil our faces as unworthy to behold him; and our feet, as unworthy to serve him; while we would yet strive to serve him with all our faculties, both of soul and body.

***~~2. How few look to him aright for the communication of his saving benefits!~~***

We see how diseased persons pressed around him in the days of his flesh; and were let down through the roofs of their houses, when no other way of access to him was open to them. But where do we find persons thus earnest in their approaches to him in their secret chambers? *The diseases of our souls can be healed by him alone*. Yet, if we look at our prayers that are offered to him day and night, who has not reason to blush and be ashamed? And whence is this, but from our unbelief, which keeps us from feeling either our need of his mercy, or of his willingness to bestow it.

***~~3. How few surrender up themselves to him as his devoted servants!~~***

Behold how the Apostles left their nets, and Matthew the receipt of custom, to attend upon their Lord! So, in heart and spirit, will all his believing people forsake all for him, [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33). But say whether this is indeed the habit of your lives? Look back to your early days; and trace your conduct up, through successive years, to the present moment, and then declare, whether you have ever risen thus superior to earthly things, and devoted yourselves unreservedly to your Lord and Savior! This is the proper office and effect of faith, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4); and the total lack of this fruit argues but too plainly the lack of the root from which alone it can proceed.

This state of things may well excite our wonder; as will appear, while I show,

***~~II. What reason there is to marvel at it—~~***

Consider, I pray you,

***~~1. With what abundant evidence Christ is set forth among you—~~***

At Nazareth, he appeared as a poor man, of a poor family, in circumstances of extreme poverty, not having so much as a place where to lay his head. And from his hearers there his future history was veiled, as was also the entire nature of his divine mission. Yet our Lord marveled at their unbelief.

But to you the entire nature of his dispensation is made manifest; and the glory of God, as displayed in it, has been set before your eyes. You see him coming down from Heaven to obey the law which you have broken, and to endure the curse which you have merited; and then rising from the dead, and ascending to Heaven, to perfect the work for you. You have beheld the meridian blaze, as it were, of that light, of which they saw but the early dawn. Nay, more; you have seen "the glory of all the Divine perfections concentrated in him, and shining forth in his face, 2 Corinthians 4:6." If, then, there was cause for marvel at their unbelief, what must there be at your unbelief?

***~~2. With what confidence you profess yourselves to be his—~~***

You would account it a grievous insult, if your right to call yourselves Christians were questioned. Yet, if you will forgive me, I would ask, *What are the great mass of you better than baptized heathens?*You have been baptized in the name of Christ, it is true; as Simon Magus also was. But how was he changed by his baptism; or, how were you changed? What evidence have you that you are "born of the Spirit," and "made new creatures in Christ Jesus?" And if, in the lack of all proof of conversion, you maintain your title to Heaven, say whether you be not opposing every declaration of God in his word, and whether there be not reason to marvel at your unbelief?

***~~3. What important interests you have at stake—~~***

On your sincere believing in Christ your eternal happiness depends. This, all who receive the Gospel most cordially acknowledge. How comes it, then, that you never take the trouble to examine your state before God, and to try the sincerity of your faith? One would suppose that the thought of eternal happiness in Heaven, or of eternal misery in Hell, would be sufficient to awaken you to some consideration: but, since nothing of this kind can influence you, we may well marvel at your unbelief.

***~~Know, then,~~***

***~~1. That the Lord Jesus Christ at this very instant marvels at you—~~***

As sure as he ever marveled at the Nazarenes in the days of his flesh, so does he now marvel at you. 'These are the persons for whom I went down from Heaven, and for whom I lived and died; yes, and for whose salvation I am yet anxious; as I have shown, by sending to them the invitations of my word, and the offers of my grace. How strange it is that they should yet remain insensible of all this love! For the Nazarenes there is some excuse; but for these, none at all. "O that they were wise, and would consider their latter end!" O that they would turn unto me in this "their day of grace, in this the day of their salvation!" '

***~~2. That you will, before long, marvel at yourselves—~~***

How strange will it appear to you, the very instant you die, that you could ever treat so lightly these overtures of grace! But, alas! the time for remedying that error will be past. If you are in Heaven, methinks you would be filled with indignation against yourselves, if indignation could ever enter those mansions of bliss. But, if you are in Hell, there will be scope in abundance for this painful feeling; since a retrospect upon the mercies you have abused, and the opportunities you have lost, will constitute the bitterest ingredient of your cup to all eternity.

May God so operate on your minds by his grace, that you may now turn to the Lord Jesus with your whole hearts, and become marvelous and stupendous *monuments of his mercy*for ever and ever!

***~~#1428~~***

***~~Christian Gratitude Delineated~~***

***~~[Mark 6:51-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.51-52)~~***

"Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened."

OUR blessed Lord, after feeding five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two small fishes, sent his disciples over the Lake of Gennesaret, while he dismissed the people: and then he went up into a mountain to pray. The disciples labored, for many hours, to reach the place of their destination; but were unable on account of the violence of the wind. After nine or ten hours' toil, they were still far from land (notwithstanding the lake was not above five or six miles broad;) and, behold, they saw one walking upon the water, whom they supposed to be a spirit; and, filled with terror at such an extraordinary spectacle, they cried out.

Our blessed Lord, however, drew near to them, and, in the most condescending manner, dispelled their fears, and went up to them into the vessel: and instantly the wind ceased; and they were transported in their boat, by miracle, to the very place where they had been enjoined to land.

On many other occasions they were "amazed, [Mark 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.12)," and "astonished with great astonishment, [Mark 5:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.42)," yes, and beyond measure "astonished, [Mark 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.37);" but, on the present occasion, it is said they were "greatly amazed within themselves beyond measure, and wondered."

Now, we shall find it by no means an unprofitable subject for our consideration, if I show you,

***~~I. What we are to think of the astonishment here expressed—~~***

I suppose that there are few among us who would not highly approve of it, as exactly suited to the occasion. For our Lord to come to them walking upon the sea, and in an instant to still the winds and waves, and to transport the ship, without any further effort on their part, to the desired haven, was beyond measure wonderful; and therefore we should be ready to commend the sensibility which they manifested, and the amazement which they expressed.

But I am constrained to say that their feelings on the occasion were altogether wrong; and that their astonishment, instead of being commendable, was highly criminal; since *it was nothing but a compound of ignorance, and forgetfulness, and obduracy*.

***~~1. Of ignorance—~~***

They knew not who our Savior was: they supposed him to be a mere man. Had they known him to be the God of Heaven and earth, they would no more have wondered at his walking on the sea, or stilling the winds, than they would wonder at a man walking on dry land, and stopping a wheel which he himself had set in motion. He had indeed proclaimed himself to be God manifested in the flesh; and, by innumerable miracles, wrought in his own name and by his own power—he had proved himself to be so. But they believed him not, and could not conceive of him in his true and proper character as their incarnate God: and to this ignorance and unbelief our Lord traces the very feelings which they had shown on a similar occasion: "How is it that you have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him, [Mark 4:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.40-41)." They "thought him to be only such a one as themselves [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21);" and to that must be traced the excess of wonder which they expressed on this most interesting occasion.

***~~2. Of forgetfulness—~~***

Within the space of twelve hours from that time, they had seen his miracle of the loaves, in which they themselves had been the instruments of dispensing a few loaves and fish to five thousand men. They themselves had seen the bread increasing in their own hands before their eyes, while they were in the very act of distributing it to the people; and, after having fed to the full the whole multitude, they had taken up in fragments probably ten or a dozen times more in quantity than there was at the beginning verse 41–44.

Now, had they kept this in mind, they could never have been so surprised at his walking on the sea, or his stilling of the winds; which were, in fact, no greater miracles than that which they had so recently witnessed, and in which they themselves had borne such a distinguished part. Hence the Evangelist blames them for their conduct, and ascribes to their forgetfulness of the one miracle, their astonishment at the other: "they were sore amazed, and wondered; for they considered not the miracle of the loaves."

***~~3. Of obduracy—~~***

They had not been duly impressed with the miracle of the loaves. If they had felt as became them on that occasion, they would never have been filled with such overpowering astonishment on this. But they were in an insensible and obdurate state: and therefore the Evangelist says, "they wondered; for their heart was hardened." In like manner, when, in the next chapter, our Lord bade them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod," and they understood him as giving directions only respecting bread, he said to them, "Have you your heart yet hardened?" And then, calling to their remembrance two different seasons when he had fed immense multitudes with a few loaves, he repeated that just reproof, "How is it that you do not understand, [Mark 8:14-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.14-21)."

Thus, you perceive, if we analyze the Apostles's feelings, instead of admiring them as suited to the occasion, we shall condemn them as altogether unworthy of their Christian character.

For the regulation of our own conduct, let us learn from their astonishment,

***~~II. What lessons it should teach us—~~***

This is a subject which I consider as of very great importance to the Church of God. Were it a mere arbitrary construction of mine, it might be supposed that I carried the matter too far, and dealt too harshly with the Apostles in my censures of them. But the censure is passed by God himself: and by it he instructs us,

***~~1. What is the proper measure of our expectations—~~***

We are apt, in our expectations from God, to take into consideration the difficulties that are to be surmounted, and our unworthiness of the blessing which we implore at his hands: and from these two considerations we are apt to doubt his effectual interposition in our behalf. But, instead of giving weight to such considerations as those, we ought rather to reflect on what God has done; and to *make his past mercies the standard by which to regulate our future expectations*.

I need his POWER. And what proof has he given of its sufficiency for me? He has created the universe, and by one act of his power called it into existence. Then I take it as an unquestionable truth, that nothing is impossible with him, and that I can be in no state whatever in which he cannot afford me effectual relief, [Isaiah 40:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.28-29).

I need also his GRACE. And what has he done that will give me any just idea of his grace? He has given his only dear Son out of his bosom, to assume my nature, and bear my sins, and, by the sacrifice of himself to restore me to his favor. Shall I then limit the extent of his grace to me in other matters? The Apostle says, "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32)." This argument is sound and conclusive; and precisely such as the disciples should have used on the occasion before us: "We have seen within these few hours the stupendous miracle of the loaves; and, having seen that, we shall wonder at no other exercise of his power or grace that he shall be pleased to grant unto us; and least of all, when we consider that the loaves were multiplied for multitudes who had flocked to him from mere curiosity, shall we be astonished at anything which he may do for us, his stated followers, and his chosen disciples."

Yes, brethren, we are to bear in mind what God has done, and from thence to conclude what he will do; and never to entertain a doubt but that his grace, in every possible point of view, whether as acting in us or exercised towards us, shall be sufficient for us.

***~~2. What is the proper expression of our gratitude—~~***

If God have shown mercy to us of any kind, either in a way of providence or of grace, we are not to be enrapt in wonder, as though he had exceeded all that his proper character had taught us to expect. This would be a very unfitting way of showing our gratitude.

Suppose a man of known piety and wealth were to relieve a poor family by bestowing on them a few shillings; and all the neighbors who heard of it were to be astonished beyond measure at this act of kindness; would their astonishment reflect any honor on the person so greatly lauded? Would it not show, either that the persons did not know his character, or that, at least, they were ignorant of what true piety requires? If they knew the man, instead of being filled with wonder at this exercise of his benevolence, they would only say, He has acted like himself, and in a manner worthy of the high character he sustains.

Thus, whatever we may receive from God, we must not be filled with wonder; but regard his mercies as a proof and evidence that He is what he has described himself to be, sovereign in the objects of his choice, and unbounded in the communications of his love.

In *admiration of his goodness*we may abound as much as we will: indeed it is not possible to have our souls too deeply penetrated with admiring and adoring thoughts of God. The more we resemble the heavenly hosts in this respect, the better: they, both saints and angels, are all prostrate upon their faces before the throne of God, in profoundest adoration, Just so should be our posture at the throne of grace, every day, and all the day long.

In *holy activity*, too, there can be no excess: we may serve God with every faculty we possess, whether of body or soul.

It is wonder only that must be excluded; because that is no better than a compound of ignorance, forgetfulness, and obduracy, and is therefore altogether unsuitable to express our unbounded obligations to Almighty God.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Are any of you involved in trouble and perplexity? See in whom you have help—~~***

You, when proceeding in the path of duty, may meet with storms and tempests, even as the Apostles did, when prosecuting their appointed course; and you may labor both long and painfully in vain. But is therefore your condition hopeless? No! there is One who is both able and willing to save you, if only you call on him. He may appear to be far off: but he is near at hand, though you know him not; and the hour of your extremity shall be the time of his effectual interposition: yes, "He who shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

But perhaps your difficulties appear insurmountable. They may be so to you; but "with Him all things are possible." At His command the winds and waves shall be still; and all your troubles shall vanish in an instant. Be assured, that what he did for his disciples of old, he will do for you at this day; and if only you commit your souls to him, you shall speedily be at the haven where you desire to be.

***~~2. Have any of you been delivered from trouble? Give to the Lord Jesus all the glory—~~***

You see how vain your own labors are; and that you may toil during your whole life in vain, if he comes not to your aid.

What could any of you have done to remove guilt from your consciences, or to mortify sin, and transform yourselves into the Divine image? To all eternity you would have labored in vain to effect any one of these things. But Jesus, by his all-atoning blood, has expiated your guilt; and, by sprinkling that blood upon your consciences, has brought peace into your souls; and, by his all-powerful grace, he has enabled you to overcome your spiritual enemies, and to fulfill the will of God. And, if it were allowed to us to wonder, you might well be amazed at what he has wrought for you.

But in what he has done, he has only fulfilled his own office, and displayed his own proper character as a Savior. Give him, then, the glory of all that he has done; and "be his witnesses" to an ungodly world, that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

***~~#1429~~***

***~~The Means of Spiritual Defilement~~***

***~~[Mark 7:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.14-16)~~***

"When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them: Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

IT is by no means uncommon to see an excessive attachment to human institutions in those who have very little regard for the laws of God. Persons of this description are ever eager to censure a trifling deviation from some foolish custom, while they allow themselves in a constant violation of the most important duties. They strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Such were the Pharisees of old: they had condemned our Lord's disciples for not complying with their traditions; our Lord therefore first exposed their hypocrisy, and then vindicated his followers by a very appropriate parable—

In illustration of the parable we shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. What it is which defiles the soul—~~***

Our Lord observes, that "whatever enters into a man cannot defile him:" not but that a man is defiled by drunkenness and excess; but it is the disposition which is indulged, and not the mere act of eating or drinking that constitutes that defilement. As *the heart is the seat of spiritual defilement*, so that alone which proceeds from it or resides in it, can render man unclean in the sight of God. The things therefore which defile a man are,

***~~Evil words—~~***

These proceed out of the abundance of the heart; and alas! what *filthiness*and overflowings of *wickedness*do they betray!

What a lack of reverence for the Deity is discovered by *profane*words! Well does God say, that "He will not hold those guiltless" who utter them.

Angry and passionate expressions manifest a murderous rancor in the heart, [1 John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15); and justly subject those who use them to the punishment of hellfire [Matthew 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.22).

Lying is held in abhorrence even by those who are most addicted to the practice of it: nor can persons who give way to it have any portion in the kingdom of Heaven, [Revelation 22:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.15).

Who would think well of that heart, which gives vent to slander and *calumny*?

As pleasing as *flattery*is to our vain minds, every one is disgusted with it except when it bears the semblance of truth; nor will God fail to punish those who so basely prostitute the powers of speech, [Psalm 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.3).

Even an idle word is odious in the sight of God; and a strict account of it shall be rendered in the day of judgment, [Matthew 12:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.36).

***~~Evil dispositions—~~***

There is not anything more sordid and groveling than a worldly and covetous disposition. The object of its desire is always stigmatized by the name of "filthy lucre."

As for *envy*, it is justly represented as rottenness in the bones Proverbs, 14:30. It even operates as a disorder to reduce our bodily frame, at the same time that it wastes and destroys the soul.

*Censoriousness*is nearly allied to this; and no less indicates a narrow, selfish, and base mind.

What stronger symptom of internal depravity can there be than a peevish, *discontented*, murmuring spirit? Even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of those who should indulge such a temper, that God would execute his judgments upon them, Jude verse 14–16.

*Levity*is less hateful indeed; but it argues an unmindfulness of the Divine presence, and a state of soul very unfitting those who are on the brink and precipice of eternity.

Nor is *sloth*by any means a small indication of a corrupt heart: it enervates all our powers, and unfits us for the service either of God or man. In what light our Lord regards this disposition we clearly see by that address of his, "You wicked and slothful servant;" "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

***~~Evil thoughts—~~***

The very "thoughts of our hearts are all naked and open before God," and he regards them as infallible marks of the state of our souls. Those thoughts indeed which are rejected instantly with indignation, do not leave any stain upon the soul; but those which are in the least degree harbored and indulged, most assuredly defile us. We are told that "the very thought of foolishness is sin, [Proverbs 24:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.9)." And Simon Magus was exhorted to "pray that the thought of his heart might be forgiven him, [Acts 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.22)."

Indeed it is but a small part of the wickedness of the heart that reveals itself by words and actions. All sin is first conceived in the imagination; and much lies buried there for lack of an opportunity to break forth. Who can number the proud, the impure, the uncharitable, the revengeful, the unbelieving, and the "vain thoughts that often lodge in the soul?" Who can estimate the guilt which we contract by means of them? It is worthy of remark, that these are the very things whereby our Lord himself says that the heart is defiled verse 21–23. And these are the things which, when brought to maturity, fill the world with adulteries, murders, and all manner of abominations, [James 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.1).

The very peculiar manner in which this truth is delivered by our Lord, leads us to show,

***~~II. The importance of understanding and knowing this distinction—~~***

Our Lord "called all the people unto him;" he addressed them not only collectively, but, as it were, individually, "every one." He repeated his exhortation, "Hearken, and understand;" and lastly, he confirmed it with a very emphatic admonition, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Now the reason of all this solemnity will appear, if we consider, that on the clear knowledge of this truth depends our knowledge of everything that is important in religion. Without it we cannot know,

***~~1. The extent of our own depravity—~~***

While we think that our defilement arises principally from outward actions, we shall entertain a good opinion of ourselves. If we have been kept from flagrant transgressions, we shall be, like Paul in his unconverted state, "alive without the law." But if the spirituality of the commandment, and our deviations from the line of duty, are made to appear to us, we like him shall "die," that is, we shall see ourselves dead in trespasses and sins, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9).

Knowing the depravity of our own hearts, we shall be willing to humble ourselves before God as undone sinners; we shall cry like Job, "Behold, I am vile; I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes. Now until we be thus brought to loath ourselves, we have no genuine repentance. We must therefore learn wherein spiritual defilement consists, if ever we would have the guilt of it removed from our souls; for, except we repent, we must perish.

***~~2. The impossibility of cleansing ourselves—~~***

*The lopping off a few branches of sin is no more than what an unregenerate person may do.* While therefore he supposes that all his defilement consists in external actions, he will be depending on his own strength. But our disorder is far beyond any remedy of our own prescription: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." "Every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts has been only evil continually." We must, therefore, become entire new creatures: "Old things must pass away, and all things must become new."

Is such a change within the power of unassisted man to effect? Let any one strive to put away every evil disposition, and to suppress with indignation every rising thought of sin; let him plant the contrary dispositions in his heart, and nourish with delight the thoughts that are of a contrary tendency; he may as well attempt to build a world as to do this in his own strength, [Jeremiah 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.23).

Yet this must be done. We do not say that a person must be absolutely perfect here; but he must pant after perfection, and loath himself for every remaining imperfection, even of thought. Surely this must be the work of that Almighty Agent who spoke the universe into existence, and brought order and beauty out of the shapeless chaos [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20); [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10). And when we know the depth of our depravity, then and then only, shall we be willing to seek help from Him who is mighty to save.

***~~3. The suitableness and excellency of the Gospel salvation—~~***

While ignorant of our own depravity, we are unaffected with the tidings of the Gospel. We imagine that others may appear to need a fountain; but we do not, because we have very little pollution. We imagine that others may need a new heart; but we have a very good one by nature. Thus the offers of the Gospel are of no value in our eyes; but when we know the depth of our corruptions, we are thankful to hear of a fountain opened for sin; and the promise of a new heart is precious to our souls, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27). The Gospel then appears exactly suited to our necessities, and "everything is accounted as dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of it."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. To those who lay a stress on formal services—~~***

We mean not to depreciate an outward conformity to religion; but where there is no more than that, the soul is in a lost and perishing condition. That is only like "the painting of a sepulcher which is full of rottenness and all impurity." Remember then, you must "lay the axe to the root of the tree." "You must be born again." This is the solemn and repeated declaration of Christ himself, "You must be born of the Spirit, or you can never enter into the kingdom of God." Hearken then, and understand this solemn admonition: let every one of you apply it to himself. Cry with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear."

***~~2. To those who have experienced vital and spiritual religion—~~***

*It is an unspeakable blessing to know anything of your own wicked hearts*; nor can you ever be sufficiently thankful to Him who has revealed to you "the mystery of iniquity" within you: but what earnest heed ought you to take lest you be drawn again under the power of your corruptions! You still carry about with you "a body of sin and death!" "The flesh lusts still against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh."

Let it then be your daily endeavor to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." Be daily "putting off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be putting on the new man," etc. It is a solemn admonition which God has given you, "If any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy." "You are now the temple of the Holy Spirit." O guard against every thought or desire that may grieve your Divine guest. You must resist the first risings of sinful inclination, as an evil desire indulged will blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and bring in with it a host of sins.

Above all, commit yourselves to that Almighty Savior, who has promised to preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom. So shall you be washed in his blood from every fresh contracted stain, and be rendered "fit for the inheritance of the saints in light."

***~~#1430~~***

***~~The Deaf and Dumb Man Healed~~***

***~~[Mark 7:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.32-36)~~***

"Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it."

*THE astonishing frequency of our Lord's miracles renders them the less noticed*; and we are ready to suppose that, after a few of them have been considered, the rest will afford us nothing new. But every distinct miracle was attended with some peculiar circumstances, and ought to excite our admiration as much as if it had been the only one recorded. To improve that which is now before us, we may consider,

***~~I. The manner in which it was wrought—~~***

Many instructive lessons may be learned from an attentive survey of our Lord's conduct in every part of his life. His manner of performing this miracle was peculiarly worthy of notice. It was,

***~~Humble—~~***

He "took the man aside from the multitude" that surrounded him: not that he was afraid of having his miracles inspected and scrutinized as the greater part of them were wrought publicly before all: but on some occasions he sought rather to conceal his works. He wished not to excite the envy of the priests, or the jealousy of the rulers. He labored also to avoid all appearance of ostentation; he would show us by his example how our acts of beneficence should be performed, [Matthew 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.3), and that we should never be actuated by the love of man's applause, [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44). Hence he so strictly "charged the people" not to divulge this miracle.

He also "looked up to Heaven" in acknowledgment of his Father's concurrence. Not but that he had in himself all power to do whatever he willed, [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21); but, as Mediator, he bore his commission from his heavenly Father, and therefore directed the eyes of men to him as the fountain of all good. Thus did he teach us to look up to Heaven for aid, even in those things for which we might suppose ourselves to be most sufficient, and to consult in everything, not our own glory, but the glory of God.

***~~Compassionate—~~***

Touched with pity toward the object before him, "he sighed." He could not view even the present miseries introduced by sin without deep commiseration. Thus he showed how fit he was to be our great high priest, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15); and how we ought to feel for others, and to bear their burdens, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2). *We should never behold the bodily infirmities of others without longing to relieve them: nor, without gratitude to God for the continued use of our own faculties.*

***~~Sovereign—~~***

Though he looked up to Heaven, he wrought the miracle by his own power. He had only to issue the command, "Be opened!" He who once said, "Let there be light, and there was light," needed only to express his will in order to be obeyed. Instantly the man received the perfect use of his faculties; and, though enjoined silence, became an active instrument of spreading his Benefactor's praise.

***~~Mysterious—~~***

Our Lord was pleased to put his finger into the man's ears, and to touch his tongue with his finger, which he had previously moistened with his own spittle. What was the precise intention of these means we cannot determine. Certain it is, that they had no *necessary*connection with the restoration of the man's faculties: but they are not without their use as they respect us. They show that there are no means, however weak in themselves, and inadequate to the end proposed, which he may not make use of for his own glory, and that it befits us to submit to any means whereby he may be pleased to convey his benefits.

But, besides more minute considerations, there are others which arise from a more general view of the miracle:

***~~II. The improvement we should make of it—~~***

All the miracles were intended to confirm the doctrine delivered by our Lord—

We may very properly therefore consider this as,

***~~1. A proof of his mission—~~***

It had long been foretold that the Messiah should work miracles. The restoring of men to the use of their faculties was among the number of the works which were to be performed by him, [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6). Here then the prophecy received a literal accomplishment; nor could prejudice itself find any just reason for questioning any longer our Lord's Messiahship. We indeed enjoy such abundant light and evidence that we need not the support of any single miracle: but, as all the miracles collectively, so should each individually, assure us beyond a doubt, that Jesus is the Christ.

***~~2. A specimen of his greatest work—~~***

Jesus had a much greater work than that of healing bodily disorders, He is the great physician whose office it is to heal men's souls. The miracles which he wrought in the days of his flesh were only as shadows of those which he had undertaken to perform.

He unstops the ears of men so that they may "hear his voice and live" He loosens their tongues so that they may show forth his praise. This he does by the invisible but effectual energy of his Spirit. Let those, who have never yet heard his voice, implore his aid. Let those, who are yet unoccupied with his praises, entreat his favor. Soon shall all natural or acquired infirmities yield to his word, [Isaiah 32:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.3-4), and "Ephphatha" be the commencement of a new and heavenly life!

***~~3. An encouragement for all to call upon him—~~***

The object of Christ's compassion had nothing to recommend him; this deaf man's desire of relief was sufficient to call forth the pity of our Lord. Who then should stay away from our Lord on account of his unworthiness? Should we make our infirmities a reason for continuing far from him? Should we not rather take occasion from them to plead with him more earnestly? And would not he rejoice in manifesting his power and love towards us?

Let every one then apply to him in humility and faith. No disorders, however complicated, shall be able to withstand his will. The believing suppliant shall soon experience the efficacy of his grace, and shall have occasion to add his testimony to theirs of old, "People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'" [Mark 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.37)

***~~#1431~~***

***~~The Blind Man Healed~~***

***~~[Mark 8:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.23-25)~~***

"Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly."

THIS miracle has many circumstances common to others. On other occasions our Lord manifested similar condescension and compassion: on other occasions also he both showed his abhorrence of ostentation, and his displeasure at the obstinate unbelief of men, by performing his miracles in private, and forbidding the persons who were cured to make them known. But the gradual manner in which he effected this cure is peculiar to this single miracle; we shall therefore fix our attention more particularly on that, and deduce from it some profitable observations.

***~~I. Persons may be under the hand of Christ, and yet have but very imperfect views of spiritual things—~~***

This man had experienced somewhat of the power and grace of Christ. Yet he could not distinguish men from trees, except by their motion. Thus are many, of whom there is reason to hope well, extremely dark and indistinct in their views.*They know very little of their own depravity, or of Christ's excellency, or of the nature of the spiritual warfare.*Thus the Apostles themselves saw not the necessity of Christ's death, [Matthew 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22), or the spiritual nature of his kingdom, [Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54). Even after Christ's resurrection they could not conceive for what ends he was risen, [Acts 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.6). Nor, for several years after the day of Pentecost, did they understand their entire freedom from the Mosaic law, or the purpose of God to make the Gentiles partakers of his salvation. Peter needed repeated visions to overcome his prejudices; nor did anything but a conviction of God's particular interposition prevent the whole college of Apostles from censuring Peter for preaching to Cornelius and his friends, [Acts 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.28) and [Acts 11:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.17-18). We may well expect therefore to find some among ourselves, who, notwithstanding they are dear to Christ, still have "the veil in some measure upon their heart."

Nor should this at all appear strange unto us. For,

***~~II. Though our Lord could heal our blindness in an instant, yet he chooses rather to do it by the repeated use of the same means—~~***

Our Lord, if it had pleased him, could have healed the man without touching him at all; or have cured him instantly by the first touch. He needed not, like Elisha, to repeat the use of the same means, because he had not power in himself to render the first use of them effectual, [2 Kings 4:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.33-35). But he saw fit to repeat the imposition of his hand in order to exercise the faith and patience of the blind man.

Thus could he instantaneously enlighten *our*minds. He who commanded light to shine out of darkness, could with the same ease shine into our hearts with meridian splendor, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6). But this is not his usual mode of proceeding in any part of his works. He perfected not the creation but in six successive days of labor. The vegetable, the animal, and the rational creation rise to maturity by degrees.

Just so, *in the new creation of the soul he gradually informs and renews it.*He makes use of his preached Gospel to open the eyes of the blind. Inadequate as these means are (even as the mere touch of a finger) he has appointed them for this end. He orders also the means to be continually used, as long as there remains the smallest imperfection in our sight. And he is pleased to render them conducive to the end proposed. He "leads us gradually into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13)," and enables us at last to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his unsearchable love, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

However imperfect his work in us now is, it must afford us consolation to consider,

***~~III. Wherever he has begun the good work, there is reason to hope that he will carry it on to perfection—~~***

Never did our Lord leave one of his miracles imperfectly wrought. In the instance before us he presently perfected the cure he had begun. Thus may we hope he will do with respect to the illumination of our minds. If indeed, like Balaam, we be only illuminated, and not really sanctified by the truth, we may justly expect to perish with a more aggravated condemnation, [Numbers 24:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.3-4), [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6); but if we walk according to the light we have, that light shall surely be increased, and all saving blessings be communicated with it, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7).

Hence the Christian's path is compared to the sun rising to its meridian height, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18). We have none of us reason to doubt, but that Christ will thus perfect that which concerns us. He has promised to do so, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8). On this ground Paul expresses his confidence, that he will complete the good work wherever he has begun it, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6). We too may be confident, provided our faith be tempered with a holy fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20). We may well argue with Manoah's wife, that he would not have revealed such things unto us, if he had intended to destroy us, [Judges 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.23). We may regard his smaller gifts as a pledge of greater gifts; and may be assured, that he who has been the *Author*of our faith will also be the *Finisher*of it [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2).

***~~Surely this subject may well teach us,~~***

***~~1. Candor in respect to others—~~***

If a person has not very distinct views of divine truth, we are apt to undervalue him, as though the "root of the matter were not in him." But God honored young Abijah because "there was *some*good thing in him towards the Lord his God." And if God does "not despise the day of small things," should we? Is our brother "a babe? let us feed him with milk." Is he "a lamb? let us carry him in our bosom." *Many a babe in divine knowledge stands higher in God's estimation, than those who value themselves as wise and prudent.*

***~~2. Jealousy in reference to ourselves—~~***

If we have ever come to Christ aright, he has so far opened our eyes, that we are made to possess some spiritual discernment. Let us ask ourselves therefore, "What do I see, which flesh and blood could never have revealed unto me? And am I desirous that my knowledge of my own heart may be more deep, my views of Christ be more enlarged, and my experience of the divine life in all its diversified operations be more manifested by its transforming efficacy upon my soul?"

Dear brethren, we must "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:" and if, "when for the time that we have been in the school of Christ we ought to be teachers of others, we need ourselves to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God," we have reason to fear that "the scales have never truly fallen from our eyes," but that a veil of darkness is yet upon our heart

***~~3. Thankfulness to God, if he has given us the smallest insight into divine truth—~~***

I would not disparage worldly knowledge: but the Apostle Paul, who had made attainments in it beyond most, yet "counted it all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Yes indeed, *a single ray of spiritual discernment is preferable to the meridian splendor of human science; since that will transform the soul, which earthly knowledge never can*; and will save the soul, when the wise of this world shall be found to have sought a mere phantom, and to have wasted their lives in a sad fruitless course of laborious folly. As to human sciences, they are not within the reach of all: but spiritual knowledge is: for God can open the eyes of the poor as well as of the rich; yes rather, "the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent, he reveals to babes," that his power may be the more seen, and his name be the more glorified. If then the day has begun to dawn on any of you, rejoice: and beg of God that "your path may shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

***~~#1432~~***

***~~The Guilt and Danger of Being Ashamed of Christ~~***

***~~[Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38)~~***

"Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

A SENSE of shame would never have been experienced, if man had abode in innocence. There is no room for shame in Heaven, because there is no sin. But since man has become a guilty and corrupt creature, it is highly requisite that he should blush and be confounded before God. His shame should rise even to self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

But so strangely has Satan blinded the eyes of men, that sin appears to them rather an object of glorying; and religion is regarded as the only thing of which we need to be ashamed. Hence iniquity is applauded, and piety decried. The Gospel, more especially, is made a butt of reproach and ridicule; and every method which the wit of man can devise, is used to bring vital godliness into disrepute and contempt. But our blessed Lord cautions his followers against yielding to the impressions of fear, or disguising their attachment to him through a wish to conciliate the esteem of men.

***~~I. Who they are that are ashamed of Christ—~~***

Though the "generation" among whom our Lord sojourned were distinguished for their wickedness, yet the present generation may with no less propriety be called "adulterous and sinful," because the affections of men are almost universally alienated from God, their proper Lord and Husband, and the world with all its vanities is received to their affectionate embrace. That many among them should be ashamed of Christ and of his words, is the natural consequence of such a state of things. To determine who they are that answer to this character, we shall arrange them under distinct heads:

***~~1. Those who openly disclaim all regard to Christ—~~***

How numerous this class is, a very little observation will suffice to teach us. The generality of men, if it were proved at this moment that there never had existed such a person as Jesus Christ, would have no one thing to alter in their conduct. This is a sure proof that they never have paid any regard to him at all. Indeed, they consider the *fear*of him as superstition, the *love*of him as enthusiasm, and all *regard*to him as a symptom of weakness and folly.

And what is this, but to "be ashamed of him," or, as another Evangelist expresses it, to "deny him." While they represent him as unworthy of any attention from his creatures, they degrade him as an impostor, and hold him up to universal contempt.

***~~2. Those who, while they feel some regard for him, are ashamed to manifest it before men—~~***

Many are persuaded in their minds, that the words of Christ are true, and that those who are obedient to them are the best and happiest of mankind: yet they dare not to unite themselves to this despised people, lest they should share in the calumny that is cast upon them. They are ashamed to be seen conversing with any distinguished servant of Christ, or to be found in a Church where the Gospel is faithfully preached. Or if they venture to go thither at any time, they assume an air of levity and indifference foreign to their real feelings, merely that they may not be thought to be tinctured with enthusiasm, or to have come thither for any other end than curiosity and amusement. They can hear the Gospel defamed, and the professors of it condemned as hypocrites and fanatics, and not dare to open their lips in vindication of either. Yes, they can even join in profane jesting themselves, much sooner than they can utter the real sentiments of their hearts. Though, in a sense, they "believe in Christ, they dare not confess him, [John 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42)." And what is this, but to be ashamed of Christ?

***~~3. Those who profess indeed a regard for him, but in circumstances of trial are afraid to maintain a consistent conduct—~~***

Many professors of religion are far from possessing that courage which is necessary to uphold them in times of persecution. Peter himself, though naturally courageous, was tempted to deny his Lord with oaths and curses: nor was he restored to God's favor without many tears and bitter lamentations. And is there not reason to fear that many of us, if brought into similar circumstances, would resemble him? How few are there among us, who, like Daniel, [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10), would persist in the path of duty, when all around them had departed from it, and when a cruel death must be the immediate consequence of their fidelity to Christ? Yet the declining to sacrifice our lives in the cause of Christ would mark us out as persons ashamed of Christ, and subject us to his everlasting displeasure. Indeed it is to such characters that our Lord more immediately referred in the words before us, compare verse 35; and therefore we cannot hesitate to class them among those to whom the warning in our text is given.

Respecting all these, our Lord plainly informs us of,

***~~II. The treatment which they must expect at his hands—~~***

There is a day coming, when "the Son of Man," who is now treated with such contempt, will appear in all the brightness of "his Father's glory," surrounded with myriads of "his holy angels," and will summon the universe to his tribunal. "Then will he be ashamed of those who now are ashamed of him."

His faithful servants he will then confess: he will declare, before all, his approbation of them, and his delight in them. He will welcome them as his brethren, and as joint-heirs of his eternal inheritance.

But not one look of love will he grant to those who, through cowardice, or love of sin, have denied him. He will turn away his face from them, as one that is ashamed of them. If they begin to claim an acquaintance with him, and to plead the services they have rendered him, he will frown upon them, and, with a look of indignation and abhorrence, disclaim all knowledge of them, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). He will drive them from his presence, as unworthy of his favor, or of the company of his faithful people.

O! who can conceive the anguish which these contemptuous sinners must endure; when the adorable Savior shall thus retaliate upon them the treatment which he has received at their hands?

***~~This, I say, is the recompense which they must expect from him—~~***

He has plainly forewarned them respecting this; and therefore it shall come to pass. But, that they may see how just this doom will be, let them only consider the folly and wickedness of their conduct.

What folly is it to turn their back on Christ, through fear of a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name! What madness to "fear them who can only kill the body, rather than Him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell!" Does not such conduct render them contemptible, and justly subject them to the sentence with which they are threatened?

What desperate wickedness too is it to be ashamed of him who is the Only-beloved of the Father, and the object of incessant adoration to all the hosts of Heaven! What horrible impiety, to pour contempt on him who left his glory for them; who for their sakes "hid not his face from shame and spitting." Yes, "who, for the joy of saving their souls alive, endured the cross and despised the shame," and "became obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross!" Let them only contemplate his kindness towards them, and then consider whether the punishment of their ingratitude exceeds the quality of their offence.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How necessary is courage to those who embrace the Gospel!~~***

It is not possible to be faithful unto Christ, and at the same time escape the censures of the world, [John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20). And our only alternative is, to "be faithful unto death," or to relinquish all hope of his favor. The fearful and unbelieving will take their portion together in the lake of fire and brimstone, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12), [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8).

O beg of God to endue your souls with courage, that you may "set your faces like a flint" against the whole ungodly world, and maintain your steadfastness even to the end.

***~~2. How desirable is it to be looking forward to the future judgment!~~***

If we attend only to the concerns of this life, we shall be anxious to preserve our reputation in the world. But if we consider how soon an unerring judgment will be passed upon us, we shall not regard the calumnies that are circulated respecting us, or the contempt that is poured upon us. This was Paul's experience in [1 Corinthians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-4); and similar considerations will produce similar benefit to our souls.

***~~3. How important is it to have just views of Christ!~~***

The more enlarged our apprehension is of his excellency and glory, the more shall we be emboldened to confess him before men. Paul endured more for him than any other disciple ever did: yet neither reproach nor suffering could move him. And whence was it that he was thus immoveable? He himself tells us; "I am not ashamed; for I know in whom I have believed, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

Thus let us get a full persuasion of his power and faithfulness to support us under our tribulations, and reward us for them, and we shall not fear the face of man. We shall rather *rejoice*that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake, and that we are *honored*to be thus conformed to his image.

***~~#1433~~***

***~~A Deaf and Dumb Spirit Cast out~~***

***~~[Mark 9:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.25-27)~~***

"When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."

VARIOUS, and extremely opposite, were the states which our Lord in the course of his ministry experienced. He was not wholly a stranger to seasons of exalted joy; but he was chiefly conversant with scenes of sorrow and affliction. He had just come down from the mount on which he had been transfigured, and the splendor of his glory was yet visible in his countenance This is not absolutely asserted by the Evangelist, but it is the most probable reason for the "great amazement" which the people discovered at the sight of him, verse 15. This idea is confirmed by the account given us of Moses the Jewish lawgiver, who experienced a similar continuance of glory on his countenance after conversing with God on Mount Sinai, [Exodus 34:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.29-30) with [2 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7). But he descended only to behold the miseries to which sin had reduced us, and to renew his labors among a scoffing and unbelieving people.

To bring into view the various circumstances of the history before us, we shall consider,

***~~I. The wretched state of the youth who was brought to him—~~***

Imagination can scarcely point out a more distressing scene than that exhibited in the context:

Here was a youth afflicted with an epilepsy, [Matthew 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.15). This affliction was greatly increased by his being a lunatic, [Matthew 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.15); to complete his misery, he was possessed by an evil spirit, [Luke 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.39). This evil spirit took advantage of his natural infirmities, and impelled him, on the returns of his disorder, to rush into the fire, or into the water, verse 22. He moreover tore and rent the youth with most excruciating agonies, verse 18, and deprived him of the powers of speech and hearing, verse 25. Thus had Satan tormented him even from his very childhood, verse 21; so that, in the very bloom of life, the youth pined and languished in the extreme misery, verse 18.

***~~This scene too justly describes the invisible influence of Satan over the souls of men—~~***

We have reason to rejoice that his power over men's *bodies*is now greatly contracted, if not wholly destroyed. What a miserable world would this be, if the malice of that fiend were not restrained! .ut his power over the *souls*of men is as extensive as ever, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8). He still takes advantage of our constitutional propensities. Some he stimulates to the pursuit of vain amusements, others to the gratification of grosser lusts and pleasures; and impels us to the commission of of the most self-destructive acts, [Acts 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.10). Doubtless much of our wickedness must be ascribed to our depraved appetites; but our malicious adversary concurs with them, and actuates us by them. Compare [John 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.6) with [Luke 22:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.3-5). While we continue to walk after the course of this world, and of those who are of the same age and station with ourselves, we are altogether his vassals, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2); and the whole world, if *viewed in a spiritual light*, exhibits little else than such wretched spectacles as that before us, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

With such scenes, however, Jesus was continually conversant—

***~~II. The application made to Jesus on his behalf—~~***

***~~The father of the youth had in vain applied to the disciples for relief—~~***

The disciples had been endued with power to cast out devils, [Matthew 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.8); but in this instance they were foiled in their attempt to exercise that power. This disappointment afforded to the unbelieving Scribes much occasion for malicious triumph, verse 14.

Our Lord, being asked afterwards by his disciples in private, assigned the reasons of their failure. They had not made the attempt in the full exercise of faith, [Matthew 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.20). Had they truly believed, nothing would have been impossible to them. They had moreover neglected to use extraordinary means on this extraordinary occasion. They should have had recourse to God in fasting and prayer, [Matthew 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.21). It seems from hence, that some of the evil spirits have more power and malignity than others. See also [Matthew 12:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.45).

From these circumstances we may gather much useful instruction. Our Lord has promised us the victory over all the powers of darkness, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20); but we must have our strength renewed by fasting and prayer, [Ephesians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.18); and must put it forth in a believing dependence on his word, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16); nor can we hope to succeed but in the use of these appointed means.

***~~He now applied to Jesus himself—~~***

Kneeling with deepest humility, he implored the mercy which he needed, [Matthew 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.14); but manifested that the disappointment he had experienced had shaken his faith even in Jesus himself, verse 22. Our Lord gently reproves him for his unbelief, and bids him be more concerned about the increase of his own faith than about the ability of the person to whom he was applying, verse 23. The father instantly with tears confesses the justice of the reproof, verse 24, and entreats the Lord to increase and confirm his faith.

How amiable was this concern for his child, and this zeal for his sad state! And should *we*be less earnest in interceding for our unconverted relatives? Like him, when human powers have failed, we are ready to question the sufficiency of God himself: but we should be careful never to limit the almighty power of Jesus; and should deeply bewail the sad remains of unbelief that are within us! Let us then labor more to imitate this afflicted parent, and in every application to Jesus offer that suitable petition, verse 24.

Like thousands of other suppliants he soon obtained his request—

***~~III. The miracle which Jesus wrought for him—~~***

***~~Our Lord immediately interposed for the relief of the youth; and Satan labored to the utmost to obstruct his design—~~***

Jesus ordered the young man to be brought unto him. Satan, enraged at the prospect of his own disgrace, assaulted him with greater fury than ever, nor did he leave him until he had made one more effort to destroy his life, verse 26. Satan exerted himself thus to defeat our Lord's purpose. Our Lord permitted him thus to act for the more abundant display of his own power. It is in this very manner that Satan still acts towards us; he cannot endure that any soul should come to Jesus for help; he usually makes his fiercest assaults upon us, when he is fearful of losing his dominion over us. Some he discourages by inward suggestions, (you are not elect, your sins are too great, you have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, etc.) and some by opposition from without. Yes, not infrequently does he reduce us almost to a despair of life, just before our perfect deliverance is about to be effected.

***~~But in vain were Satan's efforts against the sovereign power of Jesus—~~***

Jesus raised up the youth, who lay, to all appearance dead, and delivered him in perfect health to his astonished father, [Luke 9:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.42).

Thus shall also the grace of Jesus finally prevail in his people's hearts. In vain shall be the renewed attacks of their great adversary: however fiercely they be assaulted, they shall be more than conquerors over every enemy, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37); And the malice of Satan shall only render them more distinguished monuments of their Redeemer's power.

***~~#1434~~***

***~~Fasting and Prayer~~***

***~~[Mark 9:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.28-29)~~***

"And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

THE gift of working miracles was possessed by all the Apostles. Yet it does not appear that the power could be exercised at all times, and at their own option, but only at such times and on such occasions as God saw fit to permit. Had the exercise of this gift been purely optional, we can scarcely conceive that Paul would have "left Trophimus at Miletus sick, [2 Timothy 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.20)," when he wanted him much for his companion in travel; or that, when "Epaphroditus was sick near unto death," that same Apostle, who felt so deeply interested in his welfare, would not have interposed to restore him to health, [Philippians 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.27). It should seem, that a certain kind and degree of faith was necessary to be exercised by them, when they would put forth their miraculous powers; and that that faith was not always at their command, but needed to be brought down from Heaven, by fresh and more abundant communications, in answer to their prayers.

The Apostles, on having a youth, who was possessed by a mute spirit, brought to them by his father, endeavored to expel the demon from him, but were not able. The youth was then brought to Jesus himself, who, by a word, effected that which all his disciples together could not effect. The disciples then asked Jesus privately, What it was that had occasioned their failure? Our Lord told them, that they had failed through their lack of faith; a more abundant measure of which was necessary, when so malignant a fiend as this was to be expelled: and that faith could be obtained only by a more particular and solemn application to God than they had used on this occasion: "for that kind could come forth by nothing but by fasting and prayer, Compare [Matthew 17:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.19-21) with the text."

Miraculous gifts having ceased in the Church, we shall forbear to speak of them. But the power of Satan over men has not ceased: the only difference is, that formerly he could operate immediately upon the *body*, by an otherworldly power, without any concurrence on our part; whereas now he can only act on the *soul*, through the medium of our own corruptions, and in concurrence with our own will.

But, as formerly, it was not in the power of unassisted man to withstand his efforts; so neither at this time can we hope to prevail against him, but by a power received from on high. This is true at all times, and under all circumstances: but there are times and seasons when he appears to have assaulted us with more than ordinary violence, and to have gained a peculiar advantage over us, through the instrumentality of some deep-rooted corruption. To withstand him *then*, is found more difficult than at other times; and we can do nothing against him, without such a measure of grace and strength as is communicated to those only who, with deliberate and determined purpose of heart, set themselves to seek it in solemn fasting and prayer. In reference, then, to these occasions we may well apply the text: in doing which, I will show,

***~~I. The extraordinary difficulties which some have to encounter—~~***

There is no man who has not much to encounter both from within and from without. But some have far greater difficulties to contend with than others,

***~~1. From the great adversary of souls—~~***

We know but little respecting angels; except that the *good*angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who are the heirs of salvation;" and that *the evil angels are occupied in constant endeavors to ensnare and ruin the souls of men.*

Of the *evil*angels, as well as of the good, there are different ranks and orders, called "demons and principalities and powers;" and that they act under the guidance of one, even of "Beelzebub, who is the prince of the devils, [Matthew 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.24)." It should seem, too, that some possess a deeper measure of malignity than others; since one spirit, on being driven out of a man, is said to "take unto himself seven other spirits *more wicked*than himself, and to enter into him again, and make his last state worse than the first [Matthew 12:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.45)." Sometimes several of them take possession of a man at once: for "out of Mary Magdalen our Lord cast seven devils;" and out of another person a whole "legion of demons." Over Satan's family these bear an undisputed sway, [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44); and over the godly themselves they maintain a very considerable influence; insomuch, that, if not restrained by Almighty God, they would "sift" every living man "as wheat," and reduce even an inspired Apostle to chaff! [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32).

On some he acts "by deceit, putting on the semblance of "an angel of light, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3); [2 Corinthians 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.14);" and so subtle are "his wiles," and so crafty are "his devices," that it is inconceivably difficult to be always on our guard against them, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11); [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11).

Love to the Savior himself may even be perverted by him into an occasion of evil; and be rendered, through the ignorance and inadvertence of man, subservient to the advancement of Satan's purposes, [Matthew 16:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-23).

At other times, Satan comes rather "like a roaring lion, ready to devour us, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8);" and, with an overwhelming power, carries men to the commission of the most palpable and damning sins; instigating Judas to betray his Lord, [John 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.27), and Ananias and Sapphira to "lied unto the Holy Spirit, [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3)." Well is he called "the God of this world;" for, by blinding some, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4), and impelling others, he maintains a sway over all "the children of disobedience, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)."

Now, to contend with these is, more or less, the lot of all God's people, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); but some experience his assaults in a more violent degree than others; and would be utterly destroyed by his "fiery darts," if God had not furnished them with "the shield of faith, whereby to quench" or ward them off, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16).

***~~2. From their own indwelling corruptions—~~***

All have a "heart full of evil, [Ecclesiastes 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.3);" but there is a "spiritual and a fleshly filthiness;" and in some a certain sin has the ascendancy; and in others, a different sin has the ascendancy. Some, from their very infancy, are swollen with *pride*, or corroded with *envy*, or inflamed with *passion*, or envenomed with *malice*. Some betray a very early propensity to deceit, and falsehood, and dishonesty, and selfishness in all its bearings. In some profaneness and impiety are dominant; so that, without any interest to serve, or lust to gratify—they will find pleasure in insulting to his face the Most High God. In others, a disposition to *lewdness*and *intemperance*is marked from a very early period of life; and soon acquires such an entire dominion, that it bids defiance to all the efforts that are made to check it; nor can all the calamities which it entails on its unhappy victim induce him to withstand its influence.

In truth, to such a degree are many subjected to some reigning sin, whether of a spiritual or fleshly nature, that one cannot but regard them as under Satanic influence; or, to use the words of Paul, as "taken in the snare of the devil, and as led captive by him at his will, 2 Timothy 2:26."

Now, where men are thus enslaved by any *besetting sin*, they have difficulties which others have scarcely any idea of: and to them I would declare,

***~~II. The extraordinary means which they should use, in order to surmount them—~~***

*Resolutions*will be of little avail: they will yield to even the smallest temptation. The *passionate*man may resolve to restrain his anger; the *drunkard*to contract a habit of sobriety; the *lewd*person to mortify his passions—but he resolves in vain, as long as his resolutions are formed in dependence on his own strength. He returns, again and again, "like a dog to his vomit;" nor can all the bitter consequences which he has experienced in this world, nor those more awful terrors which he is taught to expect in the world to come, suffice to keep him steadfast to his purpose.

Even prayer itself has but a slight and transient effect; insomuch that, in some instances, he is even afraid to pray; because it seems as if his very prayers only stirred up his enemy to renew with greater vigor and success his irresistible assaults. But, by the ordinances of our Church, as well as by the Holy Scriptures, we are taught, that "with prayer, *fasting*" should be joined—

Fasting is a duty enjoined by God himself. Under the law, a day was appointed whereon the whole nation of Israel were to observe an annual fast, [Leviticus 23:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.27-29); and all the most eminent servants of God recorded in the Old Testament combined fasting with prayer, [Ezra. 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra. 8.21), [Nehemiah 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 1.4), [Esther 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 4.16). Under the New Testament dispensation the same duty is inculcated, and, on proper occasions, was practiced also by the servants of the Lord, [Mark 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.20), [Matthew 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.17), [Luke 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.37), [2 Corinthians 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.27).

For seasons of affliction, *fasting*is peculiarly suited; and, above all, for such a season as has been before described. It tends to *honor God*, whom we have offended by our sins. It tends to *humble ourselves*, as being itself an acknowledgment of our desert of his wrath. It tends to *mortify the very corruptions*we mourn over. It greatly aids our urgency in prayer.

In these respects it may justly be deemed of great importance: for though in itself it has no kind of merit, yet, as manifesting our sincerity, and approving us both to God and to our own consciences, it is of singular use, especially if accompanied with a corresponding humiliation of our souls before God: for, without that, it will be only an empty ceremony, a hypocritical profession, a senseless mockery.

***~~Though neither of them apart should have prevailed, the two combined will be effectual for the desired end—~~***

In no instance has God ever withheld his blessing from the two combined. Prayer alone, if fervent and believing, will not be allowed to go forth in vain. But, in the extraordinary cases before referred to, a man truly in earnest will address himself to the work of prayer in the more solemn attitude of penitential sorrow, "in weeping, and mourning, and fasting [Joel 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.12)."

How successful such prayer shall be, may be seen in the case of *Nineveh*, where the whole city was spared from destruction in consequence of their turning to the Lord in fasting and in prayer [Jonah 3:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.7-10). The example of *Daniel*is yet more encouraging than this, inasmuch as it brought down upon him not merely a suspension from evil, but the most extraordinary tokens of God's favor. See how his fast was conducted; and with what fervent prayers it was accompanied: and then see what an answer it brought down from Heaven, [Daniel 9:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.3-5); [Daniel 9:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.17-23); and know, assuredly, that such humiliation shall prevail, whatever enemies you have to contend with, whatever corruptions you have to strive against.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are yielding to their spiritual enemies—~~***

Many think it sufficient to say, that such or such propensities are naturally inherent in them; and that they are regarded rather as *constitutional infirmities*, than as any deep grounds for personal humiliation. But, on this ground, there is no sin whatever which may not be cloaked with a suitable apology. That a man will find a *greater difficulty in mortifying his besetting sin*, is true: and that he will, to his last hour, be more in danger from it, is also true: but it must be put away [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1); and, if not subdued and mortified, it will inevitably plunge the soul into everlasting perdition.

The eye, the hand, the foot, are natural, and dear, and necessary: but, if any one of them stand in competition with our duty, it must not be spared: there is no alternative, but to part with that, or to have both body and soul cast into the flames of Hell, [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48). If a man shall say 'I have grace, but not enough for that particular sin.' I answer, that grace insufficient, is no grace; and that the man who thinks he is a partaker of divine grace, while he is led captive by any constitutional or habitual sin, is only deceiving his own soul, and will find out his error when it is past a remedy, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26).

A life of alternate sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, (a life, alas! too common among those who profess religion,) will never be approved of God. I will readily allow that a man may have more than ordinary difficulties to contend with; but then he must adopt more than ordinary measures for the surmounting of them; and if he will not do this, he has only himself to blame: for "there is no kind, either of spirit or corruption, that shall not go forth by prayer and fasting."

***~~2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies—~~***

"Be strong, and of good courage: for no enemy shall be able to stand before you." Only go forth in faith, and all the *Goliath sins*in the universe shall fall under your hand. God has said, that, "provided you are not under the law, but under grace, sin shall not have dominion over you, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)." "The grace of Christ, which was sufficient for" Paul, shall be alike sufficient for all who trust in it, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9). A very "worm shall thresh the mountains, and reduce them all to dust, [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-16);" and Satan himself, that great enemy, shall be bruised under the feet of all who will withstand him manfully, [1 Peter 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8-9), [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7), [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20). The armor provided for us shall not be girt on in vain, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11). Only go forth in the strength of the Lord Jesus, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10), and you shall "be more than conquerors through Him that loves you! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

***~~#1435~~***

***~~Christ's Interest in His People~~***

***~~[Mark 9:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.41-42)~~***

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

THOUGH the Lord requires decision of character, where full information exists; and therefore says in one place, "He who is not with *me*, is against me; and he who gathers not with me, scatters abroad, [Matthew 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.30);" yet, in the passage before us, in reference to one who, for lack of fuller information, did not follow with his disciples, he said, "He who is not against *us*, is on our part."

There may be real integrity, where, from peculiar circumstances, there may be little profession: and where integrity of heart is, there will the Lord make due allowance for defects, which, under different circumstances, would provoke his heavy displeasure. The Apostles were, in this respect, but ill-instructed. They would have disallowed a brother altogether, because he came not up to their standard: but our Lord told them, that, however weak his children were, he would reward every benefit conferred upon them, and resent every injury done to them.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The interest which Christ takes in his believing people—~~***

He completely identifies himself with them, and receives as done to himself whatever is done to them,

***~~1. In a way of good—~~***

Scarcely anything can be less than a cup of water: yet, if given to any one because he belongs to Christ, the donor of it "shall not lose his reward." It is necessary that it be given for Christ's sake; else, though it may be an act of humanity, it is no act of piety: but given for his sake, it is, and shall be, accepted by him, and be richly recompensed in the day of judgment, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40).

***~~2. In a way of evil—~~***

To "offend" one of his little ones, is to cast a stumbling-block before him, by which he may fall. And this may be done either by temptation or persecution: but, in whatever way it be done, whether by allurement or menace—it shall be visited with God's wrathful indignation. To "have a millstone hanged about one's neck, and to be cast into the sea," would be a fearful judgment: but "a far sorer judgment" awaits the man who endeavors to turn from Christ one of the least of his people, or to impede his progress heavenward, [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29). Christ considers this also as done to himself, [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4), and will resent it accordingly.

If we view this aright, we cannot doubt,

***~~II. The return it calls for at our hands—~~***

Surely it calls for,

***~~1. Admiration—~~***

How wonderful it is, that our adorable Redeemer should so condescend to notice what is done to us, and to regard "the touching of us as the touching of the apple (pupil) of his eye!" It were absolutely incredible, if he had not so minutely and specifically affirmed it.

***~~2. Affiance—~~***

Is our Lord and Savior so interested in our behalf? What can we ever lack? or what is there which we have to fear? David says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore I shall not lack, [Psalm 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1);" and I am sure that we, under the Christian dispensation, are not a whit less privileged than he.

***~~3. Gratitude—~~***

What shall we not do for Him, who so cares for us? And can we reach him, so to speak, by benefitting his poorer members? *Whatever then I would do for Him, if he were personally present with me, that I will do for his redeemed people*; accounting nothing too much to do or suffer, if only I may please him, and honor him.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Are there here any who have discouraged the saints?~~***

Possibly you may have done it only by sneers and ridicule; but, in whatever way it may have been, remember the warning here given you, and repent of your conduct before it be too late. If you do not choose to go to Heaven yourselves, then beware how you aggravate your guilt, by making yourselves accountable also for the souls of others. It will be a fearful thing to have the blood of others required at your hands.

***~~2. Are there any who have delighted to do them good?~~***

"Be not weary of well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not." None are to be excluded from your benevolent exertions, but "the household of faith" have a peculiar claim, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10), as the members of Christ's body, and as the very representatives of Christ himself.

***~~#1436~~***

***~~An Offending Member~~***

***~~[Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)~~***

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to Hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into Hell-fire—where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"

TO oppose and persecute the people of God is to make God himself our enemy; nor can we cast a stumbling-block in their way without aggravating thereby our own condemnation, verse 42.

But it is not only by open profaneness that we endanger our salvation; we are no less obnoxious to the displeasure of God if we retain any *secret sin*. Hence our Lord gives us the most solemn and repeated admonition to cut off every occasion of sin. In discoursing on his words we shall consider,

***~~I. His injunctions—~~***

***~~There are many things which prove to us an occasion of sin—~~***

We are too ready to be drawn aside by our worldly interests. How often have they led men to engage in unlawful occupations, to practice deceit and falsehood, and in a thousand other ways to violate the dictates of their conscience! How has an undue regard to them deterred many from embracing the Gospel and following the Lord fully, [Mark 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.22). And how many have been turned aside by them from the truth of God, even after they had maintained a long and honorable profession, [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10). Carnal affections also frequently prove a very fatal snare. How many spiritual people have been led to connect themselves for life with an unconverted person, through an unwillingness to thwart their natural inclinations, and that too, in opposition to the most express commands of God, [2 Corinthians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14); [2 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17). How many through an excess of attachment have *idolized the creature*while they possessed it, and murmured against God the instant it was removed? Need we add *sensual appetites*to this black catalogue? Who, that knows the danger of an impure look, [Matthew 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.28-29), must not tremble?

***~~These, as soon as ever we discover their baneful tendency, should be cut off—~~***

We are far from condemning these things as bad in themselves. Our carnal appetites and affections were given us to be indulged, and our worldly interests indispensably require a considerable degree of care and attention; but when they become stumbling-blocks to us and betray us into sin, then they become sinful in themselves, and must instantly be cut off. Nor must any consideration whatever induce us to spare them. If they be dear to us as an "eye," or useful and apparently necessary to us as a "hand" or "foot"—then we must sacrifice them without pity or reserve. Different situations indeed call for much prudence and discretion in the execution of this duty. We must not lose sight of meekness and humility when we are exercising a necessary firmness and self-denial. Nevertheless we must not tamper with our consciences, but fulfill our duty, and leave outcome to God.

To aid us in obeying our Lord's injunctions let us consider,

***~~II. The arguments with which he enforced them—~~***

Men in general are averse to hear anything of the terrors of the Lord; but Paul insisted on them in order to persuade men; and our Lord himself frequently urged them on his hearers as inducements to obedience. The arguments with which he enforced his precepts in the text are most solemn and weighty:

***~~1. God will surely deal with men hereafter according to their conduct in this life—~~***

This truth is not merely asserted, but assumed in the text as incontrovertible and undoubted: nor is there any truth whatever, that is more agreeable to reason, or more abundantly confirmed by the sacred oracles, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13), [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8). And can anything be a stronger argument for self-denial? *Surely if eternal happiness or misery must be the outcome of our conduct, we should diligently consider our ways, and put away the accursed thing that would ruin our souls*. If we had no future account to give of our conduct, we might say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," but, if we believe the Scriptures, we shall rather labor to act with a view to the future judgment.

***~~2. Heaven, notwithstanding all the trials we may endure in our way to it, is infinitely better than Hell, whatever we may enjoy in our way thither—~~***

It is certain that the mortification of sin is often painful, like the cutting off a member from the body. But it is no less certain that that pain is followed by much peace and joy. But *supposing the road to Heaven were ever so thorny; will not eternal glory be a sufficient recompense for our toil?*And *supposing the gratifications of sin to be without alloy (though it will be found that the delicious draught is mixed with much gall) will they not be dearly purchased with the loss of the soul? Will not the torments of Hell be greater than the pleasures of sin?* The worms that may feed upon the body will die when our flesh is consumed; and the fire that may consume our body will be extinguished at last for lack of fuel. But "the worm that will gnaw our conscience will never die; nor will the fire of God's wrath be ever quenched," because we shall be preserved as food for the one and fuel for the other to all eternity. *What can sin offer us that can compensate for such a doom?*

Surely then this argument should induce us to mortify our most beloved lusts. Our Lord repeats it thus frequently, that it may the more deeply impress our minds. Let us then weigh it with the attention it deserves; and act as those who feel its force and importance.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. In what a lamentable state are the world at large!~~***

Men will persuade themselves that they are in the way to Heaven, even while they are willfully neglecting many duties, and committing many actual sins. But can they derive much encouragement from the words of our text? O that they did but credit the declarations of our Lord!

Shall they, who retain only one bosom lust, be in danger of "hell-fire," and they be safe who live in the allowed commission of many sins? Have they no reason to dread the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched? Shall they set up their idols in their heart, and God not answer them according to the multitude of their idols, [Ezekiel 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 14.4). Would to God that we could weep over such poor deluded creatures; that "our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears to run down for them day and night!" May God give them just views of the eternal world! And may they be so persuaded by these terrors of the Lord as to flee immediately from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life!

***~~2. What need have the professors of religion to watch over their own hearts!~~***

It is no easy thing to know whether we are freed from our besetting sin. *We have many pleas to urge in extenuation of its guilt, and many specious names whereby to conceal its malignity.*How were even the disciples themselves led captive by ambition and revenge, when they were least aware of their subjection to such evil principles, verse 35, [Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54). Thus it may be with us also.

How then should we search and try our hearts to find out our besetting sins! And how should we cry to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Let all then who name the name of Christ be jealous of themselves. And, "laying aside every weight, and the sin that does most easily beset them, let them run their race with patience."

***~~3. What reason have we to be thankful for the covenant of grace!~~***

Whatever God *requires*of us, he has also *promised*to us in the covenant of grace. Has he commanded us to part with every sin, however precious or profitable it may be? He has also promised, that "sin shall not have dominion over us, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)." He has pledged his word not only to forgive the sins of the penitent, but to "cleanse them from all unrighteousness, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)." Let those then who tremble at the injunctions in the text, look up to Jesus for help. Let them plead the promises which he has made. And doubtless they shall find his "grace sufficient for them." "They shall do all things through Christ strengthening them." This is the portion of all who embrace that covenant, which "is ordered in all things and sure, [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)." Let every believer then rejoice in that covenant, and "hold fast the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end."

***~~#1437~~***

***~~Christians to Have Salt in Themselves~~***

***~~[Mark 9:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.49-50)~~***

"For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

TO understand this subject aright, we must take into consideration the whole context. The disciples had disputed among themselves about precedency in their Master's kingdom, which they supposed to be of a temporal nature; every one of them coveting for himself the highest post of dignity and power, verse 33–37. They had also, through jealousy and narrowness of mind, forbidden a person to cast out devils, merely because he did not exercise that power in concert with them, and in subserviency to them, verse 38–41. These evil dispositions our Lord had reproved, by appropriate and weighty observations: and then he proceeded to declare to them, that the exercise of such corrupt feelings would outcome in the everlasting destruction of all who should indulge them, and would plunge them into "that fire of Hell which never should be quenched, verse 42–48." After repeating, no less than five times, that "the fire into which they should be cast should never be quenched," he told them that he expected very different tempers from them.

The terms which he used on this occasion you have just heard: they contain a solemn admonition, and suitable advice; each of which we will consider in its order. Let us notice, then,

***~~I. His solemn admonition—~~***

This is somewhat difficult to be understood. Commentators, supposing that the word "for," with which my text is introduced, is to be taken as connecting the text with the words immediately preceding, explain the first clause of our text thus: 'The fire, into which the persons before spoken of shall be cast, shall never be quenched: neither shall the persons that are cast into it be consumed: for every one of them shall be salted with fire: and, as salt preserves from putrefaction the things that are impregnated with it, so shall the fire preserve from dissolution those who shall be subjected to its power."

This interpretation is far from satisfactory, because it places two perfectly similar expressions, that which I have read, and that which follows it, in direct opposition to each other, (the one as referring to the destruction of the soul, and the other to the preservation of it,) when they are evidently intended to convey the same truth under two different figures.

To get rid of this difficulty, one commentator Macknight, would translate the word thus: "Every one shall be salted for the fire." But anyone, who looks at the original, will see that such a translation is utterly inadmissible.

The translation, as it stands, is right: nor will the sense be difficult, if only the word "for" is taken as connecting the text with the whole subject contained in the context. The whole may be explained thus: 'I expect of you, in future, a different state of mind from that which you have recently indulged. You are offered up as living sacrifices to God; and, as such, must be holy, and without blemish: and as the sacrifices under the law were offered through the instrumentality of fire, and always with the accompaniment of salt, so must you be salted with fire, and salted with salt, in order that your savor may come up with acceptance before God.'

If it be said that the term "salting with fire" is a strange expression; I answer, it is no more strange as applied to the preservation of the soul from sin, than as applied to the preservation of the body from destruction. On the contrary, it is expressly sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures in the sense now put upon it; whereas it is nowhere sanctioned in the sense which I am now controverting. John the Baptist says, "Christ shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire, [Luke 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.16)." And it is no more strange to be "salted with fire," than to be "baptized with fire." If it be said, that "baptizing with fire" means only the enduing with grace, which shall purify as fire; I answer, this is the precise meaning which I annex to the "salting with fire;" namely, *the enduing with grace, which shall purify as fire*. The two expressions are precisely parallel, both in terms and import. And, this interpretation brings unity into the subject in the place of discord; and simplicity in the place of inexplicable confusion.

Having, I hope, thrown the true light upon this difficult passage, I now proceed to comment upon it, as an injunction from our blessed Lord.

Under the Mosaic Law, this was God's command: "Every oblation of your meat-offering shall you season with salt; neither shall you allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your meat-offering: with all your offerings you shall offer salt, [Leviticus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.13)." To that ordinance our Lord refers, when he says, "Every one shall be salted with fire; and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt."

But as salt, however good, may possibly "lose its saltiness," so as to become unfit for the service of God; so may immortal souls lose the divine savor which is pleasing to God: and, as the salt in that case is "fit for nothing, not even for the land, nor yet for the dunghill;" so those professors of religion, who lose the spirituality of their minds, must be regarded as the most unprofitable and contemptible of mankind, [Luke 14:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.34-35).

Now, the allowed indulgence of such base feelings as the Apostles had lately manifested was incompatible with spiritual-mindedness; and therefore our Lord warned them, that, *if they would be useful as ministers, or be accepted as men, they must mortify all such corrupt affections, and show themselves to be under the influence of a purer principle*.

And the same admonition is proper for us also: for we, it is to be feared, are, for the most part, as worldly and as carnal as they. Look at the state of the Christian world: see how ready men are, yes, even good men, to dispute and quarrel about everything that concerns their interests in the world. See, too, how ready Christians are to decry and to discourage those who move not in their line, and belong not to their party. In a word, let the spirit of Christians, both of individuals and communities, be seen at this day; and it must be acknowledged, that the admonition in my text has in no degree lost its force, or its applicability to the souls of men.

In connection with this solemn admonition, we must consider,

***~~II. His suitable advice—~~***

The advice here given evidently refers to the whole context, and, in this respect, confirms the interpretation which we have given of the preceding clauses of our text. The disciples had given way to very evil tempers and dispositions; and, to counteract such corrupt propensities in the future, our Lord says to them, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another." The same counsel is proper for us also:

***~~1. Have salt in yourselves—~~***

We, whether as ministers or as private Christians, are to be "the salt of the earth, [Matthew 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.13)," not only richly imbued with grace in our own souls, but operating, all of us in our respective spheres, to keep the world around us from corruption. But how can we fulfill our office for the benefit of others, or how can we answer to our proper character as true believers, if there be not a savor of divine grace abiding in us, and diffused around us?

In all our fellowship with *God*, we must exercise a spirituality of mind: for what is prayer without devotion? or what is praise without fervent love and adoring gratitude? In truth, what are any services whatever, if sin is unmortified, and corruption unsubdued? "If we retain any iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18)." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: it is the prayer of the upright only that is his delight, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8)."

The same may be said of all our fellowship with *men.*God's direction to us is, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, [Colossians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.6)." It is not necessary that we be always conversing about religion: but it is necessary that there always be found in us a religious frame of mind, and that not a word escape from our lips that is inconsistent with it. "As sons of God, we must be blameless and harmless, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining among them as lights in the world, [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15);" and if we attain not to this character, "all the labor that has been bestowed upon us will be in vain, [Philippians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.16)."

But, that we may come more directly to the point which our Lord had chiefly in view, I add,

***~~2. Have peace one with another—~~***

*Love ought to be the one habit of the Christian's mind, and the very element in which he moves.*It is a shame to him to betray ambitious, envious, contentious dispositions; or to value his brother less on account of some minor differences, when he is evidently, in his own sphere, doing the Lord's work. These, and such like dispositions, are the fruitful sources of contention and hatred, as James has said: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts which war in your members, [James 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.1)."

Now the Christian world need exceedingly to be instructed on this point. All will admit that they need to "have salt in themselves;" while yet they imagine that that will consist with bigotry and contention. But I must say to all such characters, "If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, boast not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descends not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish! [James 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-15)."

If we would approve ourselves upright before God, we must "walk worthy the calling with which we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, [Ephesians 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1-3)."

This is necessary to the enjoyment of God's presence here: for then only, "when we are of one mind, and live in peace, will the God of love and peace be with us, [2 Corinthians 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.11)."

It is necessary, also, for our acceptance with him in the eternal world; according as it is written, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

Remember, brethren, this is essential to your character, as "living sacrifices, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1);" and without this you will in vain hope to be "acceptable offerings before God, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)." What then God has joined together, let no man put asunder;" but seek first to "have salt in yourselves, and then to live in peace and love one with another."

***~~#1438~~***

***~~Jesus Blesses Little Children~~***

***~~[Mark 10:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.13-16)~~***

[Editor's note: In the following section, we certainly do not agree with the author's premise of "covenant children". We neither see covenant child *baptism*, or covenant child *salvation*, nor any covenant child *blessings*in these verses.]

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them."

IT is common with men to show partiality to the failings of their friends, at the time that they are leaning rather to the side of severity in their judgment of others. But our blessed Lord showed no favor to his disciples in that respect; but was as observant of smaller errors in them, as of the more flagrant transgressions of his enemies. He ever proceeded upon that principle, "You alone have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities."

His disciples had interposed to prevent him from being troubled with a multitude of children, whom their fond parents foolishly, as the disciples thought, were bringing to him: but he was very angry with them, and gave them a severe rebuke: for however they might take credit to themselves for meaning well, their conduct in this matter was highly reprehensible.

The text presents two things to our view:

***~~I. His rebuke to them—~~***

***~~Some parents were bringing their children to Christ—~~***

To this they had probably been induced by the discourse which had recently passed between our Lord and his disciples. On their inquiring, Who should be the greatest in his kingdom? he had set a little child before them, and declared that a conformity to it in *humility*constituted the most exalted character of his subjects; and that whoever should receive one such little child in his name, would receive him; while those who should offend one, would involve themselves in the most tremendous guilt and misery, [Matthew 18:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.1-6). Hence it would naturally be supposed that Jesus had a peculiar love for little children; and that as he required others to receive them, he himself would certainly receive, and bless them too. Hence many believing parents sought to avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining a blessing for their children; and brought them to him, that he might "put his hands upon them and bless them." It was not bodily, but spiritual, health, which the parents sought for their children: and we cannot but highly applaud their zeal in such a cause.

***~~But the disciples interposed to prevent it—~~***

They doubtless thought that they were doing right, in not suffering their Lord to be so troubled. His *time*, they thought, was too precious to be so occupied; his *work*too important to be so interrupted; his *engagements*too numerous to admit of such intrusions; his *fatigues*too great to be so needlessly increased. Besides, to the children, they supposed, it could be of little use: and to the parents, only a momentary gratification: and if the precedent were once admitted, it would be followed to an unknown extent. Hence they would not allow their Lord to be so distracted.

But, while they imagined that their conduct was precisely such as it ought to be, they were really acting a very unfitting part*. It is not every one who means well, who acts well.*There is "a zeal that is not according to knowledge;" and such was theirs on the present occasion. Their conduct was indeed very criminal in many respects. It argued low thoughts of their Divine Master, whose condescension they limited; while, in truth, it is infinite. It argued an ignorance of his office, which is peculiarly designated by the prophet, as that of "a Shepherd, who carries the *lambs*in his bosom, [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11)." It argued an unmindfulness of the Father's grace, who had promised, in a peculiar manner, to pour out his Spirit upon his people's seed, and his blessing upon their offspring, [Isaiah 44:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3-4) compared with [Acts 2:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.39)." It argued unkindness to the parents, whose feelings they should have more affectionately consulted; and indifference to the children, whose benefit they should have been studious to promote. It argued also an unbelief of its efficacy: they had often seen people obtaining health to their bodies by a mere touch of their Master's garment, and yet they could not conceive that any benefit should accrue to the children's souls by an authoritative imposition of his hands, and an immediate communication of his blessing. All this was exceedingly sinful. But they erred also in the *manner*as well as in the *matter*, of their conduct; for they "rebuked" these pious women. Alas! even good men, if unreasonably interrupted, are but too apt to show an unhallowed temper, instead of exercising that meekness and gentleness which become their profession.

***~~Our Lord, however, deservedly and severely rebuked them—~~***

In Matthew's account there is a little change in the collocation of the words, which makes his address to them more emphatic, [Matthew 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.14); "Let the little children alone, and hinder them not from coming to me." But our Lord assigns as the reason of this reproof, (for he never would administer reproof without evincing the justice of it,) that "of *such*persons was the kingdom of God;" of such in age, and of such in character. Some confine this expression to the character of the persons who compose his kingdom: but, in so doing, they destroy all the force of his reasoning. If our Lord had meant only to say, that children were fit *emblems*of his subjects, it would have been no reason for his reproof; since they would be neither more so by being brought to him, nor less so by being kept away. But, if we understand that children are still, as under the Jewish dispensation, to be regarded as in covenant with God, and subjects of his kingdom, then the reason is clear and strong: for to keep children from him, would be to deprive them of privileges to which they were as much entitled as adults. Our Church lays peculiar stress upon this point in her *baptismal service.*See the Address to the parents, after the passage recording Mark's words in the Baptismal service; and shows with great clearness, that it is a complete justification of those who maintain the propriety of infant baptism: for, if infants are capable of receiving Christ's blessing, are we not to bring them to him that they may obtain it? If they are capable of receiving the thing signified, are they not fit subjects to receive the sign? And if Christ was so angry with his disciples for keeping them from him, can he be pleased with us, if we keep them from him? In a word, Christ has shown us, by this act, that children are as much the subjects of his kingdom now, as ever they were under the Jewish dispensation; and every member of our Church has reason to rejoice, that the sentiments of our Reformers on this disputed subject were in such perfect unison with the word of God.

If it be objected, that Christ did not baptize the children; we answer, His baptism was not yet instituted: the only baptism that was now observed, was that of John. The question is, Are children to be regarded as subjects of Christ's kingdom? and are they entitled to the privileges of that kingdom? Christ expressly says they are: and so say we: and therefore according to his command we bring them to him, that they may be admitted to a participation of those blessings, precisely as the Jews by God's command brought their children to be admitted into covenant with him.

In perfect agreement with these sentiments is,

***~~II. His instruction to us—~~***

Our Lord uniformly engrafted some general instruction on the passing occurrences of every day. He here instructs us,

***~~1. By precept—~~***

Children are to be regarded also as *emblems of those moral qualities, which all the subjects of his kingdom must possess*. There is in children:  
a simplicity of mind,  
a teachableness of spirit,  
a consciousness of weakness,  
a dependence on their parents' care,  
an obedience to their commands,  
and a submission to their will.

Now these must be the dispositions of all who would be numbered with Christ's people here, or be partakers with them in the eternal world: nor can anything but a resemblance to children in these respects warrant any person to believe himself in a state of favor with God. The declaration in our text is as strong and clear as words can make it. The very entrance into Christ's kingdom is by this door: it is *low*, and we must stoop; it is *narrow*, and we must be little in in our own estimation, before we can by any means find admission within it. There is no space allowed for the cumbrous ornaments of worldly wisdom, of moral goodness, of human power. We must enter naked and divested of them all—divested, I mean, in our own apprehension and conceit; and must be willing to take "Christ as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption."

This is humiliating, it is true; but it must be done; and, if we will not submit to it, we can never enter into the kingdom of Heaven: "the *wise*must become fools, [1 Corinthians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.10)," the *pure*must see their moral pollution before God, [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31), the *righteous*must see their guilt before God, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19), in their own estimation—before Christ can be valued, or his salvation desired.

We say not that a person must commit wickedness in order to fit himself for Christ's kingdom; God forbid: but he must renounce every degree of self-conceit, self-dependence, self-seeking, and self-applause; and, "whatever he had which once he accounted gain, must now be considered by him as loss for Christ."

O that all were thus divested of self, and made willing to seek their all in Christ! Let parents condescend to learn from their little children what dispositions they themselves should cultivate towards their heavenly Father; and bear in mind, that their highest perfection is to be brought to a willing and habitual resemblance to that instructive emblem.

***~~2. By example—~~***

"He took the little children up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." What amazing condescension! How amiable in itself, so to notice those who could be so little conscious of his love. How conciliatory to the parents, whose hearts were more open to impression from the kindness shown to their offspring, than from any favor that could be conferred upon themselves! How encouraging to the children, whose parents would not fail to remind them often that they had been thus highly honored, to be embraced in the Savior's bosom, and to receive his heavenly blessing! Methinks, this very circumstance would operate upon them through life to devote themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." In a word, how edifying to all!

To *parents*, it showed what their chief desire for their children should be, namely, to bring them to the knowledge of him, and to the enjoyment of his salvation.

To *ministers*, it spoke with peculiar emphasis, that they should attend to the lambs of their flock, and consider neither the basest nor the weakest of the people as beneath their notice: however laborious their occupations might be, they should reserve some portion of their time for the instruction of babes.

To *all his believing people*also, whether men or women, it showed how acceptable a service they would perform, if they labored to instruct the rising generation. If he himself did not overlook the existence of little faith, or "despise the day of small things," or disdain to sow what could not be reaped for many years, well may his people cultivate the same benevolence, and exert themselves according to their measure in the same glorious cause.

***~~From this subject we may see,~~***

***~~1. How thankful ought children to be to their instructors.~~***

To you who are instructed from Sabbath to Sabbath it appears, that the teaching of you to read is the great object which your instructors have in view: but this is by no means the case: they desire to perform the same kind office for you which the parents in our text performed for their children; they would bring you to Christ, that you may be received into his bosom, and be made partakers of his blessing. For this end they pray for you in secret, that God may render their labors effectual for your eternal good: and while they are instructing you, they often put up a silent prayer to Him who sees the desire of their hearts; and they actually put you, as it were, into the Savior's hands, saying, 'Lord, give your blessing to this dear child!' Let me then entreat you to have the same end in view, and to seek for yourselves his blessing upon your souls.

***~~2. What reason have they to be ashamed who would keep men from Christ!~~***

The disciples had some reason for discouraging the bringing of infants to Christ; but what reason have those who would deter grown persons from coming to him! Shall it be thought that there are few, if any, who would act so wicked a part? Alas! there are many: for, what is the tendency of that derision with which religion is treated, and of that opposition which is almost universally made to those who are zealous in its cause? Surely, if our Lord was "much displeased" with his disciples, who really meant well, it is no little displeasure that he will manifest against the willful despisers of his Gospel. We commend to their attention a previously cited passage, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6), and pray God that they may never know the force of it by their own experience.

***~~3. What encouragement have we all to apply to Christ for ourselves!~~***

If our blessed Lord was so condescending unto infants, what will he not be to those who come to him with understanding hearts? Will he put any obstacles in their way? Has he not said, that "those who come unto him he will never cast out?" Let not any then dishonor him by doubts and fears, as though he would not be gracious unto them. Let not any sense of their own unworthiness discourage them: but let them rather remember, that the more *lowly*they are in their own eyes, the more amiable they will be in his; and the more *empty*they are in themselves, the more certainly shall they be "filled out of his fullness."

***~~#1439~~***

***~~The Rich Youth Forsaking Christ~~***

***~~[Mark 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.21-22)~~***

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

*IT is never known what a man is, until he is tried.* Those who most dread a conflict, may approve themselves steadfast when once they are actually engaged in it; and those who are most confident of their own prowess, may betray the greatest timidity. The eagerness of *Peter*to walk upon the waves, and his vehement protestations of fidelity to his Master, might have gained him a reputation for invincible firmness, had he not been left to prove by actual experiment the weakness and inefficacy of his resolutions. The man who engaged to follow Jesus wherever he might go, began to waver, as soon as he was informed that Jesus had not a place where to lay his head.

Thus the young man in our text might have passed for the most excellent of characters, had he not been brought to the touchstone, and allowed to manifest the real dispositions of his soul. But the command which Jesus gave him, was a trial which he could not stand, and an ordeal which he could not pass.

In elucidating his conduct, we shall consider,

***~~I. The injunction given to him—~~***

We confess that the command was difficult to be obeyed. If we contemplate his youth, his rank (a ruler,) his opulence; if we contemplate the sentiments he must have imbibed, the hopes he must have entertained, the habits he must have formed—the change proposed to him must have been irksome and arduous in the extreme. To exchange wealth for poverty, ease for trouble, honor for contempt—this was hard indeed for flesh and blood; nor could anything but Almighty grace qualify him for such a work.

Yet, though difficult, the command was not unreasonable. From whom had he received his wealth; or, who but God, had made him to differ? And had not God a right to recall what he had only lent? Had he any cause to complain, if God, who for a time had elevated him above his fellow-creatures, should afterwards reduce him to a level with them? Had not God as much right to disperse his wealth among the poor, as he before had to accumulate it upon one single man? Besides, when the sacrifice, which he was called to make, would contribute so much to the comfort of his fellow-creatures; and when it would ultimately return with a rich and abundant recompense into his own bosom; was it to be deemed unreasonable? Is it not what every merchant in the universe is glad to do, to sacrifice the temporary possession of his treasure, in the hope and prospect of far richer treasures in return?

Nor was it singular. This youth gloried in being a descendant of Abraham, who was called out from his country and kindred, to go, he knew not where; to exist, he knew not how. With this fact he was well acquainted; and he knew that Abraham never found reason to repent of his self-denying obedience. Moreover, he had at this moment before his eyes persons who had obeyed a similar call, and who could say, "Lo, we have left all, and followed you."

And, in fact, though *we*are not all called to precisely the same act of obedience, we are all called to manifest that spirit, which would ensure the performance of that act, if in the course of Providence we were called to it. Thus also, in the latter part of the injunction there was nothing unreasonable, or singular. He came to our Lord for instruction; and our Lord bade him to become a stated attendant on his ministry. He would, doubtless, in the execution of this duty, have a cross to bear: but had not all Jesus' disciples the same cross? and had not Jesus a far heavier cross than any, or than all together? Yes, had he not come from Heaven on purpose to bear it for them? Was it unreasonable then that the disciple should be as the master, and the servant as his lord?

If he was really desirous of obtaining salvation, there was nothing in the injunction given to him, which did not deserve a cheerful and unreserved compliance.

But we shall have still clearer views of this subject, if we consider,

***~~II. The peculiar reasons for that injunction—~~***

Our blessed Lord, in his reply to the young man, designed,

***~~1. To reveal to him the depravity of his own heart—~~***

Because the youth had never been guilty of any notorious breach of the commandments, he was ready to imagine that he had no ground for humiliation and contrition. Our Lord, if he had pleased, might have opened to him the spirituality of the law; and shown him that he was mistaken in supposing that he had "kept all the commandments from his youth up:" but he took a shorter and more convincing method: he gave him a specific charge, to obey which was his indispensable duty: by his reluctance to obey that, our Lord showed him, that his heart was not so much in unison with the law of God as he imagined; yes, that if duty and self-interest should stand in competition with each other, he would prove as great a rebel as more flagrant transgressors.

Thus our Lord sought to counteract his pride and self-delight, by leading him to manifest the worldliness and carnality of his heart.

***~~2. To wean him from self-confidence and self-dependence—~~***

By that question which the young man so confidently asked, "What lack I yet?" we are led to suspect, that, as he saw no defects in his obedience, so he saw no ground to doubt his acceptance with God on account of his obedience. The drift of his original question, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" seems to have been to this effect: 'Master, I perceive that you are a teacher sent from God, and that you require of us something different from what I have been accustomed to hear or practice: be so kind therefore as to inform me what it is; for I would not willingly omit anything, whereby I may secure the salvation of my soul.' In this view of his question, he wanted to substantiate more fully, and establish more firmly, his claim to eternal life on the footing of his own obedience. Against this fatal error our Lord's injunction was strongly directed: it was an axe laid to the root of his self-righteousness: and it had a most powerful tendency to convince the youth, that all his hopes were built on a foundation of sand.

***~~3. To lead him to the salvation provided for him in the Gospel—~~***

Our Lord might have preached the Gospel to him more fully, and informed him that salvation was to be obtained only by faith in him, as "the way, the truth, and the life." But the time was not yet arrived for the full disclosure of Gospel truth. It was at present but sparingly promulgated. Besides, if our Lord had thus plainly declared the way of salvation, there is reason to think that the young man would either have rejected the truth without further inquiry, or embraced it without a due preparation of soul for it; in either of which cases he would miss the end which he was solicitous to attain. The best way therefore to lead him to salvation, was to show him his need of it; so that he might enter upon a profession of it with all the zeal and gratitude that would be necessary for his establishment in the faith.

But, while we thus vindicate the injunction given him, we cannot but lament,

***~~III. The effect it produced upon him—~~***

Instead of operating in the manner that our Savior wished,

***~~1. It filled him with grief—~~***

"He was sad at that saying." But what made him "sad?" Was he grieved and ashamed on account of his backwardness to obey it? That would have been a hopeful sign, and would probably have issued in his conversion to God. But alas! he was grieved at the strictness of the precept. "He had great possessions," and could not prevail upon himself to part with them. *His riches were his idol*; and of more estimation, in his eyes, than any treasure in Heaven. Had he been called to sacrifice a part of his property, he would probably have acquiesced in the appointment: but to bereave himself of all, to reduce himself to a state of poverty—this was a requisition which he could not comply with.

Such is the effect of the Gospel upon many at this time: they would gladly embrace it, and would make some sacrifices to obtain its blessings: but to renounce the world, to mortify their lusts, to turn their backs upon all that is pleasing to flesh and blood, and to bring upon themselves nothing but contempt and persecution from their dearest friends and relatives—appears to them too great a sacrifice, and *they hope to get to Heaven upon easier terms*. Thus between a sense of their duty, and an aversion to perform it, the only effect of the Gospel is to render them unhappy.

***~~2. It determined him to forsake Christ altogether—~~***

"He went away grieved." Much as he revered the Lord Jesus, and wished to partake of his salvation, he could not continue with him on such terms as these. The price was too great for him to pay; and therefore he turned his back upon him.

Unhappy youth! How much better had it been for him, if he had been born in a low estate! *What a curse to him were his riches, which stood between him and the Savior!* Who is not ready to weep over him, when he reflects upon the fatal effects of that decision? Who that sees that hopeful character turning his back upon his Divine Instructor, giving up all hopes of Heaven, and determinately preferring a present portion—does not tremble, lest he himself should be left to make the same foolish choice?

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How dangerous is the state of many, who yet think themselves safe!~~***

If we had seen that youth (regardless of the follies which persons of his age and condition too generally prosecute) coming in so respectful a manner to the despised Nazarene; "kneeling before him" with profoundest reverence; addressing him in such terms, and such an emphatic way, as to intimate that he thought Jesus to be more than human; if we had seen him declaring confidently, that, to the best of his knowledge, he had persevered in an uniform obedience to all the commandments, and was ready to fulfill any duty that could be pointed out to him; above all, if we had seen Jesus himself struck with his amiable deportment, and "loving him" for his excellent qualities; who among us would not have been disposed to envy that youth his prospects of immortality and glory?

Yet, behold, he came short of Heaven! There was "one thing he lacked;" and for that one thing (as far as we are informed) he perished for ever. O that the moral, the sober, the amiable (of both sexes), would consider this, and take warning from his example!

*The thing he lacked was a determination to forsake all for Christ*. And is not this lacking in many among ourselves? Are there not many, whom, for their amiable qualities, one cannot but love, who yet, if they must part with all, or Christ, would hold fast their present portion? O, beloved, let this matter be duly weighed; and never imagine that you are in the way to Heaven, until you can "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."

***~~2. How awful is the condition of those who have no concern for their souls!~~***

Multitudes there are, in this and every other place, whose lives have been far from moral; who, instead of having kept all the commandments from their earliest infancy—have violated them in many flagrant instances; and who never came to Jesus with an sincere desire to receive instruction about the way to Heaven. What then must be their state? We appeal to themselves. If this amiable youth was not saved, how can you imagine that salvation belongs to you, who have not done half so much for it as this perishing youth? Methinks, this one example speaks more forcibly to you than ten thousand arguments. *You must be willfully blind, if you do not see how deplorable is your condition, and how certain your ruin, if you continue in your present state*. Be persuaded that it is not so easy a matter to get to Heaven. You must have a real concern about your souls: *the attainment of Heaven must be paramount to every other consideration*. If you will gain Heaven at all, you must "take it by the holy violence" of prayer and faith.

***~~3. How blessed are they whose hearts are right with God!~~***

They may indeed be exercised with great trials: they may be called to relinquish much of their worldly interests; to suffer much reproach; and to bear many a heavy cross.*But the "heavenly treasure" will richly repay for all!*Yes, the very prospect of it is a sufficient compensation for all that we can endure.

Could we but consult this unhappy youth, and ask him what he now thinks of his past conduct, how would he condemn his conduct, how would he deplore his folly!

If, on the contrary, we could ask of Paul what views he now had of his conduct in "suffering the loss of all things" for Christ's sake; would he not confirm his former declarations? would he not affirm more strongly than ever, that all things were dung and dross in comparison to Christ?

Let us then take joyfully the loss of man's esteem, and the confiscation of our goods: let the views and prospects of glory cheer us when dejected, and animate us when faint. We have reason to expect, that "the more our afflictions abound for Christ's sake, the more our consolations also shall abound through Christ." We are sure, that, "if we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified together."

***~~#1440~~***

***~~The Danger of Riches~~***

**[Mark 10:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.23-25)**

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

IN the perusal of history, it is desirable not merely to treasure up *facts*in our minds, but to deduce from them such observations as shall increase our stock of practical and useful knowledge. It will be to little purpose to have our memory stored with facts, unless our judgment be matured by suitable reflections upon them. In reference to the *sacred history*, this remark is still more obvious and important. Very little benefit would accrue to a person from knowing that a rich young man had turned away from Christ, because he disliked the directions which our Lord had given him. If we would derive any material instruction from this event, we should consider what aspect it has upon the lives of men in general: we should, after the example which our Lord himself has set us, contemplate the effects which *wealth*generally produces on those who possess it, and the obstacles which it lays in our way to the kingdom of Heaven.

In confirmation of our Lord's reflection, we shall endeavor to show, whence it is that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

***~~I. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not to love them—~~***

***~~Riches almost universally fascinate the minds of men—~~***

Persons of opulence see what respect their wealth procures for them; that they are objects of admiration and envy to all around them; and that, by means of their money, they can obtain all the comforts and luxuries of life. Hence they are ready to conceive that riches are really good, and almost necessarily conducive to the happiness of those who possess them. Under this idea, their affections are easily attracted towards them, and they are ready to congratulate themselves on their own peculiarly favored lot. Hence that caution of the Psalmist's, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."

***~~But in proportion as they engage our hearts, they obstruct our way to Heaven—~~***

We are commanded "not to set our affections on things below, but on things above." This prohibition extends to riches, and to everything else that fascinates the carnal mind. The reason of it is moreover assigned by God himself, namely, that the love of this world neither proceeds from him, nor leads to him, but is absolutely incompatible with real love to him, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16). Let it only then be acknowledged, that the love of God is necessary to the attainment and enjoyment of Heaven; and then it will follow, that the person, who loves his riches, cannot attain Heaven; nor could he enjoy it, even if he were admitted there: he has in his bosom an object that rivals God: and God is a jealous God, who will never accept a divided heart. "We never can serve God and Mammon." If "our treasure be on earth, our heart will be there also:" and if it be looked to as the source of our happiness, then "Woe unto us; for we have received our consolation."

***~~II. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not be puffed up by them—~~***

***~~Pride is too generally an attendant on riches—~~***

As great respect is paid to riches, the people who possess them are apt to think that they deserve it. They arrogate it to themselves; they are offended if any persons refuse to gratify them with the homage which they claim. They show in their look, their dress, their manner of speaking, yes, in their very gait, they "think themselves to be *somebody*." They expect their wishes to be consulted, and their judgment to be followed. They are impatient of contradiction. They do not like, either in public or in private, to be told of their faults. If a minister deals faithfully with their consciences, they rather condemn him for (what they will call) his rudeness or harshness—than themselves for their departure from God. How commonly this disposition springs from riches, we may judge from that direction which is given to ministers; "Charge those who are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17)."

***~~And this also, if indulged, will exclude us from Heaven—~~***

"The proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord." Whoever he is, "God will certainly abase him." Not Hezekiah himself shall escape without deep humiliation, [2 Chronicles 32:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25-26); nor even then, without severe chastisements, [Isaiah 39:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 39.4-7). If we be "lifted up with pride, (whatever be the occasion,) we shall fall into the condemnation of the devil." The characteristic mark of every true Christian, and of all that shall be admitted into Heaven, is *humility*. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Worldly poverty is not more opposite to wealth, than spiritual poverty is to pride. The true Christian will "prefer others in honor before himself," and account himself, "less than the least of all saints." But, inasmuch as wealth has a directly opposite tendency, it is hostile to the interests of Christianity, and to the salvation of all who possess it.

***~~III. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not be corrupted by them—~~***

***~~Whatever a corrupt heart can desire, is attainable through riches—~~***

Wealth opens a way for all manner of sensuality and self-indulgence: and, at the same time that it gives us facilities for gratifying our evil inclinations, it leads us into such habits as greatly dispose us to sin. A luxurious table draws us to intemperance; intemperance inflames our passions; and affluence opens an easy way to the indulgence of them. The rich even think that they are, in a measure, licensed to commit iniquity: and, in their eyes, intemperance and lewdness are, at the most, no more than trivial follies, which they can commit without shame, and look back upon without remorse.

But where riches do not produce this effect, they still exceedingly corrupt the soul.

Riches habituate us to easy indolent habits, that are very contrary to those self-denying exercises in which the Christian should be employed soul.

Riches lead us into the company of those whose minds are least spiritual, and from whose conduct and example we can derive least profit soul.

Riches induce parents to seek connections for their children rather among the opulent than among the godly soul.

Riches not unfrequently draw persons into great speculations, which fill them with anxiety, and encumber them with oppressive cares.

As strange as it may seem, riches often prove incentives to avarice, as well as to prodigality, and to an oppression of others, as well as to the gratifying of ourselves. Hence, whenever the term "lucre" is mentioned in the New Testament, the term "filthy" is invariably associated with it.

***~~And the more our corruptions are indulged, the more certain we are of perishing in final ruin—~~***

We are warned, that "to be carnally-minded is death:" and the final ruin of a very large portion of those who hear the Gospel is ascribed to "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, which choke the word that they hear, and render it unfruitful." "The love of money," we are told, "is the root of all evil;" and "those who even desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition!" Inasmuch as riches induce us principally to mind earthly things, they make us enemies of the cross of Christ, and bring us to destruction as our end.

***~~IV. It is difficult to have riches, and not trust in them—~~***

***~~Wealth, while it gains our affections, is apt to become also a ground of our confidence—~~***

"The rich man's wealth," says Solomon, "is his strong city." We are apt to rely upon it, as a source both of present and future happiness. We seem, when possessed of riches, to be out of the reach of harm. When poor, we more habitually and more sensibly feel our dependence on Providence; but, when rich, we think we have no need of religion to make us happy, or of God to provide for us. We are ready to say like the Rich Man in the Gospel, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." In like manner, we think that we have no reason to fear about the eternal world. We are ready to imagine, that God will pay the same deference to wealth as our fellow-creatures do. We have no conception that a rich man, unless he has been guilty of some peculiarly enormous crimes, can be cast into Hell. It is in vain that we read of "the Rich Man lifting up his eyes in torments:" we take for granted, that a rich man, if he has been tolerably decent in his deportment, must of necessity go to Heaven. A rich man will not endure, for the most part, to have a doubt of his future happiness suggested to him. It is not without reason, therefore, that Paul says, "Charge those who are rich in this world, that they trust not in uncertain riches."

***~~But to place our confidence in anything but God, is certain ruin—~~***

God denounces a "curse on those who make flesh their arm;" and he represents their conduct as "a departure of their hearts from him." And Job informs us, that "saying to the gold, You are my confidence, is an iniquity to be punished by the Judge, and a denial of the God that is above."

***~~V. It is difficult to have riches, and not cleave to them in preference to Christ—~~***

***~~This is the point more especially referred to in the text itself—~~***

The reason assigned for the young man's forsaking Christ was that he had great possessions: and hence our Lord's reflection on the almost insurmountable difficulties which riches interpose in our way to Heaven. The fact is, that though every one is not called to renounce his riches precisely in the same way that this opulent ruler was—every one is required to sit loose to them, and to be willing to renounce them all, whenever they shall stand in competition with his duty to God. And there is no man, who is not called to make some sacrifices for Christ.

Now a rich man's reputation is exceedingly dear to him; and his interests in the world appear to him of almost incalculable importance: and, if he is called to renounce them all, the sacrifice appears too great to be endured. He hopes he shall find out an easier way to Heaven; and chooses rather to risk the salvation of his soul, than to subject himself to such grievous trials in order to obtain it. Even those who have tasted somewhat of the sweetness of religion are sometimes drawn away, like Demas; and forsake their Savior from love to this present world.

***~~But in choosing our portion now, we choose for eternity—~~***

"We must reap according to what we sow. He who sows to the flesh must, of the flesh, reap corruption." We must "part with all, if we would have the pearl of great price." "If we do not forsake all for Christ, we cannot be his disciples." "We must count all things but loss for him." "We must hate father and mother, and houses and lands, yes and our lives also, for his sake." "If we will not lose our lives for him here, we never can enter Heaven in the eternal world."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How little true faith is there in the world!~~***

Where is the man, who, if offered great riches, would be afraid to accept them, lest they should impede his way to Heaven? Or, when congratulated on his attainment of wealth, would damp the ardor of his friends by entreating rather an interest in their prayers, that the newly-acquired riches might not corrupt and destroy his soul? Where is the man possessed of riches, who does not think his way to Heaven as easy as that of any other person? In short, where is the person who does not say in his heart, 'Give me riches: I will run the risk of their doing me any harm. I have no doubt I shall get to Heaven with them as easily as without them?'

But would it be thus, if we really believed the words of our blessed Lord? Alas! even the Apostles themselves scarcely knew how to receive so hard a saying: we are told, that they were "astonished out of measure." But it befits us to credit the assertion of Him who could not err, and would not deceive.

***~~2. What reason have the poor to be satisfied with their lot!~~***

If rich men have the advantage over them with respect to *this world*, the poor have incomparably better prospects with respect to the *world to come*. These are free and unincumbered, and ready, as it were, to run the race that is set before them; while the others are impeded by their lusts as with flowing garments, and have their "feet laden with thick clay." These in multitudes flock to Heaven, "as doves to their windows," while very few of the others ever attain the heavenly prize, 1 Corinthians 1:26-28, [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5).

It must not however be imagined that the poor will be saved, because they are poor; any more than the rich will perish, because they are rich. All must run, if they would obtain the prize. He who regards the salvation of his soul as "the one thing needful," shall be saved, whether rich or poor; and he who does not, will perish. Neither the riches of the one, nor the poverty of the other, will avail him anything. The only inquiry will be, Who among them was "rich towards God?" Their several attainments in real piety will be the only ground of distinction between them.

Yet, inasmuch as a state of poverty renders us less exposed to temptation than wealth, it may well be endured with patience, and improved with gratitude. Even, if we have (through misfortunes of any kind) experienced a transition from wealth to poverty, we may well be reconciled to the change (however painful it may be to flesh and blood); since the loss we sustain may be in fact our greatest advantage. We have only lost perhaps the cargo, which, if allowed to continue on board, would utterly have sunk the ship.

***~~3. How thankful should we be that "help is laid on One that is mighty!"~~***

When the Apostles exclaimed, "Who then can be saved?" they were consoled with the declaration, that "all things were possible with God." Now this is our comfort, that all fullness is treasured up for us in Christ; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." None then need despair: however great our temptations may be, "He knows how to deliver the godly out of them," and to "preserve them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." He can uphold a Joseph, a David, and a Daniel, amidst all the splendor of courts, as well as under the pressure of the heaviest trials. Let all then put their trust in Jesus, even in that almighty Savior, whose grace is sufficient for them, and through whose strengthening communications they shall be able to do all things. So shall Abraham the rich and prosperous, and Lazarus the poor and indigent, rejoice together in God's kingdom for ever and ever!

***~~#1441~~***

***~~The Reward of Those Who Suffer for Christ~~***

***~~[Mark 10:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.28-30)~~***

"Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life."

*THROUGH the corruption of our nature, the defects of others are apt to raise us in our own estimation, and to afford us occasion for self-applause.* This ought not to be: for the faults of others should be lamented, no less than our own, because they are injurious to the souls of men: and, if we ourselves are free from those faults, we have reason to glorify God for his grace, which alone has made us to differ from others.

We have in the context a lamentable instance of human weakness; a young man, of exemplary habits, who, on being required to sell all that he had, and to give it to the poor, and follow Christ, went away sorrowful; grieved to part with Christ, but preferring his wealth before him.

Peter beholding this, began to reflect with delight on the different conduct which he and his fellow-Apostles had pursued: they had left all for Christ: and, as our Lord had told the young man, that he, if he complied with his counsel, should "have treasure in Heaven," Peter asked, what recompense should be made to him and his brethren for the sacrifices which they had made in the cause of Christ; "We have forsaken all, and followed you—what shall we have therefore, See [Matthew 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.27)."

***~~I. This inquiry is the first thing for our present consideration—~~***

Though the Apostles were poor, their *all*was as much to them, as it would have been if they had been richer: nor can we doubt, but that the surrender of it was as acceptable to God, as if the sacrifice had been more costly: "it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12)." This sacrifice was required of them, and they had offered it without hesitation; they could truly say, they "had left all for Christ;" and they had thereby approved themselves worthy of their descent from Abraham, who, at God's command, had offered his only son Isaac upon the altar.

Nor are we to imagine that the duty was peculiar to them: it is as much our duty, as it was theirs, to leave all for Christ. We are not indeed called, like the Apostles, to forsake our worldly callings in order to wait as stated attendants on our Lord. We are rather to "abide in our callings wherein we are called:" but we must be willing to sacrifice everything for Christ, and must actually sacrifice everything that stands in competition with him. In this respect the whole Christian world are called to the same exercise of faith and self-denial as the Apostles were; everything sinful must be mortified; and even the most innocent and necessary things must be given up, rather than that we should be drawn by them to the commission of any one sin, or to the neglect of any one duty. We must "hate father and mother, and even our own lives also, in comparison to Christ, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)."

Under such circumstances Peter's inquiry seems not unreasonable: for if we are to surrender up everything to and for Christ, we may well ask, 'What shall I gain by this? or, What recompense shall I obtain?' It is not to be expected that God will call us to such trials, and not remunerate us for our fidelity to him. It is true, we can never look for a reward of debt; but a reward of grace we may expect, and that too in proportion to the sacrifices we make, the sufferings we endure, and the services we perform.

We are not at liberty to make bargains, as it were, with the Almighty, and to stipulate for so much wages in return for so much service. We must rather enter voluntarily into his service, and cheerfully give up all for him: but after having made the needful sacrifices, we may inquire into the promised recompense of reward. We must, like Abraham, "go out from our country and our kindred, not knowing where we go [Hebrews 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8);" and must trust in God to make all necessary provision for us: and, if he had not specified anything in his word, we should be contented to continue ignorant of the recompense that he will assign to us: but, as he has been pleased to make specific promises to those who trust in him, we cannot do wrong in endeavoring to ascertain their import and extent.

***~~II. The answer of our Lord to this inquiry is the next point to be noticed by us—~~***

Matthew records more of our Lord's answer than either of the other Evangelists. He mentions a part which seems more immediately applicable to the Apostles themselves, who, in the day when "God will make all things new," and "there shall be new heavens and a new earth," and "when our Lord shall come in his glory to judge the world," shall be honored above all other men, being, as it were, assessors with Christ in the Judgment, and having their word as the law by which the whole world, shall be judged, [Matthew 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.28). Mark records that only which was of general use; but still he gives all the satisfaction that the most bereaved and destitute person can desire.

There is a *present recompense*which all who suffer loss for Christ shall receive; and that too exceedingly beyond any loss they can possibly sustain. It is taken for granted that they may lose the affection of all their most endeared relatives for their attachment to the Gospel; and that they may be deprived of all that they possess in the world. But God will often send them such supplies in another way, that they shall in reality sustain no loss at all: but, if he does not recompense them in this way, he will give them "contentment, which with godliness is great gain;" and such an increased enjoyment of their slender pittance, as shall be far sweeter than all the delicacies upon earth. He will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and, under the loss of earthly parents, and an earthly portion, will enable them to call him, Father, and to view Heaven itself as their inheritance. Let any one who has experienced these consolations, say, whether they be not "a hundred fold" greater than all that they ever derived from the possession of earthly comforts even in their richest abundance?

But, besides this, there is a *future*recompense, even "eternal life," which shall assuredly be given to all who suffer for Christ in this world. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together," and have "a weight of glory proportioned" to the trials we endure, and to the graces which we exercise, in his service. But who can estimate the value of that recompense? Suffice it to say, that the veracity of God is pledged for the bestowment of it, and that the blessedness conferred shall exist as long as God himself exists.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who hesitate about leaving all for Christ—~~***

Does a moment's hesitation befit you?

Think of your *Lord and Savior*—did he hesitate, when an offer was made him to redeem your souls? Did he account the conditions hard, when he had your everlasting salvation in view? No! He gladly left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our nature, and bore our curse, that he might redeem our souls from death and Hell, Compare [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8). Do you then hesitate to make any sacrifice for him?

Look at *Paul*—was he intimidated? did he account anything too much to do or suffer for his Lord? Compare [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13) with [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17); [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

Look at *Moses*—can you be called to sacrifice more than he? "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt! [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)."

Think not to have a saving interest in Christ on any lower terms: You must, in heart and affection, forsake all, if you would be his disciples, [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33).

The Rich Youth in the Gospel would not accede to these terms: but do you commend him? Do you not look upon him with pity? Do you not think he would change his mind now, if the offer were again made to him? O be wise in time! "Buy the truth, and sell it not:" be willing to "sell all that you have for that treasure which is hid in the Gospel, and for that pearl of great price, [Matthew 13:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.44-46)."

If, like Amaziah, you reply, "What shall I do for all the talents I shall sacrifice?" I answer with the prophet, "The Lord is able to give you much more, [2 Chronicles 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.9)." In fact, your gain will exceed all calculation. If you were a merchant, you would gladly embrace an opportunity of making ten or twenty percent of your money, though the return should not be absolutely certain; but here you are promised ten thousand percent, and it is assured to you by the veracity of God himself. Only "have faith in God," and all the blessings of "the upper and nether springs," of time and of eternity, are yours!

***~~2. Those who, like the Apostles, have left all for him—~~***

Whatever your losses or sufferings may have been, I congratulate you from my heart: yes, God himself congratulates you, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12), [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14), [James 1:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2-4), [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12). And I confidently put the question to you, Has any one of you been ever disappointed of his hope? Have you ever been a loser by serving the Lord? Has he not made up to you in spiritual things, what you have sacrificed for him in worldly things? In the pursuit of earthly gratifications you have often paid too dearly for your enjoyments; but have you ever had reason to regret the price you have paid for the maintenance of a good conscience, and for the benefits of the Gospel?

After having counted the cost yourself, have you a friend in the world whom you would dissuade from treading in your steps? You still experience "persecutions;" for they are a part of the Promise, if I may so speak: but do you find them so great a drawback upon your happiness, as you once expected? Is an opprobrious name, or the loss of worldly interests, so great a matter as you once imagined? Show then by your steadfastness, that, "in God's favor is life," and that though "you have nothing else, you really possess all things."

To those who are preparing for the ministry, these thoughts are peculiarly important: for this discipline is often sent, in order to prepare you for the service of the sanctuary. You are to stand in the front of the battle: you are to be examples to the flock: and it is by such exercises that you are to be fitted for your work, and to bring down a blessing on your future labors, [Deuteronomy 33:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.9-11). Still it is not of you only that these sacrifices are required; nor are you alone to receive the rich compensation that will be awarded for them. This duty is the duty of all Christians; this happiness is the happiness of all: to all therefore, without exception, I would say, "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life!"

***~~#1442~~***

***~~The Ambition of James and John Reproved~~***

***~~[Mark 10:35-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.35-40)~~***

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

THERE is a fund of instruction in the Scriptures, which the superficial reader entirely overlooks. A thousand little circumstances that are incidentally mentioned in them, serve to confirm each other for the establishment of our faith.

To administer *reproof*well, is an art exceeding rare and difficult to be attained. When called to attempt it, we in general either pass over the fault so slightly, as to convey no adequate idea of its malignity; or insist upon it so strongly, as to incense, rather than conciliate, the offending person: taking no notice of what we might approve, we are apt to look only at what we disapprove; and to search out occasion for blame, even beyond what the occasion requires.

But, instead of this, we should be forward to applaud what is good in the spirit of any person, when we cannot commend the terms in which he speaks; or to put a favorable construction on the terms he uses, when we are constrained to show our disapprobation of his spirit.

Our Lord has set us an example in this respect, which well deserves our imitation. Two of his disciples, James and John, had come to him with a request, which argued lamentable ignorance and a highly culpable ambition. But how did our Lord correct their folly? Did he expatiate upon their fault, and aggravate it to the uttermost? No, he apparently overlooked it; and annexed to their words a favorable meaning which they were never intended to convey; and then founded on them such instruction as was calculated silently and effectually to counteract the evils of the heart.

In speaking of *the request*which these disciples offered to him, we shall notice it,

***~~I. As it was intended by them—~~***

Whether the idea originated with them or their mother, we do not know: perhaps the disciples, conscious of the unreasonableness of their desires, had engaged the good offices of their mother, to veil their own ambition: or, possibly, the mother, anxious for the aggrandizement of her family, had urged on her sons to unite in the request: but at all events it is evident, that they hoped by their joint influence certainly to prevail.

Notwithstanding all that our Lord had just said about his sufferings and death, his disciples still expected that he would establish a temporal kingdom. Though he had spoken of his being crucified, yet, as he had talked also of "rising again the third day," they conceived that he spoke only of some transient trials, which would outcome in a complete triumph over all his enemies. They remembered that promise which he had very recently given them, that they should at a future period "sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, [Matthew 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.28);" and they concluded, that it must relate to some temporal dominion. Emboldened by this, they presumed to ask that they might be invested with the two highest places of dignity and power in his kingdom.

Not a thought did they bestow on his sufferings, though described in such awful terms: nothing found any place in their minds, but a hope of speedy elevation to the highest honors upon earth. Nor did they affect only a superiority over the world at large, but even above their own brethren also, even above all the other Apostles; so blind were they to their own incompetency for such a post, and so regardless of their own eternal interests. Consider their request in this view:

***~~1. How unsuitable to their talents!~~***

What qualifications had they for such an office as that which they solicited? They might be experienced enough as fishermen; but what preparation of mind had they for statesmen, and for the government of an extensive empire? Foolish and vain men! Well did our Savior say to them, "You know not what you ask."

***~~2. How repugnant to their best interests!~~***

They had been called from their usual employment, in order that they might be at leisure to acquire spiritual knowledge; and would they go and undertake an employment that would fill them with ten thousand times greater cares, even if they were qualified to engage in it? Will a man about to run a race, load his feet with thick clay? Yet, notwithstanding their Lord had very recently told them, that it was "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, [Matthew 19:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.25-26)," *they sought after wealth and honor as the summit of their felicity*. Alas! how awfully had Satan blinded their eyes, and deluded their hearts!

***~~3. How illustrative of the carnality of the human heart!~~***

Though only two of the disciples offered this request, all the others showed by their indignation that they were under the influence of the same ambition. And indeed *what they expressed in words, is more or less the language of all our hearts*. We would not perhaps utter the sentiment so plainly as they did; but we will indulge it. *We long for some further advancement in life; somewhat more of honor, or power, or wealth*. We do not indeed wish to govern kingdoms; because of that we have no prospect: but as soon as any elevation in the world appears to be within our reach, we instantly find a drawing of heart towards it. All, from the prince to the beggar, are thus affected: and even those, who profess themselves to be disciples of Christ, are still infected with this fatal malady, the love of this world. Yes, if the desire of our hearts were as plainly expressed as theirs was, we would be found, with very few exceptions, to resemble those infatuated and misguided men.

Let us now proceed to notice *their request*,

***~~II. As it was interpreted by our Lord—~~***

He graciously overlooked the true construction of their words, and affixed a sense to them which they were capable of bearing, and which divested them of a great portion of the evil which they contained: and then he formed his answer, as suited to his own construction of them. He supposed the words to relate to that kingdom which he was really come to establish in the world; and as importing a desire after the highest proficiency in grace, and the highest elevation in glory. In conformity with this idea, he speaks to them only of *spiritual advancement*, and shows them,

***~~1. The way in which it was to be obtained—~~***

It is not by a bare request that any person can arrive at eminence in the divine life. *The soul is to be disciplined by conflicts, and to be purified by afflictions.*Perfect as the Lord Jesus himself was, "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered," and "was made perfect through sufferings:" and in like manner must all his people be.

Hence he put the question to them, "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" As though he had said, You see what bitter trials I endure, that I am overwhelmed even with a sea of troubles. See [1 Corinthians 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.2), and it is ordained that all who will be distinguished either here, or in Heaven, must arrive at that distinction by the same path: "they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of Heaven," and "suffer with me here, if they would be glorified with me in the eternal world."

This is a solemn and important truth: it has been verified in every age and corner of the world: from righteous Abel to this very hour, every saint has experienced it; and those whose situations have required them to take the lead, have not only borne the brunt of the battle, but frequently have been called to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of Christ. *Persecution is a cup which every saint must drink of*, and a baptism which every follower of Christ must expect to be baptized with.

***~~2. The way in which they themselves should obtain it—~~***

In answer to the question put to them by our Lord, the two disciples, without any hesitation, affirmed that they could suffer any extremity for him. But what presumption was this! Still however our blessed Lord would not mark what they said amiss; but, passing over it in silence, told them, that they should all partake of this honor, and be rendered conformable to his image. They had been chosen by him to be his messengers to the world, and to lead others in the way wherein they should go; and therefore it was necessary that they in particular should be patterns of that faith and patience which they were to inculcate upon others.

Accordingly, the very first of the Apostles that was put to death for the sake of Christ, was James, [Acts 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.2); and John was soon imprisoned and beaten for the Gospel's sake, [Acts 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.40); and, after a life of many trials, was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he speaks of himself, at the age of a hundred years, as "a companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, [Revelation 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.9). Thus he most effectually counteracted their ambitious views, by showing them, that, *instead of honors in this world, they must look for nothing but tribulations and persecutions even unto death.*

***~~3. To what persons it should ultimately be given—~~***

Our Lord tells his disciples that the chief places in his kingdom were to be disposed of by him, not according to his own mere arbitrary will, but agreeably to a plan concerted from all eternity between his Father and himself; and that they only would possess the highest place for whom that place had been prepared.

His words however admit of two distinct meanings; they may be understood as declaring, that his gift of eternal life is limited by the decrees of God, or that it is regulated by the attainments of men. In either of these views, they contain important instruction.

God the Father did, from all eternity, enter into covenant with his Son, and give to him a people, whom he would redeem by his blood, and save by his effectual grace; and on whom he should confer everlasting happiness in Heaven. Of these our blessed Lord frequently speaks as of persons given to him by the Father; and he plainly declares elsewhere, that his bestowing of eternal life was limited to them, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2); [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24).

But it is equally true, that the degrees of glory which shall be conferred on different persons will be proportioned to their attainments in grace: it is expressly said, that "every man shall receive according to his own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8)." Of course, there are higher degrees of glory prepared for those who labor and suffer much for their Lord, and lower degrees for those who are less diligent. The parables of the pounds and of the talents are decisive upon this point.

In this sense of the words, our Lord's reply appears to be more pertinent than in the other; for then the import of them will be to this effect: 'Do not be looking for earthly honor, but for the honor that comes of God; and be as ambitious for that as you will: only remember that the degrees of it which you shall obtain, depend upon your own exertions for the attainment of it: engage heartily in my service, and expect assuredly at my hands a reward proportioned to your diligence and fidelity.'

This is an encouraging consideration to every one of us: the *cup*we may have to drink of may be bitter at the time; but it shall soon be exchanged for a far different cup, which we shall drink of to all eternity! Though we go through a sea of troubles now, our augmented weight of glory shall abundantly compensate for all the sorrows we have endured!

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. What we are to desire—~~***

If we will hear a Prophet, he says, "Are you seeking great things unto yourself? Seek them not! [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5)." If we will attend to an Apostle, he says, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)." Let us attend to these instructions, and "count all things but loss, that we may win Christ".

***~~2. What we are to expect—~~***

If we look for honor and acceptance with man, we shall be disappointed. Which of the Prophets, which of the Apostles, was not an object of hatred and persecution to an ungodly world? Who are we then, that we should expect different treatment from them? Let us bear in mind, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," and let us be content to bear our *cross*, in order that we may hereafter receive a *crown*.

***~~3. What we are to do—~~***

God has appointed to every one of us our work: let us be diligent in the performance of it: "whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with all our might." But let us be especially careful of the *rock*which these presumptuous disciples split upon. When our Lord asked them whether they could "drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism," they confidently answered that they could. And how justly they estimated their own powers, they soon showed, when, upon our Lord's apprehension in the garden, they all forsook him and fled.

Thus will it be with *us*, if we attempt to do anything in our own strength: we shall soon find that "we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought," much less to do and suffer all the will of God. Our Lord tells us, that "without Him we can do nothing." Let us remember then, that, while we engage in his service, we must derive all our strength from him. If we look to him, we need not fear either men or devils: we may set at nothing all the menaces of our most inveterate enemies: a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, need be no object of terror to us; for "our strength shall be according to our day;" and we shall be "enabled both to do all things," and "to suffer all things, through Christ who strengthened us."

***~~#1443~~***

***~~Legitimate Ambition Illustrated~~***

***~~[Mark 10:41-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.41-45)~~***

"And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

THE corruption of the heart, like fire in flint, generally lies concealed, until, by a collision with some particular circumstances, it is elicited; and then it comes forth with a power capable of producing the most fatal effects.

Until James and John had applied to the Lord Jesus for the two highest places in his kingdom, the other ten disciples appeared content with any lot that should be assigned them: but when they had reason to apprehend that their more aspiring brethren might be placed above them, they were filled with indignation against them, and were ready to dispute and quarrel with them for precedency. Then they showed, that they themselves were as much actuated by ambition as the others; and were quite as averse to yield, as the others were anxious to obtain, the highest place of dignity and power. *Unconscious of the evil that existed in themselves, they were soon offended at it in others*: and it is observable, that *we are never more easily offended, than when we behold in others the evil that is predominant in ourselves*; so blind are we in our judgment, and so partial in our decisions.

But our blessed Lord gently corrected the errors of his disciples; he showed them, that they were altogether wrong in indulging such a desire after earthly distinctions; and that, if they would affect superiority at all, the only ambition that became them was to excel in works and labors of love. This, which we may call legitimate ambition, he illustrated in a way,

***~~I. Of contrast—~~***

***~~The men of this world affect and exercise a lordly authority—~~***

Kings are rarely content with the measure of power with which they are invested by the laws, but are for the most part desirous of extending their rule; and not uncommonly they imagine that they themselves are exalted, in proportion to the degree of power that they are able to exert. Nor does it in general suffice them to govern their own subjects: they too often wish to interfere with other potentates, and to control the acts of other sovereigns. The subjugation of other states, is in their eyes a source of enviable aggrandizement: and the greater success they have in prosecuting their ambitious projects, the more restless they become; until at last universal empire is scarcely sufficient to satiate their desires. A fear of losing their own possessions, imposes indeed on many a beneficial restraint: but where no such ground of fear exists, the tyrannical dispositions of men know no bounds.

What the human heart is capable of, may be seen in Nebuchadnezzar; who ordered all the wise men in his dominions to be put to death, because they could not tell him a dream of his, which he himself had forgotten; and again commanded all who would not fall down and worship a golden image which he had set up, to be cast into a fiery furnace: in a word, "all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him; whom he would, he slew; and whom he would, he kept alive, [Daniel 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.12-13); [Daniel 3:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.2-7); [Daniel 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.19)."

The same dispositions are observable also in subordinate governors, and in all who are invested with authority: *there is in every one a proneness to extend his power, and to make his own will the rule and reason of action to those around him*: and the greater measure of despotism any one is able to exercise, the more he conceives himself to be exalted in the scale of being.

***~~But the very reverse of this should be the practice of God's people—~~***

We say not that a Christian may not be a king: (would to God that all the kings upon earth were Christians!) nor do we think it wrong for them to maintain the power assigned them by the laws: for they are invested with power by God himself, in order that they may exercise it for their people's good. Nor do we conceive that Christians of an inferior order should decline all offices of trust and power; or that power should not be exercised over the Church of God: for every society must be governed by laws: and it is desirable that the execution of the laws should be entrusted to those who will most consult the glory of God.

But this we say, that no man should strive for power under an idea that happiness consists in the possession of it, or that he himself is elevated and ennobled by it; nor indeed for any other end, than as it may be instrumental to the advancing of God's honor, and the happiness of mankind.

The Christian's attitude must be the very reverse of that which we have seen to be the habit of the world. What worldly men affect, he must despise: and what they exact of others, he must, of his own mind and will, cheerfully render to all around him. Instead of wishing to enslave others, he must willingly make himself, so to speak, a slave to others; and account it his highest honor to render services even to the least and poorest of mankind: he must be the minister of all, the servant of all imports a servant who was also his master's property.

Our Lord proceeded to illustrate this idea further, in a way,

***~~II. Of comparison—~~***

***~~Our blessed Lord has exhibited a perfect pattern for his people—~~***

He was, in a sense that none other can be, "the Son of Man:" he was, as the Jews themselves understood that name to mean, the Son of God, even God himself, [Luke 22:69-70](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.69-70). Yet "he, though being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful men:" and, instead of appearing in outward pomp and splendor, and having the great men of the earth in his retinue, *he came to minister unto his own rebellious creatures.*Yes, he waited upon them continually, "going about through all the towns and villages to do good" to their bodies and their souls. On his own immediate disciples too he waited, condescending even to wash their feet. Nor did he only spend his life in the service of mankind, but at last laid down his life for them, to ransom their souls from death and Hell. No sacrifice was too great for him to make for their welfare, no suffering too heavy for him to endure. He "bore their infirmities and sorrows" by tender sympathy, and "he bore also their sins in his own body on the tree;" enduring in his own person the curse due to them, that they through him might inherit eternal blessedness [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21).

***~~To resemble him should be the summit of our ambition—~~***

As to the ends and purposes of his humiliation and death, he must for ever stand alone: for "no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him, [Psalm 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.7)." But we may "bear one another's burdens;" and we ought to do so; for this is the law imposed on us by Christ himself, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2). We may consider all our faculties, and time, and wealth, and influence as talents committed to our care, to be improved for God and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures: we may value them all, only as means of doing good: we may make the good of others to be the great business and end of our lives, and study by all possible means to promote the comfort of their bodies, and the salvation of their souls. We may cheerfully submit to sacrifice our ease, our reputation, our liberty, yes, our very lives, in their service: yes; we may, and "we ought to, lay down our lives for the brethren," if by such a sacrifice we may promote their eternal interests, 1 [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16).

Here, I say, is scope for our ambition: nor can we possibly be too ardent in such a career as that. We must not indeed labor even in such a way for the honor that comes of man: to be aspiring after eminence with a view to man's applause, would vitiate all the actions that we could ever perform, and deprive us of all hope of acceptance with God: but, if we abound in works and labors of love for the honor of God and the good of man, then, the more numerous and self-denying those labors are, the more exalted shall we be in the estimation of God himself; and if we would possess the most distinguished place in his kingdom, this is the legitimate and the only method to obtain it.

We know that the Apostle Paul was "not a whit behind the very chief Apostles:" and the reason was, that "he labored more abundantly than they all," and rendered both to God and man the greatest measure of difficult and self-denying services, [2 Corinthians 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.5); [2 Corinthians 11:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.22-28). In a word, he most resembled his Divine Master: and in proportion as we also resemble Christ, will be our real dignity and honor.

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The true nature of Christian morality—~~***

The generality of Christians have a scheme of morals scarcely elevated beyond the systems which were established by heathen philosophers: their morality is a system of *pride*; and, however wide its circumference, every line of it centers in *self*. But the morality of the Gospel is founded in humility, and, in every part of it, has respect to the glory of God. It requires us "not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again."

Were this more considered among us, we should not hear of persons founding their hopes of acceptance on their morality: for, where is there one who has regulated his life by this standard? If we try our morals by this touchstone, we shall see that *the very best of us needs a Savior*, as much as the vilest of the human race: Let us remember then what true morality is, and labor to attain its utmost heights.

***~~2. The diversified uses that we are to make of our Savior's death—~~***

Doubtless the first great use that we are to make of it, is, to trust in it for our reconciliation with God. We all have sold ourselves to sin and Satan, and must all look to his blood as the price paid for our redemption. No other ransom ever was, or ever can be, paid for our souls: in that therefore must be all our hope, and trust, and confidence. But in the death of Christ we have also an assemblage of every virtue that suffering humanity can exercise. In that we have a pattern of all that is great and glorious; a patience invincible, a love that passes the comprehension either of men or angels. To that therefore we must look as to the pattern to which we are to be conformed: and though it is not possible that we should ever come near to his perfection, yet we must aspire after it; and, setting him ever before our eyes, must endeavor in all things to "walk as he walked."

***~~3. The criterion whereby we are to judge of our spirit and conduct—~~***

It is often difficult to ascertain the precise quality of our own actions; but here are two things, by which, as by a rule or plummet, we may be enabled to form a correct judgment.

Let us compare our spirit and conduct with that which is discernible in worldly men: and we may be nearly sure, that, if we resemble them, we are wrong.

Let us next turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and see what his spirit and conduct were on similar occasions: and we may safely conclude, that we are right or wrong, in proportion as we resemble him, or differ from him.

We do not undertake to say, that these tests are infallible in all cases; because a worldly man may sometimes do what is materially right, though from a wrong principle; and because the cases between our Lord and ourselves may not be sufficiently parallel: but the person who will habituate himself to try his spirit by these tests, will have a light which will assist him in the most intricate paths, and preserve him from innumerable errors, into which he would fall, if he had no such clue to guide him. And let not this hint be overlooked; for, "who can understand his errors?"

On many occasions, the Apostles themselves "knew not what spirit they were of." Had they on the present occasion reflected either on the conduct of the world, or on the conduct of their Lord, they would have been kept from proud ambition on the one hand, and from envious indignation on the other. While therefore we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, let us be thankful for any subordinate means of ascertaining his mind and will: and let us endeavor so to walk, that Christ himself may testify concerning us, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

***~~#1444~~***

***~~Blind Bartimaeus Cured~~***

***~~[Mark 10:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.49-50)~~***

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

*OUR Lord, like the sun in the firmament, pursued without intermission the great ends of his ministry, diffusing innumerable blessings wherever he bent his course.* The miracle which he performed at Jericho, though similar in many respects to some others which are recorded, has some circumstances peculiar to itself, which deserve to be attentively considered.

Matthew mentions two persons who were joint-petitioners on this occasion; but Mark confines his narration to Bartimaeus alone, as the more noted of the two, and as the chief speaker. To comprehend the most important incidents in this history, we shall consider,

***~~I. The state of the person whom Jesus called—~~***

***~~Bartimaeus was a distressed and humble suppliant for mercy—~~***

He was both blind, and necessitated to exist on the precarious bounty of those who might pass him on the highway. Who would have thought that God should allow one towards whom he had designs of saving love and mercy, to be reduced to so low a state? Yet such is his sovereign appointment in many instances; his own children are lying at the gate full of sores, while his enemies are faring sumptuously every day.

Hearing that Jesus was passing by, this blind man importuned his aid. He would not lose the opportunity which now occurred; nor cease from his cries until he had obtained his request. His language was expressive of an assured faith in Jesus the promised Messiah, at the very time that the rulers and Pharisees almost unanimously rejected him. Thus it is frequently found, that those things which are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes.

***~~Afflictive as such a condition is, it affords a pleasant and hopeful prospect—~~***

Distress of any kind cannot but be an object of commiseration; but none is so much to be deprecated as the blindness of the *mind*. The loss of eye-sight is no more worthy to be compared with this, than the body with the soul, or time with eternity. Miserable beyond description are they, the eyes of whose *understanding*have never yet been enlightened to behold the wonderful things of God's word. But if we be sensible of our blindness; if we be calling upon Jesus as the appointed and all-sufficient Savior, if we be persevering in prayer notwithstanding all our discouragements, and saying, "I will not let you go unless you bless me," we are surely in a hopeful state; we are not far from the kingdom of God.

In confirmation of this point we proceed to show,

***~~II. The encouragement which the call of Jesus afforded him—~~***

***~~The command which Jesus gave was announced to Bartimaeus with joyful congratulations—~~***

Jesus had declined for some time to notice his cries, but at last commanded him to be brought unto him. What a gleam of hope must instantly have irradiated the mind of this poor suppliant! A few minutes before, he had been rebuked by the multitude, and bidden to be quiet; but, happily for him, their rebukes had operated to quicken, rather than to damp his ardor. Now also the voices of those who had checked him were changed, and their rebukes were turned to encouraging exhortations. The very call was deemed a pledge of the mercy that had been solicited.

And are not the calls of Jesus a ground of encouragement to all who feel their need of mercy?

He does not, it is true, call any of us by name; but the descriptions given of those whom he does invite, are far more satisfactory to the soul, than the most express mention of our names could be: we might doubt whether there were not others of our name; but who can doubt whether he be a sinner, a lost sinner? Yet such are repeatedly declared to be the very persons whom Jesus came to seek and save.

Are we, like the blind man, longing for mercy, and striving to obtain it? It is impossible to doubt whether Jesus has mercy in store for us, since he particularly calls to him "every one that thirsts." Only let his invitations be treasured up in our minds, and we shall never despond, or entertain a doubt of obtaining our desire at last.

Participating in the general joy which this call excited, let us trace,

***~~III. The effect it produced upon him—~~***

***~~He arose and went to Jesus without delay—~~***

Intent upon one point of infinite importance, he disregarded his garment, as the Samaritan woman on another occasion left her water-pot; or perhaps, fearing that it would retard his motion, he cast it away, that he might the more speedily obey the summons. Valuable as it must have been to one so poor, he utterly despised it, when the prospect of a cure had cheered his soul; nor would he retain anything that should for one moment interfere with his expected bliss. Instantly he went, and made known to Jesus the particular mercy which he desired. He asked not any financial aid, but that, of which the value was above rubies. He had come to one who was able to grant whatever he would ask; and, as he was not straitened in his Benefactor, he would not be straitened in his own petitions.

***~~Such should be the effect which the calls of Jesus should produce on us—~~***

We should not hesitate one moment to comply with his gracious invitations, nor should any worldly concerns occupy our thoughts when a prospect of mercy presents itself to our view. We should cast off everything, however dear or even necessary it may be to us, rather than allow it to retard our spiritual progress. "We should lay aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us, in order that we may run with perseverance and activity the race that is set before us." Going to Jesus we should spread all our wants before him. If he asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" we should be ready to reply, 'Lord, open my eyes, forgive my sins, renew my soul.' If we thus improve his calls, we shall never be disappointed of our hope.

***~~We shall conclude with recommending to your imitation the conduct of this blind beggar. Imitate,~~***

***~~1. His humility—~~***

It is scarcely possible for words to express deeper humility than that manifested by Bartimaeus. He sought nothing but mercy for mercy's sake. He had no plea but that of his own misery, together with that which was implied in the appellation given to Jesus. The Son of David was to confirm his divine mission by the most benevolent and stupendous miracles. The import of the beggar's petition therefore was, 'Let me, the poorest, basest, and most necessitous of mankind, be made a monument of your power and grace.' Such exactly is to be the spirit and temper with which we must approach the Lord. If we bring any self-righteous plea, or build our hope upon anything besides the work and offices of Christ, we never can find acceptance with him. It is the broken and contrite spirit, and that alone, which God will not despise.

***~~2. His perseverance—~~***

The circumstances under which he persevered in his requests were very discouraging. He was rebuked by the people, and, to appearance, disregarded by Christ; yet, instead of giving up, he redoubled his efforts to obtain mercy. Thus should we pray and not faint. Discouragements we must expect both from without and from within. The world will cry out against us, and God himself may appear to have forsaken us: but we must argue like the lepers, and say, 'If I cease to call upon him, I must perish; and I can but perish if I continue my supplications.'

Thus must we continue in prayer with all perseverance; breaking through every difficulty, casting away every impediment, and determining, if we perish, to perish at the feet of Christ. Would to God that there were within us such a spirit! Sooner would Heaven and earth pass away than such a suppliant be finally rejected.

***~~3. His gratitude—~~***

When healed by Jesus, we find the same contempt for secular interests as he had manifested under his distress. From henceforth his concern was to honor his Benefactor: he instantly became a stated follower of Jesus, a living witness of his mercy and power. How differently did he act from those who seek the Lord in their affliction, but as soon as ever they are relieved, forget all the vows that are upon them!

Let not us be of this base and odious character. Let us rather yield up ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord, and devote ourselves wholly to his service. *Let the remembrance of his kindness be ever engraved on our hearts, and a grateful sense of it be ever legible in our lives*. Thus shall we answer the end for which his mercy is imparted, and be numbered among his followers in the eternal world.

***~~#1445~~***

***~~The Importance of Faith in Prayer~~***

**[Mark 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.24)**

"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, *believe*that you receive them, and you will have them."

THERE is no grace more highly commended in the Scriptures, than faith: for though in some respects love may be considered as the greater, inasmuch as it more assimilates us to the Deity, and is of infinitely longer duration [1 Corinthians 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.13); yet *faith is the parent of love, and the root of every other grace*. Faith, above all other graces, honors God, and benefits the soul; for it gives to him the glory of all his infinite perfections, and brings down from him a supply of all those blessings which he has promised to bestow. Faith's efficacy is particularly seen in prayer: our Lord has assured us, that faith shall secure to us every blessing that we ask for: "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

It is our intention to show,

***~~I. What is that faith which we are to exercise in prayer—~~***

Many distinguish between that faith which works miracles, and that whereby we obtain salvation: but I much doubt the propriety of the distinction as it is usually explained. It is supposed that the faith itself is different: but I apprehend that the difference exists, not in the faith, but in the objects of that faith: the faith is the same; but its operation is different, according to the objects on which it is exercised. I would say of faith, so far as it relates to our present subject, that*it is an expectation founded on a promise*.

To expect anything which God has not promised, is presumption.

To doubt the fulfillment of what he has promised, is unbelief.

To expect the accomplishment of his word, is faith.

But promises are of different kinds: some are absolute and others conditional. The office of faith is to apprehend them as they are given. If they are given *absolutely*, we must expect them absolutely. If they are given *conditionally*, we must expect them conditionally. Our faith in each must be equally assured: we must as fully expect the accomplishment of a conditional promise on the performance of the condition, as of any promises to which no condition is annexed. But we must be careful not to construe the conditional promises as absolute, or the absolute promises as conditional. If we take the absolute promises, and make them to depend on the performance of conditions, we deny to God the exercise of his sovereign grace. If , on the other hand, we make the conditional promises absolute, and expect their accomplishment merely from the circumstance of their fixing themselves strongly on our minds, we shall, on the occurrence of a disappointment, be led to doubt the veracity of God, and to reject all his promises as unworthy of belief.

We will explain ourselves more fully.

There are many promises which we call ABSOLUTE; such as those which relate to Christ as the Author of salvation to a ruined world, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); [Genesis 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.3); such as relate also to the increase and establishment of his Church, [Isaiah 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 2.2); [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6-9); and such also as afford the broad grounds of hope to all who shall believe in Christ, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7); [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37); [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39); [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7). We are to believe these as true and certain, independent of any title to them, or interest in them, possessed by us. As applied to ourselves indeed, they may be considered as conditional; but as received, they may be called absolute.

There are other promises which we call CONDITIONAL; because they are made to persons of certain characters, or upon our performance of certain conditions, [Matthew 5:3-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-10); [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8); [Matthew 11:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-29); [Acts 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.31); and these we are to believe as infallibly certain to all who attain the qualifications or perform the conditions. Yet we must not imagine that the qualification or the action forms the proper ground on which God bestows the blessing: the blessing is God's free gift, as well when it is conditionally granted, as when it is unconditional. The bestowment of Canaan on the descendants of Abraham was free, notwithstanding the final possession of it was suspended on their obedience to his commandments. So it is in all cases: the performance of conditions may be appointed of God as means to an end; and the end may be inseparable from the means; but still the end is God's free gift; and from his free grace alone do we derive our title to it: *the use of the means is no more than the beggar's stretching out his hand to receive a offered donation.*

Among these may be classed all temporal promises, such as those which relate to health, or riches, or honor: for these are no further promised than the bestowment of them shall accord with God's will, and be subservient to his glory. *We shall have them in that measure that shall be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfare*.

Promises also which relate to others, are of this kind. God engages to "pour out his Spirit on our seed and his blessing on our offspring," etc. [Isaiah 44:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3-5). But this cannot be fulfilled, unless the individuals themselves seek his blessing: and therefore it must be understood as subject to that condition.

Such then is the faith which we are to exercise in prayer. We are to lay hold on the promises of God in his word, and are to apprehend them, not as they are applied to our minds—but as they are given by God as either conditional or unconditional. Their striking our minds more or less, forcibly makes no alteration in them: they are not a whit more or less certain on that account: their accomplishment is no otherwise affected by our conduct than as we exercise faith on them, or entertain doubts respecting them. If we do not credit them, they will not be fulfilled to us. If we do credit them, they will be fulfilled absolutely, or on our performance of the conditions, according to the quality of the promises themselves.

Having stated what we apprehend to be the kind of *faith*that we are to exercise, we proceed to mark,

***~~II. The importance of faith towards the success of our prayers—~~***

Two things are noted in our text, the one expressed, the other implied; and they will serve to show us the importance of faith in the strongest light in which it can be seen:

***~~1. Without faith, no prayer even for the smallest blessing can succeed—~~***

If we go to God without faith, instead of honoring, we insult him; we tell him to his face, that the representations given of him in his word are too good to be true. *Unbelief necessarily ascribes to God a defect either of power or of will to accomplish what he has promised*: for if we believe him fully able, and fully willing, to accomplish his word, there remains no ground of doubt. It may be said that doubts may arise from a sense of our own unworthiness: but I answer, that all doubts ascribed to that source, have their origin in pride and ignorance. They argue an unwillingness to receive the promises in our proper character, and an ignorance of the freeness and fullness of the promises.

Let us make the case our own. We have invited a person to come and receive some great benefit: and he no sooner comes into our presence, than he betrays a doubt about our sincerity, and a suspicion that we intend to disappoint him. Should we be pleased with such a person? Should we feel disposed to extend our benefits to him in such a state? In what light God regards such persons, he himself has told us. He interprets all doubts of his power, or willingness to supply the necessities of his people, as a high provocation; an insult that kindles his wrath against every person that indulges them, [Psalm 78:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.19-22); [Psalm 78:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.40-41); and he warns us, that every prayer offered in such a spirit shall be disregarded; and that it will be in vain for such a suppliant to expect anything at his hands, [James 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5-7). Hence the command to all who would find acceptance to their prayers, is, to "lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting, [1 Timothy 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.8)."

***~~2. With faith, no prayer even for the greatest blessing can fail—~~***

Faith honors every perfection of the Deity: his power, his love, his faithfulness are all acknowledged, when we go to him in a firm expectation that he will fulfill his promises. Hence to such suppliants he gives a liberty to "ask for whatever they will," and assures them, that he will fulfill all their petitions, [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14); [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7); [John 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.24).

*God never binds himself to any particular time or manner of answering their prayers*: he may see fit to defer his answer for a considerable time; but he will not delay beyond the best time, [Luke 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7).

*God may also withhold the particular blessing that is asked; but he will give a better blessing in its stead*; as when he refused Moses his permission to go into the land of Canaan, but gave him a sight of Canaan, and then took him up to Heaven, [Deuteronomy 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 3.25-26) with 34:4, 5.

*God may also continue the affliction which we desire to have removed, but he will give us grace to bear it*; and will glorify himself by means of it; which, in the eyes of every real saint, will be incomparably better than the removal of it, [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-9).

It is possible enough that his people under particular circumstances may think that he has not answered their prayer; as for instance, when they have been praying for spiritual benefits, and he has sent them temporal afflictions: but the truth is, that he makes their "tribulation to work the very blessings they have sought for, namely, patience, and experience, and hope;" and it is not until long afterwards that they see how mysteriously, yet how graciously, he has answered their petitions. There is but one limit to their petitions, namely, the will of God: and if the desire be within that limit, every believer may rest assured, that God either has answered his prayers, or will answer them in due time, [1 John 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14-15).

***~~Learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The true nature of prayer—~~***

Prayer is thought by men in general to be a duty: and a duty it certainly is in some point of view; but it should rather be regarded as a *privilege*. In what light did Hagar view access to a fountain, when she and her child were perishing with thirst? In what light did the man-slayer view his liberty of running to the city of refuge? Or in what light would any poor person consider the knocking at our door, when he was bidden to come for a supply of all his needs?

O that we viewed aright God's invitations to the throne of grace! We would not come then, as too many do, to perform a task; to offer petitions which we neither expected nor desired to have answered; and which, if God should offer to grant them, we would pray back again with ten times more fervor than was put forth in offering them. No, we should come as children to a father, "delighting ourselves in him as our God," and saying with David, "At morning and evening and at noon-day will I pray;" or with the Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

***~~2. The folly of unbelief—~~***

Unbelief builds a wall, as it were, between God and us. It effectually prevents all access to him, and as effectually prevents the communications of his grace to us. It may be thought, that if God has decreed to give us his blessing, our unbelief shall not prevent it; nor need we be solicitous about praying for it. But are we not told that Jesus "could not do many mighty works at Nazareth because of their unbelief?" Do we not remember that the Apostles failed in their attempts to cast out an unclean spirit "because of their unbelief?" Are we not told, that, "notwithstanding a promise was given to the Israelites that they should enter into Canaan, they entered not in because of unbelief?" When God gave the most absolute promises, he said, "Yet will I be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)." And, when he declared by his Prophet, that he had "thoughts of peace towards his people to give them an expected end," he particularly added, that "then they should go and pray unto him, and should find him, when they should search for him with their whole heart, [Jeremiah 29:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.11-13)." Let us guard then against this most pernicious evil, and go unto our God, saying, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

Yet, in exercising faith, we must guard against presumption; for if our faith be of an unhallowed kind, and goes beyond the promise, it shall not be crowned with success. When Elisha heard that the widow's son was dead, he sent his servant with his staff, conceiving that the touch of that would suffice to restore him: but God had promised no such thing; and therefore the attempt failed, [2 Kings 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.29); [2 Kings 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.31). But *in exercising faith, let us exercise it assuredly indeed, but humbly, and in an exact conformity to the command of God.*

***~~3. The wisdom of treasuring up the promises of God in our mind—~~***

These are the true ground and measure of our expectations from God. And, if we look into the Holy Scriptures, we shall find that *there is not a state or condition in which we can be placed, but there is a promise exactly suited to it.*We go with confidence to an honorable man, when we have a promise of anything under his own hand: with what confidence then may we go to God, when we can take his promises along with us!

Look at Jacob, how he pleads with God a promise that had been given him many years before, [Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15) with 32:12. See David pleading in like manner, [2 Samuel 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 7.25), [Psalm 119:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.49); and learn from them the true use of the promises; "nor ever stagger at them through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." God's promises are "exceeding great and precious," commensurate with all our necessities. Let us therefore account nothing too great to ask; but "open our mouth wide, that God may fill it:" "nor shall one jot or tittle fail of all the good things that he has promised to us."

***~~#1446~~***

***~~The Regard Due to Christ~~***

***~~[Mark 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.6)~~***

"They will respect my son."

THERE are many passages of Scripture, wherein God speaks of himself as frustrated and disappointed by the conduct of his creatures. We are not however to suppose that events happened really contrary to the purposes he had fixed or the expectations he had formed: for it is certain that "he does according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;" and that "known unto him are all his works, from the foundation of the world." The truth is, that *God speaks after the manner of men, for the sake of accommodating himself to our low and feeble apprehensions*; and therefore we must understand his words in a popular sense, without deducing from them all the conclusions which they may appear to warrant.

In the parable before us, he is represented as adopting an expedient, which, humanly speaking, could not fail of success. He had sent many servants to the Jews, in order to obtain from them the fruits of his vineyard: but some of them they had beaten, and others they had killed. "Having therefore One Son, his well-beloved," he determined to send him, judging it impossible, as it were, that they should lift up their hands, or move their tongues against him, "They will reverence my Son." But in the sequel of the parable we are informed, that, notwithstanding the numerous and solid grounds on which this expectation was formed, their hostility to him was more inveterate than it had been to any who had preceded him; and their treatment of him was the more cruel on account of the relation he bore to God, and the interest he claimed in the vineyard.

Conforming ourselves to the mode of speaking which God himself has suggested in the text, it will be proper to consider,

***~~I. The grounds of his expectation—~~***

If we were to confine the subject to Christ's reception among the Jews, we would notice the peculiar circumstances of his incarnation, the spotless purity of his character, the multitude of his benevolent and stupendous miracles, and his perfect correspondence with all that had been predicted concerning him. But, that we may bring the subject home to our own bosoms, we shall omit these general topics which interest us chiefly as proving his Messiahship, and shall notice others which mark more strongly the grounds of a believer's attachment to him.

God then may well expect us to reverence his Son,

***~~1. On account of the dignity of his person—~~***

Jesus, though born of a woman, differed infinitely from any other of the human race. He was, in an exalted and appropriate sense, the Son of God; "his only Son, his well-beloved." He was God as well as man, "God manifest in the flesh." As he was "perfect man—so was he also perfect God, equal with the Father as touching his Godhead, at the same time that he was inferior to the Father as touching his manhood."

Now if God had sent us an angel, or only a worm like ourselves, we ought to reverence him, because the authority of the king is to be acknowledged in his ambassador. But when he sends his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who is "Jehovah's fellow," even "God over all blessed for evermore," ought we not to testify all possible respect for him? Surely when he comes to us in his Gospel, and declares who he is, and whence he came, it befits us to bow the knee before him, and to welcome him from our inmost souls.

***~~2. On account of our extreme need of him—~~***

If we did not need a Savior, we might disregard the Lord Jesus, on the principle that "the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." But who among us is free from sin? or who can make compensation to God for his iniquities? Who can satisfy Divine justice, or avert the wrath which his sins have merited? If we cannot do these things, and God has sent his only dear Son to do them for us, ought we not to reverence his Son? Ought we not to receive him with the warmest gratitude and affection?

Suppose that having sent his Son into this world, God were now to send him to the regions below, where millions of our fellow-creatures are enduring the punishment due to their transgressions: would the unhappy sufferers disregard his offers of mercy as we do? Would they not throng him on every side, and vie with each other in rending the air with their acclamations and hosannas? Why then should not we do the same? for wherein do we differ from them, except in this, that we are under a sentence of condemnation, but on them the sentence is already executed? Surely God may well expect, that we should be as solicitous to escape the wrath we *fear*, as others would be to obtain deliverance from the wrath they *feel*.

***~~3. On account of the benefits he will impart to us—~~***

If we hoped for nothing more than to avoid the miseries of Hell, methinks we could never sufficiently reverence that adorable Savior who came to deliver us from them. But this is a small part only of the blessings which he will bestow upon us. He will introduce us to the presence of his heavenly Father, and give us the most delightful fellowship with him. He will rescue us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and transform us into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness. He will even exalt us to thrones of glory, and make us partakers of the honor and felicity which he himself enjoys at the right hand of God. And when God was sending us his own Son to impart all these benefits, had he not good reason to say, "They will reverence my Son?" If a doubt had been suggested whether such a Benefactor would be welcomed upon earth, would we not have been ready to inveigh against the person who suggested it, as a calumniator of the human race?

But events have happened widely different from this prediction. God, if we may so speak, has been disappointed in his expectations; and that too in an incredible degree. This will appear by considering,

***~~II. The extent of his disappointment—~~***

How the Lord Jesus was treated among the Jews, it is scarcely needful to mention. Those who are the least instructed among us know, that instead of being reverenced, he was loaded with all manner of indignities, and at last put to death, even the cruel and ignominious death of the cross. Among us, it may be thought, he meets with a more favorable reception: but in truth, God is as much disappointed in our conduct towards him, as in that of the Jews themselves, for,

***~~1. His person is slighted—~~***

We do indeed externally revere the name of Jesus, and *profess*to call him our Lord and Savior: but do we really reverence him in our hearts? Is he truly precious in our eyes? Is he "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely?" Alas! how many days and months have we passed without so much as one affectionate thought of him! How many years might we spend in different families without hearing any heart-felt commendations of him, or being once exhorted to love and serve him! The excellencies of others are painted in glowing colors; the praises of statesmen and warriors are sounded forth in every place: but in Jesus we "see no beauty, no loveliness, for which he is to be desired:" nor have we any delight in celebrating the wonders of his love.

***~~2. His authority is disregarded—~~***

If we warn any person against such or such a line of conduct from the consideration of its being injurious to his health, his honor, or his interests—every word we utter will be duly weighed, and produce an effect suited to its importance. But if we say to any one, 'Our blessed Lord requires this, or forbids that,' we only excite a smile of contempt; and the person goes on his way without the smallest concern. Nor is this peculiar to some hardened rebels: it is found equally in persons of every age and every rank.

If we call upon the *rich*to obey his voice, they are too much occupied about the world to attend to our exhortations: they bid us go to the poor, who alone need be subject to such restraints.

When we exhort the poor to serve him, they tell us that they are not scholars; that they have no time to attend to such things; and that the rich alone, who have learning and leisure, can properly be expected to devote themselves to his service.

When we address ourselves to the *young*, they reply that it will be time enough for them to think of religion some years hence.

And when we speak to the *old*, and endeavor to bring them into subjection to Christ, they reply with anger, that they have not to learn their religion at this time of day; they do not like such novel notions; they have done to others as they would be done unto; and that they will go to Heaven their own way.

We appeal to the observation and experience of all, whether this be not the way in which men almost universally treat the authority of Christ.

***~~3. His offices are superseded—~~***

Christ has undertaken:  
as a *Prophet*, to teach us,  
as a *Priest*, to make atonement for us,  
and, as a *King*, to rule over us.

But do we seek to be *taught*by him in all things, conforming our sentiments gladly to his written word, and imploring earnestly the enlightening influences of his Spirit? Do we not rather lean to our own understanding, and adopt the sentiments of an ungodly world?

Do we trust simply in his obedience unto *death*, renouncing sincerely every other ground of hope, and looking for acceptance solely through his blood and righteousness? Do we not rather substitute some works of our own in the room of his, or at least place some reliance on them instead of relying on him alone?

How we set aside his *kingly*authority, has been already noticed.

What shall we say then? Can God be pleased with this? Must it not be extremely painful to him to see all the offices which his dear Son undertook to execute for us, thus entirely superseded?

If any be disposed to contradict this statement, let them only look within, and, as in the presence of God, inquire whether they are really living by faith in Christ, and making use of him from day to day as their "wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption?" A candid examination of their own hearts will soon convince them, that their faith in Christ is rather nominal, than real; and that, while they acknowledge him as a Savior, they do not cordially cleave unto him, or unreservedly embrace him.

***~~4. His cause and interests are opposed—~~***

One would imagine that those who do not reverence Christ themselves, would at least permit others to honor and adore him. But "the carnal mind is enmity against him;" and nothing will more effectually call forth that enmity, than a zealous endeavor to glorify his name. Men can see people on every side neglecting and despising Christ, and never once endeavor to reclaim them from their evil ways. But let any person begin to reverence Christ in his heart, and to manifest his regard to him by a suitable conduct, and they will instantly feel a fear and jealousy lest he should love and serve the Savior too much. However excellent his conduct may be, he will become an object of contempt and ridicule, in proportion as his love to Christ is influential on his heart and life.

We appeal to matter of fact: Are not those who were respected and beloved while they were utterly regardless of Christ, considered as weak and contemptible as soon as ever they submit to his authority, and devote themselves to his service? Or, if their weight of character bear down this reproach, are they not lowered at least in the estimation of the world? It is a fact, that they are looked upon as fanatics; and that it is thought a disgrace by many even to be acquainted with them.

How astonishing then must be the disappointment of God the Father, when his only, his beloved Son is not merely rejected by the world whom he came to save, but is made a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, insomuch that an sincere attachment to him shall be sufficient to call forth their most contemptuous revilings, and, in many instances, their most cruel resentment!

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are disappointing the expectations of their God—~~***

You doubtless have expectations respecting the manner in which you shall be treated in the day of judgment. You are saying, 'God will surely have mercy upon me, and will save my soul.' But, if you are continually disappointing the expectations of God, shall not you also be disappointed? Shall *his*hopes be frustrated, and *your*hopes be realized; more especially when his are founded on such a reasonable basis, and yours are altogether groundless? Ah! be assured of this, that God will have respect to none who do not reverence his dear Son; and that Jesus himself will say at last, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!"

***~~2. Those who are endeavoring to fulfill the will of God—~~***

Thanks be to God! there are some who "honor the Son even as they honor the Father;" and whose delight it is to render him the fruits which he requires. You, beloved, shall be highly favored of your God; for he has said, "Him that honors me, I will honor." But shall you receive honor from men? No, truly; for "the servant neither is, nor can be, above his Lord; if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." "Marvel not then if the world hates you; but remember, that they hated Christ before they hated you:" and that, "if you are hated for righteousness' sake," you have reason to "glorify God on this behalf." Only seek to express your reverence to Christ, not by needless singularities, but by solid and substantial piety; by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.

***~~#1447~~***

***~~Duties to Our Earthly and Our Heavenly King~~***

***~~[Mark 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.17)~~***

"And Jesus said unto them: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. And they marveled at him."

IT is said of Jesus, that "he spoke as never any man spoke." This was true, as to his general instructions: but it was more especially manifest, when, by the malice of his enemies, he was brought into circumstances wherein a merely finite wisdom would have been insufficient for his guidance. Such was the occasion now before us.

He had spoken a parable which had greatly incensed his hearers, the Scribes and Pharisees. Had they dared, they would have seized him and put him to death: but, fearing the people, they determined to accomplish his ruin in a more specious way. They sent persons to ensnare him in his words, so that they might "deliver him up to the power and authority of the governor," and accomplish through him what they dared not to perpetrate by themselves. See [Luke 20:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.19-20). It was in answer to a question put to him by them, that he gave the direction in my text: in considering which, I will point out,

***~~I. The wisdom of it, as a reply to the question proposed—~~***

The persons sent to Jesus were of two widely different views: some were *Pharisees*, who were adverse to the dominion of the Romans, and encouraged the people to cast off their yoke. The others were *Herodians*, who were altogether in the interest of the Romans, and sought, by all possible means, to uphold their authority. Just at that time, it is probable that they were called upon to pay a tax levied by the Roman emperor; and much difference of opinion prevailed at Jerusalem about the obligation of the people to pay it. The Pharisees and Herodians were at odds upon the subject: and this afforded the Scribes and priests a good opportunity to ensnare our Lord. They prevailed on some from each of the contending parties, to "feign themselves pious and conscientious men;" and to go to our Lord, and submit their differences to his arbitration, under the idea that his judgment would be satisfactory and final. Accordingly they came, professing their perfect reliance on him; who, being taught of God, must certainly know what was right; and, being commissioned by God, would be equally unmoved by either the favor or the frowns of man. They put the question plainly to him, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay? or shall we not pay, verse 14, 15."

Now this question was very ensnaring: for, if he should determine the point in favor of the Herodians, the Pharisees would stir up the indignation of the people against him, as an enemy to their liberties. If, on the other hand, he should determine it in favor of the Pharisees, the Herodians would accuse him to the Roman governor, as guilty of sedition. If he should decline giving any answer, then they would both of them revoke the sentiments they had expressed respecting his divine mission; and would expose him to all, as either ignorant, or actuated by fear and carnal policy. Thus, humanly speaking, it was impossible he should escape the *snare*laid for him. Whatever he might either do or not do, they would be sure to find occasion against him.

But Jesus "saw their hypocrisy and their wickedness;" and, with a wisdom truly divine, bade them to bring him a denarius, (a silver coin worth about a day's wages). On its being shown him, he asked, "Whose image and superscription it bore?" They, not at all aware of the drift of his question, answered, "Caesar's;" thereby unwittingly acknowledging that they were under the dominion of Caesar; seeing, that on no other supposition could they acknowledge Caesar's money as the current coin of the kingdom. Thus they were taken in their own snare: for on their answer to him was his reply founded: "Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Thus, both the parties were disappointed in their malicious endeavors: and they departed from him, greatly wondering at the wisdom that had extricated him from the snare, in which it seemed impossible but that he must be taken. "And they marveled at him."

But, in considering this reply, we must especially notice,

***~~II. The importance of it, as a precept for general observance—~~***

In it we see,

***~~1. The extent of God's requirements—~~***

Towards our earthly governors we have special obligations. They are God's representatives and viceregents upon earth: and the authority which they sustain, is no other than God's own authority delegated to them. What our duty to them is, we may see fully set forth by Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, [Romans 13:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.1-7). And that duty we must discharge, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." While we "fear God, we must honor the king."

Towards God himself we are, of course, bound to render all possible obedience. All that we are, and all that we have, is his. We are his by *creation*, and his in a more especial manner by *redemption*. "We are bought with a price, even the precious blood of his only dear Son; and we are, therefore, bound to glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his".

***~~2. The harmony of them—~~***

These duties are by no means opposed the one to the other. The two tables of the law are in perfect harmony with each other. Doubtless God is to be obeyed in the first place: and if man's requirements are contrary to his, the point is determined for us, (indeed every man's own conscience will at once determine it.) "We must obey God rather than man." But we should not without necessity place them in opposition to each other. We should rather place our duty to man in subordination to our duty to God; and so endeavor to perform the commands of both, that both may be honored and both be pleased.

The Pharisees had much to say for themselves against the right claimed by the Romans to govern that people. The Herodians, on the other hand, had much to say in support of the Roman government. But, circumstanced as they all were, our Lord, though afterwards accused of forbidding to pay tribute to Caesar, [Luke 23:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.2), determined it to be their duty to pay to Caesar what belonged to Caesar, no less than unto God what belonged to God. In conformity with which decision,

***~~I would recommend to all of you,~~***

***~~1. Integrity, in the discharge of your duty to man—~~***

There is in many a prevailing disposition to "speak evil of rulers." This attitude should on no account be indulged. Loyalty, even towards a Nero, ought to be a very prominent feature in the Christian character. To defraud the revenue also, by the evasion of taxes, is a conduct of which every Christian should be ashamed.

***~~2. Spirituality, in the discharge of our duty to God—~~***

*It is not a mere formal service that God requires, but the service of the heart.* This, then, must be rendered unto God, "whose will should be done on earth as it is done in Heaven".

***~~#1448~~***

***~~The Resurrection Proved from the Pentateuch~~***

***~~[Mark 12:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.26-27)~~***

"But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

IT is no uncommon thing for persons to conclude a doctrine to be false, because it may be attended with difficulties which they are not able to solve. This is the great source of objection in the minds of infidels, who do not merely ask, "How can these things be?" but reject at once the plainest declarations of Scripture, because they cannot comprehend everything relating to them. In this manner the Free-thinkers among the Jews discarded the greater part of the Scriptures, together with the most fundamental articles of their religion. They denied, for instance, the resurrection of the body, and it is supposed, the immortality of the soul also. And having, as they imagined, insurmountable objections to those doctrines, they came to propose them to our Lord, in full confidence that they should confound him, and overthrow the system which he was endeavoring to establish.

Their great objection was taken from the word of God itself, which appointed, that, if a man died childless, his brother should marry his widow, in order to raise up seed unto the departed person, and to prevent his name from being lost in Israel, [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 25.5-10). They, for argument's sake, assumed a case, which certainly was within the sphere of possibility. They stated, that a man with six younger brothers died without children; and that, in compliance with the Divine command, his next brother married her; and he also died childless. In like manner all the brothers in succession married her, and all died without children. Now, as the Sadducees imagined, that, if there were any future world, the same relationship as existed now must of necessity continue; they could not conceive which of the seven brethren would be acknowledged for her husband.

Our blessed Lord informed them, that they were quite mistaken about the nature of the future state; for no matrimonial connections would be formed there; but all would be, like the angels, wholly engrossed with spiritual delights: and, as to their secret thought that the resurrection was a thing impossible, they erred from an ignorance of what the Scripture had said respecting it, and of the power of God to effect it. Our Lord then called to their remembrance the passage of Scripture which we have just read; and which we will now consider,

***~~I. As establishing the point at issue—~~***

The Sadducees acknowledged only the five books of Moses as of divine authority: and therefore our blessed Lord, passing by the many plainer passages which are contained in the prophetic writings, adduced one from the book of Exodus, [Exodus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.6); [Exodus 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.16), which, obscurely indeed, but certainly, contained the doctrine in question—

God, when he spoke to Moses in the bush, announced himself to him as "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob." Now this was two hundred years after the youngest of them was dead: and yet God speaks of the relation to them as still existing. But "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The very title therefore which God assumed, implied that those persons were yet alive. Nor did it less forcibly imply, that their bodies also should be restored to life: for they, as men, consisted both of body and soul; and God was as much the God of their bodies as of their souls. And therefore if their bodies should never rise again, that relation had ceased with respect to their bodies. If it be said, that death had already terminated that relation; I answer, that their bodies were merely "sleeping in the dust" until the morning of the resurrection, when they shall awake to everlasting life; and that, as God was no less their God when they were asleep on their beds, than he was during the day, so is he their God now that they are sleeping in their graves, as much as he ever was, or ever will be.

In respect of God, with whom all things, past and future, are ever present, and "who calls things that are not, as though they were," they are now alive, seeing that they certainly shall live at the last day This seems to be the true sense of these words, [Luke 20:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.38).

But the terms here used to designate the Deity, imply, that these patriarchs had an interest in him, and were partakers of blessings from him. But if their souls were not alive, they inherited no blessing from God; and if their bodies were not to rise, they would only be partially blessed. But they had served God with their bodies as well as with their souls: and therefore their bodies were entitled to a share of that reward which they had looked forward to, and in the prospect of which they had submitted to many hardships and privations: and that God, who had promised to be "their exceeding great reward, [Genesis 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.1)," would not deprive them of their expected benefits.

What weight this argument may have with modern infidels, I know not; but it convinced and confounded all the Sadducees; insomuch that "not one of them dared to put any other question to him, [Luke 20:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.39-40)."

Let us proceed to consider the quotation,

***~~II. As declaring the believer's privileges—~~***

All that the passage implied in reference to the patriarchs, it implies in reference to believers in every age. It implies,

***~~1. That a relation exists between God and them—~~***

The covenant which God made with Abraham was expressly made also with all his *spiritual*seed, [Genesis 17:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.7-8). His *natural*seed, as such, had no part in them: neither Ishmael nor Esau had any share in this covenant. It was confined, in the first instance, to him who was born after the promise; and afterwards to those who, like him, should be born of the Spirit, [Galatians 4:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.22-23); [Galatians 4:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.30-31).

Among these, the true believer is numbered, though he should have no relation to Abraham after the flesh. This is asserted by Paul in the plainest terms, [Galatians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.7-9), and consequently, every believer stands in the very same relation to God that Abraham himself did. Hear this, all you who believe in Christ; every one of you may adopt the words of David, and say, "O God, you are my God!" and, in saying this, you may claim all God's perfections to be exercised for you, as much as ever they were exercised for the patriarchs of old.

***~~2. That covenant-blessings are provided for them—~~***

In the covenant were conveyed all *spiritual and eternal blessings*to those with whom it was made, [Genesis 12:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.2-3); and if we believe in Christ, they all belong to us Galatians, 3:13-14. In the present life we have a portion infinitely superior to that of the mere worldling: all that he feeds upon is as husks, in comparison of that heavenly manna which the saints partake of; they have "angels' food," "a peace that passes understanding, a joy unspeakable and and full of glory."

But "who can conceive what God has prepared for them" in the eternal world? Were they possessed of no better portion than what they have here, he would be ashamed to call himself their God: but Paul says, "He is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has prepared for them a city, [Hebrews 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.16)." If then we truly belong to Christ, we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ! [Ephesians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3)."

***~~3. That in the last day these blessings shall be fully and eternally enjoyed—~~***

Whatever we possess in this world, it is only transient. The believer's path is not always smooth: he has many trials; and "through much tribulation is his way to the kingdom." But in Heaven he has arrived at a state of unmixed, uninterrupted happiness. There, his soul is at perfect rest. Here, he groans by reason of sin; there, "having awakened up after the perfect likeness of his God, he is satisfied with it, [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15)." Here, he has many interruptions to his bliss; there, nothing finds admittance that can for a moment cloud his joy, [Revelation 21:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.3-4). Here, he is dependent on others for a good measure of his happiness: but there, no connections can augment his bliss, nor can any operate to the diminution of it. In a word, "he is equal to the angels:" and as the patriarchs are now in the full fruition of that portion, so shall he shortly be, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of his God."

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. To make a practical use of the Holy Scriptures—~~***

We should not readily have conceived that such important truths were contained in the words of God to Moses, if our blessed Lord had not unfolded them to our view. But, in fact, *there is in all the words of Scripture a depth which we cannot fathom*. Of this we are not sufficiently aware; and therefore we content ourselves with a superficial view of them, without exploring diligently their contents. But our Lord teaches us to reflect on what we read: 'Have you not read so and so in the Book of Moses?' and ought you not from thence to have learned such and such truths? ought you not to have drawn from it such and such conclusions? We entreat you then, brethren, to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest" what you read in the Holy Scriptures; and to *treasure up the truths contained in them for the instruction, and comfort, and sanctification of your souls.*

**2.** To seek a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ—

It is in Christ only that we become partakers of the blessings of God's covenant: "If you are Christ's," says the Apostle, "then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, [Galatians 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.29)." Until we are united to Christ by faith, we have no part or lot in his salvation. O that all would consider this! O that all would inquire, what evidence they have that they have ever come to Christ aright, and they are really "accepted in the beloved!" Brethren, flee to this adorable Savior, and lay hold upon him, and cleave unto him with full purpose of heart; and then you may with confidence call God your Father, and say, "This God is *my*God for ever and ever!"

***~~3. To look forward with joy to the eternal world—~~***

There will you meet all the glorified saints from Abel to the present hour. Not one of them is lost: God is still their God as much as ever. Dread not death, then, which shall introduce you to their company! Nor regret too deeply the loss of pious friends. Think that when you are following their bodies to the grave, their souls are in Abraham's bosom, feasting at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven. What kind of knowledge we shall have of each other then, we know not; but it is probable that, as there are no relative connections, so neither are there relative partialities; but all will be like the angels of God, filled with love and joy to the utmost capacity of their souls.

In one respect indeed, the blessedness of the just is not yet complete: because their bodies are not yet raised to a participation of it; but we may look forward to the morning of the resurrection, when all who have fallen asleep in Christ shall awake unto life, and possess both in body and soul the full and everlasting enjoyment of their God! Brethren, "Comfort one another with these words, [1 Thessalonians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.18)."

***~~#1449~~***

***~~Love to God, the Great Commandment~~***

***~~[Mark 12:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.28-30)~~***

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

IT is no uncommon thing for those who plainly declare the truth, to be beset by cavilers and objectors. Our blessed Lord, who spoke as never any man spoke, endured continually this contradiction of sinners against himself. He had been captiously interrogated by Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, and had put them all to silence. But he was again attacked by one of the Scribes, who either was, or thought himself, more subtle than any of those who had preceded him, and had already been confounded. It was a matter of controversy at that time as to which was the greater: the rites of the ceremonial, or the commandments of the moral, law; and he applied to our Lord to give his opinion on the subject. The question being one of primary importance, our Lord referred to Moses, to whom all the disputants were ready to appeal, and by whose judgment they would consider the case as decided, [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.4-5).

But this point is of as much importance as ever: and therefore I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is the first and great commandment of all—~~***

It is that which stands first in the Decalogue, and is marked with a solemnity peculiar to itself.

***~~There is but one God, who is Lord of Heaven and earth—~~***

The heathen worshiped many gods: and even the better informed among them thought that there were two great principles or powers, the one the author of all good, the other the author of all evil. But, in opposition to all such errors, our Lord informed him, that there was One eternally self-existent Being, from whom all other beings emanated and derived their existence: and that, as he was the One source of all, so he was the Lord and Governor of all, inspecting, controlling, ordering all things both in Heaven and earth.

We are not to understand this as militating against the doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. If we so separated these Persons as to make their actions independent of each other, then we would indeed do, what the Jews are ready to impute to us, worship three Gods. But we acknowledge and maintain the unity of the Godhead, as much as they do: yet, as God in many passages of Holy Writ has shown us, that there is in that unity a distinction of persons, one called the Father, the other the Son, and the other the Holy Spirit, and that each of these persons has his own proper office in the economy of redemption; we admit that distinction, and look to each of those Divine Persons to accomplish, in us and for us, his proper office. Still we deny, as strongly as the Jews themselves, a plurality of Gods, and maintain, as Moses has here asserted, "The Lord our God is One Lord."

In fact, as learned Jews thought that in these words some peculiar mystery was contained, so some of the early Christians thought that they saw in them a strong intimation of the doctrine of the Trinity in unity, [Deuteronomy 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.4-5). But I am always afraid of indulging the imagination upon topics so sacred and mysterious: and therefore I wave all notice of such doubtful matters; and the rather, because that the doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead is so clearly and unquestionably revealed in other parts of Holy Writ. I content myself therefore with affirming, that in this passage (to say the least) there is nothing repugnant to it.

***~~Our duty towards him is, to "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength"—~~***

We are to admit no rival into our bosom. The creature indeed may be loved by us, in subserviency to him; but he must possess our supreme regard, and be served on all occasions with the utmost energies of our souls. Nothing is for a moment, or in the slightest possible degree, to alienate our affections from him, or in any respect to divide them with him (he will not receive a divided heart). Whatever we have of understanding, will, or affections, they must all be employed for him without cessation, without abatement, and to the remotest period of our lives.

This is the duty of every living man, whether under the law, or under the Gospel. The heathen themselves are not exempt from it. The law itself was inscribed on the heart of man in his first creation; and, effaced as it has been by the introduction of sin, it must be again written on our hearts before we can ever behold the face of God in peace. Not even God himself can absolve us from this law: it is universally and unchangeably necessary to be observed by every child of man.

Having answered the question thus far, I will proceed to show,

***~~II. Why this is called "the first and great" commandment—~~***

Compare [Matthew 22:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.37-38).

It is justly entitled to this honor,

***~~1. Because obedience to it was the very end for which all our faculties were given us—~~***

We possess faculties far superior to any other creature upon earth.

We have an *understanding*, whereby we may know God.

We have a *will*, whereby we may devote ourselves to him.

We have *affections*, whereby we may enjoy him.

We have *bodily powers*also, whereby we may serve and glorify him.

These faculties no other creature on earth possesses. Hence man has been called a religious animal; because he alone has those capacities which fit him for religious exercises.

Now for what end were these peculiar faculties conferred upon us? Was it that we might exercise them upon earthly things? On earthly things indeed we may employ them in subserviency to God: but it was in order that we might know him, and serve him, and enjoy him, that they were imparted to us; and, if not so employed, they will ultimately prove a curse to us, rather than a blessing. *It were better to have been born idiots or beasts, than to have been endowed with such high faculties, unless we improve them for the honor and glory of our God.*Hence then this may well be called "the first and great commandment," because it is that, for the observance of which all our faculties were conferred upon us.

It may also be called the first commandment,

**2. Because, until we obey that, it is not possible that we should obey any other** **commandment—**

We are told in Scripture, that whatever *knowledge*we may possess, whatever *faith*we may exercise, whatever *works*we may perform, or whatever *sufferings*we may endure—it will be all of no account whatever, if it proceed not from a principle of love, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. This is true, even as far as man is concerned; we must have love to him, if ever we would be accepted of God. But much more must we have love to God; because without a regard for his authority, and a zeal for his glory, everything we do, however good it may be in itself, is a mere selfish act; originating from our own will, and tending to the advancement of our own honor. Love to God is necessary to constitute a religious act; and without it our very best actions are no better than *splendid sins*.

But further, this may be called the first commandment,

***~~3. Because obedience to it tends to the utmost perfection of our nature—~~***

All our faculties and powers have been deranged by sin, and rendered incapable of those exertions which constitute the duty and felicity of man. But let love to God once pervade them all, and they will all be reduced to order, and enabled to discharge the offices for which they were originally given.

The *understanding*will have its capacity for the comprehension of divine truth renovated and enlarged.

The *will*of itself will turn to everything which God requires.

The *affections*will all fix on God as their proper center, from which neither force nor attraction shall be able to divert them.

*Love to God will assimilate us to God himself.* By "beholding and contemplating his glory, we shall be changed into his image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Once more: this may be called the first and great commandment,

**4. Because by obeying it we shall of necessity be led to obey every other** **commandment—**

From which of the other commandments would any man who loves God desire to be released? There is not so much as one, that he would wish to have relaxed in any degree. They are all written in his heart; and he longs to have them inscribed there more and more clearly every day he lives. Could he have the desire of his soul, he would have "every thought of his heart brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

I think we have now seen abundant reason why love to God may well be regarded as "the first and great commandment."

**III. And now I beg your attention to that solemn admonition** with which the command itself, both as published by Moses, and cited by our Lord, is introduced, "Hear, O Israel!" Yes, Hear, all of you, my beloved brethren:

***~~"Hear this," first, for your instruction, that you may know to whom alone your allegiance is due—~~***

As for other gods, there are none that have any claim upon you, or indeed any existence but in the imaginations of ignorant and ungodly men. There are men indeed who claim an authority over you, but their authority is not their own: it is God's: and they are only as God's deputies, to exercise it for him. Between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, there is a bond of rule on the one part, and of subjection on the other: but the rule must be for God, and the subjection to God: and then only are the reciprocal obligations duly performed, when respect is had to God's authority and honor in the discharge of them, [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20).

***~~"Hear this," secondly, for your humiliation, that you may see how grievously you have failed in your duty towards him—~~***

In order to form a right estimate of your character before God, you must bring yourselves to this test, and try yourselves by this commandment. But who can abide this test? Who can find any one action in his whole life that came up to the demands of this holy law? The more we bring our lives to this standard, the more we shall see the extreme deficiency of our best deeds, and the absolute need of crying with holy Job, "Behold, I am vile! I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes."

***~~"Hear this," thirdly, for the elucidating of the Gospel salvation—~~***

It is a matter of offence to many, that they should be required utterly to renounce all dependence on their own righteousness, and to seek acceptance only through the righteousness of another, even the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ. But who that tries himself by this commandment, will find so much as one righteous act performed by him throughout his whole life? Yet,*in order to salvation, we must possess a righteousness fully commensurate with the utmost demands of the whole law*. But where will such a righteousness be found? Nowhere but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence then is the necessity for fleeing to him, and laying hold on him, and casting ourselves altogether upon him, and embracing him as all our salvation, and all our desire. Understand this matter well, and the whole Gospel will be as clear as the meridian sun, and as acceptable as it would be to one already in Hell.

***~~"Hear this," lastly, for the regulating of your entire conduct through life—~~***

From the very moment that you turn to God, you must aspire after the attainment here enjoined, and be satisfied with nothing less. And, in order to this attainment, you must contemplate deeply and continually the excellencies of the Divine character, and the innumerable obligations which he has conferred upon you. Above all, you must have impressed upon your minds *the wonderful love he has manifested towards you in the gift of his only dear Son to die for you*. This will have a constraining influence over your whole man, and will progressively transform you into his blessed image in righteous and true holiness!

***~~#1450~~***

***~~Love to Our Neighbor~~***

**[Mark 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.31)**

"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

A QUESTION had been put to our Lord, What was the first and great commandment? To this he had answered, "You shall love the Lord your God." But, lest the Scribe should overlook his duties towards his neighbor, and plead perhaps the answer of Jesus as sanctioning such conduct, our Lord reminded him that there was another commandment, similar to that which he had already mentioned; namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In discoursing upon this commandment, we shall show,

***~~I. What is the meaning of it—~~***

Self-love is generally represented as a base affection of the soul; and doubtless it is so, as it exists in fallen man; because it is always inordinate, and excessive: but, as it existed in the heart of Adam in Paradise, it was a good disposition, and absolutely necessary for his well-being. It has even now its legitimate exercise; and when directed to its proper objects, and confined within its just bounds, it deserves our approbation, and affords a correct standard for our love towards others.

Agreeably to this idea, we should show an affectionate regard to our neighbor,

***~~1. In relation to his temporal welfare—~~***

If we were laboring under any bodily disease, or misfortune of any kind, we would wish our neighbor to sympathize with us, and if possible to relieve us. Such regard then should we show to his *person*, participating in his joys and sorrows, and, like the good Samaritan, exerting ourselves to the utmost for his good [Luke 10:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.30-35).

Towards his *property*also we should maintain the same unselfish regard. We would not that another person should "wrong or defraud us in any matter:" we should wish to find in all his dealings the strictest integrity. Such then should be our conduct in all our fellowship with him. We should take a lively interest in whatever relates to him, and rather suffer wrong ourselves, than commit the smallest trespass upon him, 1 Corinthians 6:7.

We should extend our concern also to his *character*. We are extremely hurt if others take up prejudices against us, and listen to vague reports, and even by true representations lower us needlessly in the estimation of our fellow-creatures. We should therefore be candid in the construction which we put upon his actions; and be ever ready to cast a veil over his infirmities, [1 Peter 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.8); we should "hope and believe all" the good of him that circumstances will admit of, [1 Corinthians 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.7).

We should consult as much as possible his peace and *happiness*. There are innumerable ways in which others may grieve us without speaking anything false, or doing anything palpably unjust: and there are many ways in which they may promote the comfort of our minds. And there is no one who would not wish to see a benevolent disposition exercised towards him. Such then is the spirit which we should maintain towards others: we should seek our happiness in making others happy; and if necessitated to grieve them for their good, we should feel no rest in our own minds until it was restored to theirs, [2 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.2).

***~~2. In relation to his spiritual welfare—~~***

Men, it is true, have but too little concern about their own souls: and therefore we must speak of the self-love that ought to exist within them, rather than of that which actually does exist. Suppose then a number of persons to be sensible of the value of their souls, and to be earnestly desirous of obtaining mercy; would they not wish that one, whom they thought capable of instructing them, should labor to promote their eternal interests? Would they not wish that he should cheerfully endure reproach, or indeed even risk his own life, in order to effect their everlasting salvation? Such then is the concern we should express for the salvation of others. We should "greatly long after them in the affections of Christ, [Philippians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.8)." We should "gladly spend and be spent for them, even though the more we loved them the less we were loved, [2 Corinthians 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.15);" if we had a prospect of being "offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, we should consider it rather as a ground of congratulation and joy, [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17)," than of sorrow and condolence. Yes, we should actually, if called to it, "lay down our lives for the brethren, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)."

It appears indeed, at first sight, that the love here inculcated, is to be confined to those of *our own community*, [Leviticus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.18); but other passages in the same chapter prove, that it is to be extended even to *strangers*, [Leviticus 19:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.33-34); and our Lord's illustration of it shows, that it must reach even to our *enemies*, [Luke 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.29); [Luke 10:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.36-37).

Having, though very imperfectly, ascertained its meaning, let us proceed to inquire,

***~~II. Wherein it resembles the foregoing commandment—~~***

It is like the former,

***~~1. In extent—~~***

The duty of loving God comprehends every action, word, and thought that relate to God: and as the first four commandments are contained in that, so everything relating to our neighbor is included in the love which we should bear towards him. Paul enumerates not only the prohibitions of adultery, or murder, or theft, or perjury, as implied in this commandment, but even that prohibition which relates to the inmost emotions of the soul, "You shall not *covet,*[Romans 13:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.9-10)." There is not a disposition of the mind towards our neighbor, which is not either a violation of this commandment, or a positive compliance with it.

***~~2. In excellence—~~***

What can be more excellent than love to God? It is the brightest ornament and perfection of our nature. Such is also the love of our neighbor. View it as it manifested itself in the Apostle Paul; and contrast the exercises of his mind with the selfishness which obtains in the world—how beautiful the one, and how deformed the other! Let us only suppose all persons as studious to advance the interest of others, as they are to promote their own: let us suppose them as kind, as candid, as forbearing, as forgiving towards others, as they would wish others to be towards themselves. What a world would this be! it would be a very Heaven upon earth! Truly, the commendation bestowed upon a compliance with this commandment, [James 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.8), amply attests the mind of God respecting it.

***~~3. In importance—~~***

Without the love of God, all that we can possess is of no value. The same also may we say respecting the love of our neighbor. On it, no less than on the former, do the law and the prophets depend, [Matthew 22:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.40); without it, all our pretenses to the love of God are vain, [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.20). We may have the most eminent gifts, and appear to exercise the most distinguished graces, and after all be "nothing" in the sight of God, if we be not under the influence of this Divine principle, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). By this we fulfill the law, [Galatians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.14); and therefore the want of it must constitute us transgressors of the deepest die.

We may learn from hence,

***~~1. How much we need a Savior—~~***

Ignorant people not only reject the Gospel, but cut off also one half of the law, omitting what relates to God, and retaining only the duties of the second table. But we will suppose for a moment, that our duty to God is of no consideration; and that our duty to our neighbor comprehends all that we need to regard; yet who will venture to rest his hopes upon this ground, that he has fulfilled his duty? Ah! we must be ignorant indeed, if we do not see that we have violated this commandment every day of our lives, and that "our mouths must be stopped as guilty before God."

Put away then, my beloved brethren, your delusive hopes; and *look for mercy through the merits of Him who fulfilled the law for you*. It is through his vicarious sufferings that your selfishness must be pardoned, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21); and through his obedience alone that you must find acceptance with God, [Romans 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.19).

***~~2. How we may best approve ourselves to him who has become our Savior—~~***

The fulfilling of this law is that which Christ regards as the most acceptable expression of our regard for Him. He has enforced it by new motives, and exemplified it in a new manner, and has taught us to consider our obedience to it as the best evidence of our sincerity.

Behold, then, you professors of religion, what you have to do: get your self-love mortified, and your love to others strengthened and increased. Get your hearts enlarged towards enemies as well as friends ("for if you love your friends only, what do you do more than others?"), and "let your love to them be sincere." There is indeed a peculiar love due to "the household of faith;" but though it should be superlatively exercised towards them, it should not be confined to them exclusively. Every human being should have an interest in your regards; and towards all, you should do as you would be done unto. Let this be the invariable rule of your conduct; so will you adorn your holy profession, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven!

***~~#1451~~***

***~~Excellence of the Moral Law~~***

***~~[Mark 12:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.32-34)~~***

"So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him."

IT is the Christian's duty to be ready at all times to "render a reason for the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear." But there are some situations wherein this is extremely difficult. If a person obviously comes only to cavil, we cannot but be pained on his account; and we are apt to feel a degree of irritation also on our own. But we ought to be much on our guard against the smallest degree of severity, lest we increase the prejudices which we should labor to subdue. It is true, we have not in such cases much prospect of success: but we learn from the instance before us, that we ought not to despair.

It was a question much agitated among the Jewish doctors, What was the first of all the commandments; whether that relating to circumcision, (whereby they were admitted into covenant with God,) or that which respected sacrifices, (whereby they obtained acceptance with God,) or that about the Sabbath, (whereby they honored God in a more especial manner,) or that respecting their phylacteries, (whereby they kept up the daily and hourly remembrance of God in their minds; for on their phylacteries, or borders of their garments, they wrote passages of the law,) or finally, whether the moral law were not superior to the ceremonial laws altogether?

The Scribe who proposed this question to our Lord, though less captious than those who had preceded him, was under the influence of an improper spirit: yet our Lord returned to him, as he had done to all the others, a plain and incontrovertible answer, and thereby not only convinced his judgment, but in a very considerable degree conciliated his esteem, and disposed him for receiving further information.

The *answer*which our Lord gave to him has already been considered. That which we are now to attend to, is the Scribe's reply; which naturally suggests to us the following observations:

***~~I. That the great practical duties of the moral law are supremely excellent—~~***

The Scribe, not contented with the commendation bestowed upon the commandments by our Lord, gives them a decided preference to all the most sacred institutions of the Mosaic ritual: and in this he was perfectly correct: for, however excellent they were in their place, the love of God and our neighbor are of infinitely greater value.

***~~1. The great practical duties of the moral law are good for their own sake; whereas the institutions of the ceremonial law were good only as means to an end—~~***

We must by no means depreciate the "burnt-offerings and sacrifices;" because they were the appointed means of reconciliation with God; they directed the attention of men to the great Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered; and they prepared the world for the coming of Christ. But still they had no *intrinsic*excellence: if separated from the ends of their institution, the blood of bulls and of goats was of no more value than the cutting off a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood.

But the love of God and our neighbor is really of inestimable value: it is the appropriate exercise of our faculties; and, if carried to the extent that is enjoined in the commandments, it would be an anticipation of Heaven itself. See [1 Samuel 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22).

***~~2. The great practical duties of the moral law can be performed only by a renewed heart; whereas the institutions of the ceremonial law may be performed by the most abandoned of mankind—~~***

A wicked Balaam could offer sacrifices in abundance: but who can put forth all his intellectual and active powers in love to God and man? None, but he who has been renewed by the Spirit of God. It is not possible for an unregenerate man to offer such sacrifices as these: they are far too high, too pure, too spiritual: he may easily burn upon an altar the bodies of slain beasts; but he cannot "present his own soul a living sacrifice to God;" he cannot have his heart inflamed with the fire of divine love, unless he be regenerate and created anew in Christ Jesus.

Respecting the practical duties of the moral law, we may farther observe,

***~~II. That they are such as must commend themselves to the conscience of every candid inquirer—~~***

To those who are blinded by prejudice and passion, the words of truth and soberness appear as folly and madness. Our Lord compares the attempting to instruct such persons, to a casting of pearls before swine, who will only turn again and rend us, [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6). But, as our Lord's answer constrained the Scribe to confess that he had spoken truth, so must it prevail over every one that has a mind at all open to conviction. Let anyone bring the great practical duties of the law to the test; let him propose as severe a test as he will; and we will venture to affirm, that the more they are scrutinized, the more excellent will they appear.

***~~1. Are they reasonable?—YES.~~***

What can be more reasonable, than that we should love Him who is infinitely lovely, and who has so loved us as even to give his only dear Son to die for us?

***~~2. Are they conducive to our happiness?—YES.~~***

Wherein does the happiness of Heaven consist, but in the exercise of love? Conceive of the whole heart, and mind, and soul, and strength being occupied in love to God; and our neighbor being in all respects loved as ourselves, and treated by us in everything, as in a change of circumstances we would wish him to treat us; must we not be happy? With every evil passion so subdued, and every Divine affection so exercised, we say again, could we fail of being happy?

***~~3. Are they perfective of our nature?—YES.~~***

The lack of love is that which debases us even lower than the beasts that perish. "The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's care:" but we, with all our advantages, are . . .

blind to the highest excellency,

insensible of the greatest obligations,

and regardless of our best interests.

No words can describe the full malignity of such a state. But *let a principle of love possess our souls, and it instantly refines all our feelings, regulates all our dispositions, and transforms us into the very image of our God*. More cannot be said in confirmation of this truth, than what John has said, "God is love: and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him, [1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16)."

***~~4. Are they instrumental to the honoring of God—YES.~~***

We know of no other way in which God can be honored; because these two commandments comprehend the whole of our duty. But by abounding in a regard to these, we may, and do, honor him. This our Lord has plainly declared; "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." By the preaching of his word, his name is known; but *it is by the practical effects of that word upon the hearts and lives of his people, that his image is reflected, and the efficacy of his grace displayed.*

A candid mind, we have said, must acknowledge the excellency of duties which are capable of standing so severe a test: and, for the encouragement of such candor, we observe,

***~~III. That an approbation of the moral law argues a state of mind favorable to the reception of the Gospel—~~***

When there is a readiness to approve the boundless extent of these commandments, there must of necessity be,

***~~1. An openness to be convinced of our lost estate—~~***

It is an ignorance of the *spirituality*of the law, that causes men to deny their desert of God's wrath and indignation. They think that a very small degree of love to God, and a very partial regard to their fellow-creatures, is the whole of their duty: and, if they have not violated the commandments by some gross and flagrant transgression, they imagine, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, that they "have kept them all from their youth up." But let a person once acknowledge it his bounden duty to love God with all his heart, and all his understanding, and all his soul, and all his strength; and to love his neighbor in all things as himself, and he can no longer resist the conclusion that his whole life has been one continued act of sin; for *there has not been one day, one hour, one moment, wherein the frame of his mind has perfectly corresponded with the demands of the law*. It was such a view of the law that made Paul confess himself a lost sinner, under a sentence of eternal condemnation; and was the first thing which overcame his aversion to the Gospel, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9).

***~~2. A willingness to embrace the offers of salvation—~~***

This necessarily follows from the former. A man who feels himself perishing, cannot despise an offer of deliverance. One who had not committed homicide, might view a city of refuge with indifference; but one who saw the pursuer of blood close upon him, would flee to it with all his might.

***~~3. A readiness to receive and improve the aids of God's Spirit—~~***

No one can view the "exceeding breadth of these commandments," without feeling the impossibility of keeping them by any strength of his own. While he thinks the law extends no farther than to the *outward act*, he supposes himself capable of performing all that is required: but when he sees that it reaches to the *heart*, he is easily persuaded, that he needs the agency of God's Spirit to qualify him for a due discharge of his duty. He therefore will be glad to hear that God has "promised the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." He will think it no indignity to stand indebted to a Divine agency: on the contrary, while his approbation of the commandments inclines him to obey them, he will thankfully accept the offered influences of the Spirit, and rejoice in the prospect of being "able to do all things through Christ who strengthens him."

These things necessarily resulting from a just knowledge of the law, and being the characteristic marks of those who embrace the truth, they must needs be also good preparatives for the reception of the Gospel.

Such was our Lord's judgment in reference to the Scribe, when he had heard his approbation of the moral law. And to every one who manifests such a disposition, we may say with our Lord, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

***~~We shall now conclude with a word,~~***

***~~1. Of caution—~~***

Surely those who indulge prejudices against the truth, and cavil at the Gospel instead of embracing it, should well consider how awful their condition is: for if one who, like this Scribe, yields to conviction, and acknowledges that conviction before his ungodly companions, and exposes himself thereby to shame and reproach for conscience sake, may yet be only *near*to the kingdom of God, and not a *partaker*of it—then what must be the state of cavilers, and of those who reject the truth?

They also who approve of the truth in their hearts, and show a decided regard for those who preach or profess it, should take care not to rest in such a state. For to what purpose is it to be "not far from the kingdom of God," if they be not afterwards brought into that kingdom? To what purpose is it to be "*almost*Christians," if they do not become *altogether*Christians? To what purpose is it to have "a name to live," if yet they continue "dead?"

The Wise Virgins only, who had oil in their lamps, were admitted to the wedding-feast; the others who had the lamps without the oil, *the appearance but not the reality of grace*, were excluded from it. Alas! what a mortification must it be to such in the eternal world, to find that once they were not far from the kingdom, but that, after all, they fell short of a participation of it; that *they dropped into Hell, as it were, even from the gate of Heaven!*O! I would most earnestly caution you against sleeping in such imminent danger, and against resting in anything short of a thorough conversion.

***~~2. Of encouragement—~~***

We trust there are many who, when they hear the demands of the law, and the declarations of the Gospel, are ready to say, "Well, Master, you have said the truth." To such then we would address ourselves in the most encouraging terms; "you are not far from the kingdom of God." Only go on a little further, and you will be brought effectually into the kingdom. Seek to know the way of God more perfectly. Make your inquiries, if you will, provided you make them in a sincere spirit. But endeavor to improve all opportunities of instruction. The word of God to you is, "Then shall you know, *if*you follow on to know the Lord." Be thankful for the light you enjoy, and for the smallest disposition to improve it. Take heed, however, that your knowledge leads you to Christ, and produce suitable effects upon your hearts and lives: so will you become members of Christ's kingdom on earth, and finally be partakers of his heavenly kingdom!

***~~#1452~~***

***~~Not Far from the Kingdom of God~~***

***~~[Mark 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.34)~~***

"And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said unto him: You are not far from the kingdom of God."

OUR blessed Lord has given us this caution: "Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)." But, in following this suggestion, we must be careful not to judge precipitately, but to give to every one an opportunity, at least, to manifest the real dispositions of his mind. Such was our Lord's conduct, in relation to the different descriptions of persons who conversed with him.

There came to him many who sought only to ensnare him, and "catch him in his words, verse 13." They, however, put on an appearance of sincerity, and addressed him with great respect, verse 14; and therefore, notwithstanding he saw through their deceit, he answered the questions which they proposed to him, verse 15–27.

After he had put both the Herodians and the Sadducees to silence, a Scribe from among the Pharisees, with no better intention than the former, put a question to him, though of a less ensnaring kind. Compare [Matthew 22:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.34-36). This person seems to have been instigated by others, rather than to have followed the bent of his own mind: and the benefit of returning a courteous answer, even to captious inquiries, now strikingly appeared; for he was convinced by the instruction he received; and by showing the teachability of his own mind, he elicited from our Lord that gracious testimony, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

It shall be my endeavor,

***~~I. To confirm the declaration of our Lord—~~***

The question asked by the Scribe was, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Our Lord replied, That it was that which enjoined us to "love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: and that the second was like unto it, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, verse 28–31." In this answer the Scribe fully acquiesced; and thereby he showed, that "he was not far from the kingdom of God."

Now, observe what his acquiescence implied. It indicated,

***~~1. Knowledge—~~***

This was a knowledge which was by no means common among the Scribes and Pharisees at that day. They laid a very undue stress upon outward rites and ceremonies; and upon circumcision in particular, (as many among ourselves do upon baptism,) as though that were of itself sufficient to secure a man's acceptance with God. The having of Abraham for their father, was, in their estimation, a sure title to Heaven, [Matthew 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.9); while an obedience to the moral law was with them only a secondary concern.

This Scribe, however, was better instructed. He saw that the requirements of the moral law were of primary and indispensable obligation; and that, without an obedience to them no person could have a well-grounded hope of God's favor.

Now then I say, that this degree of knowledge, deeply fixed in the mind, and openly avowed, is an excellent preparation for the kingdom which our blessed Lord came to establish upon earth. Where this measure of light exists in the soul, we cannot but hope that it shall be so augmented by the Gospel, as ultimately to guide a man into the way of peace.

***~~2. Sincerity—~~***

Our blessed Lord had silenced the former questioners; but he had not so convinced them, as to elicit any approbation of his sentiments. They were too full of prejudice to make any such acknowledgment; and would have been glad enough to justify their own views, if they had known what reply to make. He, on the contrary, was open to conviction: he would not reject knowledge, because of the person by whom it was imparted; nor would he close his eyes, or shut his ears, because his instructor was a hated and despised man. He would receive truth from whatever quarter it came; and entertain it in his mind without jealousy and without fear.

What if the Gospel which we preach were so heard; and truth were thus freely allowed to make its way to the heart? Truly the kingdom of God would be far more enlarged among us, than ever it has yet been. And the same may be said of every place under Heaven, where the Gospel is faithfully administered.

***~~3. Piety—~~***

There was not in this Scribe a mere acquiescence in the truth proposed to him, but a most cordial approbation of it. He dilates upon our Lord's words with evident pleasure; and adds to them, what was not necessarily required, a declaration that those two commandments, of the supreme love to God, and of loving our neighbor as ourselves, were "more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices."

Now this was in the very teeth of all that the Pharisees maintained. There was among them, and there exists to a vast extent among ourselves, an idea, that *if a man were punctually observant of all the rites and ceremonies of religion, he must of necessity be in a good state before God*. But this Scribe justly sets down the outward observances of religion as of no account, if the person performing them were not animated by love to God and man. Rites and ceremonies are of no value, but as means to an end: whereas love is of infinite value, for its own sake—it is a conformity to God: it is the image of God upon the soul of man.

Now this the Scribe both saw and felt: and, wherever such a feeling is, truly the man may well be said to be "not far from the kingdom of God."

Taking, then, our Lord's declaration as unquestionably true, I will proceed,

***~~II. To found upon it some beneficial advice—~~***

I will address myself,

***~~1. To those who answer to this character—~~***

There are many, and doubtless many here present, in whom is found a good measure of knowledge, and candor, and piety; while yet the best that can be said of them is, that "they are not far from the kingdom of God."

It will be asked, of course, What are the defects of this character? and what needs to be added to it, in order to bring a man fully into the kingdom of God? I answer, There must be in him these three things:

first, a sense of his undone state, on account of having violated this law;

next, a dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, as having fulfilled this law for us;

and, lastly, a determination of heart, through grace, to fulfill it ourselves.

Without the first of these, a broken and contrite spirit, whatever be a man's other qualities, he is not yet upon the threshold of God's sanctuary.

Without the next, that is, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, he has not knocked at the door; for "Christ is the door, through which alone any man can enter in, [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9)."

And without the last, obedience to God's commands, whatever his profession be, it is clear that he has not entered in at that door: for if he had, his faith would be demonstrated by his works.

Now, then, to my regular and well-disposed hearers, I would affectionately offer this advice: Take it not for granted that you are right before God; but weigh yourselves in the balance of the sanctuary, and search wherein it is that you are found lacking.

True religion does not consist in knowledge nor in candor, nor in what I have ventured to call piety; by which I mean, an approbation of what is good: it consists in a thorough conversion of the soul to God, in a way of deep penitence, and simple faith, and unreserved obedience: and until these are found in you really, deeply, abidingly, you are not really partakers of the kingdom of God. You may be "not far from it;" but you are not *in*it; nor do the blessings of it belong to you. I pray you, mistake not the appearance of religion for the reality; nor ever rest until you have attained a clear, decisive evidence that you are indeed the Lord's.

***~~2. To those who have not even attained this character—~~***

How many are there that are yet full of ignorance, and prejudice, and aversion to the truth! What, then, must I say of you? Can I administer to you the encouragement which our Lord gave to the inquiring Scribe? Must I not rather say, that you are *far*from the kingdom of God? If you are far from that kingdom, consider, I pray you, to what kingdom you are near—even to the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of the wicked one! I grieve to suggest to any of you so painful a thought: but I appeal to you, whether your state be not one of extreme danger: for if, while possessing all that this Scribe possessed, you may yet have no part in the Gospel kingdom, it surely befits you to tremble at your state, and to cry mightily to God, if perhaps you may at last find admission into it, and be saved for ever.

Possibly this counsel may be neglected by you, as that of Christ was by the Pharisees of old. But judge in what light they *now*view their past obduracy. But their weeping now is of no avail. I pray God that you, my brethren, may now improve the opportunity afforded you, and may seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

***~~3. To those who are really admitted into the Redeemer's kingdom—~~***

See how to act towards those who are yet unsaved. "Be always ready to give to every one who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15)." And be particularly careful to encourage good appearances wherever you may find them. Our blessed Lord, looking upon the Young Man in the Gospel, "loved him;" notwithstanding he knew that, when his professions should be put to the test, they would be found delusive, [Mark 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.21-22). And this is to be a pattern for us. What if our Lord, who knew the design of this Scribe, had given him a repulse at first, instead of answering his question? The man would have been hardened in his wickedness; instead of being, as we would fondly *hope*he was, brought effectually into the kingdom of God. Learn, then, tenderness towards such characters, "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. [2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26)."

At the same time, show to all around you what it is to be really partakers of Christ's kingdom. Show by your life and conduct what the character of his subjects is; and seek to be daily growing in a fitness for that kingdom which awaits you at your departure hence. Determine, through grace, that "having a promise of entering into God's rest, nothing shall induce you to come short of it."

Think what a terrible disappointment it must be to any soul to find itself not far from the kingdom of God, and yet not *in*it; and *to fall from the very gates of Heaven into the bottomless abyss of Hell*. Determine, I say, that nothing shall divert you from your course, or retard you in it: but that, with God's help, you will "so run as to obtain the prize."

***~~#1453~~***

***~~The Widow's Mite~~***

***~~[Mark 12:41-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.41-44)~~***

Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a penny. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

THE morality of the Gospel is applauded by most: yet there are few who do not, by their explanations and comments, deprive it of half its excellence. The "turning of the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right;" the "surrendering of our shirt to him who has already taken away our coat;" the "forgiving of an offending brother, not only seventy times, but seventy times seven;" these, and other precepts of a sublime import, are reduced to little more than an abstinence from revenge; so anxious are men to reduce the Scripture to their own practice, rather than to elevate their practice to the standard of God's word.

The same would be done in reference to the great duty of liberality; but happily an example is set before us which cannot possibly be explained away. Had the conduct of this poor widow been merely set forth in a way of precept, instead of being exhibited in actual life, it would have shared the fate of those other precepts, and have been pared down to a general commendation of self-denying charity. But here is no opportunity afforded us for talking about Eastern metaphors and figurative expressions; here is a plain simple fact, decidedly approved by Him who cannot err; and consequently, it may be regarded as an illustrious example, which, as far as we may be in similar circumstances, we shall do well to follow.

Let us consider,

***~~I. Our Lord's commendation of the widow—~~***

In the temple there was a treasury, where all who felt their hearts disposed to make a voluntary offering to the Lord, were enabled to do it: and the money so collected was expended in the service of the sanctuary, either in sacrifices that were to be offered, or in the wood, and salt, and other things necessary for the offering of them. Depraved as that generation was, the custom of contributing freely for these purposes very generally prevailed: it seems, that "the people" in general, and not merely a few liberal individuals, "cast in" their contributions. Many that were rich contributed largely: but a poor widow, who possessed only a single farthing in the world, gave that, even "all her living."

Now it may well be doubted whether there be a man upon earth who would not have disapproved of this act, if our Lord himself had not expressly commended it. They would have blamed it as unnecessary, as useless, as presumptuous: *unnecessary*, because God could not require any offering at the hands of one who was so indigent; *useless*, because a farthing towards the expenses of the temple was literally no more than a drop in the ocean;  
  *presumptuous*, because to cast away her all, was to tempt God, and to expect a further supply from him, when she was throwing away the supply he had already afforded her.

But our blessed Lord took pains, (if we may so speak,) to express his approbation of it. "He called his disciples to him," to inform them of it, and to declare to them his sentiments respecting it. We do not apprehend that he knew the circumstances from any conversation he had had with her: he had no need to be informed by others, because he himself was omniscient: and he declared without hesitation, that this donation of hers, small as it might appear, was indeed both great and good:

it was *great*, inasmuch that it exceeded all the accumulated presents of the rich who had contributed; since they had only given a part of their property, "out of their abundance;" whereas "she, in her poverty, had given all that she possessed, even all her living:"

it was also *good*, because she had given it with a single eye to the glory of God; and God, who knew the motive by which she had been actuated, accepted it as "an offering of a sweet-smelling savor."

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from it—~~***

Among many other lessons we may learn from it,

***~~1. How to estimate charity—~~***

We are apt to estimate it by the *amount*that is given on any occasion, but this affords no proper criterion for judging of real charity. That must be judged of, first,

by the *proportion*which the donation bears to the ability of the donor;

and, next, by the *disposition*and design of him who gives it. Donations that are large in the actual amount, may yet be small, when taken in connection with the donor's opulence. While the smallest gifts, as in the instance before us, may be truly great, on account of the poverty of him that bestows them. This is told us by Paul, who says, that "God accepts them according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not: if only there be a willing mind, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12)." The amount of the gift makes no difference in his eyes. That which gives everything its chief value is, its being done with a sincere desire to please and honor him. Without that we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and yet have not one atom of that charity which will be approved of our God, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

***~~2. How to practice it—~~***

Much was there in the conduct of that poor widow that is deserving of imitation. We should dispense our charity **secretly**. We are well assured, that there was nothing of ostentation in her upon this occasion; else our Lord would not have bestowed such commendation upon her. She wanted none to be spectators of her liberality; it was sufficient for her that God was privy to it. Thus "our left hand should not know what our right hand does." There are occasions indeed, when, for the sake of example, it is necessary that our liberality should be known: but, when that is not the case, we should rather affect privacy, and be satisfied with approving ourselves to God.

We should also dispose of our money **cheerfully**. She needed not to be urged to it: she was happy in serving God. See 1 Timothy 6:18 and [2 Corinthians 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.7); and doubtless, instead of imagining him indebted to her for any service she could render, she considered herself infinitely indebted to him for the disposition he had given her.

We should also impart **liberally**of what we possess. If any be disposed to set aside her example as singular, and not intended for our imitation, we appeal to similar conduct in the Churches of Macedonia; where, in the midst of deep poverty, they abounded unto the riches of liberality; and gave, not only according to their ability, but even beyond their power, being willing of themselves, and asking the Apostle with much entreaty to be the distributor of their alms.

We may indeed be foolishly prodigal in giving where the occasion does not require it: but, if we have really an eye to the honor of God, we need fear no excess. Many may proudly *talk*of giving their mite; but we shall not find many that will really do it: but the more we can deny ourselves for God, the more acceptably shall we serve him.

***~~3. How to act on the present occasion—~~***

It may also be stated, that, if carnal sacrifices were offered to God by means of the contributions in the one case, the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving will abound in the other.

It may also be suggested, that the Lord Jesus has his eye upon the treasury, and is observant of every one, to mark, both *what*he gives, and by what *motive*he is actuated: and that he will bear testimony to our *liberality*in the day of judgment, and confer on us a reward proportioned to it. [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6).

***~~#1454~~***

***~~The Duty of Watchfulness Enforced~~***

***~~[Mark 13:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.32-36)~~***

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping."

ON different occasions, but especially at the close of his life, our Lord taught his disciples to look forward to a future period, when he would assuredly come again. He specified two objects for which he would come:

the one was, to destroy Jerusalem;

and the other, to judge the world.

And, inasmuch as the former of these advents was typical of the other, he blended them both together, and thereby raised in them an expectation that they should take place at the same time. The truth is, that though the one was accomplished within forty years, and the other, notwithstanding almost eighteen hundred years have already past, remains yet to be accomplished at some distant and unknown period—they are both equally present in the mind of God, "with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years."

It is also true, that the day of death is to every man, in effect, as the day of judgment: so that the union of the two periods in their minds, notwithstanding their distance from each other, was strictly just, as it respected God, and highly beneficial as it respected them. Not but that our Lord did make a clear distinction between the two periods: for in verse 30, he says, "This generation shall not pass until all these things (relative to the destruction of Jerusalem) be done. And then, in a way of contrast, he adds, "But of that day and that hour, namely, the Day of Judgment, knows no man." It is in reference to this latter period that he speaks in the words of our text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

***~~I. The duty inculcated—~~***

Watchfulness and prayer are often united in the Holy Scriptures as duties of the first importance. In themselves they are different; but in their *exercise*they are inseparable. Neither would be of any avail without the other. Prayer without watchfulness would be hypocritical; and watchfulness without prayer would be presumptuous. We shall therefore combine the duties, as though it had been said, *Watch in the exercise of prayer.*And that we may yet further simplify the subject, we shall not enter into a detail of particulars, but rather follow the general ideas of our text; and show,

***~~1. What we should watch and pray against—~~***

Here we must include everything which has a tendency to lull us to sleep. We see how intent men are on all the things of time and sense: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, so occupy them, that they find no time nor inclination for spiritual concerns.

Against these then we should "watch and pray." We should watch, to prevent them from gaining an ascendant over our hearts; and cry mightily to God to keep us from yielding to their influence. Seeing how the whole world is led captive by them, we should tremble for ourselves; and day and night entreat God rather to leave us destitute of all earthly things, than to give us over to the love of them, or allow them to deprive us of eternal happiness.

***~~2. What we should watch and pray for—~~***

To be found ready, at whatever moment our Lord shall call for us, should be the one object of our ambition. With this view, we should seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but that which is from God through faith in Christ. Not content with a general hope of acceptance through Christ, we should wash our every sin, yes our every duty also, in the fountain of his blood, which must cleanse us from the "iniquity even of our holiest actions."

We should seek also to "be renewed in the spirit of our minds," and to be transformed into "the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness." No present attainments should ever satisfy us: if we were as holy as Paul himself, we should, like him, "forget the things that are behind, and reach forward towards that which is ahead."

With a view to progressive holiness, we should carefully "abide in Christ," "living by faith in him," and receiving daily out of his fullness grace upon grace: assured, that without him we can do nothing, but through him shall be enabled to do all things.

In a word, we should seek to be ever ready to meet our God; yes, to be "looking for, and hastening unto the coming of that day," when we shall be summoned to his tribunal, and receive our eternal destiny.

For the attainment of this happy frame of mind, we should be watching our progress in the Divine life, and praying day and night to God to perfect in us the work that he has begun.

Let us next attend to,

***~~II. The considerations with which it is enforced—~~***

These may be comprehended in the two following:

***~~1. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall call us—~~***

The time of the general judgment is unknown to the holy angels; nor was it revealed even to the Messiah himself for the purpose of communicating it to us. As *God*, one with the Father, he knew all things; but as the *Mediator*, he received his instructions from the Father, and delivered nothing but what he had before received, [John 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.31), [Revelation 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.1). And there was good reason why it should be concealed; because if it had been represented as at a great distance of time, men might have become secure; whereas the idea of its uncertain arrival tended to quicken all to holy exertion.

In like manner the uncertainty of the time of our *death*has a very beneficial effect; since it necessitates us to be always ready. The idea of a man going a long journey, and leaving his servants their appointed work, and ordering them to expect him every moment until they see him, justly illustrates this point. There is not a moment of our lives when we may sit down secure. The night was divided into four watches, which terminated at evening, at midnight, at the cock-crowing, and in the morning. Now at no one of these periods are we sure that we shall not be summoned into the presence of our God.

What a consideration is this to enforce the duty in our text! Who that reflects one moment on the possibility of his being called *this night*to the judgment-seat of Christ, must not desire to be found in the exercise of watchfulness and prayer?

***~~2. The awfulness of being found in a sleeping state—~~***

In the parable of the *Ten Virgins*we are informed what we must assuredly expect, if we indulge in careless security; we shall be shut out from the marriage-supper of our Lord, and be "cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." It will be to no purpose to plead, that we were not engaged in any wicked projects. We were "slothful servants," and therefore are justly regarded as "wicked." We were unprepared, and therefore are justly cut off from all further opportunity to prepare for our great account; *we treated Heaven with contempt, and therefore we are consigned to the miseries of Hell.*

Who that contemplates these tremendous consequences, must not determine with God's help to watch and pray through the whole remainder of his days?

**Our Lord's concluding admonition,** "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!" will lead us to address some different descriptions of persons:

***~~1. The old—~~***

Is so much of your time gone, and will you not improve the remainder?

***~~2. The young—~~***

What security have you against death, that you should delay so necessary a work?

***~~3. The afflicted—~~***

God sends you afflictions on purpose to awaken you from your slumbers, and to stir you up to heavenly pursuits. What an aggravation will it be of your guilt, if these afflictive dispensations pass away unimproved!

***~~4. The backslidden—~~***

What an awful thing is it, that, instead of having advanced in the Divine life, you have lost in a good measure the life which you once had! Attend to God's admonition to the Church of Sardis, lest he execute upon you the judgment that he threatened to inflict on them! "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. [Revelation 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2-3)"

***~~5. The more steadfast Christian—~~***

Experience proves that the exhortation to "watch" is not less necessary for you than for others. How many who are on the whole pious; grieve, by their unwatchfulness, their Divine Master! Be on your guard against such a slothful way of seeking him as his Bride was found guilty of, [Song of Solomon 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.1); nor think to justify your sloth by such frivolous excuses as were urged by her, [Song of Solomon 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-3). If you act like her, like her you will reap the bitter fruits in the hidings of his face, Song of Solomon 3:1-4; [Song of Solomon 5:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-6). To you then no less than to others I would say, "Sleep not as do others, but watch and be sober [1 Thessalonians 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.6-8)."

***~~#1455~~***

***~~We Should Watch for Our Lord's Second Coming~~***

***~~[Mark 13:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.37)~~***

"What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch!"

*GOD is pleased to speak to us, not only in his word, but by the dispensations of his providence. Calamities, whether foreign or domestic, whether public or personal, are sent by him to awaken our drowsy consciences, and to stir us up to a remembrance of our latter end.* By all of them, whether menaced only, or actually inflicted, he addresses us, as Jesus did his disciples (whom he had forewarned of the evils coming upon Jerusalem, and hereafter also upon the whole world), "Watch therefore, for you know not when the Master of the house comes."

On a subject like this we should in vain attempt to speak anything new. But though we may do no more than remind you of truths with which you are already well acquainted, it will not be unprofitable for me to suggest to your thoughts,

***~~I. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord will come to judgment—~~***

Our Lord, in illustrating what he had been speaking respecting the day of judgment, compares himself to a master leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay at whatever moment he should return. He represents the precise time of his return to judgment as unknown to men, or angels, or even to himself; (so far at least, that the Holy Spirit, by which he was anointed to his prophetic office, had not communicated it to him as any part of the revelation which he was to make known to men;) and from thence inculcates the necessity of incessant watchfulness.

Now, as the time of death is to us the commencement of our eternal state, and as it is equally unknown to us as the judgment itself, we shall direct our attention more particularly to that.

But what shall we say on such a subject as this? It needs neither proof nor elucidation: nor can any words make the uncertainty of life more evident, than the observation and experience of every man have already made it. We appeal to your observation of what takes place around you: does not our Lord call men to death and judgment at every age, and often when his summons is least expected? We appeal to your experience: can you not recall to your minds many *accidents*which might have proved fatal? and do you not see, that you are yet liable every day and hour to be taken away by disease or accident?

Instead of dwelling on so obvious a truth, we will endeavor to point out,

***~~II. Our duty arising from this consideration—~~***

Thrice in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the same injunction, "Watch! See verse 33." To enforce this, we would say,

***~~1. Expect the second coming of your Lord—~~***

Put not from you, as you are too apt to do, the thoughts of death and judgment, but meditate upon them in your minds, and labor to get them impressed upon your hearts. Reflect upon their uncertainty, as to the precise period of their arrival, their nearness, their awfulness; and keep yourselves, as it were, in the daily and hourly expectation of them.

***~~2. Prepare to meet him—~~***

Two things are indispensable for all who would behold his face in peace, namely, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These must be experienced by you: neither the one nor the other can be dispensed with. Get a deep repentance therefore, and a living faith: and rest not in any state short of that which the Scriptures require, and the primitive Christians actually attained.

***~~3. Guard against any measure of drowsiness which may interrupt or render your preparation for him doubtful—~~***

It will be a fearful thing if the Master of the house "should find you sleeping." Yet who among us is not apt at times to be "weary in well-doing?" "The Wise Virgins, as well as the Foolish Virgins, slumbered and slept:" yes, even the Apostles slept, when our Lord had bidden them watch. We should therefore "exhort one another daily, and so much the more as we see the day approaching:" and, instead of giving way to sloth, should use all possible means to "strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The careless—~~***

How many continue such in spite of all the warnings which they have received from sickness in themselves, or the sudden deaths of others! But what will they think of their conduct, when once they are taken hence? If any one of us knew that a thief would certainly come this very night to break into his house, would he lay himself down to sleep as at other times? Should we not watch, and use our utmost efforts to frustrate his designs, [Matthew 24:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.43).

Why then do we not act thus in reference to our souls? Are our souls of less value than our property, or the concerns of time than those of eternity? Are not the consequences of unwatchfulness sufficiently awful, [Matthew 24:48-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.48-51)? And is not our real danger increased, rather than diminished, in proportion to our security, [1 Thessalonians 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.3), [Proverbs 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.9-11). To every one then who is unconcerned about his eternal state, and unprepared to meet his God, we address the reproof which even heathen mariners gave to a prophet of the Lord? "What do you mean, O sleeper? arise and call upon your God, if so be that God will think upon you, and you perish not, [Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.6)."

***~~2. The half-awakened—~~***

Pardon the term: it is but too appropriate to the states of many, who, if good wishes would carry them to Heaven, would not come short of it; but, when God calls them to run, and strive, and wrestle, and fight, will not exert themselves in the way that he requires. Nevertheless God's word is true; "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force!" "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able:" none shall succeed but those who "strive." Guard then against the fate of the Foolish Virgins, who were not aware of their lack of divine grace, until it was too late to obtain it, [Matthew 25:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.8-13). Let the Apostle's exhortation sink down into your ears, [Romans 13:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.11-14), and adopt instantly the resolution of the prophet, "I will stand upon my watch-tower, and will watch to see what God will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved, [Habakkuk 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.1)."

***~~3. The professing people of God—~~***

Do not think yourselves to be above the exhortation in our text: "What we say unto some, we must say unto all, Watch!" See what a caution our blessed Lord addressed to his own Apostles, [Luke 21:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.34-36); and then say, whether any caution can be too strong for you. Many who have appeared to run well, have turned back again; and not a few have died without ever returning to the good way from which they have departed. Be then on your guard, "lest, having known the way of righteousness, you turn from the Holy Commandment delivered unto you." Beware of imitating the slothful conduct of the Spouse in Solomon's Song, lest, like her, you provoke your heavenly Friend to depart from you, [Song of Solomon 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 3.1); Song of Solomon 5:2-6. Watch unto prayer with habitual persevering earnestness, [Ephesians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.18).

You know the truths we have insisted on; act therefore agreeably to them, and to your holy profession, [1 Thessalonians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.2); 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8. "Have your loins continually girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord.

***~~#1456~~***

***~~Commendation of Mary's Love~~***

***~~[Mark 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.8)~~***

"She has done what she could."

OCCASIONS sometimes arise, wherein it is difficult to discern the precise line of conduct we should pursue. In a season of public festivity, for instance, or on account of some domestic occurrences, we may be called to unite in feasting, and perhaps to incur considerable expense in providing entertainments for others: and a doubt may well arise in our minds, how far we ought to countenance such proceedings, and whether we ought not rather to save our money for the support of the poor. But we must not expect to have our path so clearly marked, but that there shall be abundant room left for difference of opinion in such things. All that seems practical is, to lay down *general principles*, and to view the Lord Jesus Christ as an example best fitted to assist us in the application of them.

There certainly are times, when, according to our rank and station in life, we should "be given to hospitality and unite in "rendering honor to whom honor is due." Yet we have need, on the other hand, *to guard against the indulgence of an ostentatious or worldly spirit*. To lean to the side of moderation is undoubtedly the safer plan: nevertheless, when just occasions present themselves, there is a liberality that well befits the Christian character.

We read in the preceding context that a feast was made for our Lord in the house of Simon the leper; and that Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead, was one of the guests invited to meet him. Our Lord did not refuse to sanction a feast prepared for his sake: nor, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, manifested her regard for him in a way that had an appearance of extravagance, did he condemn her for it: on the contrary, he judged that it was suited to the occasion; and therefore he vindicated her from the uncharitable censures which his own disciples passed upon her, and declared his decided approbation of what she had done.

We propose to consider,

***~~I. The act commended—~~***

There are two points of view in which this may be considered:

***~~1. As retrospective—~~***

The act itself was this. While Jesus reclined at the table, Mary came with "an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head and on his feet; and then wiped his feet with her hair."

Now in this act she had respect to all the kindness which the Lord Jesus Christ had shown both to her and to her family. He had favored them with a more peculiar intimacy, and had testified on many occasions a pre-eminent regard for them. The opportunities thus offered them for spiritual good had been improved by all of them, but especially by Mary. When Martha had studied chiefly to show respect by external services, Mary had been intent on acquiring good to her soul from his instructive discourses; and, on being blamed by Martha for neglect of duty, she was applauded by her Lord for having "chosen a better part, which would never be taken away from her."

But there was one mercy in particular which she had received from the Lord Jesus, and which had filled her soul with the profoundest gratitude. Her brother Lazarus had been raised by him from the dead. Jesus had not indeed come to them so speedily as they had wished; but this delay gave him an opportunity to display towards them in a more abundant measure the riches of his grace, and the all-sufficiency of his power. He expressed his sympathy with them under their affliction; and taught them to expect from him not only the restoration of their departed brother, but the everlasting salvation of their own souls, [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26).

How to requite all this kindness she knew not, but what she could do, she most gladly did; and, without any fear of the uncharitable constructions that were likely to be put upon her conduct, as ostentatious, obtrusive, prodigal—she determined to honor him before all to the utmost of her power.

***~~2. As prospective—~~***

We do not apprehend that Mary herself had any idea of confirming our Lord's assertions respecting his approaching death. But as the prophets of old were inspired by the Spirit of God to speak things which they themselves did not understand, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11), and as Caiaphas, the high-priest, had very recently foretold (though unintentionally and without the remotest conception of the meaning of his own words) the glorious ends that would be accomplished by the death of Christ, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52); so Mary, though unconscious of it herself, predicted by this act the death and resurrection of her beloved Lord.

It was common among the Jews to embalm the bodies of their departed friends: but there would be no time allowed for such tokens of respect from the friends of Jesus: for he would not be taken down from the cross until the Sabbath was nearly arrived; and on the Sabbath no such work could by the Jewish law be performed; and at the earliest dawn of the third day Jesus was to rise. Jesus therefore construed this action of Mary's as a preparation for his funeral, and as a performance of a rite, which could not otherwise have been performed at all. See the words immediately following the text. This, we acknowledge, was not intended by herself; but it was designed and overruled by God; who by this significant emblem foreshowed the very events which in a few days were fully accomplished.

Such was the act; let us next consider,

***~~II. The commendation given it—~~***

The disciples blamed it as an act of extravagance and waste: and thinking lightly of the honor done to their Master, reflected only on the loss sustained by the poor; since if it had been sold and given to them, it would have provided relief for many. It was worth about ten pounds of our money. The person who first raised the objection was Judas, who, being a thief and carrying the bag, would have saved the money to his own use. He being disappointed of his prey, pretended to feel for the poor; (for the worst of men will profess a regard for virtue, when their only object is to condemn and obstruct its exercise;) and the rest of the Apostles too readily adopted his views; so prone are even the best of men to adopt uncharitable sentiments, rather than be at the pains to make a full inquiry into the things which they condemn. But our blessed Lord, who knew the pious dispositions of her heart, proceeded,

***~~1. To vindicate the act—~~***

"She has wrought a good work upon me," says our Lord. If acts of *charity*are not to be omitted, so neither are acts of *piety*. "The poor are always with us; and we have opportunities of doing them good at all times:" we may be, and we ought to be, in the daily habit of administering to their needs, and consulting their welfare. But there are occasions that call for particular exertions: occasions which have more especial respect to the glory of God, and the honor of the Lord Jesus; (such as the dispersion of the Holy Scriptures, and the conversion of the lost to the faith of Christ;) and to these we should lend our aid with more than usual liberality, even though we should thereby contract our ability to relieve the temporal needs of men; for though we are certainly to do the latter, yet we must on no account leave the former undone.

It is a very erroneous idea that our fellow-creatures only are to occupy our regard. Is God to have no appropriate token of our love? Are the wonders of redemption so insignificant, that they call for no expressions of gratitude on our part? So far are these considerations from deserving only a subordinate place in our esteem, that they should operate as the leading motive in all our exertions for the poor; and whatever we do, we should do it as "constrained by the love of Christ," and "with a view to his glory."

***~~2. To applaud the agent—~~***

Greater commendation could not be bestowed than that which is contained in our text; "She has done what she could." An angel from Heaven could in that respect have done no more. David's desire to build the temple, and his endeavor to make preparations for it, were as acceptable to God as the actual erection of it by Solomon. And the widow who gave two mites, not only equaled, but far exceeded the liberality of the rich, though it is confessed that "they cast in much into the treasury, [Mark 12:42-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.42-44)." And thus it is with us, whether we possess ten talents, or only one, if only we labor to improve what we have, "it shall be accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12)."

Not content with applauding her at the moment, he ordained that this act of hers should be recorded in his Gospel, and continue to be held up to the admiration of mankind even to the end of the world, verse 9. But was this memorial of her to be recorded solely for her honor? No, as the record of Abraham's faith being counted to him for righteousness, was not made for his sake only, but for ours also, to whom a similar faith would be productive of similar benefits, [Romans 4:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.22-25), so this piety of Mary's was recorded, not for her sake only, but to stimulate and encourage us to an imitation of it.

***~~It should stimulate us.~~***

We should consider that there is one great object which we should ever propose to ourselves through life; and that is, to serve and honor the Lord Jesus Christ. We should consider also that there is one only measure in which we should seek to effect that object; and that is, to the utmost extent of our ability. We should never think of what we have done, but of what we can do; nor account anything done, while anything remains to be done. *Our daily and hourly inquiry should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all the benefits that he has done unto me?"*We should be as ingenious to *devise*plans of honoring him, as we should be diligent in the *execution*of them: and "whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with all our might."

***~~Moreover, it should encourage us.~~***

We are apt to think, that because we can do but little for the Lord, it is in vain to attempt anything. But we are in this respect all upon a level: the poorest, the weakest, the basest may do what they can; and the greatest of mankind can do no more. What an encouraging thought is this! How justly may it banish all those painful feelings which we are apt to indulge, and call forth into action every energy we possess!

What though I cannot govern kingdoms for him, or go forth with apostolic zeal to preach his Gospel? What though I have no wealth, no talent, no influence to cast into his treasury? I have my mite, and he will graciously accept it.*I may give him at least the affections of my soul*: and if I pour them forth in his house, or at his table, or in my secret chamber, he will smell as sweet a fragrance, as incense or sacrifice ever yet afforded him. If then we have nothing else to give him, let us spiritually adopt, as Mary did, the resolution of the Spouse in the Song of Solomon; "While the king sits at his table, my spikenard sends forth the smell thereof [Song of Solomon 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.12)."

***~~We would address a few words,~~***

***~~1. To those who assume this character to themselves—~~***

Nothing is more common than to hear persons assert, that "they do all they can:" nay, many found on this very thing their hopes of acceptance with God. But this is dreadful presumption in any one, and more especially in those who are most forward to arrogate this character to themselves. Indeed the assumption of this character, while we found our *eternal hopes*upon it, is a contradiction in terms: for to found our hopes upon anything that we can do, is to exclude Christ from his office as a Savior, and to dishonor him to the utmost of our power.

Moreover, if those who look with such delight on their own actions, would inquire what exertions they have made to honor Christ—it is to be feared that a few unmeaning ceremonies, or actions, that required neither self-denial nor zeal, would be found to constitute the whole of their boasted service. Let such persons then remember the caution given us by Paul, that "not he who commends himself is approved of God, but he whom the Lord commends, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18)."

***~~2. To those who are aspiring after it—~~***

Those who will be zealous for their Lord must expect discouragements, and that too, not only from the ungodly, who will be sure to put a bad construction on their actions, but even from many well-meaning, or even pious persons, who will misinterpret their designs. If the very same occurrence were to take place at this very hour, under precisely the same circumstances, there are few of the Lord's disciples who would be able to appreciate it aright: few would have such an exalted view of Christ's dignity and glory, as to see that a concern for that ought to swallow up every other consideration. One would accuse her of extravagance, another of bold obtrusiveness; and the more favorable, who gave her credit for pious intentions, would blame her enthusiastic ardor and needless singularity.

But, beloved, be not discouraged by such things. I would not indeed recommend you to act in a way that should give unnecessary offence either to the world or to the Church of God: but on the other hand, I would not recommend you to have such a respect to the opinions of men, as to moderate your exertions in the cause of Christ, to please them. What though Mary was condemned, not only by vile hypocrites, like Judas, but even by the Apostles themselves; who does not envy her the approbation of her Lord? Who does not see in this memorial of her an ample recompense for the temporary obloquy that she sustained? And who that reflects on the reward that she is now receiving in Heaven, does not see *the blessedness of discarding the fear of man, and of living unto God?*

Let us then endeavor to approve ourselves to our all-seeing and ever-adorable Savior. Let us guard against entertaining uncharitable thoughts either of those who fall short of us, or those who go beyond us, in acts of love to him. *We all have our different views, different tempers, different tastes.*Both Martha and Mary sought to honor him; the one in laborious service, the other in pious adoration; and both were accepted in what they did. Let us then "do what we can;" and strive to honor him in the way best suited to our capacities and talents: and, as he has poured out his soul unto death for us," let us be ready at all times to sacrifice for him our name, our property, our life.

***~~#1457~~***

***~~The Self-Distrust of the Apostles~~***

***~~[Mark 14:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.17-19)~~***

In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

Nearly every particular relative to the sufferings of our blessed Lord was the subject of prophecy. The Psalmist, in different parts of his inspired compositions, specifies many minute occurrences which should take place at the time of our Savior's death. In some of his expressions, the primary reference is to himself; in others, he refers to the Messiah alone. The passage to which there is an allusion in our text is of the former kind. It evidently is applicable, in the first instance, to David, whose life was sought by his friend Ahithophel, [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9) with [2 Samuel 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 16.23). But, inasmuch as David was an eminent type of Christ, as Ahithophel was of Judas, the passage is declared by our blessed Lord himself, to have been a prediction of the event which was just about to be accomplished in the traitor Judas.

While all the disciples were with their Lord, celebrating the Passover, Jesus declared to them what was about to take place; that one of them, even one of his twelve Apostles, who were with him, would betray him. This declaration filled them all with astonishment and grief. They all looked one upon another, to see whether any one would avow such an intention as that: and when no one seemed conscious of any such purpose, all began to suspect themselves, and to ask, "Lord, is it I? Is it I?"

We shall find it not unprofitable to consider,

***~~I. The self-distrust of the Apostles—~~***

***~~If ever there was an occasion when self-confidence might justly be expressed, methinks it was at that hour, and in reference to that point—~~***

Methinks the Apostles might well have said, 'Lord, how can it be that any one of us should so forget his obligations to you, as to deliver you up into the hands of your blood-thirsty enemies, that they may put you to death? We trust that the principles which we have imbibed from you are too deeply rooted in our hearts to admit of our ever perpetrating such an act of wickedness, unheard-of wickedness, as that. We acknowledge that we are both weak and sinful; but no consideration under Heaven could ever induce us to commit such an abomination as that; and we do hope that, during the years you have known us, you have seen no reason to suspect us of it.'

***~~But among them all there was no feeling but of self-distrust—~~***

No one doubted the truth of our Lord's assertion, or questioned, for a moment, the certainty of the event. Nor did any one give way to unkind and uncharitable suspicions respecting his brethren. It might have been supposed that each, conscious of his own integrity, would begin to think which of the Apostles was the most likely to act so base a part; and to fix the accusation upon one or upon another, as the prejudices of his own mind might lead him. But nothing of this kind appeared in any one of them. Each began to suspect himself, rather than any other: each said, as it were, within his own bosom, 'I know more evil of myself than I do of any one else; and therefore I have more reason to be jealous over myself, than over any other person: Lord, am I the unhappy person of whom you speak? I am not, indeed, conscious of any such intention, but you know what is in man: you know what evils I may yet commit: tell me, Lord, is it I?' Thus, with the deepest grief, and the most painful anxiety, every one of them in succession asked, "Is it I? Is it I?"

At last the traitor Judas himself, fearing lest his very silence should mark him out as the one to whom the guilt must attach, presumed also to put the question, "Master, is it I?" [Matthew 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.25). And our Lord told him plainly that it was; and afterwards pointed him out also to the other Apostles, by giving to him a sop in the presence of them all; so that when the act should have been committed, and all the distressing consequences should have ensued, the other Apostles might remember, that the whole had been foretold by the prophets, and foreseen by our Lord himself, [John 13:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18-19); [John 13:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.25-26).

Let us now attend to,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it—~~***

Truly, it must have been a most affecting scene. From it we learn,

***~~1. That there is no evil which fallen man is not capable of committing—~~***

There are some evils against which our nature utterly revolts; and, if we were supposed capable of committing them, we would be ready to say with Hazael, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do such a thing as this?" [2 Kings 8:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 8.11-13). But so think all, until the fact is proved upon them. Suppose it had been said, "The God of Heaven and earth will become incarnate, and in his own person display, as far as human eyes are capable of beholding it, all the glory of his perfections, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." The whole period of his existence upon earth shall be occupied in the exercise of the sublimest virtue, and in acts of the most unbounded beneficence. But he shall be hated, reviled, persecuted even unto death, the accursed death of the cross. But where shall we find men base enough to accomplish it all? Where shall we find rulers impious enough to promote such wickedness, or people base enough to carry it into effect? Where shall we find a favored disciple to betray him? Where soldiers impious enough to seize him? Where a judge either unjust or timid enough to condemn him? Where shall we find a man hardy enough to stretch his sacred limbs upon the cross, and nail them to the accursed tree? Where, in short, shall we find agents capable of acting all the different parts in this bloody tragedy?

If we were to ask of every individual ruler, and judge, and soldier in the universe, 'Will you be the person to execute such an office against your incarnate God, and more especially after you have had all his glory displayed, as it were, before your eyes in every quarter of the land?' you would think that the prophecy must fail, for lack of persons to fulfill it. But it did take place, according to the predictions concerning it: and the Apostles showed a just consciousness of the depravity of our fallen nature, when each, believing that the words of Jesus would be fulfilled, inquired whether he himself were the person destined to fulfill them.

***~~2. That there is no person so eminent, but he has reason to distrust himself—~~***

Had our Lord said, that some heinous person should betray him, it might have been supposed that a person impious enough should be found. But shall such a one be found among his own disciples, who have heard all his public discourses, and been instructed also by him in private, and beheld all his miracles, and been distinguished by him above all others among the sons of men? Yes, even among *them*shall this traitor be found.

Not all the advantages that ever were enjoyed by mortal man, nor all the grace that was ever given to mortal man, will be sufficient to uphold him, if God, for one moment, withdraws from him his everlasting arms.

A more holy man than *David*cannot be found: yet, after years of most distinguished piety, he fell, as you well know, into sin of the deepest dye. Who that had seen *Solomon*, too, at the dedication of the temple, would have supposed it possible that he should abandon himself to such a course as he pursued during the greater part of his life?

And who are we, that we should think ourselves beyond the reach of temptation and sin? "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls." To the most devout and holy among you all will I say, "Be not high-minded, but fear!" And when the most hateful picture of human deformity is exhibited to your view in the ministry of the word, with holy jealousy over yourselves, lift up your hearts to God, and say,*"Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?"* Then pour out your souls before him; and with fervent supplication cry, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)."

***~~3. That the foreknowledge of God does not at all lessen the criminality of our acts—~~***

The Apostles did not, for a moment, entertain the absurd and impious thought, that the impiety predicted would be less criminal because it was foreseen. The action would be not a whit the less voluntary on this account; and the woe denounced by our Lord against the perpetrator of it was not, in any degree, the less merited or less severe.

Now, who shall say what Almighty God foresees respecting us? The probability is, that were futurity now to be disclosed to our view, it would be said, 'One in that assembly will betray me, and, for the sake of some present gain, will sacrifice my honor and interests in the world. Another will commit such or such an enormity, and afterwards will terminate his own life with suicide.'

Suppose, now, that such a prediction were uttered, shall any one of us presume to say, 'It cannot relate to me: I am not within the reach of such evils as those?' No! Rather let every one, with holy fear, suspect himself; and say, 'Lord, is it I? O that it may not be me! Lord, grant that I may never be left so to dishonor God, and so to ruin my own soul!'

But I will suppose that God foresees such an event in any one of you. Are you the less free agents in all that you do? God has foreseen all that you have hitherto done: but did he ever impose upon you a necessity to do it? or will your conscience acquit you of having contracted guilt by means of it? Learn, then, neither to deny God's foreknowledge on the one hand, nor to make it an occasion of questioning your own responsibility, on the other hand.

God knows, at this moment, who will dwell with him for ever in Heaven; and who will take up his abode in Hell for ever, as much as if our doom had already taken place. But this must not affect our conduct in the least; nor are we at liberty to make his prescience a ground either of presumption or despair. We must look to our ways, and run with holy diligence the race that is set before us. God's final decision will be the result of our conduct, and not of his decrees. He will never save any one purely because he had decreed to save him; nor condemn him because he had decreed to make him "a vessel of his wrath." If He award eternal life to any one, it will be because he had sought it in Christ, and "by a patient continuance in well-doing." And, if any one be made a monument of God's indignation and wrath, it will be altogether on the ground of his evil deeds, and of his having rejected that Gospel whereby alone he could be saved. [Romans 2:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-10). Let us rest assured, that in the last day no one will have reason to complain of the divine decrees; but that, both in those who are saved and those who perish, the wisdom and equity of our God will eternally be glorified.

***~~#1458~~***

***~~Self-confidence Condemned~~***

***~~[Mark 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.31)~~***

"But he spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all said likewise."

*THE influence of example is exceeding powerful, whether it leads to good or evil.* This is well known in armies; where courage or timidity beget a kindred feeling speedily, and to a great extent. In moral habits, also, the conduct of one will produce a considerable effect on others.

When our blessed Lord apprised his disciples that one of them would betray him, the self-distrust of one diffused itself through all; yes, extended even to the traitor himself, who, if from no better feeling than shame, joined, at last, in that self-diffident inquiry, "Lord, is it I?" [Matthew 26:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.21-22); [Matthew 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.25).

On the other hand, the dissimulation of Peter drew aside the whole Galatian Church, not excepting even Barnabas himself, [Galatians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.13). In like manner, unhappy Peter, by his characteristic self-confidence, betrayed all the other Apostles into the commission of the heinous transgression of protesting an unwavering fidelity to their Lord, without contemplating the weakness of their own purposes, and the treachery of their own hearts.

Our Lord had told them, on the evening before his crucifixion, that they would all deny him that night. Peter, confident in the supposed firmness of his own resolutions, replied, "Although all shall deny you, yet will not I." And, on being more particularly warned that he himself would, that very night, no less than thrice deny his Lord, he, so far from relaxing his confidence, only "spoke the more vehemently, If I should die with you, I will not never deny you." And such was the unhappy effect of his confidence, that every one of the Apostles caught, as it were, the contagion, and expressed themselves in the same vehement language as he: "Likewise, also, thus said they all." Doubtless they all meant well: the resolution itself was good: but it was evil, as being made in dependence on their own strength.

To mark this distinction the more fully, I will show,

***~~I. The wisdom of the resolution, as conceived in their own minds—~~***

It was a resolution worthy of the Apostles, and worthy to be adopted by every one of us.

***~~1. Our blessed Savior deserves it at our hands—~~***

What has He not done for us? And what has he not suffered for us? And should we be afraid to confess him? Should any consideration under Heaven induce us to deny him?

***~~2. He also requires it at our hands—~~***

At the very commencement of his ministry he declared that "those only should be acknowledged as his disciples" who "denied themselves, and took up their cross daily, and followed him." Nay more; that "they only who were willing to lose their life for his sake, should find it unto life eternal, [Matthew 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.38-39)." And what can be more reasonable than this? If He, the Lord of Heaven and earth, encountered death for us—shall we think it too much to lay down our lives for him? Methinks, if we offer ourselves a sacrifice for him, it is no other than a reasonable service, which is at once our plainest duty, and our highest privilege.

But the conduct of them all too certainly evinced,

***~~II. The folly of the resolution, as announced in their own strength—~~***

***~~Not one of them was able to fulfill his word—~~***

That very night "they all forsook their Lord, and fled," and Peter, who arrogated to himself a greater measure of fidelity than all the others, was the very first to deny his Lord, and denied him with more blasphemous impiety than all the others together.

And who among us would be more firm than they?

"We have not in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5);" how much less, then, can we think to maintain our fidelity towards our Lord, amidst all the terrors of a most cruel death? Through Christ strengthening us, we may undertake anything, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13); but "of ourselves we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)." In truth, the more self-confident we are, the more "we provoke the Lord to jealousy," and challenge him to leave us to ourselves, [Jeremiah 17:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5-8). Then only can we hope to stand, when we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)."

***~~Learn then, Brethren,~~***

***~~1. What your duty is—~~***

Doubtless, this is great and arduous: nor must you, for a moment, wish to lower it. You must see that nothing under Heaven should stand in competition with Christ, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8). The state of every man's mind should accord with that of the holy Apostle, when he said, "I am willing, not only to be bound, but to die for the Lord's sake:" and if we are brought to the trial, no sufferings should move us; nor should we account our lives dear unto us, if only we may finish our course with joy, and finish the work which our blessed Lord has assigned us, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13).

***~~2. Where alone our strength lies for the performance of it—~~***

"I know, O Lord," says the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself; and that it is not in man that walks to direct his steps, [Jeremiah 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.23)." And we are told by the wisest of men, that "he who trusts in his own heart is a fool, [Proverbs 28:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.26)." Be convinced of this; and know that the more you resemble a little child in your spirit, the more secure you are. "When you are weak, then is it that you are really strong; for then shall God's strength be perfected in your weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10)."

***~~#1459~~***

***~~Peter's Denial of His Lord~~***

***~~[Mark 14:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.71)~~***

"But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom you speak."

THE inspired writers commend themselves and their writings to us, by their faithfulness in recording their own faults. If Mark wrote his Gospel, as many suppose, under the direction of Peter, we are constrained to admire the humility of Peter more especially: since his fall is narrated more strongly, and his repentance touched upon more slightly, by Mark, than by any other of the sacred historians. The aggravated circumstances of his conduct, which are mentioned in the text, serve in a very striking manner to show us,

***~~I. The folly of indulging self-confidence—~~***

Peter had been warned generally, (in common with the other disciples) that he would *forsake*, and particularly, (in relation to himself,) that he would *deny*, his Lord. Conceiving it impossible that he should ever be guilty of such treachery, he protested that he would rather die with his Lord, than save his life by such base means. But when he came to the trial, he fulfilled our Lord's predictions. He did not even profit by experience; for, when he had betrayed his cowardice in the first instance, he exposed himself to needless temptations by associating himself with the most inveterate enemies of his Lord. Had he gone to the high-priest's palace, to bear testimony to the character of Jesus, we must have commended his courage: but when he had no better object in view than the gratifying of his curiosity, we cannot but condemn his rashness and presumption. The consequence was such as might be expected: his courage failed him in the hour of trial; and he committed the very sins against which he had been warned.

It is almost uniformly thus with ourselves, when we presume to rush into temptation, under the idea that we are strong enough to withstand its influence. Who among us has not found, that a needless intimacy with the ungodly has led him into an undue conformity to their habits and principles; and proved, in the outcome, injurious to his soul? We have thought perhaps that we could maintain our integrity among them with ease and constancy, notwithstanding we have been expressly warned that "a believer can have no fellowship with an unbeliever," and that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." But the result of all our experiments has uniformly established that divine aphorism, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool!"

In the conduct of Peter we may further see,

***~~II. The danger of yielding to the fear of man—~~***

Peter was naturally of a bold intrepid spirit. But he was left on this occasion, that he might know his weakness, and have a convincing evidence that his strength was in God alone. It is common indeed to represent his temptation as light; as though he had been intimidated by the voice of a servant maid. But whoever takes into the account all the circumstances that are related in the different Evangelists, will see, that he had abundant cause for fear; and that, if he had confessed his connection with Jesus, he would most probably have caused his doom; more especially as it would soon be known, that he was the person who, but an hour or two before, had attempted to kill a servant of the high-priest.

But his mind should have been fortified against the danger. He had been told, when first he became a follower of Jesus, that he must "forsake all," and "hate even his own life," in order to be approved as his disciple: and he had very recently professed his readiness to die in his Master's cause: he therefore should have now fulfilled his engagements, and shown, that he had both counted the cost, and was willing to pay it. But his courage failed him; and he purchased a temporary peace at the expense of his honor, his conscience, and his soul.

It is justly said, that "the fear of man brings a snare." Perhaps it is itself one of the greatest snares that lie in our way to the kingdom of Heaven. The profession of Christianity does not indeed expose us now to sufferings as it did in the Apostles' days: but *a real love to the Gospel, and conformity to the Savior's image, is as offensive now to an ungodly world, as it ever was*. Nor can any one become a sincere and zealous follower of Christ, without incurring much hatred, contempt, and calumny.

Nor is this easy for us to bear. A man who could face an enemy with undaunted courage, would not be able to face the sneers and ridicule of his pretended friends. And hence it is, that many, like Nicodemus of old, are ashamed and afraid to maintain an open connection with the friends of Christ. Though they know in their hearts that Christ is the only source of spiritual and eternal life; and that those only who follow him in this world will enjoy him in the world to come; they are afraid to avow their principles, and ashamed to associate with the known adherents of Christ. But, if they so deny him in the presence of his enemies, he will surely deny them in the presence of his Father.

We would, lastly, show you from the text,

***~~III. The extent to which we may go, when once we begin to fall—~~***

Peter began with dissembling (mixing with the servants, as if he had been perfectly like-minded with them), and then denied his Lord, and at last confirmed that denial with the most horrid oaths and imprecations; yes, he denied that he even so much as knew the man. Who could ever have thought that Peter could have fallen thus low? But *the downward road is very precipitous; and no one knows, when once he yields to sin, where his evil dispositions will carry him*. Sin makes a breach in the soul; and if means are not used at first to obstruct its progress, it will soon inundate the whole man.

The example of Peter in the text is a standing memorial to the people of God, and *a warning to them to resist the first motions of evil*in their bosoms.

*Judas*began with petty thefts.

*Demas*began with secret covetings.

*David*with wanton looks.

If we profit not by their examples, the best that we can hope for will be, to be brought back to God with "broken bones;" and the probability is, that we shall come short of Heaven at last, if not have a foretaste of Hell in our bosoms, even while we are here. If we would maintain our integrity, we must not only flee from gross sin, but "hate even the garment spotted with the flesh."

***~~#1460~~***

***~~Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene~~***

***~~[Mark 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.9)~~***

"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons."

ON few subjects has the ingenuity of critics been exercised more than in reconciling the accounts which the different Evangelists give respecting the appearances of Christ after his resurrection. It is not to be wondered at, that, when such a great variety of occurrences are related in so small a space, some by one person, and others by another, some in a more concise way, and others in a more detailed way—there should arise a difficulty in adjusting the precise order in which every fact arose. Cavilers indeed, and infidels have made this a matter of triumph; as if the existence of a difficulty in such a particular as this would invalidate the testimony of the inspired writers altogether.

But we do not hesitate to say, that it *confirms*rather than lessens, the credibility of their testimony; since it proves to a demonstration, that there was no collusion between them, but that they related in the simplicity of their minds what they knew to be true, without inquiring whether, in recording a fact, the omission of a trifling circumstance might occasion some obscurity respecting the order or manner of its accomplishment.

Leaving those smaller matters, we shall fix our attention on points of the first magnitude and importance: we shall,

***~~I. Notice the manifestations which Jesus gave of himself after his resurrection from the dead—~~***

His first appearance only is mentioned in the text: but it was so speedily followed by others, and their united effect is so important in establishing the truth of his Divine mission, that we may well combine them together, and set them before you in a collective view.

They were,

***~~1. Early—~~***

It was necessary that our Lord should rise on the third day after his crucifixion. Not only did the period of Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the fish determine the time of Christ's continuance in the grave, [Matthew 12:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.40), but it was expressly declared by David, that "God's Holy One should not see corruption, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10)," and consequently that he should rise from the dead before the fourth day, when bodies in that hot climate, usually began to corrupt, [John 11:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.39). Our Lord himself also had said, that, if they should "destroy the temple of his body, he would in three days raise it up again, [John 2:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19-21)." And so frequently had he foretold that he would rise again on the third day, that the prediction was generally known among his enemies, and was indeed the ground of those very precautions which they used to guard the sepulcher, and thereby defeat any conspiracy among his followers, [Matthew 27:63-66](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.63-66).

If then he had not risen on the third day, he would have been proved to be a deceiver: and if he had not made his appearance on that day, he would have given such occasion of triumph to his enemies as could scarcely ever have been removed. The absurd report that was circulated by the soldiers respecting his being stolen away while they were sleeping, would have been sanctioned; and the difficulty of removing that first impression would have been greatly increased. The disciples too, who were already disconsolate, and, in their own apprehension, deceived, would have abandoned themselves wholly to despair.

To prevent these evil consequences, our blessed Savior manifested himself to Mary "early" on the morning of his resurrection; yes, at least five times on that very day did he make his appearance to different parties of his disciples; first to Mary, then to the other women, then to Peter, then to two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and then to the eleven who were gathered together. Thus *early*were his triumphs proclaimed; and thus seasonably were his disciples comforted!

***~~2. Numerous—~~***

We have already mentioned five appearances on the day of his resurrection. How many were given to his disciples afterwards, we cannot ascertain: for we are sure that they are not all recorded by the Evangelists. Paul mentions that Jesus was seen by James, and by five hundred brethren at once; neither of which appearances are particularly specified in the Gospels. We are told however, that "he was seen of the disciples forty days;" which is a clear intimation that his fellowship with them was both frequent and familiar.

Now in this he graciously condescended to our weakness. Had his manifestations of himself been very few, we might have been ready to fear, that those who testified of his resurrection were either deceivers or deceived. Not even the Apostles themselves credited the appearance of their Master to Mary, or the other females: the very report was considered by them "as an idle tale." Much more therefore may we expect that his avowed enemies would have disbelieved it; and we at this distance of time would have had scarcely any foundation for our faith and hope. But the number of his appearances was such as to preclude a possibility of intentional collusion, or unintentional mistake.

***~~3. Indubitable—~~***

However numerous the appearances had been, if they had been all in dreams or visions, or to separate individuals, or at a distance, there would have been reason to doubt the truth and reality of them. But they were of the most satisfactory kind imaginable. Let it be granted, that Mary Magdalene, and the other women, and Peter, and the disciples going to Emmaus, were deceived; and that the various conversations which they had with him were mere impositions on their eyes and ears; were the eleven deceived, when, notwithstanding the doors were shut, he presented himself in the midst of them, and bade them handle him (to see that he was not a mere spirit, but had flesh and bones, like any other man), and did eat and drink before them?

Was the unbelieving Thomas deceived, when our Lord bade him put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the wound that had been made in his side; and when, in consequence of the impossibility of resisting conviction any longer, he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!"

Were the five hundred brethren, who saw him at once, deceived; or were they all in a conspiracy to deceive others?

Were Peter and the rest deceived, when he told them on which side of the ship to cast their net, and then partook with them of the fish which they had caught?

Were they deceived, when, after conversing with him a long time, his disciples saw him ascend gradually from the midst of them, and taken up into Heaven? Blessed be his name! he has taken care that so important a truth, on which all our hopes depend, should not rest on any doubtful testimony, but that it should be substantiated by proofs which cannot be denied without subverting all kinds of evidence, and all human testimony whatever.

Let us now proceed to,

***~~II. Inquire, Why he appeared first to Mary Magdalene in particular?~~***

It is said of Mary Magdalene, that "he had cast seven devils out of her." And if she was, as she is generally supposed to be, that Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus in the Pharisee's house, [Luke 7:36-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.36-38), she had been, not like the common demoniacs, a mere object of pity, but a vile, notorious, abandoned sinner. In this view, the mention of Jesus having cast seven devils out of her, gives singular importance to the text; and most forcible reasons may be assigned, why he appeared to her first, in preference to all other persons.

He did so,

***~~1. To display the exceeding riches of his grace—~~***

This was the chief design of God in that plan which he formed for the redemption of mankind, [Ephesians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.6); [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7). The same glorious design also may be seen in a variety of incidents, which, though apparently perhaps of small importance, are deserving of very attentive consideration. The command, for instance, respecting the publishing of the Gospel first in Jerusalem, where all ranks of people had so recently united in crucifying the Lord of glory, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47), is a most astonishing display of grace and mercy: one would rather have thought that the Apostles should have been ordered to pass them by for ever, than to make them the first offers of salvation. The instruments employed to propagate the Gospel, yet further illustrate this point. The person chosen to minister the Gospel to the Jews, and to convert thousands of them to the faith, was Peter, who had just before denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Yes, to him was such peculiar attention shown, that he was selected by the angel, as the person to whom, above all others, the knowledge of our Savior's resurrection was to be instantly conveyed, verse 7. And our blessed Lord himself thrice renewed his call to the Apostleship, in the presence of the other disciples, lest his past denial of his Lord should be construed as a renunciation of it, or a dismissal from it, [John 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.15-17). In like manner, the person who was commissioned to go unto the Gentiles, was Saul, the persecutor; who was arrested in his murderous career, and made the most honored, and most useful, of all the Apostles.

In the same light we view the preference shown to Mary Magdalene above all others. In manifesting himself first of all to her, our Savior may well be considered as declaring, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound, [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20)."

***~~2. To reward her pious assiduity—~~***

Mary having purchased ointments and spices for the purpose of embalming our Lord's body, went early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulcher, to perform that last and mournful office. Though her prospects with respect to his establishing a temporal kingdom were altogether blasted, her regard for him was not in the least diminished. She was anxious to testify her respect in the only way that now remained to her: nor did any considerations of expense, or trouble, or danger, operate for a moment to impede her efforts. Such expressions of sincere love could not escape the notice of the omniscient and gracious God. Our adorable Emmanuel would have accounted himself "unrighteous, if he could have overlooked such works and labors of love as she now showed towards his name, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10)." It had long before been announced by him to the world, "he who honors me, I will honor:" and now he fulfilled that word to this highly-favored handmaid: nor will he ever allow even a cup of cold water, given to a person for his sake, to lose its reward.

***~~3. To give encouragement to all future penitents to the end of time—~~***

The various events recorded in the Scriptures are not to be limited to the persons to whom they more immediately refer. Many judgments were inflicted, and many mercies given, for the benefit of the Church in future ages: and "they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come."

We read of pardon being revealed to *David*the very instant that he confessed his heinous crime: and the improvement which he himself makes of that stupendous mercy, is, "For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto you, in a time when you may be found, [Psalm 32:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.5-6)."

*Paul*also informs us of the "exceeding abundant grace shown to him;" and then adds, that he had been thus eminently distinguished by God for this reason; "that God might show forth in him all long suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting, [1 Timothy 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.14); [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16)."

For the same end, it should seem, was Mary Magdalene thus highly favored. Persons, who are conscious of having committed enormous sins, are apt to think that they can never obtain mercy of the Lord: but our blessed Savior would have them know that "though our sins may have been as crimson, they shall be white as snow," and that he is never more willing to feast with us upon the fatted calf, than on our first return from a dissolute and abandoned life.

***~~Conclusion—~~***

Behold how effectually every ground of doubt is removed from us! Can we doubt Christ's power and authority to save? He has risen from the dead, and thereby given the most convincing evidence that he is ordained of God to be the Savior of the world. His numerous appearances to his disciples after his resurrection preclude all possibility of deception.

Can we doubt his willingness to save even the chief of sinners? This astonishing exercise of grace to one out of whom he had cast seven devils, forbids us to entertain the thought. Let all then trust in him as both able and willing to save them to the uttermost.

***~~#1461~~***

***~~On the Gospel Message~~***

**[Mark 16:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15-16)**

"And He said to them: Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

IT is to be lamented that an unhappy prejudice exists in the Christian world against the peculiar and most essential doctrines of our holy religion; and that, while ministers defend with zeal and ability the *outworks*of Christianity, they are at little pains to lead their hearers within the veil, and to unfold to them those blessed truths whereon their salvation depends.

Under the idea that moral discourses are more accommodated to the comprehensions of men, and more influential on their practice, *they wave all mention of the sublime mysteries of the Gospel, and inculcate little more than a system of heathen ethics*. They would be ashamed, and almost afraid to make such a passage as this the ground-work of their discourse, lest they should be thought to be contending for some uncertain, unimportant tenets; instead of promoting the interests of piety and virtue.

But can anyone read such a solemn declaration as that in the text, and account it unworthy of his notice? Can anyone consider the circumstances under which it was uttered, or the authoritative manner in which the Apostles were commanded to publish it to the world, and yet think himself at liberty to disregard it? Shall the very recital of it beget suspicion, as though nothing were desired but to establish the Shibboleth of a party?

Let us put away such unfitting jealousies, and enter in a fair and candid manner into the investigation of the words before us: let us consider that they were among the last words of our blessed Lord while he sojourned upon earth; that they contain his final commission to his Apostles, and, in them, to all succeeding pastors of his Church; that they are distinguished by our Lord himself by that honorable appellation, "The Gospel," or glad tidings; and that they were delivered by him not only as the rule of our faith, but as the rule of his procedure in the day of judgment: let us, I say, consider the words in this view, and, with hearts duly impressed and open to conviction, attend to what shall be spoken, while we endeavor to explain the import—vindicate the reasonableness—and display the excellency—of this divine message. May the Lord grant, that, while we are attending to these things, the "word may come, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance."

***~~I. In explaining the import of our text, we shall have little more to do than to ascertain the meaning of the different terms; for the sense of them being once fixed, the import of the whole will be clear and obvious—~~***

**Salvation**can mean nothing less than the everlasting happiness of the soul. To limit the term to any temporal deliverance would be to utterly destroy the truth as well as the importance of our Lord's declaration: for though it is true, that they, who believed his prophecies relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, escaped to Pella, and were rescued from the misery in which the Jewish nation was involved, yet the followers of our Lord in that and every age have been subjected to incessant persecutions and cruel deaths. Nor was that deliverance either of so great or so general concern, that the Apostles needed to go forth "into all the world," or to preach it to "every creature." Our Lord "came to seek and to save those who are lost;" he came to open a way for the recovery of our fallen race, and to restore men to the happiness which they had forfeited by their iniquities: this is the salvation spoken of in the text, and justly termed, a "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

This salvation is to be obtained by faith, "He who believes shall be saved." By the term, "**believing**" we are not to understand a *mere assent*given to any particular doctrine; for there is not any particular doctrine to which the most abandoned sinner, or even the devils themselves, may not assent. In this sense of the word, James says, "the devils believe and tremble." The faith intended in the text is far more than an acknowledgment of the truth of the Gospel; it is an approbation of it as excellent, and an acceptance of it as suitable. *Assent*is an act of the understanding only: but true faith is a consent of the will also, with the full concurrence of our warmest affections. It is called in one place a "believing with the heart;" and in another, a "believing with all the heart."

In few words, *faith is a new and living principle, whereby we are enabled to rely upon the Lord Jesus Christ for all the ends and purposes for which he came into the world*; a principle, which, at the same time that it takes us off from all self-dependence, leads us to purify our hearts from the love and practice of all sin. To such faith as this our Lord frequently annexes a promise of eternal salvation.

In his discourse with Nicodemus he says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever *believes*in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever *believes*in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He who believes on him is not condemned; but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." And in the close of that chapter it is added, "He who believes on the Son has everlasting life; but he who believes not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Not that there is anything meritorious in this grace of faith, more than in any other; for, as a grace, it is inferior to love; but salvation is annexed to this rather than to any other, because this alone unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we are accepted, and by whose merits we are saved.

To the term Salvation is opposed another of a most awful import, namely **Damnation**: as the former cannot be limited to any temporal deliverance, so neither can this be limited to any temporal judgment. For, not to mention the express and repeated declarations that the punishment of the wicked will be as "a worm that dies not, and a fire that is not quenched," our Lord, in the very words before us, contrasts the consequences of unbelief with the consequences of faith; thereby manifesting, that they were to be considered by us as of equal magnitude and duration: and, in his account of the final sentence which he will pass upon the righteous and the wicked in the day of judgment, he describes the *happiness*of the one and the *misery*of the other by the very same epithet, in order to cut off all occasion of doubt respecting the continuance of either: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

We are constrained, therefore to acknowledge that the threatening in the text includes nothing less than the everlasting misery of the soul, under the wrath and indignation of God!

This, tremendous as it is, will be the fruit of **unbelief**, "He who believes not shall be damned." We must not suppose that the unbelief here spoken of characterizes only professed infidels, who openly avow their contempt of Christianity; for then it would by no means afford a sufficient line of distinction between those that shall be saved, and those who shall perish; seeing that there *are many who profess to reverence the Christian revelation, while they live in a constant violation of every duty it enjoins*.

If the receiving of Christ, as he is offered in the Gospel, is the faith that saves; then the not receiving of Christ in that manner must be the unbelief that condemns. This observation is of great importance: for *the generality seem to have no idea that they can be unbelievers, unless they have formally renounced the Christian faith*. Their consciences are quite clear on this subject: the guilt of unbelief never caused them one moment's uneasiness.

But can anything be more plain, than that the same faith which is necessary to bring us to salvation, must be also necessary to keep us from condemnation? Indeed it is so self-evident a truth, that the very mention of it appears almost absurd; and yet it will be well if we admit its full force in the point before us. For, however zealous many are to comprehend holy actions and affections in their definitions of saving faith, they are backward enough to acknowledge that a lack of those qualities must evidence them to be in a state of unbelief. Yet, until this truth is felt and acknowledged, there is little hope that the Gospel will ever profit them at all.

There is a qualifying clause in the text which we must not leave unnoticed; and the rather, because it is added in the former, but omitted in the latter part; "He who believes, and is **baptized**, shall be saved; but he who believes not shall be damned." Our Lord had appointed baptism as that rite whereby his disciples should be introduced into the Christian covenant, as the Jews had been by circumcision into the Mosaic covenant: and *men's submission to this rite served as a test of their sincerity, and a public badge of their profession*. If any were inwardly convinced that the religion of Christ was indeed of divine authority, and were not prevented by insurmountable obstacles from conforming to this rite, they must cheerfully enlist themselves under his banners, and honor him in his appointed way. They must "follow the Lord fully," if they would be partakers of his benefits. But, on the other hand, if they should submit to this ordinance, and yet be destitute of true faith, their baptism would not save them; they would perish for their unbelief: baptized or unbaptized, they would surely perish.

The parts of the text being thus explained, there remains no difficulty in the meaning of the whole as it stands connected together. No words can be found that can more forcibly express the solemn truth, which our Lord intended to convey: the import of his declaration is so obvious, that we shall not attempt to elucidate it any farther, but will proceed,

***~~II. To vindicate its reasonableness—~~***

That men should be saved for their good works, or condemned for their gross iniquities, would be thought reasonable enough; but *that they should be saved by faith, or condemned for unbelief, seems to many to be utterly unreasonable and absurd*. But, to a candid inquirer, the equity and reasonableness of both these points may be easily and plainly evinced.

*If faith were, as some imagine it to be, a mere assent to certain propositions, it must be confessed, that, to expect salvation by it would be preposterous in the extreme.*But it has already been shown that this is not saving faith.

The man who *truly*believes, invariably comes to Christ in this way:  
  he confesses with humility and contrition his past offences;  
  he acknowledges, from his inmost soul, that he deserves the everlasting wrath of God;  
  he renounces every hope that might arise from his comparative goodness, his penitential sorrows, his future purposes, his actual amendment;  
  he embraces Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Savior; and relies simply and entirely upon the promises which God has made to us in the Son of his love.

This, I say, is the believer's experience at the first moment he truly believes in Christ. To this we might add, that, from that moment, he lives in a state of communion with his Savior, and exerts himself to the utmost to adorn his profession by a holy life and conduct. But we intentionally omit all the fruits of faith which he afterwards produces, lest any one should be led to confound faith with its fruits, or to ascribe that to faith and works conjointly, which properly belongs to faith alone.

Consider then a person coming in this penitent manner to Christ, and trusting in the promises of his God; is it unreasonable that such a person should be saved?

Who in all the world should be saved so soon as he, who implores deliverance from his lost estate?

Who should reap the benefits of Christ's death, but he, who makes that his only plea and dependence?

Who may so justly hope to experience God's fidelity, as he who rests upon his promises?

Who, in short, should enjoy all the blessings of redemption, but he who seeks redemption in God's appointed way?

Surely, if it is reasonable that Christ should "see of the travail of his soul," and that God should fulfill his own word, then is it most reasonable that he who believes in Christ should be saved.

With respect to the *condemnation of unbelievers*, we readily acknowledge that that also would be unreasonable, on a supposition that unbelief were nothing more than a dissent from certain propositions, through a lack of sufficient evidence to establish their divine authority. But *unbelief is a sin of the deepest dye; and the person who is under its dominion is in a state as offensive to God as can well be conceived*.

For, in the first place, he rejects that which has been established by every kind of evidence which a revelation from Heaven can admit of: and, in rejecting it, he shows that he is lifted up with pride and presumption: for *he not only takes upon him to sit in judgment upon God, but denies his own state to be so dangerous and depraved as God has represented it.*If he acknowledges himself to be a sinner, he still feels neither his guilt nor his helplessness as he ought, but "goes about to establish a righteousness of his own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God."

That wonderful method which the infinite wisdom of God has contrived for the restoration of our fallen race, he accounts "foolishness," and substitutes what he esteems a safer and better method of his own. The most stupendous display of divine love and mercy that ever was or can be exhibited, he disregards: and thus, both "tramples under foot the Son of God, and does despite unto the Spirit of grace!" Yes, to use the language of an inspired Apostle, he "makes the only true God a liar;" for whereas God has said, that "there is no other name whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus, nor any other foundation than that which he himself has laid," the unbeliever directly contradicts him, and unequivocally declares his expectation that there is and shall be some other way of acceptance with him.

Now is it unreasonable that such a person should be punished? that such a despiser of God should be left without any part in the believer's portion?

Let us only apply the case to ourselves.

If a child should pour contempt upon the wisest counsels of his parents, and question the truth of their most solemn protestations, would we not think him worthy of his parent's displeasure? Would not we ourselves, in such a case, manifest our disapprobation of his conduct?

Who then are we, that we should insult God thus, and do it with impunity? Who are we, I say, that, when we are at liberty to withhold a blessing from an ungrateful fellow-creature, or to inflict a punishment on him adequate to his offence—we should not be in like manner amenable to God?

If any say, "We acknowledge the sinfulness of unbelief, but think the punishment of it too severe."

I answer that *God himself is the best judge of the malignity of sin*; and he has denounced death, eternal death, as the wages due to every sin: much more therefore may it be inflicted for unbelief; since there is no sin so complicated, nor any that so effectually precludes even a possibility of salvation. *We may purge away any other sin by a believing application to the blood of Christ; but by unbelief we reject the only remedy provided for us.*

Hoping that the *reasonableness*of our Savior's declaration has been satisfactorily proved, we come,

***~~III. To display its excellency—~~***

While the *Gospel of Christ*is misrepresented and opposed by man, the angels, who are incomparably less personally affected by its provisions, are ever contemplating it with admiration and joy. And, if it were better understood among us, it could not but meet with a more favorable reception; for it has innumerable excellencies, which render it worthy of universal acceptance. Let us examine a few of its leading features.

**In the first place, it clearly defines the only way of salvation.** Take any other way of salvation that ever was devised, by repentance for instance, or by sincere obedience; what inexplicable difficulties occur to our view! for, who can tell what degree of repentance will satisfy God for our breaches of his law, and be a sufficient price for Heaven? Who can mark out the line which shall be drawn between those that shall be saved and those that shall perish? Who can tell what sincere obedience means? It cannot mean the doing what we *will*, for that would put a murderer on the same footing with an Apostle: and if it mean the doing what we *can*, where is the man that can be saved by it? Where is the man who has not violated it in ten thousand instances, or who does not violate it every day of his life? *Who can truly say that for any one day he has mortified every sinful habit as much as he could, exercised every holy affection as much as he could, and practiced every species of duty as much as he could?*And if we cannot but acknowledge that we might have done more, who shall say what degree of insincerity may be indulged without violating the law of sincere obedience? On all such plans as these we are utterly at a loss; we are lost at sea without a compass.

But take the doctrine laid down in the text, and the way of salvation is so plain, that "he who runs may read it." Let any man ask himself this question:

Do I believe in Christ? Let him pursue the inquiry somewhat farther:

Do I feel myself a guilty, helpless, condemned sinner?

Do I renounce all dependence on my own wisdom, strength, and righteousness?

Do I see that there is in Christ a fullness suited to my necessities?

Do I daily, with humility and earnestness, beg of God that "Christ may be made unto me wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?"

These questions are easy enough to be resolved; and by the answer which conscience gives to them, we may know assuredly whether we are in the way to Heaven or to Hell. And who does not see how great an excellency this is in the Gospel-salvation? Who does not see how strongly this circumstance recommends the doctrine in our text?

**Another excellency in the Gospel is, that it is equally suited to all persons in all conditions.**

Had any self-righteous methods of acceptance with God been proposed to the dying thief, what consolation could he have found? How little could he do in his few remaining hours! However he might have admired the goodness of God to others, he must have utterly despaired of mercy himself. But through faith in Christ he was enabled to depart in peace and joy.

As to the murderers of our Lord, how long must it have been before they could have entertained any comfortable hope of acceptance! But the Gospel affords a prospect of salvation to the very chief of sinners, and that, even at the eleventh hour.

Nor is there any situation whatever, in which the Gospel is not calculated to comfort and support the soul. Under first convictions of sin, what is so delightful as to hear of a Savior? Under subsequent trials and temptations, how would our difficulties be increased, if we did not know that "God had laid help upon One that was mighty!"

The people of God, notwithstanding the hope which they have in Christ, feel great and heavy discouragements on account of the power of indwelling corruption: they seem oftentimes to be rolling a stone up the hill, which rushes impetuously down again, and necessitates them to repeat their ineffectual labors. And what would they do if their dependence were not placed on the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God? Surely they would lie down in despair, and say like those of old, "There is no hope; I have loved strangers, and after them I will go."

Under the various calamities of life, also, believers find consolation in the thought that the salvation of their souls is secured by Christ. Hence they are enabled to bear their trials with firmness: they "know how both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." And shall not this

recommend the Gospel? that there is no situation, no circumstance whatever wherein it is not suited to us? that while every other method of salvation increases our anxiety, and, in many instances, drives us utterly to despair—the Gospel always mitigates our sorrows, and often turns them into joy and triumph.

**A farther excellency of the Gospel is that it refers all the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.**Every other plan of salvation leaves room for man to boast: but, on the plan of the Gospel, the most moral person upon earth must subscribe to the declaration of the Apostle, "By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." None, who have obtained a saving interest in Christ, will take the glory to themselves. The voice of all without exception is, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise."

There is not anything that distinguishes true believers more than this, that they desire to glorify Christ as the one source of all their blessings. In this their hearts are in perfect unison with the glorified saints, who sing continually, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever."

And is not this another excellency of the Gospel? Is it at all desirable that while some in Heaven are ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb, that others should ascribe salvation to God and to themselves? Surely the felicity of Heaven is much increased by the obligation which they feel to Jesus, and the consideration that every particle of that bliss was "purchased for them by the blood of God" himself; nor is there so much as one among all the hosts of Heaven who would consent for an instant to rob the Savior of his glory.

**The last excellency which I shall mention as belonging to the Gospel, is, that it most of all secures the practice of good works**. Here is the chief ground of jealousy with the world: and if the Gospel were indeed liable to the imputations cast on it, if it gave licence to men to continue in sin, we would not hesitate to discard it as a fiction, seeing that it could never be the production of a holy God.

But, as the Apostle says, "The grace of God which brings salvation teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." If we appeal to antiquity, who was ever so strenuous as Paul in asserting the doctrine of justification by faith alone? And yet, who was ever so abundant in labors of every kind? Or who ever inculcated with greater energy and minuteness the necessity of good works?

If we come to modern times, we must observe that they, who now preach justification by faith, are with the very same breath accused of opening Heaven to all, however they may act, and yet of shutting the door against all by their unnecessary strictness: and those who receive the Gospel are condemned as licentious, while they are at the same time blamed as too rigid and precise. Nor is this by any means a slight proof of the efficacy of the Gospel on the hearts and lives of its professors; for if their sentiments expose them to the former censure, it is their holy conduct that subjects them to the latter censure.

We grant and acknowledge it with sorrow, that there are some who name the name of Christ without departing from iniquity: but must all therefore be represented as of the same stamp, and the Gospel itself be considered as unfavorable to morality?

Is it just, that, while ten thousand glaring sins pass unnoticed in an unbeliever, the misconduct of a few, or perhaps one single fault in "a person professing godliness" should excite a clamor against all the Christian world as hypocrites?

But, thanks be to God! we can appeal to experience, that faith "does work by love," and "overcome the world," and "purify the heart." We are therefore emboldened primarily and principally to recommend the Gospel from this consideration, that while the zealous advocates for self-righteousness are miserably defective in all spiritual duties—the Gospel of Christ invariably stimulates us to a holy, spiritual, and unreserved obedience.

Many more excellencies of the Gospel might be mentioned: but if those that have been stated will not endear it to us, it is in vain to hope that anything which could be added would procure it a favorable reception.

And now, as there are many in this assembly who are already engaged in the service of the sanctuary, and many others who are destined in due time to undertake the sacred office of the ministry, and as the words of my text are in a more especial manner applicable to persons so circumstanced, allow me, with humility, yet with freedom and faithfulness, to address myself in a more especial manner to them; and let me entreat you to bear with me if I "use great boldness of speech."

I would beseech you then, my Brethren, to consider, that as *the eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures is suspended on their reception or rejection of the Gospel*, so their acquaintance with the Gospel must depend, in a great measure, on those who are authorized to teach it: for "faith comes by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Be not offended then if I ask, whether you yourselves have "received the truth in the love of it?" If you have not, how can you properly commend it to others? How can it be expected that you should "contend earnestly for that faith" which you yourselves have never embraced; or that you should labor with befitting zeal to convert your hearers, when you yourselves are unconverted?

O let it be a matter of deep and serious inquiry among us, whether we have felt the force and influence of the Gospel?

Have we ever been convinced of unbelief?

Have we seen the equity and reasonableness of the judgments denounced against us while in that state?

Have we, under a deep conviction of our guilt and helplessness, "fled to Christ for refuge?"

Have we discovered the transcendent excellency of this salvation; and do we feel in our inmost souls its perfect suitableness to our own necessities, and its tendency to promote the interests of holiness?

Can we say with the Apostle, that, what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the word of life, that, and that only, we declare unto our people?

In short, while we profess that "the ministry of reconciliation has been committed unto us," do we experience this reconciliation ourselves?

The salvation of our own souls, no less than that of our fellow-sinners, depends on this. Indeed we are more interested in the Gospel than any; for if we continue ignorant of it, we perish under the aggravated guilt of rejecting it ourselves, and of betraying the souls of others into irretrievable ruin. We, of all people under Heaven, are most bound to divest ourselves of prejudice, and to labor with our whole hearts, both to enjoy the blessings of the Gospel, and to show ourselves as patterns of its sanctifying influence. Let us then, in compliance with the Divine command, "take heed to *ourselves*, and to our doctrine, that, in so doing, we may both save ourselves and them that hear us."

But let others also be aware, that though they may have no responsibility attaching to them as ministers, they have as Christians. I must beg leave therefore to say unto all, that the faith which they profess cannot save them, unless it is accompanied with a renovation of heart and life. Do not then be hasty to conclude that you are true believers: "examine yourselves whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves."

Be assured, it is no easy matter to believe. It is by no means pleasing to flesh and blood: there is not anything to which we are naturally more averse. What our Lord said to the Jews of old may be addressed with equal propriety to the greater part of *nominal*Christians, "You will not come unto me, that you may have life." But let it be remembered, that, however humiliating it may appear to our proud nature to renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and to look for acceptance through the merits of Christ alone, it must be done. It will profit us little to have received the outward seal of his covenant, unless we possess also "the faith of God's elect." Our lofty looks must be humbled, our haughtiness must be brought down, and the Lord alone must be exalted! We must bow before the scepter of his grace, or we shall be "broken in pieces with a rod of iron."

If we truly and cordially "receive Him, we shall have the privilege of becoming the sons of God; and if sons, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

But "what shall our end be, if we obey not the Gospel?" What prospect have we, but to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Behold then, life and death are this day set before you.

Bearing, as we do, a commission from the Lord Jesus to preach his Gospel, "we are debtors both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise." In his sacred name, therefore, we deliver our message; we are constrained to deliver it with all faithfulness, "whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear." He, who with a penitent and contrite heart believes in the Son of God, and, by virtue of that faith, is enabled to confess him before men, and to honor him by a holy life, he shall "receive the forgiveness of his sins, and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ."

But he who believes not on the Son of God, however moral he may have been in his external conduct, and whatever pleas he may urge in extenuation of his guilt, he, I say, "shall not see life, but the wrath of God shall abide upon him!" He has practically said, "I will not have this man to reign over me;" and the despised Savior will, before long, issue this vindictive sentence, "Bring him hither, and slay him before me." The decree is gone forth, nor shall all the powers of Heaven or Hell reverse it, "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; but he who believes not, shall be damned!"

**The Gospel of LUKE**

[Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries](https://gracegems.org/Simeon/simeons_devotional_commentaries.htm)

***~~#1466~~***

***~~John the Forerunner of Jesus~~***

***~~[Luke 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.17)~~***

"And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

THE Mosaic dispensation may be called the age of prophecy; for under it was foretold everything which would be accomplished to the end of time. The nearer the prophets arrived to the commencement of the Christian era, the more minute and circumstantial were their predictions respecting it. Other prophets had spoken largely of the Messiah; but Malachi, the last of them, points out his forerunner; and closes the prophetic canon with announcing the mission of one who would prepare the world for his reception, [Malachi 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.5-6).

Accordingly, about the time that Christ was to come, it was expected that Elijah, or at least some prophet like unto him, should first appear Hence those questions put to the Baptist, [John 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.21), and to our Lord, [Matthew 17:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.10-13). Hence, when the angel was sent to Zachariah to inform him that he in his old age would have a son who was destined by God to the office of introducing the Messiah; he cited that very prophecy of Malachi, and cast the true light upon it: he told him, that this son of his would go before the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah, and have the honor of announcing to the world the Messiah's advent.

Respecting this person, thus solemnly foretold, and thus miraculously born, we shall be led to notice two things;

***~~I. His character—~~***

It is in a comparative view that the text requires us to consider this:

***~~He came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," whom he closely resembled—~~***

The resemblance may be seen in the endowments of their mind—they were both men of eminent piety. Compare [1 Kings 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.24) and [James 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17) and [2 Kings 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.9); [2 Kings 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.11) with [Luke 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.15), [John 5:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.35), [Matthew 11:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.9), [Matthew 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.11).

The habits of their life—they were self-denied and dead to the world. Compare [1 Kings 17:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.3-6), [1 Kings 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.10) and [2 Kings 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.8) with [Matthew 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.4) and [Luke 1:80](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.80).

The exercise of their ministry—they were bold reprovers and successful reformers. Compare [1 Kings 18:17-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.17-40), [1 Kings 21:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.19-24) and [2 Kings 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.3-4) with [Luke 3:7-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.7-14), [Luke 3:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.16-19) and [Matthew 21:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.32).

***~~In this view, John is said to be "great in the sight of the Lord"—~~***

Such a character will not be admired among men: but with God it is in the highest estimation. We grant that, in some respects, John's character is not so much suited to us, as it was to him, and the particular office he sustained. But, for the most part, it is proper for every person in every age, and most of all for ministers.

It is proper that we be "filled with the Holy Spirit;" and if we are so "even from our mother's womb," happy are we. We ought also to show a holy superiority to the world, to sit loose to its cares and pleasures, and to be regardless of its frowns or favors. We should dare to serve our God, even though the whole nation has departed from him: and bear our testimony against sin, by whoever it be committed. We should show ourselves determinately on the Lord's side, and "shine as lights in a dark world."

Suited to his august character was,

***~~II. His office—~~***

***~~This was peculiar to himself; he alone of all the sons of men was appointed to be the forerunner of his Lord—~~***

It was customary for great personages to send messengers before them to prepare their way: and such a messenger was John the Baptist, [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1) with [Matthew 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.10); [Matthew 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.14). It was highly proper that so glorious a person as the Messiah should not even appear to come in a surreptitious or clandestine manner; but that the minds of men should be directed to him, and his arrival be made the subject of general expectation.

Hence we find, that the great argument by which John excited men to repentance, was this, "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" He continually disclaimed all pretensions to the Messiahship himself, and directed them to One, who was speedily to arise among them, "whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose." As the Messiah's harbinger, he strove to prepare the hearts of men for his reception. Men of all ages and descriptions were warned by him; and "fathers with their children were turned by him unto the Lord their God." The most "disobedient" among them "were converted by him to the wisdom of the just," even to that adorable Jesus, whom all the righteous love, and in the love of whom true wisdom consists. This was the end and aim of his whole ministry, even to point men to that "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world:" and, having succeeded in this according to his father's prediction, verse 76, 77, he was glad himself to "decrease," that "the Messiah might increase" and be glorified, [John 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.30).

***~~But similar to his, is the office of every minister—~~***

*The minds of the generality are as regardless of Christ as if he had never come into the world*; they take his name indeed into their lips, but have no desire after his salvation in their hearts. Hence arises the necessity of crying to them continually, "Behold the Lamb of God!" "Behold him, behold him! [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1)." Him we must exalt as the only Savior of the world; and account our lives well spent, if we be the favored instruments of converting but a few to him.

***~~We cannot but observe from this subject,~~***

***~~1. How great a person Christ must be—~~***

From the preparations which were made for his reception, we are led to expect that he was possessed of more than human dignity: and accordingly we find him identified with Jehovah, Compare [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1) with [Matthew 11:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.10), and designated as the "Lord our God, verse 16." Yes: he was "Emmanuel, God with us," or, as he is elsewhere called, "the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13)." While therefore we contemplate his incarnation, let us think of it with the profoundest admiration, and the most lively gratitude.

***~~2. How important must be the knowledge of him—~~***

The very end for which John was miraculously given to the world, was to bear witness to Christ, and to commend him to the Jewish nation. Was then the knowledge of Christ of such importance to the Jews? Surely it is no less so to us: our salvation depends upon it, as well as theirs: and therefore we should all ask ourselves, 'What do I think of Christ? What am I the better for him? What hope have I in him?'

In him alone can we find acceptance, and "by him alone can we be justified." To him then let us direct our most assiduous attention, and "count all things but as dross and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of him."

***~~#1467~~***

***~~The Angel's Message to Mary~~***

**[Luke 1:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.35), [38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.38)**

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."

Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

AS none can tell what devices Satan is plotting for their ruin, or what snares he may bring them into; so none can tell what thoughts of peace and love God may have towards them, or what mercies he may speedily grant unto them. Little did the persecuting Saul think, when on his journey to Damascus, what God would do for him before he reached the place of his destination. And as little did Mary imagine, when engaged in her domestic duties, what was in reserve for her, or what a single day should bring forth. The time fixed in the Divine counsels came at last, when the Messiah was to be brought into the world; and the Virgin Mother was to be informed of God's designs respecting her. Methinks, at the first address of the angelic messenger, she was filled with surprise and terror: but having been fully instructed respecting that peculiar favor which God had prepared for her, she acquiesced in the Divine proposals, and committed herself with all her concerns, into the hands of her Almighty Friend.

We propose to consider,

***~~I. The honor promised her—~~***

She was informed, that God had ordained her to be the happy instrument of bringing into the world his only dear Son. And, on her inquiring how that should be accomplished in her virgin state, she was told that the Holy Spirit, who at the first creation of the world "moved upon the face of the waters," and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty, should, by his almighty power, form in her that Holy Being, who would, in his human as well as his divine nature, be the Son of God.

But here a question arises, why should the Messiah be born in this way? Why might not the privilege of bearing him be given to her in a way more agreeable to the common course of nature? We answer, that there was, if we may so speak, a *necessity*for it:

***~~1. That he might not be involved in Adam's guilt—~~***

Adam was not a mere individual, but the head and representative of all his posterity; and, when he violated the covenant which God had made with him, he brought a curse, not on himself only, but on all his descendants also. This is evident from the death of infants, who cannot have contracted personal guilt, and yet suffer the punishment of sin. This could not be, if sin were not imputed to them. It is by "the transgression of Adam that they are accounted sinners, and that judgment comes upon them to condemnation, [Romans 5:12-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12-19)." "In Adam all die, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22)."

Now if the Lord Jesus had descended from him in the common way, he would have lain under the same sentence of condemnation with others, and therefore would have needed a deliverer himself, instead of becoming a deliverer to others.

***~~2. That he might not partake of Adam's corruption—~~***

When Adam fell, he became corrupt in every member of his body, and in every faculty of his soul. And we are particularly informed, that "he begat a son in his own likeness," not in the likeness of God in which he was created, but in his own image as a fallen creature. An awful evidence of this truth he soon beheld, in Cain's hatred, and murder, of righteous Abel.

Of this corruption Christ must have participated, if he had been born in the way of other men: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one! [Job 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.4)," says Job: and again, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman, [Job 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 25.4)." In this case, he could not have been "a Lamb without spot or blemish;" and consequently not a proper sacrifice for sin. He must be without sin himself, if he is to take away the sins of others, [1 John 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.5); and "offer himself without spot to God," if he is to purge away the guilt of a ruined world, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14).

***~~3. That the Scriptures might be fulfilled in him—~~***

The very first promise which announced his future birth, designated him as exclusively "the Seed of the woman, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." We might not perhaps have so limited the import of that passage, if subsequent prophecies had not thrown the true light upon it: but Isaiah expressly says, that "a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14); and an inspired Apostle assures us, that this Scripture had an exact and literal accomplishment in the birth of Jesus, [Matthew 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.22-23).

The Prophet Jeremiah also, encouraging the Jews to return to their native land, tells them, that "God would create a new thing there, namely, A woman should compass a man, [Jeremiah 31:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.22);" that is, should bear a man-child in her virgin state, which had never taken place from the foundation of the world, and which would in a peculiar manner require the exercise of his all-creating power.

Now the Scriptures cannot be broken: if therefore Jesus was to be the Messiah spoken of in the prophets, he must be born in this very manner; and the honor of bearing him must be enjoyed in this way alone.

From the conferring the honor, we are naturally led to consider,

***~~II. Her acceptance of it—~~***

Here, while we behold her virgin modesty, unalloyed with any mixture of pride or boasting, we are of necessity called to admire,

***~~1. Her faith in the promise—~~***

When Zachariah, an aged and pious priest, had been informed by the angel that he would have a son in his old age, he doubted the truth of it, and required a sign for the confirmation of his faith, verse 18-20; but when this holy Virgin was told of a thing far less credible, she doubted not one single moment: her question was, not for the assuring of her mind about the truth of the promise, but merely for information respecting the mode of its accomplishment.

Now in this she showed the eminence of her piety: and for this she was particularly commended by God himself, who inspired Elizabeth at the first appearance of the Virgin, to exclaim, "Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord, verse 45."

It was such an exercise of faith that made Abraham so distinguished among all the sons of men, and so eminently beloved of his God, [Romans 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3); [Romans 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.13); [Romans 4:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-22). This also was the grace which most particularly characterized all the saints of old, Hebrews 11; which also our blessed Lord invariably honored with his peculiar approbation; which therefore should exalt his Virgin mother in our esteem.

***~~2. Her submission to the appointment—~~***

She could not but know that the honor proposed for her acceptance might entirely ruin her character, and possibly even affect her life: for God himself had commanded, that a virgin betrothed should, if unfaithful to her engagements, be punished with death, exactly as she would have been if actually married, [Deuteronomy 22:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 22.23-24). On these grounds she might well have suggested doubts, and inquired how she should be protected from these awful consequences. But she felt no doubt, but that He, whose power and love could confer upon her the proposed honor, would exercise a watchful care over her, and either entirely prevent, or richly recompense, these dreaded evils.

Like "Abraham, who at the call of God went out, not knowing where he went," she cheerfully committed herself to the Divine protection, knowing in whom she had believed, and assured that he would never leave her nor forsake her. That there was just ground for such fears, appears by the very purpose which Joseph formed, of putting her away as an adulteress: and which was only prevented by the intervention of God himself, who sent an angel to inform him by what means she was pregnant, and to commend her to his peculiar care.

Here again we cannot but admire that resignation and fortitude, whereby she rose superior to all those fears and apprehensions, which such a situation was calculated to inspire.

***~~3. Her gratitude for the favor—~~***

At the first, as we might expect, her frame was that of meek and humble submission. But, when she had had time to reflect upon the greatness of the mercy given unto her, and the blessings which would come upon the world by her means, she broke forth into the most exalted strains of praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." She justly acknowledged, that, "He who was mighty had done to her great things," in the contemplation of which "all generations would call her blessed." She viewed with ineffable delight the accomplishment of that promise which had been made to Abraham; and doubtless, to the last moment of her life, adored that God, who had made use of her as his honored instrument to fulfill it.

***~~In the review of this mysterious subject, we may learn,~~***

***~~1. How God fulfills his promises—~~***

The difficulty here seemed insurmountable. The Son of God, in order "to redeem those who were under the law, must be made under the law," yet not really obnoxious to its curse; and be "made of a woman," subject to all the infirmities of our nature, and yet be free from sin, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5), [Hebrews 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17), [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15).

But God is never at a loss: "with him nothing is impossible:" he devised and executed a plan whereby we might have "such a high-priest as befit us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, [Hebrews 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26);" a plan, that filled all Heaven with wonder. Thus, in other dispensations of his providence and grace, he often permits difficulties to arise, which preclude all hope of our attaining the object of our desire. But, in the best and fittest season, he interposes, and "makes light to arise in obscurity, and our darkness to be as the noon-day." At this hour, as much as in the days of Abraham, is that saying true, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen."

***~~2. How we ought to receive God's promises—~~***

Among the many promises which God has given us, there is one "exceeding great and precious," not unlike to that which has been the subject of our present consideration; namely, that "Christ shall be formed in our hearts, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19); that being so formed, he "shall dwell in us, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17);" and that so dwelling in us, he shall be to us "the hope of glory, [Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27)." This promise is even greater than that which was fulfilled to the blessed Virgin, inasmuch as a spiritual union with the Lord exceeds that which is merely carnal, [Luke 11:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.27-28).

And how should we receive this promise? I answer, precisely as the blessed Virgin did. We should not stagger at it through unbelief. We should not account it too good for his love to grant, or too great, for his power to execute. We should be alike unmoved by either the difficulties that may obstruct its accomplishment, or the dangers that may follow it. Our reputation, our interests, our life—we should commit to the hands of a faithful Creator, equally ready to suffer for him, or to he more illustrious monuments of his paternal care. O happy would we be, if in this manner we could embrace every promise he has given us, and in full expectation of its accomplishment say, "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word."

***~~#1468~~***

***~~The Virgin's Song of Praise~~***

***~~[Luke 1:48-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.48-49)~~***

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

*THE characteristic features of the unregenerate man are pride and selfishness.*If the qualities of others are superior to his own, he regards them with envy; if inferior, he regards them with contempt. The reverse of this is universally produced by the grace of God. That teaches us to "seek not our own things only, but also the things of others;" and to "prefer others in honor before ourselves," being ready at all times to acknowledge and commend what is good in them, and to give God the glory of whatever good there may be in us.

No where will this be found more beautifully exemplified than in the interview which took place between Elizabeth and Mary. Immediately after the blessed Virgin had been informed of God's gracious design respecting her, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who had, by the immediate influence of God, been enabled to conceive a son in her old age. On her very first appearance, Elizabeth, neither elated with her own honor, nor envious of Mary's, broke forth into the warmest congratulations; losing all sight, as it were, of her own mercies, and rejoicing altogether in those which had been given to her pious friend.

Mary too, in her reply, showed clearly on what her mind was fixed, and what was the main desire of her heart. Not a single word savoring of self-exaltation escaped her lips: but with devoutest gratitude she ascribed unto God the honor due unto his name.

In considering these first effusions of her soul, it will be proper to notice,

***~~I. The grounds of her joy—~~***

Doubtless she had some respect to the peculiar mercy given to her, verse 48, 49; nor could she without base ingratitude have overlooked it. But it is evident that her views were directed to "God" himself, as the Benefactor, the "Savior," of mankind.

If we consider God the Father as the object in whom she rejoiced, still it was in him as sending his Son into the world, and by him reconciling the world unto himself. It was in him also as her Savior. Here then we see her sentiments in relation to the state of her soul before God. Holy as she was, *she saw herself a sinner before God, and justly obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure*. She was convinced also that she could not by any means make atonement for her sins, or reconcile herself to God. She felt that she needed a Savior as much as the vilest of the human race, and she looked for salvation solely as the gift of God through the merits of her Redeemer.

Were such her views? Then what ought to be ours? what should be our estimate of our own state? How vain must be that conceit, which the more chaste and sober among us are prone to indulge, that they do not deserve the wrath of God; or that they shall find acceptance with God because of their comparative goodness!

If we consider the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of her joy, (which we may well do,) then do we see what her views were of that child, whom she was in due time to bring into the world. "David, in and by the Spirit, had called him Lord," at the time that he spoke of him as his son, who would in due time arise to sit upon his throne. Compare [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1) with [Matthew 22:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.43-45). And Elizabeth had directly acknowledged that holy Being that was but just formed in the Virgin's womb, as "her Lord;" and had declared that the infant in her own womb had leaped for joy at his approach, verse 43, 44. The Virgin herself too knew his Divine origin, and that he was "the Son of the Highest." Well therefore might she "magnify" him for his astonishing condescension, and "rejoice" in him as her deliverer from the wrath to come.

It is probable enough that her views of his work and offices were much less distinct than ours: but, whether more or less clear, they were manifestly the ground of her joy. She knew that he was sent to be the Savior of the world; and she had no doubt but that he would "finish the work which God had given him to do."

And have not we the same ground of joy, [Luke 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10-11). Or rather, ought not our joy in him to be more sublime, in proportion as our knowledge of him is more clear? O let not our views of him be less exalted, or our affiance in him less firm!

From viewing the grounds of her joy, let us turn our attention to,

***~~II. The expressions of her joy—~~***

Here we behold a blessed mixture of admiration, gratitude, and joy. It is evident that her mind was full of her subject: the abruptness of her speech shows, that she had "mused in her heart until the fire kindled; and then she spoke with her tongue." She was naturally of a ruminating thoughtful turn, [Luke 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.29); [Luke 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.19); [Luke 2:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.51); and, from the moment when the angel announced to her the Divine purpose, we doubt not but that her meditations had been on this subject night and day. Here then, overwhelmed, as it were, with the greatness of this mystery, she gives vent to her feelings, and magnifies him as her Savior, whom by faith alone she knew to have been formed in her womb.

Gladly would she have presented to her God a tribute of praise adequate to the occasion. Her soul and spirit "were engaged to the uttermost:" but the language of mortality was too feeble for such a theme. Yet, as far as she could, she "magnified" her Lord, and rendered to him the acknowledgments so justly due.

As to the joy she felt, that also, no less than her theme, exceeded the powers of language to express. Even if she could have expressed it, her words would not convey to us any precise ideas, unless we had correspondent feelings within our own bosom.

If such, then, was her state, we ask: What can any man know of this mystery, who has not been filled with wonder at it? What can any man know of it, who does not rejoice in it with most exalted joy, and bless God for it from his inmost soul? As a speculative truth, indeed, it may have received our assent, even though we have never contemplated it with any suitable emotions: but if the excellency of the truth has been ever felt, we have found that we sunk under it as ineffable and incomprehensible; and were constrained to adore in silence the mercies which we could not utter.

***~~From this instructive history we may learn,~~***

***~~1. Our duty—~~***

Persons readily acknowledge their obligation to do as they would be done unto, or even to perform some religious duties: but they can live all their days without rejoicing in God, and yet never feel any sense of guilt on account of it. But are not the commands on this head as clear, and as forcible, as on any subject whatever? "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice! [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4)." "Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, [1 Thessalonians 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16); [1 Thessalonians 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.18)." Indeed the exercise of this heavenly disposition is represented as characteristic of the true Christian, insomuch that no person can claim that honorable appellation, who is a stranger to it: "We are the true circumcision, who rejoice in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3)." Let not any then imagine that they are in a state acceptable to God, while they continue to have such low thoughts of the Savior, and are so insensible to all the wonders of redeeming love.

***~~2. Our privilege—~~***

We are almost ashamed to have spoken of joy in Christ under the name of *duty*. What would a glorified saint feel, if exhorted to it as a duty? He would spurn at the idea: he would say, 'It is not my duty, but my privilege! It constitutes the very happiness of Heaven.'

O that we could learn to think of it in that view! It is in this very light that *Peter*speaks of it, not as an object to be desired, but as an attainment common to the saints: "Believing in Christ," says he, "you rejoice with joy unspeakable and and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)."

Look at the *Psalmist*, and behold his state: he determined to praise his God with every faculty of his soul, [Psalm 103:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-2), and every member of his body, [Psalm 35:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.9-10). "My soul: yes, all my bones shall say, etc.", if we may so speak; and to spend every day, (I had almost said, every hour,) to the end of life, in this blessed employment, [Psalm 145:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.1-2); [Psalm 146:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.1-2); [Psalm 119:164](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.164); [Psalm 119:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.62).

Let us imitate his example. "Let them give thanks, whom the Lord has redeemed:" if we do not, "the very stones will cry out against us." We are not advocates for enthusiasm: but if to resemble the holy Virgin, to be filled with admiring thoughts of the Savior, and to anticipate the felicity of Heaven, let us be enthusiasts: such enthusiasts will God approve. Yet, that we give no just occasion for that reproach, let us combine *discretion*with *devotion*; according to the exhortation of the Psalmist, "Sing praises to the Lord, sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord, sing praises; sing praises with understanding, [Psalm 47:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 47.6-7)."

***~~#1469~~***

***~~The Song of Zachariah~~***

***~~[Luke 1:67-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.67-75)~~***

"Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

[This Sermon was preached on Christmas-day]

CONSIDERING the depth of humiliation to which the Son of God was about to submit, in taking upon him our nature, it was necessary that his birth should be attended with such circumstances, as were calculated to impress the minds of men with a conviction of his real character. Accordingly we find, that, previous to his birth, there was ample testimony given to him as a most extraordinary personage, such as the world had never before seen. A person was sent "to prepare his way before him:" and this forerunner was himself distinguished by a preternatural birth. The father of this messenger was informed by an angel, that his aged, and hitherto barren, wife should conceive a son, who should be called John. On his expressing some doubt of the angel's veracity, he was struck mute for his unbelief; and continued so until the birth and naming of the promised child: and then, on his confirming the appointment of his wife respecting the name of the child, his tongue was loosed, and he broke forth into this prophetic hymn of praise: in which he blesses God for the advent of the Messiah,

***~~I. As an accomplishment of prophecy—~~***

***~~The incarnation of the Son of God had been foretold from the beginning of the world—~~***

It was announced to *Adam*immediately after his fall, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). To *Abraham*it had been promised with an oath, [Genesis 22:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.16-18). To *David*, from whose loins the Messiah was to spring, it had been confirmed by an everlasting covenant, [Psalm 89:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.3-4); [Psalm 89:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.34-36); [Psalm 132:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.11); [Psalm 132:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.17-18).

In a more particular manner it had been foretold that Christ would "visit and redeem" his people. The state of the Israelites in Egypt, and their redemption from thence, had been foreordained from the beginning, in order to typify this great event. Abraham was warned of the afflictions which his posterity would endure there, and of the wonderful deliverance which at a remote period they should experience, [Genesis 15:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.13-14) with [Acts 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.6-7). Joseph in his dying hour assured his brethren, that God would "visit them," and bring them thence, [Genesis 50:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.24-25). And Moses was in due time sent upon this errand, and commissioned to inform his wretched countrymen, that God was come at last to visit and deliver them, [Exodus 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.16-17). Now in the text, there is, as in the sequel will more fully appear, a reference, not to the event merely, but to the very terms in which that event was predicted: from which circumstance, the typical application of that history to the incarnation of Christ, is clearly warranted and confirmed.

***~~For the accomplishment of this great event, this holy man blessed and adored his God—~~***

The prospect of this event had excited a lively joy in the bosom of Abraham, at the distance of two thousand years, [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56); and all who, in the intermediate space, had successively believed the promises, had lived and died in the pleasing expectation, that the happiness denied to them would be granted to their posterity, [Hebrews 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13). When the time for the Messiah's advent drew near, the expectation of him became more general, [John 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.25), more joyful, more assured. Many there were who "looked for redemption in Jerusalem, [Luke 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.38)," and "waited for Jesus as the Consolation of Israel, [Luke 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.25)." What wonder then that, on the sight of his forerunner, Zachariah burst forth in these triumphant strains? What wonder that, in the confidence of faith, he spoke of the Savior as already arrived, yes, and the work of redemption as already effected by him, though there were yet several months to elapse before he would be born into the world? It was surely the fittest use of his newly-recovered speech; and had he forborne to use it thus, "the very stones would have cried out against him."

But the incarnation of Christ was a ground of joy to him:

***~~II. As a means of spiritual blessings—~~***

Here the reference to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt is yet more manifest than before. The requisition made by Moses to Pharaoh was that Israel should go into the wilderness to serve the Lord. This was the ground of contest between them, [Exodus 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.1-3); until at last God, by his terrible judgments on the Egyptians, decided the point. But, after that the Israelites were brought forth to the very borders of the Red Sea, they were menaced with utter destruction by Pharaoh and all his host. The overwhelming of that army in the sea completed the deliverance of his people, so that they could from that moment serve the Lord without any fear of their ancient oppressors.

The redemption wrought out by Christ is in perfect correspondence with this. By his advent we obtain,

***~~1. Deliverance from our spiritual enemies—~~***

We are in the hand of enemies more cruel and tyrannical than those of Egypt; we are in bondage to *sin*and *Satan*, *death*and *Hell*. From these our blessed Lord delivers us. This is twice mentioned in the text. *By the blood of his cross he expiates sin, overcomes Satan, destroys death, and liberates from the jaws of Hell.*He is "a horn of salvation" to his people, a mighty and irresistible Savior, who will push down all his enemies. None can detain us any longer in bondage, when he comes to set us free: "if he make us free, then are we free indeed, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36)."

***~~2. Liberty to serve our God—~~***

Deliverance from the punishment of sin would be unworthy of the name of a deliverance, if it were not accompanied with a restoration to the Divine favor, and a thorough renovation of heart and life. As long as we were destitute of holiness, we must of necessity be strangers to happiness. Heaven itself would be no Heaven to an unholy soul. But Jesus "redeems us from all iniquity, and purifies us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." He causes us to delight ourselves in God; and to "serve him without fear." In this respect we far exceed all who lived under the Jewish dispensation: for they were kept at a distance from God; and the very services which they rendered to him, tended to generate in them a servile fear, [Hebrews 12:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-21). But we "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father! [Hebrews 12:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-24) with [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)."

Can it be doubted whether these things deserve our grateful acknowledgments? If the state to which the Israelites were brought in the Wilderness or in Canaan, was a just ground of praise and thanksgiving, is not ours much rather?

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let us bless God for the event we this day commemorate—~~***

The Savior's birth was proclaimed by angels as "glad tidings of great joy to all people;" and the heavenly hosts themselves began a new song in Heaven, "Glory to God in the highest!" The virgin who bore him, the patriarch who took him in his arms, the prophetess who beheld him, together with many others, rejoiced exceedingly in his advent, notwithstanding they had such imperfect views of his character.

Shall not we then; we who have had his nature and office so fully revealed to us; we who have seen him dying, rising, ascending, and enthroned; we who have beheld him sending down the Holy Spirit from Heaven, and saving myriads of sinners like ourselves; yes, we who have experienced his power to save, (if we have indeed experienced it,) shall not we praise him? Yes, blessed, "blessed be his name for visiting and redeeming" our souls! "blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen, and Amen! [Psalm 72:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.18-19)."

***~~2. Let us seek to participate the blessings accruing from it—~~***

Though we are not properly affected with our spiritual bondage, because we are in love with our chains, yet is it far more terrible than any to which our bodies can be subject. Now we are well assured, that if heavy tasks were daily imposed on us, and we were constantly beaten for not executing what it was not in our power to perform, we would frequently pour out our complaints before God, and cry to him to avenge our cause, [Exodus 5:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.14-16). What stupor then has seized us, that, in a situation incomparably more lamentable, we do not embrace deliverance when it is offered? Let us not be satisfied with captivity, when Christ is "proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1)." Let us not "thrust him away from us, [Acts 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.27); [Acts 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.39)," when he is come to visit us: but let us welcome him into our hearts, as well as into the world, and never rest until "we know him in the power of his resurrection, in the fellowship of his sufferings, and in a conformity to him" both in holiness and in glory, [Philippians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10).

***~~#1470~~***

***~~The Causes of Our Savior's Incarnation~~***

***~~[Luke 1:78-79](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.78-79)~~***

"Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

OUR Savior's birth, though in many respects peculiarly low and abject, was attended with some circumstances worthy the occasion. We might mention his miraculous conception, the acclamations of angels, etc. etc; but we shall only advert to the account given in the context of his Forerunner, who was prophesied of by Isaiah; named by the angel before his conception in the womb; born in a supernatural way; celebrated by several to whom the spirit of prophecy was given after it had been withdrawn from Israel three hundred years, commissioned to prepare men for the reception of the Savior, and to publish the tidings in the text—

From them we shall be led to contemplate,

***~~I. The advent of our Lord—~~***

***~~Our Lord is here represented under the image of the Sun—~~***

This is a metaphor by which he has been designated throughout all the Holy Scriptures. *Balaam*spoke of him as "a Star that should come out of Jacob, [Numbers 24:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.17);" *Isaiah*, as "a great light which the Gentiles who were walking in darkness should behold, [Isaiah 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.2) with [Matthew 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.16);" *Malachi*as "the Sun of Righteousness that should arise on the world with healing in his wings, [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2)." In the New Testament also he is declared to be "the true light which lights every man that comes into the world, [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9)." Our Lord himself also assumes that character; "I am the light of the world: he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12)." Even in Heaven itself does he sustain the same character; for "the Lamb is the light thereof, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)."

Moreover, what the sun is to the material world, that is he to us. He is the Author of all light, natural, [Genesis 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.3); intellectual, [Job 38:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 38.36); spiritual, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17); and, as the face of nature withers or revives, according as the influence of the sun upon it is increased or diminished, so the souls of men continue dead or are quickened, according as the Sun of Righteousness withholds or imparts his invigorating rays.

***~~Under that character he has visited our benighted world—~~***

A dawning of his appearance had been long visible in the promises of God, and in all the prophetic writings, as also in the whole of the Mosaic ritual. But at his incarnation he began more clearly to illumine this horizon. He diffused a light around him by his doctrine and example: and those who could see through the veil of his flesh, "beheld his glory, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." And those who now will receive his truth, and "follow his steps," shall surely be as much distinguished from the world around them, as those who are groping in midnight darkness are from those who are walking in the light of the noon-day sun.

This will lead me to speak of,

***~~II. The end of his advent—~~***

***~~The whole world were in utter darkness—~~***

How little did even the wisest philosophers know respecting anything pertaining to the eternal world! Truly "the world by wisdom knew not God, [1 Corinthians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.21)." Nor are we in reality more enlightened in reference to spiritual things than they. I grant that, so far as *speculative*knowledge is concerned, we have the advantage of them: but in respect to *saving*knowledge, we are as dark as they. *Take the sentiments even of the world at large, and compare them with the word of God; and they will be found as far from the truth as if they had no inspired volume to instruct them*. And where their mere sentiments are correct, how faint are their apprehensions of the truths which they profess to hold! How inadequate is their sense of the evil of *sin*, of the majesty of *God*, of the excellency of *Christ*, of the beauty of *holiness*, or of any one spiritual truth whatever! The truth is, that we are looking for "peace" "in the ways" of sin, as much as the heathen themselves, and, notwithstanding all our advantages, we are, like them, "in darkness and the shadow of death," on the very confines of destruction.

***~~To dispel this darkness He came into the world—~~***

Human reason could not break through the clouds with which we were enveloped; still less could the human reason convert the soul to God. No way for reconciliation with God could ever have been found out by mortal man. To make reconciliation for him, to reveal it to him, and to render it available for his eternal welfare, were the great objects of the Savior's incarnation. He visited our world "to give light to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace:" and every soul that avails himself of the Savior's instructions, shall be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)."

Already, methinks, you begin to see,

***~~III. The unbounded mercy of God displayed in it—~~***

***~~Well is it traced to "the tender mercy of our God"—~~***

To what else can we trace it? *What could man do to merit such a gift as that of God's only dear Son?*But the expression in my text deserves particular notice. The words import, "the affections of mercy," which were moved in commiseration of our fallen state. Conceive of God as looking upon our first parents after the fall, and as saying concerning them, as he did concerning his people Israel, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man— the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. [Hosea 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.8-9)." Yes indeed, this will give a just view of the compassion which moved Almighty God to send his Son for the redemption of a ruined world.

And can we withhold our admiration from this stupendous act of mercy?

Let us only contemplate the benefits we receive from the material sun. Suppose we had been from the first moment of our existence in the state in which large districts of the habitable globe are for one half of the year: suppose we had been in utter darkness even until now; and God had unexpectedly, and unsolicited, caused the sun to visit us in meridian splendor: Would there have been any bounds to our admiration or gratitude? What then shall we say now that he has caused "the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon us," and "the day-star to arise in our very hearts, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19)." Truly, "if we do not bless him, the stones will cry out against us. See [Ephesians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4); [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet sitting in darkness—~~***

This is the state of the whole unconverted world. If a man feeling in his bosom the ranklings of anger and hatred, he "is in darkness even until now, [1 John 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.9)," what must they be who are living altogether to themselves and to the world? Think what you may, you are "in the shadow of death," and on the very confines of destruction! I pray you improve the opportunity now afforded you, and "while you have the light, walk in the light, that you may be the children of light".

***~~2. Those who have been "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel"—~~***

Bless your God: bless him without ceasing: bless him with your whole hearts. Is it a pleasant thing to behold the sun? What delight then must you have in beholding the glory of God as beaming forth in the face of Jesus Christ!" See then that you walk worthy of this great mercy: for "if you walk in the light as he is in the light, then shall you have sweet fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse you from all sin. [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)." Let Christ be your light in this world, and you shall dwell in the beams of his meridian glory for ever and ever!

***~~#1471~~***

***~~Christ's Incarnation Glad Tidings to All~~***

***~~[Luke 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10-11)~~***

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

IT has pleased God on many occasions to confer upon the poor some peculiar tokens of his regard: he has even "chosen them," in preference to all others, "to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom." But, as though he had designed to mark with special approbation the exertions of honest industry, he has given his most distinguished favors to them at a time when they have been employed in the duties of their respective callings. *Gideon*, "who was of a poor family of Manasseh, and the least in his father's house," was threshing his father's wheat, when he was called to judge and to deliver Israel, [Judges 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.11); [Judges 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 6.15). *Saul*, who also was "of the least family belonging to the least of all the tribes," was seeking his father's donkeys, when he was anointed to be king over Israel, [1 Samuel 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 9.3); [1 Samuel 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 9.20-21). *David*also, the least of Jesse's family, was brought from the sheepfold, that, from tending his father's sheep, he might be exalted to the throne, and be made the shepherd, and king, of God's peculiar people, [Psalm 78:70-71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.70-71) with [1 Samuel 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 16.11).

Thus, when God had sent his dear Son into the world, he commissioned an angel to announce the tidings of his advent. But to whom did he send the angel? To Herod, or the chief priests? No, but to poor shepherds, who, for the security of their sheep, and their own mutual convenience, were keeping their watches through the night, verse 8. To fix their attention, and to counteract the scandal which the tidings themselves would occasion, (for it must seem strange indeed to hear of the Savior of the world, and the Lord of Glory, lying in a manger,) the angel appeared clothed with light, such light as clearly indicated the dignity of the messenger, and the importance of the message. Having dispelled the fears which his first appearance had excited in their minds, he addressed them in the words which we have just read: in elucidating which, we shall consider,

***~~I. The tidings announced—~~***

The birth of Jesus is here declared: and the city wherein he was born is specified in appropriate terms, in order that the accomplishment of that prophecy which had foretold the place of his birth might be distinctly seen and acknowledged, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2).

The description here given of Jesus is worthy of our deepest attention. The angel describes him by,

***~~1. His office—~~***

Many saviors had been sent to Israel in former ages, [Nehemiah 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.27); but here was one infinitely superior to them all; one who came to deliver, not one people only, but a whole world; not from temporal bondage or misery, but from sin and Satan, death and Hell.

***~~2. His right and title to it—~~***

The name "Christ," as also the name "Messiah," signifies 'Anointed:' and it was the name by which the great Deliverer was expected both by the Jewish and Gentile world, [John 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.25). It was not a Jewess, but a Samaritan, that said this. Now this name denoted his divine commission, together with his eminent qualifications for the performance of his office. The kings and priests, and, in some instances, the prophets also, were set apart for their respective offices by a holy unction. And he, in whom all these offices were combined, was consecrated to them by a public and immeasurable effusion of the Holy Spirit, [Luke 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.22); [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18) with [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7), and [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34). He was no unauthorized intruder; but a Savior duly sent and qualified.

***~~3. His sufficiency for it—~~***

Had the person announced as a Savior been a mere creature, he never could have effected all that was necessary for those whom he came to save. But he was "the Lord," even Jehovah himself. It had been said of him by the prophet, eight hundred years before, "To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and his name shall be called, The Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" and that prophecy was declared to be now accomplished. Consequently, whatever he had undertaken, he was able to perform: his *atonement*would be sufficient to expiate the sins of the world: his *righteousness*would be sufficient to justify all that should trust in it for acceptance: and his *grace*would be sufficient to make them conquerors over all their enemies.

Together with the tidings themselves, the angel announced also,

***~~II. The importance of them—~~***

The term, "behold," is always used to mark the importance of that to which it is prefixed. But here the precise view in which the tidings claim our attention is distinctly specified. They are a matter,

***~~1. Of exceeding joy—~~***

To illustrate this, we need only observe by whom the message was delivered, and if whom. An angel was the messenger: but he was not privileged to say, "To *us*is born a Savior:" no; there was no Savior provided for the fallen angels: but for man, when he fell. God became incarnate: "he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham, [Hebrews 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.16)."

Suppose then, that instead of being sent to men, the angel had been sent to his fallen brethren; and that, having opened the gates of Hell, he had announced the tidings to the *apostate spirits*, "To you is sent a Savior!" O what joy had been diffused through those miserable regions! How would the vaults of Hell have rung with acclamations and hosannas! How would every spirit instantly have forgotten his pains, and pressed forward to hear the full import of this astonishing message!

Thus then ought the tidings to be received among us: since the only difference between them and us is, that on them is executed the sentence they deserve, and we are shut up in prison, waiting to have the same executed upon us, as soon as the full measure of our iniquities shall be completed.

***~~2. Of universal joy—~~***

These tidings were equally interesting to Jews and Gentiles; to those of the apostolic age, and to us who live at such a distance, both of time and place. Nor is there one among the children of men who has not equal cause to value the Savior that is here announced. Who is there that does not need the merit of his atonement and the efficacy of his grace? And who is there to whom they are not freely offered? There is not one on earth who can be saved without them; nor is there one, however abandoned, who may not, by a believing application to the Savior, be interested in them. Well therefore may they be called good tidings "to all people;" since they are so to all, of every age, and of every description: and well may the prophet call on the whole creation to shout for joy, [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23).

***~~We conclude with inviting you all to imitate the shepherds:~~***

***~~1. Inquire into the truth of the tidings you have heard—~~***

The shepherds instantly went to Bethlehem, to see with their own eyes the truth of what they had heard, verse 15. To you then we say, "Go to Bethlehem," or rather, Go to the Bible, and search whether these things be not as they have been represented?

What would you have thought of the shepherds, if, when they had such an opportunity of obtaining satisfaction on the point, they had neglected it, and had laid themselves down to sleep? O be not such yourselves. You have incomparably better means of information than they had. You may see the whole record concerning this holy Child; his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, yes, you may see the union of the Godhead with his human-nature, and may read, in facts as well as in declarations, his ability to save you to the uttermost. O arise, and inquire into these deep mysteries, with all the humility and attention they demand.

***~~2. When convinced of the truth of them yourselves, communicate them diligently to others—~~***

The shepherds would not hide within their own bosoms the things they had heard and seen, but published them abroad for the information of others also, verse 17. And should you be silent? When you have so much clearer instruction to convey, should you not impart it gladly to those around you? Remember, that if you have the knowledge of Christ as the only and all-sufficient Savior, you are on no account to put that light under a bushel, but to make use of it that you may guide others also into the way of peace.

***~~3. Make them the theme of your joyful praises in the midst of your earthly business—~~***

"The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, verse 20;" they forsook not their duty: but returned to it in a joyful and devout frame of mind. A discovery of the deep things of God is not intended to take us out of the situations in life which we have been called to fill; but to make us holy and happy in them. Let this effect be wrought on you. Neglect not your worldly occupations, whatever they may be; but serve God in them, and abound in praises and thanksgivings for that which has been revealed unto you. However base or toilsome your vocation be, care not for it; but make it to appear that *the knowledge of this Savior can render any yoke easy, and afford a joy which the world can neither give nor take away.*

***~~#1472~~***

***~~The Angels' Song~~***

***~~[Luke 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.13-14)~~***

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

THE circumstances of our Savior's birth characterize in a measure, the dispensation which he came to introduce.*The Gospel exhibits a plain, yet profound, scheme of salvation. While its great outlines are intelligible to the most base capacity, it abounds with the most sublime, and inscrutable mysteries.*Thus, in the incarnation of our Lord, there was a *baseness*which seemed unsuitable to such an occasion; and at the same time a *majesty*that was worthy the person and character of the new-born infant: he was born, not in a palace, but a stable, and had only a manger for his reception: yet did an angel come from Heaven to announce his birth; and a multitude of the heavenly host attended to proclaim his praise.

In this divine hymn the incarnation of Christ is represented in a two-fold view:

***~~I. As a subject for our deepest contemplation—~~***

The subject itself is announced in those words of the angel to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." And, in honor of this marvelous event, a multitude of the heavenly host break forth into strains, so abrupt, as to need much careful elucidation, and so ardent, as to express as fully as possible what angels feel in the contemplation of this divine mystery.

***~~Behold, "peace" now exists "on earth"—~~***

The whole race of man had fallen, and were subjected to God's heavy displeasure. Nor was there on man's part any possibility of restoring himself to the Divine favor. But God devised a mode for reconciling the world unto himself through the intervention of his only dear Son. On his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who was "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," "he laid our iniquities," that so, his justice being satisfied by an atonement in our behalf, reconciliation might be effected for us in perfect consistency with all the Divine perfections.

Hence peace was brought down from Heaven to earth, through the sufferings of our incarnate God, who is therefore emphatically called "the Prince of Peace." Now every sinner in the universe may have peace with God, and in his own conscience, if only he welcomes this Savior into his heart, and believes in him as God's appointed instrument for the salvation of the world.

***~~And now also is revealed "good-will toward men"—~~***

*The strongest possible evidence of God's love to men, was the gift of his only dear Son to die for them.* In this view the incarnation of our blessed Lord is always spoken of, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16). [1 John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10); and Jehovah himself is represented as commending his love to us in, and by, this marvelous event, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8).

But far more than this is comprehended in the expression here used by the holy angels. I understand by it, that, through the incarnation of Christ, a full scope is given to the exercise of God's "good-will to man," so that it can flow down in the richest abundance into the soul of every one that is "at peace" with him. Yes, to every believing soul "will God manifest himself as he does not unto the world," and "dwell in him, and abide with him," and give a spirit of adoption, yes, and the witness of the Spirit to attest to him the relation in which he stands to God," and will "rejoice over him to do him good," "rejoicing over him with joy, and resting in his love, and rejoicing over him with singing." There is no expression of good-will which a believing soul is capable of receiving from God, which shall not, more or less, be given by God to every one who is at peace with him through faith in Christ.

***~~And by all this is "the highest possible glory reflected upon God himself"—~~***

There is not a perfection of the Deity which is not honored by this, yes, and more honored than ever it was before. *Wisdom*and *goodness*and *power*and love had been displayed before in the formation of angels, and in the blessedness diffused throughout the whole creation, and the perfect adaptation of everything to its proper end. *Holiness*too and *justice*had been rendered conspicuous by the expulsion of all the fallen angels from Heaven, and the consigning of them over to everlasting misery in Hell. But there had been no trace of *mercy*to be seen in any corner of the universe: nor could the highest intelligence in Heaven conceive how the exercise of this perfection could consist with the rights of justice.

But now the union and harmony of all the Divine perfections was seen through the incarnation and death of God's only dear Son, justice exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy in away of justice, or, as the Psalmist expresses it, "Mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

Well then did the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest." They had seen no "peace" proclaimed in Heaven; no expression of "good-will" towards the fallen angels: but towards men on earth both were most gloriously displayed. Hence with wonder and admiration this blessed assembly pour forth their praises in this appropriate song, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good-will towards men!"

But to contemplate this subject will be of no use, unless we enter fully into it,

***~~II. As a mercy devoutly to be acknowledged—~~***

The *angels*, though in comparison to us they had no interest in this event, came down from Heaven to celebrate and proclaim it. And shall not *we*celebrate it? Shall so much as one of us remain indifferent, now that the glad tidings of it are brought to our ears? Consider, I pray you,

***~~1. Your own personal interest in it—~~***

Where would all of you have been, if God had not devised and executed these means for your restoration to his favor? You have all participated in the *guilt*of the fallen angels, and must all have partaken of their *misery*. What could you have done more than they to avert or mitigate your doom? You would have lived only to fill up the measure of your iniquities, and would then have been reserved, like those unhappy spirits, in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. But, through the substitution of God's only dear Son in your place, and the atonement he has offered in your behalf, there is not so much as one of you that may not be reconciled to God, and made an everlasting object of his favor.

In fact, I who speak to you at this moment, am "an ambassador from God to announce to you these glad tidings." To me, as his servant, is "committed the ministry of reconciliation, to declare, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" and at this very moment it is as if the Lord Jesus Christ himself addressed you: for, as bearing his commission, and actually representing him, "I now beseech you all in Christ's stead: Be reconciled to God, [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-20)."

Will not you then adore God for this revelation of his mercy to you? Will you not all rise as one man to welcome this Savior, and adore him, and to seek through him the blessings he is come to impart?

*What if such a revelation of mercy were sent to the fallen angels, do you think they would hear it with indifference?* Or, if they did hear it with indifference, is there so much as one of you that would not say, "Leave them to themselves; their damnation is just?" Know then, that in condemning them, you condemn yourselves; and "out of your own mouth will God condemn you" at the last day. But I hope better things of you, my brethren; and I call upon you all now at this very moment, to join the angelic choir, and sing, 'Glory to God in the highest, who has opened such a way for the effecting of my reconciliation with him, and for these wonderful displays of good-will to my guilty soul.'

***~~2. The glory that will accrue to God from it to all eternity—~~***

But for this revelation of God's mercy to us, there would have been little difference between earth and Hell: for God would have been no more glorified in the one than in the other. But God is glorified in the midst of us: I trust there are in this very assembly, some at least, who have found peace with God, and can attest from their own experience how sweet are the manifestations of his good-will to their souls. And the time is shortly coming when "all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." And O what a place will this wretched world then be! What bright manifestations of the Savior will then be given to men! Methinks the visions of Mount Tabor will then be common upon earth, and this song of angels will become the common tone of fellowship between man and man throughout the whole world.

But raise your thoughts to *Heaven*, my brethren, and consider for a moment what is passing there. There are already millions of redeemed souls that rest not day or night from these songs of praise. There the chorus is swelling louder and louder every day by the accession of saints made perfect, every one having tuned his harp to the heavenly song, and bursting forth at his first entrance into Heaven into acclamations and hosannas that shall never end. And what shall we say of that period when all the assembly of the redeemed, together with all the holy angels, shall join in one universal uninterrupted song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and honor, and blessing; therefore blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever! [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13)."

Can you, my brethren, contemplate that day, and not rejoice in the expectation of it, and long to be found in the happy number of the redeemed? I call upon you, then, yes I charge you all in the name of the Most High God, to begin this very day this heavenly song. Leave to an ungodly world to make this a season of carnal festivity: you make it a season of holy joy; a very anticipation of Heaven itself.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

But I cannot close the subject without entreating you all to imitate the conduct of these holy angels. They were not content with being happy themselves; they sought to promote the happiness of others by making known to them these glad tidings, and setting them an example of the frame of mind which they should cultivate.

This is the way in which I would recommend to you, my brethren, to spend this holy season. Let each according to his ability improve the opportunities that are afforded to him, of diffusing far and wide this divine knowledge, and of stimulating all around him to the attainment and the exercise of this heavenly joy.

***~~#1473~~***

***~~Inquiry into the Gospel Recommended~~***

***~~[Luke 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.15)~~***

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us."

IT is a rich mercy to have a faithful instructor, who will declare unto us the whole counsel of God. But to obtain any solid benefit, we must search into the truths we hear, and endeavor to get a deep impression of them upon our minds. Without care and diligence on our parts, it would be to little purpose to enjoy the ministry of Paul himself, or even of angels from Heaven.

What would the shepherds have been profited by the tidings which the angels announced to them respecting the Savior's birth, if, like too many among us, they had contented themselves with admiring the eloquence of the chief speaker, or the sweetness and melody of the hymn they sang? They set us a good example: they thought not of amusement, but of edification; not of the *manner*in which the messengers performed their part, but of the *truths*delivered by them. No sooner had their heavenly instructors left them to themselves, than they proposed to go immediately and examine into the things which had been made known unto them.

From this striking incident we shall take occasion to set before you,

***~~I. The event referred to—~~***

***~~In the preceding context we are informed what the tidings were, which were brought by the angels—~~***

These tidings were, that a Savior was that very day born into the world. A general expectation prevailed among the Jews that about that time a person of most extraordinary character should be born in their land, and should become a Savior to the Jewish people. Very erroneous notions indeed obtained respecting the nature of the benefits which he would impart to them: but the more enlightened persons among them extended their views beyond a mere temporal deliverance, and looked forward to spiritual and eternal blessings.

The advent of this person was now proclaimed to the shepherds; and it was declared, that the Child was born "in the city of David, as the prophets had foretold in [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2); and, that not the Jews only, but "all the nations" of the earth, were interested in the salvation which he was come to effect.

The tidings yet further intimated, that the new-born infant was none other than "the Lord of Glory." It was no common child whose birth was announced: though he partook of flesh and blood—yet was he possessed of a nature infinitely superior to that of men or angels. The shepherds were informed that "the Child which was born, and the Son that was given, was," as Isaiah had foretold, "the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)," even "Emmanuel God with us, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14)." As the salvation which he was to accomplish was to be extended to all people, so he was fitted for his work, being the omnipotent Jehovah, who could not fail of success in whatever he undertook.

Lastly, it was declared, that notwithstanding the dignity of his person, and the greatness of his office, he was to be found in a state of the deepest humiliation. It was not in the palaces of Herod or the high-priest, or in the mansions of the great and noble, that this Child was to be found. No, they must go and look for him in the stable of an inn; and they would "find him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger," like one that was ordained to be "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people, [Psalm 22:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.6)."

***~~The same tidings are announced to us at this day—~~***

No angels are now sent, or need to be sent, or such messages; because the Scriptures give us all the information that we can desire. But ministers are ambassadors from God; and are commissioned from God to declare the same joyful tidings as were conveyed to the shepherds by the heavenly hosts. We then make known to you, that that very Jesus, who once lay in the womb of the blessed Virgin, and who, at his birth had no other mansion than a stable, no other cradle than a manger, that same Jesus, I say, was "God manifest in the flesh! 1 Timothy 3:16," even "God over all blessed for ever! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5). We moreover declare unto you, that he is "the Savior of the world," and that "there is no other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ! [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)."

From the regard which the shepherds paid to this event, we proceed to show you,

***~~II. The inquiries to be made concerning it—~~***

No message that comes from God ought to be treated with contempt; much less should one that is of such mysterious import, such universal concern.

Inquire then into,

***~~1. The truth of the fact—~~***

*There is something so astonishing, and almost incredible, in the idea of God becoming man, in order to save a ruined world*, that it should not be hastily embraced, no, not even though it were declared by an angel from Heaven. It befits us to examine what can be adduced in confirmation of it. We should, with the Bereans, "search the Scriptures daily, to see if these things are so, [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11)." We should inquire whether the prophets spoke anything respecting this great event, [1 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-11); whether they gave any reason to believe, that God would ever take upon him our nature, and accomplish our salvation in so strange a way, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2), [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6), [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14). We should inquire what proof the Apostles had, that they were rightly informed; and what evidence there is, that, in relating these things to us, they were divinely inspired, [2 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16), [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.21). In short, we should, if I may so speak, "go to Bethlehem," and see for ourselves; yes, we should "make haste" to do so, lest we lose the opportunity afforded to us, or become indifferent to the report itself.

***~~2. The grounds and reasons of it—~~***

It cannot be that such an event should ever have taken place without some urgent necessity. We should therefore inquire what occasion there was for it. If we do this, we shall find that among the various reasons that will occur to the mind, there are two peculiarly prominent, two that will sufficiently account for the whole mystery; and these are, *Man's happiness*, and *God's honor*.

Without the incarnation and death of the Son of God, man could never have attained to happiness. He was reduced to the state of the fallen angels in respect of guilt; and he must have resembled them in respect of misery, if such a way had not been devised and executed for his recovery. Moreover, it was in this way only that God could save man, and at the same time maintain the honor of his own perfections. *Without an atonement, his justice could not be satisfied: nor could his mercy be exercised in consistency with his truth and holiness*. It was, that "mercy and truth might meet together, and that righteousness and peace might kiss each other, [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10);" it was for this end, I say, that our God became incarnate: and the more we examine into the reasons of this mysterious dispensation, the more we shall be satisfied, that it is in every respect worthy of its Divine Author.

***~~3. Its use and importance—~~***

We are not to amuse ourselves with empty speculations upon such momentous points as this; but to inquire into their practical use and importance. Now these tidings will upon examination be found as important to us as to any people at any period of the world.

Our first and great concern is: How may we be reconciled to our offended God? To this we find a complete and satisfactory answer in the event referred to. The Lord Jesus Christ has become a mediator between God and man; he has taken our nature, in order that he might "bear our sins in his own sacred body," and work out a righteousness whereby we might be justified; so that "God may now be just, and yet the justifier of all who believe, [Romans 3:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25-26)."

In this mystery the burdened conscience finds rest and peace. From this, the vilest of the human race may take encouragement to return to God; and be fully assured, that, for Christ's sake, all his iniquities shall be pardoned, and not one of them be remembered against him any more for ever, [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12). Surely then we should spare no pains in investigating these things, so that we may derive from them the consolation and happiness they are intended to convey.

***~~To recommend yet further this spirit of inquiry, we shall conclude, with showing you the benefits that will result from it:~~***

***~~1. You will receive conviction in your own minds—~~***

The shepherds did not doubt the veracity of the angels; but their faith was certainly confirmed when they had ocular demonstration of the fact that had been related to them. Thus, though we may not really disbelieve the incarnation of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, or doubt whether he be the only, and all-sufficient Savior of the world—yet the more we examine the Scriptures with humility and prayer, the more deep will be our insight into this "great mystery of godliness," and the more shall we attain "a full assurance of understanding" with respect to it.

Let this then incline us to go with one accord to Bethlehem, and to commence the pious search. Yes, let the hope and prospect of so rich a benefit stimulate us to united and instantaneous exertions.

***~~2. You will be disposed to communicate the joyful tidings to others—~~***

This was the first-fruit of the conviction which the shepherds had received: "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child, verse 17." And will you be contented to "put your light under a bushel?" Will you not rather imitate the famished lepers, who when they had found the Syrian camp deserted, and a vast plenty of provisions and booty of every kind lying unprotected, "said to each other: We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace. [2 Kings 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.8-9)."

You find in general, that persons are averse to speak of the great mysteries of redemption, because they have so little considered them: on the contrary, those who feel the importance of them, cannot be restrained from speaking of them: and if they are derided or menaced for their zeal, they will give the same answer as the Apostles did, "We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard! [Acts 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19-20)."

***~~3. You will abound in praises and thanksgivings to God for them—~~***

In this respect also the shepherds manifested the fruits of diligent and humble inquiry: "They returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them, verse 20."

And shall not we feel a similar disposition, if once our hearts are duly impressed with these things? Yes, if we "muse as we ought, the fire will kindle, and at last we shall speak with our tongues [Psalm 39:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.3)." We shall vie even with the angelic hosts in singing, "Glory to God in the highest for the peace which is brought down on earth, and the good-will that is thereby expressed towards man!"

If, then, our fellow-creatures have any claim upon us for the benefit of our instructions, or God has any demands upon our gratitude for the stupendous mercies he has given unto us—then should we search with diligence into the truths that are revealed, in order that we may be quickened to the performance of our duty, and be stimulated to pay our tribute of love to man, and of praise to God.

***~~#1474~~***

***~~The Circumcision of Christ~~***

***~~[Luke 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.21)~~***

"And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

THE naming of children has often been used, not merely for distinction's sake, but also to express some expectation or wish which the parent entertained respecting his child. Of course, the name must frequently have ill-suited the character of the person that bore it. This was remarkably the case with the two first children that were born into the world. Adam named the first Cain, (which signifies getting,) supposing that he had gotten that Promised Seed who was to repair the ruins of the fall: and his second son he named Abel (vanity), having already had abundant evidence of the sinful dispositions of Cain. But in both he was mistaken; for the former proved a murderer; and the latter a godly man.

But God has on several occasions condescended to give names to children previous to their conception in the womb: and the names so given have always designated the real character of the persons themselves. We are particularly informed that God required the child which he gave to Zachariah and Elizabeth to be called *John*, which means grace or favor; because, while he was a favor bestowed on them, he was to be an object of God's peculiar favor, and an occasion of much good to others, [Luke 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.13-14).

The name of *Jesus*also was given by the angel to the Virgin's Child, "before he was conceived in her womb." And how significant this was, it is scarcely needful to mention. It was the same name with *Joshua*, and meant *Divine Savior*: and was therefore most fitly given to Him, who was "Emmanuel, God with us," and who was destined "to save his people from their sins For a fuller explanation of this, see Discussion on [Matthew 1:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21-23)." The time of imposing the name on a child was generally that of his circumcision. It was thus in the case of John, [Luke 1:59-63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.59-63), as also in that of Jesus: the solemnity of that rite giving an additional weight to the name imposed.

But it is to the rite itself, that is, to circumcision, that we shall confine our attention at this time: for, in point of importance, it seems to have been the first and greatest of all the ordinances among the Jews. We propose to show,

***~~I. The nature and intent of circumcision—~~***

***~~It was originally given to Abraham as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace—~~***

God made a covenant with Abraham, to give him a numerous posterity, with the land of Canaan for their inheritance; and at last one particular Seed, "in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed." This promise Abraham believed; and he looked forward to that peculiar Seed as the true and only source of blessings to himself. In consequence of this faith, he was accepted of God; who engaged to treat him as a righteous person, through the righteousness of the Savior imputed to him, [Romans 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3); [Romans 4:18-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-25). And in token that he would execute every part of this gracious covenant, he appointed him and all his posterity to be circumcised. This is the account which Paul himself gives of this ordinance: he calls it a "sign," and a "seal:" a "sign" to Abraham and his seed, that they were the Lord's peculiar people; and a "seal" to them, that God would be his and their God, provided they walked in the faith, and in the steps of their father Abraham [Romans 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11-12). As a sign, it showed them their engagements to God; and as a seal, God's engagements to them.

***~~But, as continued to the Jews, in and after the days of Moses, it was a seal of the covenant of works—~~***

The Mosaic covenant differed materially from that of Abraham, and yet the same ordinance was a seal to both. The rite of circumcision was absolutely indispensable to all, [Genesis 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.14) It was equally enjoined by the law. Compare [Exodus 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.48) with [John 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.22). It was invariably the rite by which, and by which alone, any persons, whether infants or adults, were initiated into that covenant. And in what light were they taught to view it? We answer, as binding them to an observance of the whole law of Moses, and as suspending their salvation on their performance of this condition. In this light Peter viewed it, when that famous controversy respecting circumcision was brought before the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem: he reproved those who insisted on the observance of that rite, for "putting a yoke upon the Christians, which not even the most eminent among the Jews had been able to bear, [Acts 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.1); [Acts 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.10)."

Of course, if circumcision had not bound them to the observance of the whole law of Moses, there could have been no foundation for this objection. Paul yet more strongly confirms this statement: for he says to those who were in danger of being misled by the Judaizing Christians, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: for I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law, [Galatians 5:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-3)."

Here then the point is clear; that though circumcision was given primarily as a seal of the covenant of grace, it was eventually (though not expressly called so) a seal of the covenant of works also. From the time that it was first instituted, it continued to be a sign and a seal; but the privileges of which they were a seal, and the obligations of which they were a sign, varied according to the nature of the covenant to which the rite itself was annexed:

to *Abraham*, it sealed the covenant of grace;  
to *Moses*and the Jews, it sealed the covenant of works.

This view of the rite will throw light upon,

***~~II. The reasons of our Lord's submitting to it—~~***

These were chiefly two;

***~~1. That he might appear to be the Promised Seed—~~***

The Person in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was marked out by God as one particular individual, who should in due time arise, and in whom "the covenant made with Abraham should be confirmed." Paul infers this from the very term used on that occasion being in the singular number: and though we should not have conceded to him that inference, as a critic, we doubt not but that the truth he affirms was intended, by the Holy Spirit, to be marked in that very expression on which he founds his remark, [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16). At all events, the Messiah was to be of the posterity of Abraham; all of whom were circumcised: therefore, if Jesus were not circumcised, he could have no claim, no allowable claim, to this distinction: whatever he might be, he could not be acknowledged to be a child of Abraham. It is true, this mark could not distinguish him as the Messiah, because it was common to all the Jews: but the lack of it would have been an infallible proof that he was not the Messiah; and therefore he submitted to receive it.

***~~2. That he might be fully under the obligations of the Mosaic law—~~***

Mankind at large were subject only to the moral law; and therefore for their redemption it would have been sufficient for the Son of God to assume our nature: but the house of Israel, for whose salvation he was sent in the first instance, were under the ceremonial law; and therefore for their redemption he must be made under that also. This is particularly noticed by Paul, who says, that "in the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5)."

Now it was by circumcision that the children of the Jews were initiated into the Mosaic covenant, and brought fully into subjection to the law. Hence therefore Christ submitted to circumcision, and acknowledged at all times his obligation to obey that law in everything. He says himself, "I have not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them." There is one very remarkable instance of his obedience to the law, which reflects considerable light on the subject before us.

Baptism was not any part of the original law: but it had been introduced as an additional rite for the admission of proselytes into the Jewish religion: and the introduction of it had been so far sanctioned by God himself, that John, the forerunner of our Lord, was expressly commissioned to baptize all who desired an admission into the kingdom of the Messiah. Hence Jesus Christ himself went to be baptized by him: and upon John's declining it as unsuitable to the dignity of our Lord, Jesus said to him, "Allow it to be so now; for thus it befits us to fulfill all righteousness, [Matthew 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.15)."

The same strict adherence to the law was observable in him at all times, except when the execution of his high office, and the establishment of his Divine authority, required a temporary deviation from it. Indeed, *he not only fulfilled the law, but was himself the completion of it*; every part of it being accomplished in him as its great prototype. In a word, if he would redeem mankind, he must do it by obeying that law which we had broken, and enduring those penalties which we had incurred. This therefore he undertook to do, that, by his atoning sufferings and perfect obedience, he might restore us to our forfeited inheritance. Of this work his circumcision was the commencement: it was the commencement of those sufferings which constitute his atoning sacrifice, and of that obedience which constitutes our justifying righteousness. It was the commencement of that "work which God had given him to do," and which terminated at last in what the Apostle fitly calls, "his obedience unto death."

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~III. The lessons, which his submission to it may teach us—~~***

It may well teach us,

***~~1. To observe the instituted ordinances of our religion—~~***

Circumcision, with respect to us, is done away, and is superseded by the milder rite of baptism. But baptism is as necessary for us, as circumcision was to the Jews; and it is to be administered to the very same persons.

We know that this is a point disputed by many; who are fond of bringing forward the controversy on all occasions. Far be it from us to encourage a controversial spirit: we would avoid it, and discourage it to the utmost of our power. Yet it is necessary that we should instruct those who are under our charge in all things relating to their duty; and therefore, without offence to others, we may be allowed to state with plainness our views and sentiments.

Two reasons in particular are urged for not administering baptism to infants: the one is, that we are not anywhere in Scripture commanded to do so; the other is, that children are not capable of all the ends of baptism; since baptism presupposes a knowledge and approbation of those principles, into which we are baptized.

But to this we answer, What occasion was there for renewed orders concerning a thing that had already existed two thousand years? A rite more suited to our dispensation was introduced; but the persons interested in it were not therefore deprived of their birthright. If it was intended to abridge the privileges of children, we might well expect that such an intention should have been expressed: but where has God expressed it? and who but God can take away the privileges which God has given?

Again: If it is any argument against the baptism of children, that they cannot understand the principles which they become pledged to maintain, it is equally so against the circumcision of infants: and whoever will condemn that, let him answer it to God.

Be it so; children are not capable of all the ends of baptism. But was Christ capable of all the ends of circumcision? Was not one end of it to put away (emblematically then, and really afterwards) the lusts of the flesh? But had he any lusts to put away? Yet he was circumcised: and consequently children may now be baptized, though they are not capable of all the ends of baptism.

Once more: Are not children capable of receiving the blessings of the covenant? for our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for *of such*is the kingdom of God." And if they are capable of the blessings of the covenant, are they not also of the seal; when that seal is nothing more than a token from God that the blessings shall be theirs?

We have said thus much, not for the sake of stirring up controversy, but of confirming you in the principles, which, as members of the Church of England, you profess.

This only we add, that if Jesus Christ submitted to circumcision for the good of his enemies, much more should you consult the benefit of your children by dedicating them to God in baptism.

***~~2. To seek that purity of which circumcision was an emblem—~~***

What the true circumcision was, we are abundantly informed both by Moses and the prophets, [Deuteronomy 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 10.16), [Jeremiah 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 4.4). Even at that time circumcision, if not accompanied with a suitable course of life, was accounted for uncircumcision. And much more, under our dispensation, must those only be accounted Christians, who are such in deed and in truth, [Romans 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.25); [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29).

We will call upon you all then, not to rest in your baptism, as though that made you Christians, but to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and "the answer of a good conscience towards God, 1 Peter 3:21." It is remarkable that Paul represents this very purification as the thing intended to be produced by the circumcision of Christ. We are (federally) "circumcised in him:" but (personally) we are to "put away the body of the sins of the flesh, [Colossians 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10-11)." And the very promise which God has given us, is, that "he will circumcise our hearts, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, [Deuteronomy 30:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.6)."

Look to it then, my brethren, that this seal of our covenant be found in you. "Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is renewed in righteousness and true holiness." It may be painful thus to mortify the flesh; but it must be done, if you would have any well-founded hope towards God: for, notwithstanding "salvation is bestowed by grace through faith," yet it is an unalterable truth, that "those who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

***~~#1475~~***

***~~Presentation of Christ in the Temple~~***

**[Luke 2:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.22-24)**

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

IT is a comfortable consideration to the poor and ignorant, that they may possess the knowledge of salvation, though they have never been instructed in the nature of the Mosaic law, or seen its full connection with Christianity. But it is certain that a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures tends exceedingly to establish us in the faith, and to quicken us to a holy obedience. The importance of being acquainted with the Old Testament, appears from the frequent reference which there is to it in the New Testament.

Sometimes we meet with references put interrogatively, "What is written in the law?" "What says the law?" and sometimes positively, "It is written in the law." Hence it is obvious that, *without an acquaintance with the law, much of the force and evidence of the Christian Scriptures must be lost*: and therefore we cannot but earnestly recommend an attention to the Old Testament, as the means of more fully comprehending the New Testament. In the short passage before us, we are directed no less than three times to compare the history with the ordinances which had before been given to Moses: the time of the Virgin's purification, the offering she offered, and the presentation of her infant Son in the temple, are all said to be "according to the law of the Lord." To that then we shall refer you, while we consider,

***~~I. The purification of the mother—~~***

For the elucidation of this subject, there are several distinct inquiries to be made—

***~~What did the law enjoin in relation to purification after child-birth?~~***

A woman was deemed unclean for seven days after her deliverance from child-birth, so that she rendered every one unclean who even came in contact with her: and for thirty-three days afterwards she was not permitted to touch any holy thing, or to enter into the temple. The time was doubled for a female child: the mother was then more or less unclean for eighty days.

She was then to come to the door of the tabernacle, and to present there a lamb and a pigeon; the pigeon for a sin-offering, and the lamb for a burnt-offering: by the sin-offering acknowledging her sinfulness, and by the burnt-offering testifying her gratitude for the mercies given unto her. If the mother was poor, she might offer a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons; the burnt-offering might be suited to her means; but, whatever were her circumstances, her sin-offering must be the same: because the same atonement is necessary for all; but the modes of testifying our gratitude must vary according to our various situations in life, See [Leviticus 12:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 12.1-8).

Such was the ordinance itself. We proceed to ask,

***~~What sentiments was this law intended to convey?~~***

The very offerings which were presented on the occasion, intimated, that those who had experienced deliverance from child-birth had just occasion for renewed expressions of humiliation and gratitude. Such is the state of human nature since the fall; that a taint is contracted, and communicated also, by that law which was given to man in innocence, "Increase and multiply." David says, "I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Indeed the very pangs of child-birth, remind all who are called to endure them, of the first transgression; and, as being inflicted on account of sin, they call for acknowledgments of our sinful state. This, I say, was intimated by the sin-offering, whereby "an atonement was made for her who offered it." The burnt-offering, as a token of gratitude, needs no comment; every one must see that it was proper for the occasion, and justly expressed what might be supposed to be the state of her mind.

Yet there is good reason to inquire,

***~~What necessity was there for the mother of our Lord to obey this law?~~***

Certainly, whatever taint may be contracted by others, none could have been by her on this occasion. Yet, as the manner of her conception was not generally known, and Joseph was her reputed husband, it was proper to comply with the requisitions of the law, as much as if she had borne a child in the common way. It would have ill become her to cast a stumbling-block before others on this occasion: and her own heart was so full of love to God, that she counted nothing a burden that she could do for him. She determined therefore, as Jesus himself did in the instance of his baptism, to fulfill all righteousness to the utmost of her power.

It may be asked however,

***~~What is this law to us?~~***

Doubtless, as to the *ceremonial*part of it, it is abrogated altogether: but, as to its spiritual import, it speaks as loudly to us as ever it did to the Jews. Humiliation and gratitude are the proper fruits of mercies received. I say, humiliation first, and then gratitude. This is not the order in which these feelings arise in the mind of the ungodly, but it is the order in which they rise in the heart of a Christian: a sense of unworthiness abases his soul in the dust, and enhances, beyond all expression, the favors conferred upon him. We appeal to every spiritual person for the truth of this: and we call on every one, whatever are the mercies he has received, to express his sense of them in this way. Certainly those who have been delivered from the pains of child-birth, have abundant reason to present such offerings to God: and we do not hesitate to say, that their expressions of gratitude should be diversified and enlarged according to the opportunities and abilities that God has given them. We must not however limit the subject to this particular deliverance; for, whatever mercy God has given unto us, we should endeavor to requite him according to the loving-kindness he has shown us.

Having thus considered the purification of the mother, let us direct our attention to,

***~~II. The presentation of her Son—~~***

Here is the same reference to the law, as before. We will state to you,

***~~1. What connection it had with Christ's presentation in the temple—~~***

Upon the destruction of the Egyptian first-born—while not one of the first-born, either of men or cattle, that belonged to Israel, died—God claimed the first-born of Israel, both of men and beasts, as his peculiar property, [Exodus 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.2); and required that the reason of his so doing should be transmitted carefully to the last posterity, [Exodus 13:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 13.11-14). Afterwards he accepted the tribe of Levi and their cattle in the place of the first-born and their cattle, [Numbers 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 3.11-13); and appointed them, with very peculiar and impressive solemnities, [Numbers 8:5-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 8.5-23), to be consecrated to his service in their stead. He appointed also that the precise number of the persons belonging to each should be ascertained; and it being found that the first-born were two hundred and seventy-three more in number than the Levites, he ordered that they should be redeemed at the price of five shekels a-piece, and that the money should be paid to Aaron and his sons for the service of the tabernacle, [Numbers 3:39-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 3.39-51). And from that time it was an established law, that every male which opened the womb should be holy to the Lord, [Numbers 18:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 18.15-16); the clean beasts were to be sacrificed to him; and the unclean to be redeemed with a lamb: but the first-born of men were universally to be redeemed; his mercy to them, and his consequent property in them, being thus kept in everlasting remembrance.

Now Christ, as Mary's first-born, came under this law; and though his life had never been forfeited, yet, to fulfill the law, and cut off all occasion of offence, he must be redeemed in the same manner as others. For this purpose his parents carried him to the Temple, and presented him before the Lord, in the way that God had appointed.

But it may be asked, Did the blessed Virgin wish to exempt him from the peculiar service of her God? No, she knew that he was sent into the world to be his servant, and that his ear was bored to the door-post as soon as he assumed our nature. Compare [Psalm 40:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6) with [Hebrews 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5). But she would omit nothing which the Law required, either at her hands or his: teaching us thereby to sink all personal concerns in a regard for the honor of our God, and the good of our fellow-creatures.

***~~2. What their compliance with the law in this instance may teach us—~~***

Loudly indeed does it speak to mothers. Behold the blessed Virgin taking her infant child "to present him to the Lord:" is not this the thing which you should do the very moment you embrace your new-born babe? Should you not do it every time that you administer to its necessities, or supply its wants? Methinks you should never draw out the bosom to it, without lifting up your heart in prayer for it, and entreating God to accept and own it, as a child of his.

How can any of you endure the thought of bringing forth for Satan, and nourishing a child for him? Surely your prayer should often be 'Lord, I ask not for my child the things of this world; (give him food and clothing, and I am content;) but I ask for grace; I ask for mercy; I ask for peace; I ask for all the blessings of salvation for him. I ask that you yourself may be his portion, and that he may be the lot of your inheritance. Yes, you who have travailed in birth with your dear children, let your anxieties for them be summed up in this: that they may be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

If you "travail in birth with them again and again until Christ is formed in them, so far from pitying your anguish, I will rejoice over you, and say, that "your labor shall not be in vain."

Little do mothers consider how much, under God, the salvation of their children depends on them. Little do they think how the prayers they have offered for, and with, their children, and the tears they have shed over them, would impress their tender minds, long after their tongues have been silent in the grave: and probably induce a penitential sorrow, when some concurring providence shall have softened and prepared their minds. Were parents more anxious about the spiritual welfare of their children, we would not so often find them in their declining years bowed down with trouble, and "their grey hairs brought with sorrow to the grave."

And does not the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple speak to young people also? Yes surely; and that too in most instructive terms. You are ready to think it too early yet awhile to give yourselves to the Lord: but can that ever be too early, which is your most indispensable duty, your highest privilege, your surest felicity? Did *Samuel*ever regret that he was given to the Lord even from his mother's womb? Did *Timothy*spend a less happy life, because he followed the faith and piety of Lois and Eunice? If you could but once taste the blessedness of true religion, you would never think of it as a toil, or dread it as a bondage: having "drunk water out of the wells of salvation," you would most contentedly leave to others the muddy draughts which they with difficulty collect from their own "broken cisterns." Be prevailed upon, then, to make the attempt to give yourselves to the Lord; to commence that blessed course which Jesus trod before you. You have a special promise given to you by God himself; "They that seek me early, shall find me." The Lord impress it on your minds, and lead you to a sweet experience of its truth and blessedness!

But the subject speaks to *all*of us; yes, I say, to all. Do we not all profess to be "the Church of the first-born?" and is it not on that ground that we hope to be numbered with "the general assembly, who are written in Heaven?" Behold then, we all belong to God: he lays claim to every one of us, and says, "They are mine." True, "we have been redeemed, yes redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." But *why*have we been redeemed? That we might not serve the Lord? Nay; but that we might serve him: "Christ has redeemed us, that he might purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." In the name of God then I say, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price; therefore you should glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his."

And here let me observe to you, that there is no commutation of service admitted or allowed. If all the tribes of the earth should offer to stand in your place, and to serve God in your stead, he would not regard their offer, nor dispense with your service. All of you must surrender up yourselves to him. You have already been devoted to him in baptism: remember then the vows that are upon you: Remember "whose you are, and whom you are bound to serve:" and know assuredly, that those words which are so often, but so ignorantly, uttered by us in our prayers, contain the very truth of God, "his service is perfect freedom."

***~~#1476~~***

***~~Christ the Consolation of Israel~~***

***~~[Luke 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.25)~~***

"And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."

*IN every age of the Church, there have been some distinguished from the common herd of professors by their sincere zeal and piety.* At the time when our blessed Lord came into the world, the Jewish nation were in a most degenerate state: yet were there some, who, with humble and assured expectation, "looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Among those was that aged saint, "to whom it was revealed, that he should not see death, until he should have seen the Lord's Christ:" "the same man was just and devout," waiting for the sight of him whom he regarded as "the Consolation of Israel," and expecting it as the consummation of all his wishes.

The description here given of our Lord is worthy of peculiar attention; while the conduct of the holy patriarch is also replete with useful instruction. We propose therefore to consider,

***~~I. In what respects Christ is "the Consolation of Israel"—~~***

The Scriptures inform us, that there is consolation in Christ, [Philippians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1), even abundant, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5), and everlasting consolation, [2 Thessalonians 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.16-17). Our Lord himself, speaking of the Spirit, calls him "*another*Comforter, [John 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16)," intimating thereby that he himself had sustained and executed this office. But as the Israel of God in that age were in some respects different from the Israel that now is, it will be proper to distinguish between them, and to show in what respects this glorious title is applicable to Christ,

***~~I. In reference to the Jewish Church—~~***

*He came to give them clearer light.* Moses had revealed to them the will of God: but he had put a veil upon his face to intimate the darkness of that dispensation, [2 Corinthians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.13); and had expressly referred them to a prophet who would arise after him, to whom they must look for fuller instructions, [Deuteronomy 18:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.15). The prophets of later ages taught the people to look forward to the times of the Messiah, when the glorious light should arise upon the Church, to chase away all the clouds of darkness in which it was then involved, [Isaiah 60:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.1-3). [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2); insomuch that at the time of Christ's advent there was a general and assured expectation, that a fuller revelation was about to be given to them by him: "We know that Messiah Comes, who is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things [John 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.25).

*He came also to deliver them from the yoke of the ceremonial law.*This was a heavy burden, which not even the most spiritual among them was able to support. This was never intended to continue any longer than the period fixed for the Messiah's advent. It was foretold by David, that a priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek; and consequently, with the change of priesthood, there must be a change of the whole law that related to it, [Hebrews 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.11-12). Other prophets spoke of "a new covenant, [Jeremiah 31:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.31-34)," and of "a shaking again, not of the earth only, but also of the heavens, [Haggai 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.6);" by which they intimated that the old covenant should vanish away, [Hebrews 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8), and that the new order of things, which could not be shaken, should remain, after that the former was abrogated and dissolved, [Hebrews 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25); [Hebrews 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.27).

*He came moreover to establish a universal empire.*The Jews in general misunderstood the prophecies relating to this event, and supposed that their Messiah would erect a temporal monarchy: but those who had a clearer insight into the meaning of the prophets, expected the establishment of a spiritual kingdom, wherein they should not merely be "delivered from all their enemies, but should serve God without fear in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of their life, [Luke 1:72-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.72-75)."

To those who viewed him as the appointed Source of these benefits, his advent must be an occasion of most exalted joy: and accordingly it was announced as such by the angelic hosts, who said, "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord! [Luke 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10-11)."

***~~2. In reference to the Christian Church—~~***

Having partaken of all the preceding benefits, we are led to contemplate the Savior more immediately in reference to our own necessities.

*O, what a consolation is he to us, while we view him as the Atoning Sacrifice for our sins!*What tongue can utter the feelings of a contrite soul, when, after many fears of God's wrath, it is enabled to see the efficacy of Christ's atonement? *O, the peace, the joy, the exultation that arise from every fresh application of his blood to the conscience!*Well is "the peace said to pass understanding," and "the joy of believing to be unspeakable and full of glory!"

*But we are enabled to view him further as our "Advocate with the Father."* In this light, he is, if possible, more precious than in the former. The comfort springing from his sacrifice would be greatly diminished, if we did not know that he is entered into Heaven with his own blood, to plead the merit of it in our behalf. What should we do under any fresh contracted guilt, if we had not an Intercessor, through whom we might return to God, and offer our petitions with confidence of acceptance? Weak and frail as we are, we would sit down in despair: but having such a High-Priest that is passed into the heavens for us, we may come boldly to the throne of grace, assured of obtaining mercy, and of finding grace to help us in the time of need, [Hebrews 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.14); [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16).

*Further, we behold him also as a fountain of all spiritual blessings.*"It has pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). Whatever we need, whether wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, there is a fullness of it all in him; and we may say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)." What an unspeakable consolation must this be to those who feel their emptiness and poverty! What blessed confidence does it bring into the soul, when, under a full conviction that we have not in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5), we are enabled to say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

In these views "Christ is so precious to those who believe in him," that they "account all things but loss and dung in comparison with the knowledge of him [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)."

It will not be unprofitable to consider,

***~~II. In what manner we are to "wait for" him—~~***

In the precise sense in which this expression is used in the text, we can now only wait for his coming to judge the world. But there is a spiritual advent to the believers's soul, which every believer is entitled to expect: for, as Christ said to his disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you, [John 14:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.18); so he says to every obedient follower, "I will come unto you, and make my abode with you, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23)." This advent therefore we are entitled to expect, and we should wait for it:

***~~1. In a renunciation of all other comforters—~~***

The ungodly, in their troubles, go, like the Jews of old, to the creature for help and comfort, [Hosea 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 5.13).

The *worldling*flees to his business.

The *voluptuary*flees to his indulgences.

The man of *gaiety*flees to his vanities.

The *formalist*flees to his duties.

They all "forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13)." But we must go to Him, who invites the weary and heavy-laden, and gives them assurances of rest, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28). The language of our hearts must be, "Lord, to whom shall we go! [John 6:68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.68). Whom have we in Heaven but you! and there is none upon earth that we desire besides you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)." "None else shall save us; for in you, even in you alone, the fatherless finds mercy, [Hosea 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.3)."

***~~2. In a firm persuasion of his all-sufficiency—~~***

We shall in vain hope for comfort in Christ, if we doubt either his power or his willingness to save us. "If our faith be wavering, we shall receive nothing of the Lord, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7)." We should not therefore come to Christ, saying, "Lord, if you can do anything for us, interpose and help us, [Mark 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.22);" but, "Lord, I know that with you all things are possible! [Job 42:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.2)."

Your *blood*can cleanse from the deepest guilt, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7), [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18).

Your *grace*can vanquish the most deep-rooted lusts, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

One *glimpse*of your countenance can turn all my sorrows into joy, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6), [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11).

"Having you, though possessed of nothing else, I possess all things, [2 Corinthians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.10)."

What a holy glorying would such views of Christ introduce into the soul, even if its distresses were ever so accumulated, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10). Surely, our consolations should abound not only above, but also in proportion to, our heaviest afflictions, 2 Corinthians 1:5.

***~~3. In an assured expectation of his promised advent—~~***

That he has promised to come to the souls of his afflicted people has been before shown. Indeed a very principal end of his heavenly mission was, "to comfort those who mourn in Zion, and to appoint unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3)." Will he then relinquish the work he has undertaken? Will he violate his own engagements? "Is he a man, that he should lie, or the Son of Man, that he should repent?" Let us not then listen to the suggestions of unbelief and impatience, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9); but rather obey the voice of the prophet, who says, "Though the vision tarries, wait for it; for in due time it shall come and shall not tarry, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)."

***~~Our improvement of this subject shall be,~~***

***~~1. In a way of inquiry—~~***

What do we make the ground of our consolation? We see what is supremely and exclusively the consolation of Israel. O that our regard to Christ may testify for us, that we belong to the true Israel!

***~~2. In a way of encouragement—~~***

Consolation implies some previous trouble. Now, trouble, if not of a temporal—yet certainly of a spiritual kind, we must all feel. Let us acquaint ourselves with Christ, and we shall never be at a loss for comfort. Let us live near to him, and we may defy all the powers of earth and Hell! See [Isaiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.9).

***~~#1477~~***

***~~Testimony Borne to Jesus in the Temple~~***

***~~[Luke 2:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.28-32)~~***

He took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, nd the glory of Your people Israel."

WHILE we are noticing, as they arise, the various steps of our Savior's humiliation, we shall have repeated occasions to observe, how carefully God has guarded us against the unfavorable impressions which we might otherwise have received from them. At no season was the Divine interposition more remarkable than at our Savior's birth. The circumstances that attended it were as humiliating as could well be conceived; for he was born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough. But the descent of angels from Heaven to announce and celebrate his advent, was more than sufficient to counterbalance the effect which the baseness of his appearance might produce.

Thus it was also when he was presented to the Lord by his parents, at the time of his mother's purification in the temple. He was presented in order to be redeemed, as all other first-born children were; as though his life had been forfeited, as well as theirs. But, as a counterpoise to this, an aged saint, to whom it had been promised that he should not die until he had seen the Messiah, was warned by an express revelation from above to go into the temple for that purpose. While he was there, the child was brought thither by his parents; and this holy man was inspired to distinguish his person, and to proclaim his character. His language on this occasion is very instructive: it shows us,

***~~I. What views we should have of Christ—~~***

We have no reason to think that in his outward appearance the infant Jesus was at all different from others. But this aged saint, on taking him up in his arms, announced him,

***~~1. As the divinely-appointed Savior—~~***

It was to God the Father that this holy man addressed his devout acknowledgments, and said, "My eyes have seen your Salvation." We must never forget, that *the Father is the fountain from whence the streams of salvation flow*. He is "the giver of every good and perfect gift;" and the gift of his dear Son to a ruined world was altogether the fruit of his love. "He prepared for him a body." He qualified him for his office by an immeasurable communication of the Holy Spirit. He upheld him in the execution of his work, protected and preserved him until his hour was come, and enabled him to persevere until he could say, "It is finished."

Moreover the Father himself bore testimony to him under that character. Thrice, by an audible voice from Heaven, did he point him out to the world in that view; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear him." He constrained angels (both good and bad), and men (enemies as well as friends), to unite their testimony with his.

In raising up Jesus from the dead, he declared also with irresistible evidence, that Jesus was his Son; and that what he had done for the salvation of the world, was accepted in our behalf. The Apostles, whom he sent forth to instruct the world, were everywhere to bear this testimony, that the "Father had sent his Son to be the Savior of the world:" and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon thousands, both in his gracious influences and miraculous powers, in order to confirm their word.

In a word, our blessed Lord himself always spoke of himself as sent by the Father to perform His will; and therefore, while we thankfully acknowledge the readiness with which Jesus undertook our cause, we must always regard him as God's salvation, commissioned by him for that purpose, accepted by him in that capacity, and proclaimed by him for that end.

***~~2. As the universal Savior—~~***

The immediate and primary objects of the Messiah's attention were, (as our Lord himself informs us,) "the lost sheep of the House of Israel, [Matthew 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.24)." And, after his resurrection, he gave especial commandment, that his Apostles, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel to all nations, should make the first offers of salvation to the Jews, even in that very city where he had so recently been condemned to death, and to that very people who had imbrued their hands in his blood, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47). Accordingly we find that the Apostles forbore to preach unto the Gentiles, until the Jews had obstinately rejected their testimony, and poured contempt upon the offered salvation, [Acts 13:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.46).

But the ultimate design of God was to give salvation to the world at large. If the Jews were to have the peculiar glory of giving birth to the Savior, and of having the Gospel first ministered to them, they were not to engross all the benefits of his mission. The Gentiles, who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, were to behold his light, and to be guided by him into the paths of peace. Wherever there is a fallen child of Adam, there is a person for whom Christ came into the world, and to whom the Gospel, if thankfully accepted, shall become the power of God unto salvation. We are of Gentile extraction, and to us are the blessings of salvation offered: nor should we ever name the name of Christ, without feeling our obligations to him, and glorying in him as "all our salvation and all our desire."

These two points which we have noticed in the text, as distinguishing the character of the Savior, are united by the prophet; who represents the Father as addressing his Son in these memorable terms: "It is a light thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation unto the ends of the earth, [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6)."

That these views are not merely of a speculative nature, will be evident, while we notice,

***~~II. The blessed effects of them upon a dying hour—~~***

That the aged saint was in a measure affected, as Jacob was at the sight of his beloved Joseph, [Genesis 46:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 46.30), we may very well concede: but still there was a difference between the two cases, corresponding with the difference between the objects seen: the one was affected as a parent, at the sight of a long-lamented son; the other was affected as a believer, at the sight of him on whom all his hopes, and the hopes of a ruined world, were built. The fact is, that a sight of Christ in his true character has now, and at all times, the very same effect. The mere circumstance of beholding his bodily presence, or of taking him up into one's arms, would never reconcile one to the thoughts of death: but the beholding of him as the Author and Procurer of salvation, (as we may do by faith,) will universally,

***~~1. Divest death of its terrors—~~***

That which makes death terrible, is sin. We know in our minds that sin is hateful unto God, and that he has denounced his heavy judgments against it: and consequently while that continues unrepented of, we cannot but feel a secret dread of God's tribunal, and of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. But, if we have "by faith seen him, who is invisible," if we have embraced in our hearts the Lord Jesus, and relied upon him as the appointed Savior of the world, what have we to fear? "Our iniquity is forgiven, and our sin is covered" by "believing in Jesus, we are justified from all things;" even "sins of a crimson dye are made white as snow." The sting of death therefore is drawn; and we may adopt the language of the Apostle, "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 15:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.56-57)."

It is true, that many, who are ignorant of Christ, are enabled to brave death on a field of battle, and even to look forward to it with composure in its more gradual approaches. But in both cases *they either put away the thought of God's judgment altogether, or deceive themselves with the idea that they are prepared to meet it.*Let them only be undeceived respecting the state of their own souls, and the state to which alone the promises of salvation are attached, and the most stout-hearted man in the universe will tremble: and it is uniformly found, that those persons who most appear to disregard death, are most averse to hear of it, or to reflect on its consequences on the souls of men. It is the knowledge of Christ alone that affords a Scriptural hope of acceptance with God; and therefore it is that alone which will enable us to view with comfort the approach of death.

***~~2. Make it an object of desire—~~***

Paul tells us that to whoever "it is Christ to live, it is also gain to die:" and he speaks of himself as "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which he considered as far better" than the happiest state he could enjoy on earth. Would we know what it was that made death so desirable to him? He tells us, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me." And in proportion as our views of Christ are clear, the same effects will follow: "We shall rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Who can hear that prayer of Christ's, "Father, I will that those whom you have given me may be with me, to behold that glory which you have given me;" who, I say, can hear this, and not long for its accomplishment?

There may remain in us somewhat of a natural fear of dissolution; and a regard for our families may perhaps make us wish to prolong for a season our stay on earth: but when, like Stephen, we behold the Lord Jesus and the glories of the invisible world, we feel every other tie dissolved, and long to have "mortality swallowed up of life." We are now like persons in a foreign land, who, after having formed many friendships there, are reluctant to leave it; but, feeling the stronger attractions of their own family and country, relinquish present comforts, in the hope and prospect of others more sublime. This is represented as the state of all who have made any progress in the divine life; they are "looking for, and hastening to, the coming of the day of Christ, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12)." Some may enjoy more of triumph in their end, and others less; but the testimony of David is found almost universally true, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace, [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37)."

We may learn from hence,

***~~1. In what manner we should approach God's temple below—~~***

It is particularly noticed respecting this distinguished saint, that "he came by the Spirit into the temple." Thus was his mind prepared for those manifestations of the Savior which he there received.

And what is the reason that we come up so often to the house of God without any benefit to our souls? Is it not that we come thither merely in a customary formal way, perhaps from no better motive than curiosity, and never pray to God for his Spirit to accompany us thither? We do not go up with enlarged expectations: we do not even think of having Christ revealed to our souls. But why do we not expect to see Christ there? Has he not said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world?" And is not this the particular direction of God to his ministers, "Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes! [Isaiah 62:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.11)."

Know then, brethren, that, though you cannot see Christ in the flesh, you may by faith obtain a far brighter view of him than that holy man enjoyed who embraced him in his arms: and if you would have such manifestations of him to your souls in the house of God, you must pray to God for his Spirit to accompany you to his house, and take away the veil from your hearts. "Be not straitened in yourselves, and you shall not be straitened in your God:" only come hungering and thirsting after Christ, and you shall never be "sent away empty."

***~~2. In what way we may secure admission into his temple above—~~***

There is one great preparation for an entrance into Heaven, and that is, *a sight of Christ by faith*. "This is life eternal, to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Without the knowledge of Christ no man can behold the face of God in peace. "There is no other foundation whereon any man can build," "nor any other name whereby any man can be saved." It was this which saved those who looked forward to him before his advent; and it is this which alone saves any since his advent.

O that we duly considered this! How diligently should we then inquire, What are my views of Christ? How am I affected with them? Do they lead me to cast myself upon him? Do they enable me to rejoice in him? Do I under the influence of them look forward to the period of my dissolution as that which will introduce me to his more immediate presence, and to the consummation of all my hopes? Brethren, rest not in a mere nominal profession; be not content with calling Christ, *Lord*, *Lord*; but seek such views of him as shall transform you into his image, and make you fit for his glory.

***~~#1478~~***

***~~The Ends and Effects of Christ's Exhibition to the Would~~***

**[Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35)**

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

*THE ways of God are deep and unsearchable. The richest displays of his love have been often accompanied with the heaviest afflictions.*The honor bestowed on Paul was the forerunner of great sufferings. Thus the Virgin's distinguished privilege of bringing the Son of God into the world was a prelude to the severest anguish to her soul. Even the gift of the Messiah himself, while it saves some, is the occasion of a more dreadful condemnation to others. It was foretold, that, as this was one end, so it would also be an effect, of Christ's mission.

***~~I. The remote ends of Christ's exhibition to the world—~~***

God has on the whole consulted his creatures' good as well as his own glory; but he will not effect the happiness of every individual.

***~~The "fall of many" was one end of Christ's coming—~~***

His appearance was contrary to the carnal expectations of the Jews. Hence he became a stumbling-block to almost the whole nation. It had been plainly foretold that he should be so, [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15). This prophecy is frequently quoted by the inspired writers, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23), [1 Peter 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.8). Our Lord himself expressly refers to it, [Matthew 21:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.42), [Matthew 21:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.44). He elsewhere confirms the declaration contained in it, [John 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.39).

***~~The coming of Christ actually produced this effect—~~***

Many took offence at him: his base parentage, his poor appearance, his sublime doctrines, his high pretensions, etc. Thus they became more wicked than they would otherwise have been, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). Thus also they perished with a more aggravated condemnation, [Matthew 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.22).

But this was by no means the chief end.

***~~The "rising of many" was another end of Christ's coming—~~***

Jews and Gentiles were in a most deplorable condition: they were guilty, helpless, hopeless. From this state Christ came to raise them. This also was a subject of prophecy, [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14); and our Lord often declares that this was the end of his coming, [Luke 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.10), [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10); hence he calls himself "the resurrection and the life, [John 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25)."

***~~And his coming produced this effect also—~~***

Few believed on him before his death: but myriads were raised by him soon after. They rose from a death in sin to a life of holiness. This effect is still carrying on in the world. Many from their own experience can say with Hannah, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8).—

These ends, however, were more remote.

***~~II. The more immediate end—~~***

The minds of men in reference to God were very little known: neither ceremonial nor moral duties could fully reveal their state; but he came to make it clear how every one was affected towards God.

No man ever met with so much contradiction as he, [Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3). He was contradicted by all persons Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, Herodians, on all occasions. In all that he taught about his person, work, and offices, and in all he did, in working miracles, etc., in the most virulent manner. They came to catch, ensnare, and provoke him, in spite of the clearest evidence They would rather ascribe his miracles to Beelzebub, and his doctrines to madness, impiety, and inspiration of the devil, and in the most solemn seasons—even on the cross itself. This was frequently as a sword in Mary's bosom.

***~~By his becoming such a mark, the thoughts of men's hearts were revealed—~~***

The *Pharisees*wished to be thought righteous;  
the *Scribes*, the free-thinkers of the day, pleaded for candor;  
the *Herodians*professed indifference for all religion;  
yet they all combined against Christ. Thus they showed what was in their hearts.

***~~The preaching of Christ still makes the same discovery—~~***

Christ is still a butt of contradiction in the world. Before his Gospel is preached, all seem to be agreed; but when he is set forth, discord and division ensue, [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36). Then the externally righteous people show their enmity; then the indifferent discover the same readiness to persecute. On the other hand the humility of others appears: many tax collectors and harlots gladly embrace the truth, and many believers manifest a willingness to die for Christ.

***~~By way of improvement we may inquire,~~***

***~~1. What self-knowledge have we gained from the preaching of Christ?~~***

He has been often "set forth crucified before our eyes." This must in a measure have revealed our thoughts to us. What discoveries then has it made? Has it shown us our natural pride and self-righteousness, our self-sufficiency and self-dependence, our light thoughts of sin, our ingratitude, our unbelief, our enmity against God and his Christ? If it have not taught us these humiliating lessons, we have learned nothing yet to any good purpose. *Let us take the Gospel as a light with which to search our hearts.*Let us beg of God to illumine our minds by his Holy Spirit.

***~~2. What effect has the preaching of Christ produced on our lives?~~***

We must either rise or fall by means of the Gospel. Are we then risen with Christ to a new and heavenly life? Or are we filled with prejudice against him and his people? Let us tremble lest be prove a rock of offence to us. If we rise with him now to a life of holiness, he will raise us before long to a life of glory!

***~~#1479~~***

***~~Christ's Early Habits~~***

***~~[Luke 2:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.49)~~***

And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

THE prophets and apostles of old are proposed to us as examples in a variety of respects: but *we are to follow men no further than they themselves followed Christ*.*Christ is the great pattern, to which all are to be conformed*. So fully is his character delineated in the Holy Scriptures, that we can scarcely ever be at a loss to know either what he did, or what he would have done, in any circumstances of life. The account we have indeed of his early days is very concise. *There is little related of him to gratify our curiosity, but enough to regulate our conduct.*The only authentic record which we have of the transactions of his childhood, is that before us.

His parents had carried him up at twelve years of age to Jerusalem, where all the males were obliged to assemble thrice in the year. After the paschal solemnities were completed, his parents set out on their journey homeward, and proceeded for one whole day, concluding that Jesus was in the company together with them. In the evening, to their great surprise, they sought for him in vain among all his kinsfolk and acquaintances; and therefore they returned the next day with their hearts full of sorrow and anxiety to Jerusalem, to search for their beloved child: but there they could hear no tidings of him all that night. Prosecuting their inquiries the third day, they found him at last, conversing with the doctors in the temple.

Joseph being only his reputed father, left the task of reproving him to Mary his mother. She, gently chiding him for the distress he had occasioned them, received from him the reply which we have just read; in which he vindicated his conduct, from the superior obligations which he owed to his heavenly Father, and showed, that their anxieties had arisen from their own ignorance and unbelief. They, we are told, "understood not his saying:" but we understand it, and from a sense of the vast importance of it, we will,

***~~I. Explain to you his reply—~~***

This was probably the first time that he had ever been at Jerusalem since he was quite an infant: and he was solicitous to improve to the uttermost the opportunity which this season had afforded him, of cultivating divine knowledge, and "increasing in heavenly wisdom." Not wearied with the seven days that he had spent in spiritual exercises, he was happy to prolong the time, and to sit among the doctors (not with dictatorial forwardness, but with the modesty of a child) to answer any questions that were put to him, and to ask for information on those points, in which he found himself not yet sufficiently instructed, verse 41-47.

It was in the use of such means as these that the indwelling Godhead gradually irradiated his mind, and trained him up for the office, which at a more advanced age he was to fulfill. This was "the business to which his heavenly Father had called him," at this time; and it was the delight of his soul to execute it: nor was he responsible to his earthly parents for overlooking on this occasion that attention to their feelings, which, in less urgent circumstances, he would have gladly shown.

For all this he appealed to them: "How is it that you sought me with such anxiety? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" You know whence I am, that I am, in a way that no other child ever was, or ever will be—the Son of God. You know the end for which I was sent into the world, even to save my people from their sins. You know what marvelous interpositions have been given to me, insomuch that I was preserved, while all the children of Bethlehem, from two years old and under were slain. You know also that the same heavenly Father who bade you carry me into Egypt, advised you afterwards of Herod's death, and directed you to return with me to our native land. And can you doubt that a child so born, and born for so great an end, and so miraculously preserved, shall be taken care of? Was not my heavenly Father's care sufficient without yours?

Again, You have known my habits from my earliest infancy, and how entirely I have been devoted to my God, while in no single instance did I ever show myself forgetful of you. You might well have concluded therefore, that I acted under the special direction of my heavenly Father, and might have been assured in your minds, that I was engaged "in my Father's business." You had abundant reason to be satisfied of all this; and therefore, though I cannot disapprove of your returning to search for me, I cannot altogether commend your sorrows and anxieties respecting me; since, if you had duly considered the circumstances I have referred to, your minds would have been comforted, being stayed on God.

Now, though "his parents understood not this at the time," we who enjoy a fuller revelation of God's will, clearly comprehend it; and therefore may well, like Mary, treasure it up in our hearts. And being further informed, that during the whole of his youthful days "he was subject to his parents," we see, that the construction we have put upon his words is true, and our vindication of his conduct is correct.

Having explained his words, let me now,

***~~II. Commend to your attention the sentiments contained in them—~~***

Two things are here evidently insinuated:

***~~1. That the service of God is of paramount obligation—~~***

God's claims are infinitely superior to all that *man*can assert. We are to love and serve him with all our heart and soul and strength. In matters of mere arbitrary institution, he is pleased indeed to wave his claims, and to give a priority to ours; saying, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, [Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.6);" but in the service of the heart and of the soul, he will never for a moment abandon his rights. He says, "My Son, give me your heart!" and this we must give him at the peril of our souls. In comparison with him, "our earthly parents, yes and our very life itself, are to be objects of hatred" and contempt, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). We are not to regard the authority of any superiors whatever, but to say, "whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19). Nor are we to be influenced by any examples, however numerous; but like Joshua, we must say, "Whatever the whole nation may do, I and my house will serve the Lord, [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

This is strongly inculcated under the Christian dispensation: "Give yourself wholly to these things, [1 Timothy 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.15)." "Rejoice evermore: pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16-18)."

In a word, our whole life should be such, as, if any one shall inquire after us, to leave no doubt upon his mind, but that we are dutifully and diligently engaged "in our Father's business."

It is not necessary that we should be always praying: our Lord himself was not praying at this time, but gaining instruction in the things of God. This was his duty. Ours is to perform the various offices of life in their season, combining in their due measure the services which our station in life calls for, with those which we owe more immediately to God. *But in all that we do, we must have respect to God's authority as appointing it, and seek God's glory in the execution of it.*"We must live not unto ourselves, but solely and entirely unto God, [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)."

***~~2. That in serving him, it is not possible for us to engage too early, or too earnestly—~~***

Our Lord was only twelve years of age at this time: and now, after having fulfilled all his duties during the seven days of the feast, he persisted even until the tenth day in prosecuting what he judged to be for the improvement of his own mind, and for the honor of his heavenly Father. It is probable that, while all the males of Israel were at Jerusalem together, he, a little child, could not gain the attention of the great doctors at Jerusalem, who would almost of necessity be fully occupied with those who had come from every quarter of the land. But when the strangers were all gone, he might without difficulty gain access to the great and authorized instructors of the Lord's people. This probably was one reason of his staying at that time, so that he might improve to the uttermost the only opportunity that had ever been afforded him.

In like manner, when, in the course of his ministry, he had been laboring all the day, and praying all the night, and then, without taking any sustenance, was laboring also the next day, his friends sought him, fearing "he was beside himself", so as irreparably to destroy his own health, [Mark 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.21). Now in all this he has shown us, that, however we may be wearied in the Lord's service, we are never to be weary of it; but are to prosecute it incessantly to the very utmost of our power.

In short, whatever progress we may have made in our divine course, we are to "forget the things which are behind, and to reach forth to those that are before," and never to pause until we have gained the prize, [Philippians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13). [14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Philippians 3.14).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To parents—~~***

You have a solicitude for your children's welfare: you are anxious for the preservation of their health, and the advancement of their temporal prosperity. These feelings, if kept within due bounds, I by no means condemn. But your chief concern should be for the welfare of their souls; and your labor should be to engage them thoroughly in the business assigned them by their heavenly Father. If you neglect this, or show a lukewarmness about it, you will involve yourselves in guilt of the deepest dye! You remember how Eli was punished for this sin, [1 Samuel 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 3.11-13); and his sons Hophni and Phinehas will reproach him in the last day as accessary to their destruction.

Beware lest that reproach be vented against you by your children: for assuredly, if your souls will be required at the hand of your minister, much more will the blood of your children be required at your hands, [Ezekiel 33:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.8).

***~~2. To young people—~~***

You have from the moment you came into the world a business assigned to you by God, and you are bound to execute it from the very beginning according to your capacity. If you commence it early, you have a special promise from God, that you shall succeed in your efforts, [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17). And tell me, what period of life is there, in which you can be so well employed as in doing your Father's will? You may think that youth and manhood are seasons rather for pleasure and for temporal pursuits: but *the more you resemble Christ, the happier you will be.*Who is there among you that does not congratulate Samuel, Obadiah, Timothy, on their early surrender of themselves to God. Be assured, that such a retrospect in your own case will, in a dying hour, be a source of much comfort to your souls. In the meantime you will greatly honor God by dedicating your whole lives to him, and will diffuse blessings through the world, instead of being, as alas! too many are, curses to all around them. And thus, it may be hoped, you will conciliate the favor both of God and man, verse 52.

But if unhappily you be blamed for consecrating yourselves to God, then must you be ready to give a reason of your conduct with meekness and fear, [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15)."

***~~#1480~~***

***~~Ministry of John the Baptist~~***

**[Luke 3:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.4-6)**

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

THERE is an abruptness in the language of the prophets, which, though it sometimes casts an obscurity over their writings, often gives them very peculiar force and energy. This may be noticed particularly in the passage referred to in our text. At the beginning of the fortieth chapter of his prophecies, Isaiah, without any particular intimation of it breaks forth into a distinct subject, which from that time occupies his chief attention. He has indeed in the preceding chapters occasionally spoken of the Redeemer's kingdom: but from the beginning of this chapter he almost loses sight of the deliverance from Babylon, and dwells, even in the primary sense of his words, on the more important deliverance of men from their bondage to sin and Satan. He informs us in verses 1-2, that God had commissioned him to comfort his drooping people with assured prospects of his returning favor through the intervention of the Messiah. Then, passing over eight hundred years as scarcely more than a single day, he seems to himself to hear the very voice of Christ's forerunner, and to see him occupied in preparing the Messiah's way: and then, with a confident expectation that God's word should stand, he predicts the ultimate and universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

The passage is quoted by Luke as actually fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist; and it may well be considered as of peculiar importance, since it is quoted by all the four Evangelists. In considering it, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. What are the chief obstructions to our Redeemer's kingdom—~~***

***~~Some obstructions were peculiar to the apostolic age—~~***

The *Jews*were so attached to Moses and their law, that they could not endure anything which appeared to weaken their authority, and to transfer the people's regard to any other teacher. Knowing that their religion was from God, and not aware that it was intended only to be of temporary duration, they accounted it the vilest blasphemy to speak of the ministry of the one, or the authority of the other, being superseded.

They had also very erroneous notions of the Messiah's kingdom: they supposed he would be a great temporal prince, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and raise their nation to the highest pinnacle of human grandeur. Hence they were quite indignant that a poor despised Nazarene, who himself was their Messiah.

These prejudices greatly obstructed the establishment of Christ's kingdom among them, and proved an almost insurmountable bar to their conversion.

Nor were the *Gentiles*in a state more favorable than the Jews. They were addicted to the vilest lusts, the grossest superstition, the most confirmed idolatry. The more learned among them were still further from the kingdom of God, and more hostile to it, on account of their *philosophic pride*, which led them to reject everything which did not savor of human wisdom, and the Gospel especially, which appeared to them so repugnant to it. To be saved by a man who was crucified, and therefore apparently unable to save himself, was in their eyes a most flagrant absurdity.

Thus Paul informs us that "the preaching of the cross was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."

***~~But there are other obstructions which are common to all ages—~~***

It is not needful to distinguish between the different parts of the imagery, whereby these obstructions are described; else we might see in the boastings of pride, the stubbornness of passion, and the gloominess of despondency, a correspondence between the terms that are used, and the obstacles that are depicted. Certain it is, without intending to refine upon the text, that these are the most common impediments to the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

Men will not endure to be told that they are justly obnoxious to the wrath of God, and utterly incapable of saving themselves; and that all, the best as much as the worst, must be indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ for all their hope and all their salvation. The pride of the human heart rises against this, and turns from it with disgust. The lusts and passions of men also are averse to the dominion of Christ. They hate to be controlled; they will not submit to the restraints of the Gospel. To have their sins mortified, is like the plucking out of a right eye, or the cutting off of a right hand: the fleshly filthiness that is in us, pleads for indulgence: and every disposition of the mind, as well as every appetite of the body, sets itself against the authority of Christ, and rejects his yoke.

But besides these, which are the more obvious impediments to the Gospel; there are some others, which, though little noticed, are both powerful and common. There is in most men a tendency to despair. While the unbelief of some leads them to despise the Gospel as an idle tale, in others, it operates to keep them back from embracing it, under an idea, that they never can be brought to the state that it requires. Either their *guilt*appears too great to be forgiven, or their *lusts*too strong to be subdued, or their *circumstances*so peculiar, as not to admit of so great a change in all the habits of their life.

These are obstacles which we all feel in a greater or less degree; and which must be removed, before Christ can enter freely into our hearts.

That a view of these things may not discourage us, let us consider,

***~~II. How these obstacles are to be removed—~~***

***~~As there were some peculiar obstacles in the apostolic age, so were there also peculiar circumstances calculated to remove them—~~***

The general *expectation of the Messiah*, which prevailed about the time of his coming, certainly tended to prepare his way.

The preaching of *John*the Baptist, who with holy firmness laid his axe to the root of Pharisaic pride and hypocrisy, awakened a great and general attention to religion, [Matthew 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.5-6), insomuch that many doubted whether he were not the Messiah himself.

The ministry of *Christ*also produced a general sensation through the Jewish land: the holiness of his life, the wisdom and authority of his words, and the number and beneficence of his miracles, wrought conviction upon the minds of thousands, and drove his enemies to the necessity of putting him to death, or of leaving him in the uncontrolled possession of universal influence.

The ministry of the *Apostles*, confirmed as it was by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the gift of tongues, and by miracles unnumbered, had yet greater effect: it bore down all opposition, and triumphed over the united powers of earth and Hell.

The *universal extension of the Roman empire*contributed also to the facilitating of the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom; since it gave to the Apostles an easy communication both with Jews and Gentiles throughout the world, in almost every part of which the Jewish Scriptures had already prepared their way.

***~~But it is of more practical importance to show how our difficulties are to be removed—~~***

As these are the same in every age, so the means of removing them are such as are open to the use of all. We need notice only two; and these are, repentance and faith.

REPENTANCE is the great leveler of all obstructions: it "humbles the loftiness of man," and "brings into captivity every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ." Wherever real penitence exists, it brings the soul into the dust before God. No longer is the Gospel deemed unnecessary or severe: the penitent sees that without it he must inevitably perish. Whether he has been more or less moral, he is equally disposed to smite on his bosom and cry for mercy. His vain conceits of his own goodness all vanish; and, instead of despising others as inferior to him in sanctity, he accounts himself rather "the chief of sinners." And it deserves particular attention, that the Baptist himself prescribed this as the very first and principal means of smoothing the way for the reception of Christ, verse 3.

The next means, and that which renders the other effectual, is FAITH. This, no less than repentance itself, is a universal leveler. If repentance brings down the hills and mountains, faith exalts the valleys, straightens the crooked paths, and smooths the rough. Wonderful indeed is the efficacy of humble faith: it dissipates at once all desponding fears: the things which appeared utterly insurmountable, now become plain and easy: the blood of Christ is acknowledged as sufficient to cleanse them from all sin; and the grace of Christ as sufficient to make them victorious over every enemy.

It is remarkable that our blessed Lord, on his first entrance on his ministry, united faith with repentance, as the grand, the effectual expedient for establishing his kingdom in the world, [Mark 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.15). And his Apostles after him continued to further his interests in the very same way: they preached everywhere "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

To stir us up to that exertion which is necessary, let us contemplate,

***~~III. The blessed consequences of the removal of all obstacles—~~***

The manifestation of Christ's glory is that which ever did, and ever shall, follow the removal of those things which have hitherto veiled him in obscurity.

***~~See how it was on his first appearance—~~***

The clouds which surrounded him, concealed in a measure the bright effulgence of his rays: his humble birth, his base appearance, the contempt and abhorrence in which he was held, all tended to cast a veil over his divine majesty: yet even then his own more immediate disciples "beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father."

***~~See it more particularly after the day of Pentecost—~~***

Until that time his very Apostles saw but very imperfectly the nature of that kingdom which Christ came to establish: but when the Holy Spirit had opened their eyes, and had sealed their testimony on the hearts of others, what a splendor beamed from the countenance of our incarnate God! Then it was seen, that he who had been "crucified, was the Lord of glory," the brightness of the Father's glory, and the "express image of his person." Every eye looked to him: every heart trusted in him: every soul "received out of his fullness grace upon grace." He was that object which, if I may so speak, was the center and circumference of the globe: in him all united; and beyond him none aspired. "In him the whole body of believers, collectively and individually, were complete."

***~~See it at this hour—~~***

Who is loved? who is honored? who is served? who is glorified, wherever the Gospel prevails? Who, but that adorable Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! Those who once saw "no beauty or loveliness in him for which he was to be desired," now behold him as "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." "He is truly precious" to their souls; and to call him "their Friend and their Beloved," is the highest object of their ambition, or, rather, the only thing about which they have any material concern. It is the same in every quarter of the world: it is the same among high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. If "God has shined into their heart to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they "determine to know nothing else," to"glory in nothing else," "this is all their salvation, and all their desire."

***~~But who can tell what it shall be in the latter days?~~***

The text informs us, that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Hitherto, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used to spread the Gospel, darkness very generally prevails, and the obstacles to the Redeemer's kingdom are but partially removed. But the day is near at hand, when "all nations shall serve him," and "all people shall know him from the least of them to the greatest." Yes, "the mouth of the Lord has spoken it;" and therefore it shall assuredly come to pass.

Obstructions there are, no doubt, both great and numerous: but "before Zerubbabel, the mountains shall become a plain." The extension of vital Christianity through the world is not more incredible than the establishment which it has already gained in the earth; especially when we consider, that, what has been already done, is, under God, the work of a few unlettered fishermen. O that that day may appear! O that God would "hasten it in his time!"

***~~Conclusion—~~***

As "a voice crying in this our wilderness," I would now say to you, "Prepare the way of the Lord." He has entered into the world: he has established his kingdom among men; he now "stands and knocks at the door of your hearts," and desires admission into them. O think what it is that obstructs Christ's entrance into your hearts!

Is it a proud conceit of your own goodness? Let this mountain be brought low, comparing your lives with the demands of God's holy law.

Is it an inveterate love of sin, and of this present world? let it give way to penitence and faith, that your path may be plain and smooth.

Is it a doubt of the practicability of your salvation? Rely on Christ: "all things are possible to him that believes."

Perhaps you will say, that "a preparation of heart must be from the Lord:" true; but it must be sought by you in the daily exercise of meditation and prayer. If you need any incentive to these duties, do but reflect upon the benefits resulting from them:

Think of a revelation of Christ to your soul!

Think of his glory exhibited to the eyes of your mind, and shining with increasing brightness to the perfect day!

Think too in how little a time you will "see him as he is," and "be with him for ever!"

Dearly beloved, beg of God to "take the stumbling-blocks out of your way:" he is the same gracious God as ever he was; and if you cry unto him "he will make a high-way for you, like as he did for Israel in the day that he brought them out of the land of Egypt, [Isaiah 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.16);" he "will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight: these things will he do unto you, and not forsake you, [Isaiah 42:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.16)."

***~~#1481~~***

***~~Liberality to the Poor~~***

***~~[Luke 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.10-11)~~***

So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

*IN order to understand the true meaning of any part of Scripture, the strictest attention must be paid to the context*. If this rule is not observed, there is scarcely anything which may not be sanctioned by the inspired volume; and the most contradictory positions may appear to stand on equal authority. Suppose, for instance, the question in our text is taken, as other apparently similar questions must be taken, namely, as an inquiry into the way of salvation; we shall make John the Baptist return an answer directly contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel. When the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What he must do to be saved?" they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31)." This is the only true answer that can be given to that question; for "there is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved," but the name of Jesus Christ, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

But if we look into the context, we find that John the Baptist had been "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, verse 3;" or, in other words, had been preaching salvation by Jesus Christ, exactly as the Apostle Peter, and indeed all the Apostles, did on the day of Pentecost. See the people's inquiry, and Peter's answer, [Acts 2:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37-38).

Then, seeing multitudes coming to him for baptism, and apprehending that the great majority of them were taking up a profession of religion upon very light and erroneous grounds, he cautioned them strongly against a presumptuous confidence on the one hand, or an unproductive and hypocritical profession on the other; and exhorted them, if they would not experience the fate of a barren tree, to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, verse 7-9."

In reply to this, the people ask, "What shall we do?" That is, What fruits shall we bring forth, in order to evince our sincerity?

And the direction which John gives them, is an answer exactly suited to the occasion: it is to this effect; 'If you would approve yourselves sincere and upright in your profession of faith in the promised Messiah, show forth your faith by your works, and, above all, by an abounding exercise of love.'

Having thus prepared our way by a view of the context, and having ascertained what the Baptist's design was in giving the people the direction in our text, we shall proceed to the more distinct consideration of his answer, and shall open to you,

***~~I. Its import—~~***

It is manifest that the direction given by him is figurative, and therefore not to be taken in its strict and literal sense. But we must not therefore imagine, that we are at liberty to disregard it, as though it had no force at all. There can be no doubt but that the Baptist intended to inculcate*a very tender compassion towards our indigent fellow-creatures, and a very enlarged exercise of liberality for their relief*. To obtain, with as much precision as the subject is capable of the true import of his words, we shall adduce from other parts of Scripture, but especially from the writings of the same Evangelist,

***~~1. Some other passages of similar tendency—~~***

First, we shall notice one or two that are also figurative, [Luke 12:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.33-34); [Luke 14:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.12-14); There can be no doubt but that these require a very high degree of liberality to the poor, since they were actually practiced in their strictest sense by the first Christians, [Acts 2:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-45); [Acts 4:32-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32-37). From these we may turn to others that are more plain, [Luke 6:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.38); [Luke 11:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.41); What an accumulation of words is there in the former of these passages to encourage our compliance with the precept; and what a gracious blessing in the latter! To the *rich*there is an especial charge given to be bountiful, 1 Timothy 6:18-19; but it is not to them only that this duty belongs; but to those also who gain a daily subsistence by their manual labor, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28).

To all, according to their ability, it equally appertains; for, on the foresight of a dearth in Judea, all the disciples of Antioch, every one according to his ability, contributed instantly to their relief, [Acts 11:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.28-30).

***~~2. Some examples which are set forth for our imitation—~~***

That of Zaccheus is particularly to our purpose, because he was just converted to faith in Christ, and because our blessed Lord himself acknowledged this heavenly disposition to be an *evidence*of his having actually obtained acceptance with his God, [Luke 19:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.8-9). But the example of the Macedonian Churches is yet more pertinent; because it is an example, not of an individual, but of whole Churches; and those, not in a state of ease and opulence, but of great affliction and deep poverty; and because it is expressly set forth for the imitation of others, who are called upon to imitate it, in order to prove the sincerity of their love to Christ, [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4); 2 Corinthians 8:8-9.

By carefully comparing these several passages, we see clearly what our duty is: we are not required to burden ourselves in order to ease others, but so to participate their burdens that they may partake of our ease, [2 Corinthians 8:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.13-14); thus to "bear one another's burdens is eminently to fulfill the law of Christ [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

Having thus marked the import of the injunction in our text, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Its reasonableness—~~***

The whole of God's "law is good," and the service it requires is reasonable. But the duty enjoined in our text, though arduous to a selfish mind, is particularly reasonable. For consider,

***~~1. What obligations we owe to God for the superior comforts which we enjoy—~~***

It is God who assigns to all their lot, not only in respect to the situation in which they are born, [Acts 17:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.26); [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.28), but in all the changes, whether prosperous or adverse, which they experience through life, [1 Samuel 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.6-7). Whatever therefore we have above others, "it is God alone who has made us to differ, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)."

And how eminently is this the case with respect to the ravages of war which during these last twenty years have desolated almost the whole of Europe, but have never reached our happy land! Methinks, it is not possible to have even the most indistinct view of our obligations to God, without saying from our hearts, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?"

***~~2. What we ourselves would desire if we were reduced to the state in which myriads of our fellow-creatures now are—~~***

It is not easy to place ourselves in the situation of persons of whom we hear only by report: but yet we may conceive what we ourselves would desire, and what we would think reasonable, if we were perishing with cold and nakedness and hunger, while others, embarked in the same cause with ourselves, were exempt from those sufferings, and were enjoying comparative ease and affluence. Would we not wish them to stand forth for our relief? Would we not think it reasonable, that their exertions should rise in proportion to our necessities, and that they should almost literally fulfill the precept in our text, the man who had two coats imparting to us who had none, and that he who had food should do likewise? Let us adopt for our principle the golden rule, and *"Do unto others, as we would have them do unto us."*

***~~3. What our blessed Lord and Savior has done for us—~~***

This is the consideration which Paul himself suggests in reference to this very point, [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9). O consider, "how rich he was" in the possession of his Father's glory; and how "poor he became," "not having so much as a place where to lay his head," but dying under the curse that was due to our sins. Consider too what his object was; namely, that we, who deserved to be in Hell without a drop of water to cool our tongues, might through his poverty be rich, and possess all the glory of Heaven. Does such love as this require no return?

When this very Savior tells us, that what we do unto the least of his brethren, he accepts as done to himself, shall we think any requisition hard, or any sacrifice too great? Truly, not only our property, but even our life itself, may well be sacrificed for him, 1 [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16), [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13); and we should account ourselves happy in proportion as we have an opportunity to advance his glory in the world.

But instead of dwelling any longer on the general reasonableness of this precept, we will proceed to notice,

***~~III. Its suitableness to the present occasion—~~***

Rarely, if ever, has greater occasion for charitable exertions existed than at present. Now therefore we might justly call upon you to comply with our text almost in the literal sense. But, waving that, we must urge you to adopt the principle that is there inculcated: and to bear in mind, that "he who sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7." Do not however forget the important distinctions with which we began the subject. It is to glorify Christ, and to show the sincerity of your love to him, that we invite you; not to purchase Heaven by your alms. Bear that in mind; and God will not forget it in the day of judgment.

***~~#1482~~***

***~~Practical Duties Enforced~~***

***~~[Luke 3:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.10-14)~~***

So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

WHATEVER lack of *human*learning men may feel, they are, for the most part, well satisfied with their attainments in *religious*knowledge. If they are conscious of some faults, they do not suspect any lack of just information, but only a defect in practicing what they already know. But when persons begin to see their guilt and danger, they find that they need to be instructed in the very first principles of religion; and they are glad to make inquiries, which formerly they would have utterly disdained.

This was the effect produced by the ministry of John the Baptist. The Scribes and Pharisees, being filled with self-conceit, rejected his word, and represented him as no better than a demoniac: but multitudes of others came to him with great solicitude, not to obtain answers to any speculative questions, but to ask: What they must do, to escape the wrath which he had so forcibly set before them.

We shall find it profitable to consider,

***~~I. His answers to their inquiries—~~***

Those who successively applied to him, and to whom he gave his answers, were,

***~~1. The people—~~***

As these must of necessity comprehend a great variety of characters, the Baptist gave his answer generally, so as to strike at the characteristic evil of our fallen nature, selfishness.*The natural man lives neither for God nor for his fellow-creatures, but for himself alone.*If he has great riches, he may without any difficulty give something to the poor and indigent: but if he has little more than bare necessities, he feels little, if any, responsibility for the use of them, and is chiefly occupied in making them subservient to his own comfort.

From this selfish disposition innumerable evils proceed: indeed, it lies at the root of almost all evil. Hence the Baptist set himself in the first place to counteract it; and recommend in its stead the universal exercise of liberality and compassion.

That the Baptist's injunction should be taken according to the strict letter, we do not say: but, to give it any sense at all, it must imply far more then is commonly practiced, or generally supposed to be our duty. The least it can mean is, that *we should consider ourselves as stewards of all that we possess, and dispose of it conscientiously for the honor of God and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.*

***~~2. The Publicans—~~***

The tax collectors were persons appointed under the authority of the Roman government to collect the taxes; and so odious was the office among the Jews, that few who had any regard for their own characters, would undertake it. Hence it was executed very generally in an unjust and oppressive manner; insomuch that the office, which was at first hated only on account of its evincing the subjection of the Jews to a foreign yoke, became proverbially infamous on account of the conduct of those on whom it was conferred.

Among the candidates for baptism were some of these: and they likewise inquired what they should do. Now it is worthy of observation, that John did not recommend them to give up their office, notwithstanding the difficulties and temptations that attended the execution of it; but only to guard against the evils that were commonly practiced in the discharge of it. The greater the temptations to which they were exposed, the more desirable it was that the office should be filled by persons who were truly honest; and the more honor such persons would do to religion, by maintaining an unblemished character in such a post. His advice therefore to them was to exact nothing beyond what they were authorized to demand, but to regulate their whole conduct agreeably to the laws of justice and equity.

This injunction however need not to be confined to them: it is equally applicable to all persons possessed of official authority, and indeed to all persons whose interest might lead them in a way of trade or business to impose on others for their own advantage.

***~~3. The soldiers—~~***

The grace of God, which nothing can withstand, had reached the hearts of some of these: and they too made similar inquiries. To them also did the Baptist make a similar reply. Unfavorable as the life of a soldier is to the cultivation of piety, he did not tell them to get their discharge, but cautioned them against the evils incident to their profession. From their very education and mode of life, they are apt to disregard the feelings of men, and to injure or insult those who do not immediately comply with their wishes. In that age and country, it was also common for them to turn informers, that by false accusation they might share the fines that might be levied, or obtain bribes for exercising a pretended forbearance. Discontent and mutiny too were evils to which they were in general prone.

Against all of these practices the Baptist warned them. He testified that all such things were evil, and that every person must abstain from them, if he would avoid the wrath which hangs over the head of every impenitent transgressor.

But neither should these cautions be limited to those who made the inquiry, nor to persons engaged in the military life: for *the duties of peacefulness, equity, and contentment are applicable to every situation, and every age.*

That these answers may appear in their proper light, we shall proceed to show,

***~~II. The suitableness of them to the occasion—~~***

Certainly at first sight they appear defective, not to say, erroneous: for it never can be admitted for one moment that the correcting of those habits would procure everlasting salvation. Such a reformation could make no atonement for their past sins, nor could it in any way supersede the necessity of believing in Christ. To understand the matter aright, we must consider what the import of their inquiries was, and what was the Baptist's more immediate office.

John had told them all to "bring forth fruits fit for repentance." They immediately inquire, each for himself, what are the particular things which they must do; that is, what they must do to evince the sincerity of their repentance. This is the question to which all his answers were directed. If it be thought that he should have begun to "preach Christ unto them," I answer, This was not his office, at least, not in the plain specific way in which the Apostles preached Christ on the day of Pentecost: he was rather "to prepare the way of the Lord;" and therefore he "preached only the baptism of repentance, [Luke 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.3-4)." Bearing these things in mind, his answer will be found precisely suited to the occasion. They were calculated to impress upon their minds the following truths:

***~~1. Sinful habits are an obstacle to the reception of the Gospel—~~***

Who does not see that the indulgence of their respective sins was calculated to blind their eyes and harden their hearts? Are persons, at the very time that they are addicted to the grossest immoralities, in a state fit to receive instructions in the sublime doctrines of the Gospel? Must not every word of it appear "foolishness unto them?"

What was the effect produced on the worldly-minded Pharisees, when our Lord spoke of "making friends of the unrighteous mammon?" We are told, "the Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things; and they derided him, [Luke 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.14)." And does not daily experience show, that there must be a certain preparation of mind for the due reception of truth? If you cast the best seed that can be procured into land not broken up, but overgrown with briers and thorns, will you expect a harvest? So, if persons be not sufficiently convinced of the evil of their ways as to be willing to reform them in matters which unenlightened reason would condemn, there can be no hope that they will improve aright the sublimer truths of revelation.

The Baptist's answer then was precisely what you would give to a man who by continued drunkenness had brought on illness: 'I can recommend you to a physician, whose prescriptions will infallibly cure you; but it is in vain to go to him, if you do not determine to put away your habits of intoxication.'

***~~2. The putting away of besetting sins is an indispensable evidence of our sincerity—~~***

The people professed to be penitent, and asked what they must do to prove it. Now can any one imagine that they could be sincere, if they were not willing to change their lives?

*What is repentance?*It is not a mere sorrow for having subjected ourselves to God's displeasure; for then the devils, and those who have died in their sins, would be as great penitents as any. True repentance implies a hatred of sin, and a determination to forsake it: and consequently, the Baptist's injunctions afforded the people a proper test, whereby to ascertain the truth of their professions. If we at this day heard anyone expressing a desire after salvation, and were informed that, notwithstanding the plainest warnings, he still held fast his iniquities, and would not part with them; would we give him credit for sincerity? No! we would tell him at once, that all his professions were mere hypocrisy, and that whatever he might pretend respecting a dependence on Christ, he would only deceive his own soul.

***~~3. The following of the light we have, is a good preparative for more light—~~***

A man brought out of a dungeon cannot bear at once the full blaze of the meridian sun; he must be brought to it by degrees. In the same way, neither can we hear at once the bright effulgence of Divine truth.

Our blessed *Lord*told his disciples, that "he had many things to say unto them, which they were not at that time able to bear:" and "he spoke the word in parables, as the people were able to hear it."

*Paul*adopted the same method of apportioning to his people his instructions according to their respective capacities; "giving milk to babes, and strong meat to those who were of full age." Had he not attended to this rule, he would have produced the same effects as would follow from a wrong administration of food; he would have destroyed those whom he designed to nourish: whereas by a more judicious conduct, he trained up the children for stronger food and higher attainments.

Thus the *Baptist*directed his hearers to cultivate the acknowledged duties of compassion, honesty, and contentment: that in the exercise of these duties, they might gain a deeper insight into the evil of their past ways, and a fuller preparation of heart for a due reception of the Gospel.

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. The importance of ministerial fidelity—~~***

People in general love to have a minister who will "prophesy unto them smooth things and prophesy deceits." But what will be the end of such things? "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch?" It may be painful to us to hear the truth, when we are called to "pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand:" but it is better far that we should be informed of our danger, than that we should be left to involve ourselves in irremediable ruin.

We are told that many of the tax collectors and harlots actually repented, and became partakers of the kingdom of Heaven. Did not they bless John? And will they not continue to bless God for him to all eternity? Do not then be grieved, if your minister lays his axe to the root of your sins, if he "cry aloud, and spare not." It is his duty to do so; and if he forbears to warn you, "your blood will be required at his hands." He must "not use flattering words;" but must "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It is in that way alone that he can "deliver his own soul," or hope to save the people committed to his charge.

***~~2. The need of mortifying our besetting sins—~~***

Every man has some sins to which he is more particularly addicted, or, at least, to which he is more enticed. His age, his situation, his employment in life, have some peculiar snares, against which he ought to guard. Every one therefore should inquire what are the dangers to which he is more especially enticed.

Persons advanced in life should examine themselves respecting querulousness. Men of business should maintain a jealousy respecting worldliness and the frauds of trade. Young people should watch over the vanity of their minds, and the violence of their passions.

In short, the inquiry of every one should be: What sin have I to guard against? What are the chief obstacles to my advancement in religious knowledge, and to my attainment of everlasting happiness? Happy indeed would it be, if we were thus intent, every one on his own particular case! and happy would it be, if, having found out our besetting sins, we could say with the Psalmist, *"I have kept myself from my iniquity!"*

Doubtless there is much beyond this: this is only the threshold of the sanctuary: but it is a threshold which we must pass over, before we can get within the veil.

It is not our concern at present to expatiate upon the Divine life, as it is experienced by the advanced Christian: we are now only preaching, like John, the baptism of repentance; reserving to other occasions the fuller delineation of the Gospel salvation. But we shall have attained no trifling object, if the drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, or any other person, be led to see, that, until he has put away his besetting sins, he can no more go to Heaven, than Satan himself be brought there from the depths of Hell!

***~~3. The moral tendency of the Gospel—~~***

The things insisted on by John, are mere preliminaries: instead of being the whole Gospel, they are only an introduction to the Gospel. The Gospel itself is not satisfied with a renunciation of sinful habits; it requires also the cultivation of holy habits; not only to put away selfishness, dishonesty, and discontent, but to live altogether above this world, and to be ready even to "lay down our lives for the brethren." The gospel does not call us to believe in Christ, in order that we may afterwards indulge in sin; but that our hearts may be purified by faith, and that we may be transformed into the very image of our God.

See then who are the true Antinomians: not those who urge you to come to Christ for life and salvation, but those who tell you that to be honest and just, and sober and charitable, is all that is required of you. With such persons it is common to quote those words of Balaam, "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." But they quite forget the walking humbly with God; and then confine the doing justice and loving mercy to a few outward acts. Give the full scope to these words, and they do contain the whole of our duty: but we must omit no part of them: nor must we reduce any part to the puny standard of Pharisaic morality. Look at Christ and his Apostles, and there we see the morality which we are to aspire after. Those who are inquiring after Christ, do well to ask, What shall I do? But those who profess to have believed in Christ, must rather ask, "What am I doing more than others? [Matthew 5:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.47)."

***~~#1483~~***

***~~The Imprisonment of John~~***

***~~[Luke 3:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.19-20)~~***

"But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison."

THE inspired volume, when considered only as containing a *history*of other ages and other nations, is read rather for the purpose of informing the mind, than of benefitting the heart; and hence it produces comparatively little effect even on those who are most conversant with its contents. But the true light in which it should be regarded is as a history of man, to whatever age or nation he may belong. *It is a mirror that reflects the human heart in all its dispositions, and in all its actings*. When viewed in this light, it acquires a ten-fold greater importance, because *it exhibits us to ourselves*, and makes us the actors in all that is done.

In reading an account of John the Baptist, and of his imprisonment by Herod, we feel but little interest, except as we condemn the licentiousness of Herod, and commiserate the fate of his faithful monitor. But if we would divest ourselves of the idea that it passed many centuries ago, and consider the transaction as having recently occurred in our own neighborhood, we would almost of necessity be led to contemplate it in a more general view, and to *notice in it the power and malignity of sin*. It is in that view that I propose to call your attention to it at this time.

Let us take occasion then to remark from it,

***~~I. The power of sin—~~***

It is indeed astonishing in its power to blind, to enslave, to harden all in whom it dwells!

***~~1. Sin blinds—~~***

Herod could not but know that it was wrong for him to take his brother Philip's wife. Yet doubtless he contrived by some vain excuses to justify it to himself. And thus it is that *every sinner deludes himself*. In some cases, he denies the criminality of his actions altogether, "calling evil good, and good evil, and putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)."

Where they cannot altogether hide from themselves the evil of their ways, they find some excuse, either from their constitutional propensities, or the habits of all around them, or some peculiarity in their situation at the time. "They feed on ashes; and yet to such a degree has a deceived heart turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)."

Whatever is the particular lust of which they are enamored: it is "Satan that has blinded their eyes! [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4)." They walk in the vanity of their mind, "having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts, [Ephesians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.18);" and "they know not where they go, because that darkness has blinded their eyes, [1 John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.11)."

***~~2. Sin enslaves—~~***

Though Herod was willing to "do many things," and forbear many things respecting which he was admonished by John, he could never be prevailed on to part with his incestuous consort. And thus it is with sinners of every description: there are some sins to which they have but little inclination, and which therefore they may be induced to renounce: but *their besetting sin they cannot find it in their hearts to mortify*, so addicted are they to the commission of it, and, as it were, "tied and bound with it as with a chain," which they cannot break. See this in the drunkard, the whoremonger, etc. etc. While they see and cannot but acknowledge the sinfulness of their habits, they have a "law in their members warring against the law in their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin which is in their members, [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23);" or rather, they are "taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)."

***~~3. Sin hardens—~~***

One would have supposed that when Herod, "knowing that John was a holy and just man, feared" him, he would never have been induced to persecute him for his fidelity. Yet of his own mind he had imprisoned John, and would have put him to death, had he not been restrained by his fear of the people; and, when solicited by his daughter to give her John's head on a platter, he sent an executioner to behead him, and presented it to her according to her desire. This he did for his oath's sake. But how could any oath bind him to the commission of murder? He would have found ample means of inducing her to alter her request if sin had not "seared his conscience," and "made his heart as adamant."

But *sin is of its own nature progressive*: and to such a degree do men become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," that evils, which once they could not have contemplated as possible ever to be committed by them, are committed easily and without remorse. *Hazael*, when warned of the enormities which he would one day commit, exclaimed, "Is your servant a dog that he should do such things?" Yet he afterwards executed these things to the full extent of the predictions concerning him!

And if the future conduct of many, who are now but just beginning their career of sin, were opened to their view, they would not believe that they should ever attain to such heinous sins. But, what is said of strife, may be said of every other sin; namely, that "the beginning of it is like the letting out of water:" the breach at first is small; but it soon widens, until the inundation becomes irresistibly powerful, and irremediably destructive!

Such is the power of sin; of which in the history we may yet further see,

***~~II. The malignity of sin—~~***

It tends to inflict misery,

***~~1. On all who indulge it—~~***

Look at Herod in the midst of all his indulgences: was he happy? Which of the two, I would ask, was the happier: Herod, in the midst of his excesses, or John, when bound with chains in prison for righteousness' sake? No one, I think, can entertain a doubt. The truth is, that *sin and misery are indissolubly connected even in this life*; according as the Apostle, speaking of the ungodly, has said, "Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known, [Romans 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.16-17)."

Take the adulterer, for instance: You may suppose him as happy as his heart can wish. But what is Job's account of him? "The eye of the adulterer watches for dusk; he thinks, 'No eye will see me,' and he keeps his face concealed. In the dark, men break into houses, but by day they shut themselves in; they want nothing to do with the light. For all of them, deep darkness is their morning; they make friends with the terrors of darkness. [Job 24:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 24.15-17)." And of the wicked generally, Eliphaz says, "All his days the wicked man suffers torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for him. Terrifying sounds fill his ears; when all seems well, marauders attack him. He despairs of escaping the darkness; he is marked for the sword. [Job 15:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.20-22)."

Yes, an evil conscience will so haunt a man, that he shall be afraid to go out into the dark, or almost even to look under his bed: so truly is it said, "The way of transgressors is hard! [Proverbs 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.15)."

There are indeed those who will profess to feel no apprehensions: but we are assured by the heart-searching God, that their boastings are vain: for "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked! [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)."

***~~2. On the world at large—~~***

See what misery the gratification of Herod's lusts produced: on Philip, whose wife he took; on Herodias, whose mind and conscience he so defiled; on John, whom for his fidelity he murdered; and on all the Church of God, whom he thus deprived of a faithful counselor and instructor. But he cared not what evils he inflicted, if only he might have his own licentious passions gratified.

Who can tell what miseries the seducer inflicts upon his hapless victim; and the adulterer, on the object of his unlawful desires? The same may be spoken of the ambitious man, who wades through seas of blood to the attainment of fame and power. May I not mention the scoffer too, who hates and derides all serious piety, and cares not how many souls he ruins, provided he may but indulge his enmity against God and his Christ?

But what is it that has turned the whole world into one vast theater of contention and sorrow? It is sin, which has established its empire on the ruins of peace and love. Nor is there to be found a nation, or family, or individual, whose happiness has not suffered from this malignant evil!

***~~From this subject we may yet further learn,~~***

***~~1. The danger of indulging sin—~~***

Who shall say to what extremity, one sinful thought shall carry us? Little did *Herod*imagine to what the first desire which he formed after Philip's wife would lead him. And little did *David*anticipate the results of the first glance which he caught of Bathsheba. Do not say then, of a sinful thought or desire, that it is little; but learn to flee from it as from the face of a serpent; and *let every declension from the path of duty be viewed by you as a step towards Hell itself.*

***~~2. The duty of reproving sin—~~***

We are not all called to act like John, and to obtrude our remarks on the ears of kings and princes. But *a holy fidelity befits us all in our respective spheres*. We must take care indeed that we do not reprove others in a wrong spirit. There are many circumstances wherein silence may be the most effectual reproof. But a holy fortitude befits us all. We must all be witnesses for God in the place where we live, and shine as lights in a dark world. And if for our fidelity we be called to suffer, as John suffered, we must rejoice that we are so honored of our God, and be willing to lay down our own lives, if only we may save the souls of others.

***~~#1484~~***

***~~The Descent of the Spirit upon Christ~~***

**[Luke 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.21-22)**

"When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

IN every part of our Lord's history, from his first entrance into the world to his dissolution upon the cross, we observe an astonishing combination of the most opposite events: we see the majesty of Heaven degraded to the lowest depths of humiliation; and the most base of mankind, who was "a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people," exalted to the highest honors that Heaven itself could confer upon him.

Observe the circumstance of his *birth*: what can we conceive more degrading than for the Savior of the world to be born in a stable, and to be laid in a manger? Yet, to counter-balance this, angels were sent to announce his advent, and a star to point out to the inquiring Magi the place of his nativity.

Thus it was also at his *baptism*. The ordinance of baptism was intended to intimate the need which we have to be washed from our sins: Jesus, therefore, could not submit to baptism without acknowledging, in appearance, that he was a sinner, like unto us: nevertheless, for wise and gracious reasons, he insisted that that rite should be administered to him. But whatever ignominy might attach to him on this account, the offence was completely rolled away by the interposition of his God and Father, who on that occasion bore testimony to him by an audible voice from Heaven, and by a visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him.

These are the two subjects for our present consideration. We notice,

***~~I. The visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him—~~***

There are many things relative to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, which are worthy of observation—

***~~1. The time of it was remarkable—~~***

Jesus had just conformed to God's ordinance of baptism. Though he had no need of baptism, (not having any sin to wash away,) yet, as it was a rite instituted by God for the introducing of men into the Messiah's kingdom, he judged it expedient to comply with it himself, that he might "fulfill all righteousness" in his own person, and be in all things a pattern to his followers. This was well pleasing to God, who cannot but be interested in the observance of his own ordinances. And the conferring of so distinguished an honor upon Jesus on that occasion clearly shows, that "God will honor those who honor him;" and that in a reverential attendance on the instituted means of grace, we may expect blessings which we shall in vain hope for in the neglect of them.

Those who absent themselves from the House of God under the idea that they can spend their time more profitably at home, and those who stay away from the Lord's table under an apprehension of their unworthiness to go to it, would do well to consider this.

He was, moreover, actually engaged in *prayer*. On three different occasions did the Father bear testimony to Jesus by an audible voice from Heaven; and every time was either in, or immediately after, prayer. At his *baptism*(see the text), at his *transfiguration*([Luke 9:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.29); [Luke 9:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.35)), and just *before his death*([John 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.28).). What an evidence does this afford us of the importance and efficacy of prayer! And who that lives near to God in the exercise of that duty, has not found that promise realized, "You shall call, and the Lord shall answer; you shall cry, and he shall say, Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9); [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)." Audible voices, indeed, we are not to expect; but we are sure that "God has never said to any, Seek my face in vain."

***~~There was something peculiar also in the manner of it—~~***

It was of great importance that the attestation thus publicly given to the character of Jesus should be such as could admit of no doubt. Accordingly "the heavens were opened," just as they afterwards were at the time of Stephen's death, [Acts 7:55-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.55-56), so that the very throne of God, as it were, became visible to mortal eyes; and the Holy Spirit descended visibly, in a bodily appearance, and abode upon him. Whether the Holy Spirit assumed the shape of a dove, or only appeared in a luminous body with a hovering motion, like that of a dove, we do not take upon us to determine. We rather think the latter. But the appearance was such as could leave no doubt in the minds of the spectators that there was a special communication to Jesus from Heaven, even such a communication as had never before been given to mortal man.

***~~But the ends of the Spirit's descent are most worthy of our attention—~~***

We are sure that it was designed to confirm the Baptist's mind. The providence of God had so ordered events, that John and Jesus, though related to each other, had lived thirty years in the world without forming any acquaintance with each other. Had they been intimate with each other, it might have been thought that an agreement had been formed between them to deceive the world. But John had no knowledge of the person of Jesus, until he was inspired to point him out as "the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world:" and this very sign was promised to John, as the means whereby his mind should be satisfied that the testimony which be had borne was true: and John himself declares, that his own conviction of Christ's Messiahship was grounded on this very thing, [John 1:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.32-34).

But there was another end, even *the inauguration of the Messiah himself to his high office*. The Jewish kings and priests, and in some instances the prophets also, were anointed with oil at the time of their consecration to their work: and therefore it behooved Jesus, in whom all these offices were to be combined, to be set apart for them by a nobler unction. Accordingly he was "anointed with the oil of joy and gladness above his fellows, [Psalm 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.7)." It had been expressly foretold that he should be so anointed, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1), and that "the Holy Spirit should rest upon him, [Isaiah 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2); and he himself mentioned, in his very first sermon, that these prophecies were then accomplished; and that he was then executing the very office for which he had been commissioned and qualified by that peculiar unction, [Luke 4:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.17-21).

Besides this *visible*attestation to his character, we are called to notice also,

***~~II. The audible testimony of the Father to him—~~***

In many different ways did the Father bear witness to his Son: every miracle that was wrought by Jesus was a seal whereby the Father attested the truth of his divine mission. But on this occasion he addressed his Son by an audible voice; and therein bore witness to,

***~~1. His person as the promised Messiah—~~***

The Messiah had been long foretold under the character of "the Son of Man, [Daniel 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13);" and that term was understood by the Jews as equivalent to the Son of God, [Luke 22:69-70](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.69-70). That Jesus did indeed sustain this character, and that he was the very person of whom all the prophets spoke, was a point to be proved; and God determined that it should be proved by every species of evidence that could be adduced.

Hence, besides the foregoing proof which was offered to the *eyes*of men, another was added which appealed to their *ears*. And in the very words which are used, there seems a reference to the prophecies which were accomplished in him. "You are *that my*beloved Son," that Son, whose advent has been so long foretold, and so long expected. [There is a force in the repetition of the article, which, though lost in the Translation, should not be overlooked.]

In this view the expression of the text precisely corresponds with that which had been long before used by the Prophet Isaiah: "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1)." Whatever pretensions, therefore, false Christs may urge, or whatever objections infidel professors of Christianity may raise against Jesus, we have the infallible testimony of God himself that Jesus is the Christ.

***~~2. His acceptableness in that office—~~***

In every view the Father could not but feel delight and delight in him. As voluntarily undertaking the mediatorial work, as richly qualified for the discharge of it, and as persevering in it notwithstanding all the difficulties that he should have to encounter, he must be highly acceptable to the Father. But God foresaw the perfect accomplishment of all his designs through the ministration of his dear Son: he saw, as it were, all his elect delivered from their guilt and misery, and made partakers of everlasting glory and felicity: he saw all his own perfections also honored and exalted in the mystery of redemption: and he cordially approved of it as the most stupendous effort of wisdom and of love. None can henceforth entertain a doubt whether he will accept those who come to him by Christ, since it was on account of the suitableness and sufficiency of his atonement that the Father was so "well pleased in him."

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. How we should think of God—~~***

We know nothing of God except from revelation. It is presumptuous, therefore, either to form notions about him from our own vague conjectures, or to refuse our assent to the representations which he has given to us of himself.

That there is a *Trinity*of the persons in the Godhead is doubtless an incomprehensible mystery, but it is plainly revealed in numberless passages of Scripture. It is indeed from other passages that we know each of the persons in the Trinity to be God: but that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are Three distinct persons, is as clear as any truth can be: and so clearly is it intimated in the very words of our text, that the ancients were accustomed to say, "Go to Jordan, and there learn the doctrine of the Trinity."

***~~2. How we should act towards him—~~***

All that is required of us is, to be like-minded with God.

Did God point him out as his beloved Son? Let us believe in him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Did the Father profess himself well pleased in him? Let us delight ourselves in him. Let it be the joy of our hearts to contemplate his fullness and sufficiency, and to be receiving grace upon grace out of his fullness.

Let us, in short, "count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and glory in him as all our salvation, and all our desire.

***~~#1485~~***

***~~Our Lord's First Sermon at Nazareth~~***

***~~[Luke 4:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.21-22)~~***

And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." So all bore witness to Him, and were amazed at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

THE Sabbath was appointed as a day of rest; yet not altogether for the rest of the body, but that the soul might be the more at leisure to acquaint itself with God. In this view it is a most gracious and merciful appointment; because, the time being fixed, all are disengaged at once, and ready both to serve their God together, and to receive instruction respecting their duty towards him.

Our blessed Lord, after he had entered upon his ministry, employed every day in the execution of his work: but he availed himself especially of the opportunity which the Sabbaths afforded him, to instruct the people. At Nazareth, where he had been brought up, "he went into their synagogue, as his custom was;" and being called upon to read the portion of Scripture appointed for the day, he stood up and read a passage from the prophecies of Isaiah; and then sat down to expound it. His exposition or comment is not given to us: but the *substance*of it is set before us, in few, but comprehensive, words.

It is our intention to consider,

***~~I. His comment on the Scripture—~~***

When he told the people, that on that very day the passage which he had read to them was fulfilled in their ears, we must suppose him to have spoken to this effect:

***~~'I am the person whom the Father has sent—~~***

'From my base appearance you will be ready to think that I can have no pretensions to the office of the Messiah: but it is of me that the prophet speaks in the words which I have now read: I am the person on whom the Spirit has been poured out; "the Lord has anointed me, and sent me" to instruct and save the world.

***~~'And this is the commission which I am come to execute—~~***

'The *poor*are the special objects of my attention; they being particularly "chosen by my Father to be rich in faith, and heirs of my kingdom." Yet, if any be "poor in spirit," and sensible of their low and lost estate, to them am I sent; and to declare to them the glad tidings of salvation, is the delightful work which I have undertaken.

'More particularly, if any be "*broken-hearted*" with a sense of guilt and misery, I am come "to heal" them by an application of my blood and Spirit to their souls: their *guilt*will I remove by my all-atoning blood; and their *misery*, by sending them my Holy Spirit to be their comforter and guide. It is not as a temporal prince or conqueror that I am come: my conquests are altogether of a spiritual nature; but they are irresistible, and shall be complete. Are any persons so blinded by Satan, and enslaved by sin, that they appear like captives, immured in a dungeon, and bereft of sight, and galled with massive chains? [This was a common mode of treating captives. Sampson was so treated by the Philistines ([Judges 16:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.21)), and Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. ([2 Kings 25:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 25.7))]

'I am come to set them free, not only breaking off their fetters, and restoring them to the light, but renewing even their organs of vision, and bringing them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And this I shall do, not by war and bloodshed, but by an exhibition of truth to their souls. The Word is my sword, and the ministry of it is that chariot in which I will ride on, conquering and to conquer, until every enemy be put under my feet!

Thrice it is said, "He has sent me to preach."

'In a word, you all know what is done in the year of jubilee, how debts are cancelled, slaves are liberated, and inheritances are restored. Such are the benefits which I impart: I proclaim the arrival of that happy period, at least as far as respects the *souls*of men. Whatever debt of sin any man may owe, it shall be forgiven him: his *bondage*, however severe, shall be brought to an end: and his *inheritance*, however justly forfeited, shall be restored to him, even all the inheritance of Heaven.

'Thus circumstantially has the prophet described my office, which already I have begun to execute: "This very day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears:" and all of you who will believe in me, shall enjoy the benefits I am come to bestow.'

Such we may suppose to have been our Savior's comment on the Scripture which he had read. Let us next view,

***~~II. The effect produced by it—~~***

This was far different from what might have been expected: yet it will afford much instruction to us—

***~~1. They listened—~~***

No sooner had he read the passage, than "the eyes of all were attentively fixed on him." The sublimity of the words, and the impressive energy with which they were read, engaged their attention, and made them very desirous of hearing what this celebrated teacher should deduce from them.

Happy would it be, if this eagerness to receive instruction were more visible among us. But, in general, when a minister has read the words which he proposes to explain, many, instead of putting forth all the powers of their minds to understand and apply the subject, compose themselves in the most comfortable posture, and sink habitually into listlessness and indifference; satisfied with having performed a duty, though they reaped not the smallest benefit.

But consider the word which you hear, though spoken by a sinful man like yourselves, is, as far as it is agreeable to the mind and will of God, to be regarded "not as the word of man, but as the word of God." "We are ambassadors for Christ; we speak to you in Christ's stead; and God himself beseeches you by us." Whenever, therefore, you hear the Scriptures explained, you should, like the Centurion and his friends, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33), receive the word with all humility of mind, and treasure it up in your memory for the regulating of your hearts and lives.

***~~2. They were amazed—~~***

Their amazement arose, in part, from their recollection of his parentage and education, which appeared to them ill suited to his high pretensions. But, in part also, it arose from the persuasiveness of his manner, and the exalted nature of his discourse, to which they could not but "bear witness." And well indeed might they be amazed that such a messenger should be sent from Heaven, and that such blessings should be imparted unto men.

But alas! the very same truths delivered among us are heard with indifference! Yes, though opened in the fullest manner, and exhibited in the clearest light, they are regarded as uninteresting speculations, if not as an idle tale. The work and offices of Christ may be explained, and all the wonders of redeeming love be opened to our view, and yet no admiration be excited. Yes, *the talents of the speaker may be admired, and the subject itself be overlooked.*But would this be the case if men felt their need of this salvation? Surely not! They would be filled with rapture, and adore their God all the day long.

***~~3. They disobeyed—~~***

As much as they were struck with the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, they could not overcome their prejudices. They had but lately seen him following the humble occupation of a carpenter, and they could not conceive that such a one could possibly be the Messiah. Hence they did not receive his testimony. Hence also, when warned of the danger of rejecting him, and of God's determination to communicate to the Gentiles those blessings which they despised, they burned with rage against him, and sought to destroy him!

Alas! how common a character is this! How many are there who hear, and to a certain degree approve, the Gospel, while yet they are not effectually changed by it! They are still under the dominion of prejudice and passion; and sit in judgment on the Gospel, instead of yielding obedience to it. The *sublimity of its doctrines*is a stumbling-block to them; and the *purity of its precepts*an offence. *What is gratifying to their feelings they will receive; but whatever tends to the mortifying of their pride or the subduing of their besetting sins, they will not endure*.

O that the example before us may put us on our guard! This day is this Scripture fulfilled in our ears, as truly as in the day that Jesus read it in the synagogue. Jesus is still the anointed Savior: still does he retain and execute the commission given him by the Father: still does he "say to the oppressed, Go free!" The captive that is bruised with chains, and deprived of sight, and broken-hearted with a sense of his sorrows, may even now be restored to sight, and liberty, and joy. Our adorable Savior is ever ready to give him "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness".

Beloved brethren, "receive not this grace in vain;" neither be contented with a partial approbation of the Gospel: but surrender up yourselves sincerely and unreservedly unto the Lord; ever dreading, lest your misimprovement of the light afforded you should provoke him to remove your candlestick, and to transfer your advantages to others.

***~~#1486~~***

***~~Physician, Heal Yourself~~***

***~~[Luke 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.23)~~***

He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' "

WE are told that "Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs, [1 Kings 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.32)." To condense the results of general observation in some brief sentence, was a mode of communication which wise and learned men of old greatly affected: and to search out what was so communicated, was a study in which the young were deeply employed, [Proverbs 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.5-6). By proverbs every species of instruction was imparted. By them, also, were reproof and encouragement conveyed with peculiar force and emphasis. Nor was there any one so wise, but he might be addressed in this manner without offence. Even our blessed Lord, after having represented himself as the great Healer of the world, conceived that his hearers would apply to him this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself."

This, doubtless, was a common proverb at that time, as it is also among us at the present day: and it shall be my endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is its import—~~***

It may be understood,

***~~1. As a sarcastic reflection—~~***

This is the precise view in which it was understood by our blessed Lord. He had wrought many miracles at Capernaum: and now at Nazareth, where he had lived from his earliest years, the people hoped to see similar exertions of his almighty power: and, because he did not see fit to gratify their unreasonable expectations, they doubted the truth of the reports which they had heard concerning him. Hence "our Lord said to them, You will surely say unto me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country." But they had no right to dictate to him thus. The report of what he had done in Capernaum was authenticated beyond all reasonable doubt; and the people of Nazareth ought to have believed in him. But, being offended at him on account of his base parentage and connections, they could not endure to regard him as their promised Messiah: and it was to punish this unbelief, that our Lord withheld from them any further evidence at that time.

This is the account given both by Matthew and Luke verse 22-24 with [Matthew 13:54-58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.54-58); and this shows the precise meaning of the proverb, as applied to him by his countrymen at that time. Its meaning was, 'You profess yourself the Messiah; and, if you do not give us all the proofs of it which you have given to others, we will not receive you. We shall take it for granted that you are incompetent to the task; and that you decline all efforts for our conviction, because you are not able to impose on us who know you, in the way that you have imposed on others, to whom you were not so well known.'

Thus was the proverb used by them as a sarcastic reflection; intimating, that he could not do in his own country what he pretended to have done at a distance from it.

***~~2. As a beneficial admonition—~~***

Certainly, a person seeking to reform others should, so to speak, begin at home; and, if he does not, he will provoke others to retaliate with this advice, "Physician, heal yourself." It is in this sense that the proverb is more generally used among ourselves. And in this sense it exactly accords with the instruction given by our Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount: "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye. [Luke 6:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.41-42)."

In this view it is a beneficial admonition, for which all must be prepared who would do good to others: and to cut off all just occasion for it must be the one labor of their lives.

When we see our blessed Lord supposing it applied to himself, it will be desirable to ascertain,

***~~II. To whom it may with propriety be addressed—~~***

You will bear in mind, that our Lord was supposed to possess and exercise such powers as fully attested his divine mission. These powers the people of Nazareth, therefore, called upon him to display among them: and on his compliance with these terms, they suspended their acceptance of him as their promised Messiah.

Had he never given sufficient proof of his divine mission, they would have been justified in demanding more convincing evidence of it. But what he had done at Capernaum was abundantly sufficient to show that God was with him of a truth; and therefore their demand was unreasonable, and the refusal of it was a just punishment for their incredulity. But we may well apply the proverb,

***~~1. To the proud moralist, who pours contempt upon the Gospel—~~***

Many, like the Pharisees of old, adhere to the law of works, and regard the Gospel as foolishness. Their principles, they judge, are quite sufficient for the effecting of everything that is necessary for their salvation. Then, I say, 'Prove it to us. You profess that you have satisfied others: but, before we can acquiesce in your high pretensions, we call upon you to satisfy us. Physician, whoever you are, heal yourself, and let us see in you a proof of the efficacy of those principles of which you boast.' That they will suffice to "cleanse the outside of the cup and platter," we readily admit: but that they will operate effectually to the cleansing of the inside, we greatly doubt.

We will admit the truth of all that was alleged by your great prototype in the Temple: "I thank you, O God, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess, [Luke 18:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11-12)."

But, in our view of religion, humility, and faith, and love, are very primary and essential parts: and we beg permission to ask, What evidence you give us of these? we see not of these any proof whatever: and, until we see them visibly wrought into the frame and constitution of your soul, we must call into question all your high pretensions; and must consider your rejection of the Gospel as a proof of your own pride, and ignorance, and unbelief'.

***~~2. To the censorious professor, who dishonors the Gospel—~~***

Almost all classes of Christians are ready to censure and condemn those who differ from them: and, even in their own society, there are but too many who cast on each other unkind and censorious reflections: and, in fact, *those who are the most faulty themselves are the foremost in finding fault with others*.

This disposition greatly prevailed among the Pharisaic Jews; who, boasting of their high privileges, were forward to condemn others, while they themselves were guilty of the very same or worse enormities than those which they censured in others. Hence Paul, in the true spirit of this proverb, reproved them; saying, "You who teach another, teach you not yourself? You that preach, a man should not steal, do you steal? You that say, a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege, [Romans 2:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.21-22)."

Now, in this, must I reply to multitudes of professing Christians:

Do you complain of others as carnal and worldly and covetous, and are you yourselves faulty in these respects?

Do you complain of pride, anger, and uncharitableness in others, and yet indulge them in yourselves?

Do you censure others for bigotry and intolerance, and yet betray the same unhallowed spirit towards those who differ from you?

In a word, look at home; and let your severity be directed rather against your own defects, than the defects of others. Instead of prescribing remedies so profusely to others, apply them first for the healing of the disorders of of your own souls.

***~~3. To true believers, who desire to adorn and recommend the Gospel—~~***

Be sure that those to whom you recommend the Gospel will first mark its operation upon your minds: and, if they see that it has done little or nothing for you, they will not be disposed to expect any great benefits from it to themselves.

On the contrary, if they see that it has wrought a valuable change on you, they will be ready to receive it, in order that they themselves may be made partakers of the same benefits. Hence, your first care must be to experience all its sanctifying and saving operations in your own souls; that, when you commend it to others, you may be able to say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled, of the word of life, that same declare I unto you, 1 [John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1-3)."

Paul could appeal to his hearers, "how holily, justly, and unblamably he had behaved himself among them, 1 Thessalonians 2:10;" and could boldly say, "Whatever you have heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you [Philippians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.9)." This rendered his word incomparably more powerful than it would have been under other circumstances; and no doubt, if you also can make a similar appeal, whether you be ministers or private Christians, it will give ten-fold effect to your instructions.

To all, then, I would say, labor first to improve the Gospel for the sanctification and comfort of your own souls; and then will those who behold the brightness of your light, acknowledge that God is with you of a truth; and that the Gospel, which has wrought such things for you, is worthy of universal acceptance.

***~~#1487~~***

***~~Christ Escapes from His Blood-thirsty Persecutors~~***

***~~[Luke 4:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.28-30)~~***

"So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way."

*NOTHING is more uncertain or transient than popular applause.* However just may be the grounds of any praise that is bestowed, the smallest circumstance is sufficient to obliterate all remembrance of a person's merit, and to render him an object of general indignation.

At the close of his life our Lord experienced this in a most astonishing degree: for the very people who but three days before had followed him with acclamations and hosannas, were instigated by their rulers to cry out with equal fervor, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Scarcely inferior to this was the instance that occurred to him the very first time he preached at Nazareth. When his sermon was but half finished, his auditors were filled with admiration at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth: but before the close of it, they rose up in murderous rage in order to destroy him.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The occasion of their rage—~~***

***~~Our blessed Lord had preached to them in a kind but faithful manner—~~***

He had opened to them a passage from the prophet Isaiah, and informed them, that it was accomplished in him. This on the whole afforded general satisfaction: but yet he saw that there were some objections lurking in their minds, relative to his parentage and education; and that they were displeased because he had not given a preference to his own townsmen, and wrought his miracles at other places, rather than his own town. These objections he anticipated, and proceeded to return an answer to them.

He observed, first, that prophets in general were not received in the place where they had been educated, because the people who had known them as equals or inferiors, did not like to submit to them in their prophetic character.

Secondly, he showed them, from different instances in the Scriptures, that *God had always dispensed his favors in a sovereign manner, and had sometimes imparted them to the despised Gentiles in preference to his own peculiar people*.

This was the immediate purpose of what he spoke; but doubtless there was much more insinuated than what was plainly expressed. His answer was intended to bring conviction upon their minds, and to show them, that they were indulging prejudices against him in spite of all they had heard respecting him; and that, if they yielded to their unbelief, they would constrain him to withhold his blessings from them, and even to send them to the Gentile world in preference to them.

***~~This was the true ground of all their rage—~~***

They saw the drift of his teaching, but they hated the light; and therefore sought immediately to extinguish it. They were not disposed to contend with him in a way of argument; for they saw that the truth was against them. They resorted therefore to clamor and persecution, the usual substitutes for truth and reason. But to reject him merely, was not sufficient; nor could they be contented even with expelling him from the city: no; nothing but his blood would satisfy them; and therefore, forgetting the sanctity both of the synagogue and of the Sabbath, they rose up with one consent, and thrust him out of the city to a cliff, that they might despatch him in a moment. Probably in executing this, what they would have called the judgment of zeal, [Numbers 25:7-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.7-13), they thought they were doing an acceptable service to their God; so blinded were they by their own passions, and "captivated by the devil at his will."

The inspired historian has declared to us,

***~~II. The manner in which our Lord escaped its effects—~~***

Our blessed Lord on different occasions withdrew himself from those who loved him, and from those who hated him, [Luke 24:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.31), [John 8:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.59). His escape from them at this time may be considered,

***~~1. As it respected them—~~***

His withdrawment from them was *miraculous*, as much as if he had beaten them all down with his word, [John 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.6); or smitten them with blindness, [Genesis 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.11), [2 Kings 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.18), or struck them dead upon the spot, [2 Kings 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.10), [2 Kings 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.12). The precise mode of his withdrawment is not specified; but it may be that he rendered himself invisible, and thus escaped from their hands.

It was also *merciful*, both as it tended to convince them of his miraculous power, and especially as it prevented them from executing their murderous purposes. What a mercy did David esteem it, when by the interposition of Abigail he was kept from destroying Nabal, [1 Samuel 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-33). Much more, if they ever received grace to repent of their wickedness, was it a mercy to those infatuated zealots, that they had not been allowed to imbrue their hands in the blood of God's only Son.

But it was also *judicial*, for, by means of his departure, the people of Nazareth were deprived of many temporal benefits, which, if they had received him more worthily, he would have imparted to them: they were deprived also of his spiritual instructions, which, if duly improved, would have converted and saved their souls.

***~~2. As it respects us—~~***

In this escape of his we see, what care he will take of us, and what care we ought to take of ourselves.

*Every faithful servant of God must expect persecution, but he is immortal until his work is done.*God will screen him from his enemies, however numerous, potent, or inveterate they may be, [Zechariah 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.5), [Isaiah 33:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.21-22), [2 Kings 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16-17). Look at *Paul*when a conspiracy was formed against his life. Look at *Peter*when chained in an inner prison in order to be brought forth the next day for execution: how seasonably, and in what an unlooked-for manner, did God interpose for their deliverance, [Acts 23:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.12-13), [Acts 23:16-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.16-24), [Acts 12:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5-8). *Thus will God exert his almighty power on behalf of all who serve him faithfully, unless indeed the hour is come for them to receive their full reward*. We never need to fear the face of man: for God has "put a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the jaws," of every man; "nor can any have even the smallest power against us, except it be given him from above."

But notwithstanding our assurance of *Divine protection*, we ought to take all prudent precautions to avoid the fury of our enemies, and to avail ourselves of those methods of escape which God in his providence has opened to us. "If they persecute us in one city, we should *flee*to another," and like Paul, when "let down by the wall in a basket," elude the resentment which we cannot pacify. We must not indeed deny Christ, or decline any duty, even though death should be the inevitable and immediate consequence of our fidelity: but we must never court death, if we have an opportunity of saving our lives by secracy or flight.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What need have all Christ's followers to count the cost before they take up a profession of religion!~~***

Ministers indeed, for the most part, are called to stand foremost in the post of danger, and to bear the brunt of the battle: but every soldier of Christ is called to "endure hardness," and to "fight a good fight." If by our life and conduct we condemn the world, though the reproof be tacit, and rather intimated than expressed, the world will be filled with wrath against us; and, if allowed by God, will persecute us unto death. Let us then understand what we are to expect, and stand at all times prepared for the worst.

***~~2. What a ground of thankfulness should we esteem it, if we are in any measure divested of carnal prejudice against divine truth!~~***

All of us, if not restrained by God, should, like the Nazarenes, be ready to vent our indignation even against Christ himself, if he uttered any truths offensive to our ears. What a mercy then is it if we can hear our sins condemned, and have our indignation turned against *them*, rather than against our faithful monitor! Let us cultivate this disposition, whether it respects the public preaching of the word, or private admonition.

Against our sins we cannot manifest too much displeasure. Happy would it be for us, if by one act of zeal we could despatch them utterly. Let us at least set ourselves against them without delay, and prosecute them from henceforth without intermission, and without mercy.

***~~#1488~~***

***~~An Evil Spirit Cast out~~***

***~~[Luke 4:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.33-34)~~***

"Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

IF any doubt the existence and agency of devils, the history before us is well calculated to satisfy them upon that head. It is evident that though Satan spoke by the mouth of the man whom he possessed, he spoke in his own person, and in the name of those other spirits that were leagued with him. To represent this man as disordered with an epilepsy is to confound things which the evangelist was most careful to distinguish, verse 40, 41. Besides, we cannot conceive that a physician (for such was Luke) should mention it as a remarkable circumstance that a disorder "did not hurt" a man by leaving him, verse 35; whereas, if we suppose this to have been a demoniac possession, the observation is just and proper; for we may be sure that when Satan threw down his poor vassal, he would have hurt, yes, killed him too, if Jesus, by an invisible but almighty agency, had not interposed to prevent it.

There being many accounts of evil spirits cast out by our Lord, we shall not advert to every circumstance of this miracle, but endeavor to improve that particular incident mentioned in the text; namely, *the request of Satan that Jesus would let him alone*. In order to this we shall,

***~~I. State the grounds of Satan's request—~~***

In acknowledging Jesus to be "the Holy One of God," Satan might be actuated by a desire to bring the character of Jesus into suspicion, as though they were in confederacy with each other; or perhaps he wished to impress the people with an idea that none but madmen and demoniacs would make such an acknowledgment: but in requesting Jesus to let him alone he was instigated rather by his own fears—

***~~1. He knew Jesus—~~***

Jesus was like any other poor man; his own disciples, except on some extraordinary occasions, did not appear acquainted with his real character. But Satan knew him, notwithstanding the lowly habit in which he sojourned among men. He knew Jesus to be the Son of God, who had left the bosom of his Father, that he might take our nature, and dwell among us. He was well aware that this Holy One must of necessity feel an irreconcilable aversion to such an "evil spirit," such a wicked fiend as he was; while at the same time there was no hope of prevailing against him either by fraud or violence. Hence he wished to be left to himself, and to be freed as much as possible from his interposition.

***~~2. He dreaded Jesus—~~***

It is not impossible but that Satan's expulsion from Heaven might have arisen from his refusal to do homage to the Son of God. However this be, he well knew that Jesus was "the promised seed," who should ultimately "bruise his head." He had already been foiled in a conflict with this despised Nazarene, and had learned by experience the impossibility of resisting his command. Nor could he be ignorant that Jesus was to be his judge in the last day, when the full measure of his sins should be meted out to him, and his present miseries be greatly augmented. Hence, while he "believed, he trembled." Hence those requests which he offered on other occasions, "Torment me not;" "send me not into the deep," that is, the depths of Hell. Hence also that question, in the passage before us, "Have you come to destroy us?" No wonder that, under such circumstances, he should be filled with terror, and ask, as the consummation of his highest wishes, to have a respite granted him.

That such desires were not peculiar to Satan will appear, while we,

***~~II. Inquire whether similar requests be not offered by many among us—~~***

***~~It is certain that many hate the declarations of Christ in his Gospel—~~***

Men will endure to hear those sins from which they themselves are free, exposed and condemned; but when the light is brought to reveal their *besetting*sins, they hate it, and wish to have it removed from them. This is found to be the case even in the public ministration of the word.

But it obtains in a still higher degree in private and personal admonition. Let a servant of Christ come in his master's name to a man that is proud or covetous, lewd or dissipated, or under the dominion of any particular lust, and let him set before that man the enormity of his besetting sin, and the judgments denounced against it; will he find a welcome? Will not the sinner wish to change the conversation? Will he not say in his heart, perhaps too with his lips, 'Let me alone; what have you to do with me?' Will not he regard such a monitor as an enemy to his peace, and be ready to ask, "Are you come to destroy" all my hope and comfort?

Nor is this aversion to the light peculiar to the sensual and profane: it is rather found to be more inveterate among those whose regularity in outward things has afforded them a ground for self-admiration and self-delight.

***~~Such persons accord with Satan both in sentiment and inclination—~~***

*To hate the authority of Christ in his word, is exactly the same as to hate his personal authority when he was upon earth.* And to wish to have the light of his truth withheld from us, is the same as to desire the restraint of his personal interposition. Nor is this a mere fallible deduction of man's reason; it is the express declaration of God. Those who would not hear the law of the Lord, are represented by the prophet as saying to him, "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us, [Isaiah 30:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.9-11)."

Job speaks yet more plainly to the same effect: he represents those who spent their days in wealth and pleasure, as saying to the Almighty: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of your ways: what is the Almighty that we should serve him? What profit should we have if we pray unto him? [Job 21:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.13-15)." It is evident, that not only the sentiments of these sinners, but also their very expressions, are almost the same with those of Satan in the text.

To evince the folly of harboring such dispositions, we shall,

***~~III. Show the inefficacy of such requests, by whoever they may be offered—~~***

***~~It was in vain that Satan pleaded for a temporary liberty to indulge his malice—~~***

Jesus would not even receive his acknowledgments, but peremptorily enjoined him silence. Nor would he allow Satan to retain possession of his wretched slave: he would not even permit this cruel enemy to "hurt" him; so little were the wishes of Satan consulted by our Lord and Savior.

***~~In vain also will be all our wishes to retain with impunity our beloved lusts—~~***

God may indeed forbear to let us alone us for a season, and say, "Let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)." When he sees that we "will have none of him," he may justly give us up to our own hearts' lusts, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12). But this would be the heaviest curse that he could inflict upon us. It would be even worse than immediate death, and immediate damnation; because it would afford us further opportunities of "treasuring up wrath" without any hope of obtaining deliverance from it. Besides, it would be only for a little time, and then "wrath would come upon us to the uttermost!" When we stand before the judgment-seat we shall in vain say, 'Let us alone; What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth?' Our doom will then be fixed, and our sentence executed with irresistible power and inexorable firmness. When once we are "fallen into the hands of the living God," all hope of impunity or compassion will have ceased for ever!

***~~This subject affords us occasion to suggest a word or two of advice—~~***

***~~1. Rest not in a speculative knowledge of Christ—~~***

We observe that Satan was well acquainted with the person and offices of Christ: but, notwithstanding all he knew, he was a devil still. To what purpose then will be all our knowledge, if we be not sanctified by it? It will only aggravate our guilt, and consequently enhance our condemnation also. We never know Jesus aright until we love his presence, and *delight in an unreserved compliance with his will.*

***~~2. Endeavor to improve his presence for the good of your souls—~~***

He comes to us in the preaching of his Gospel: he has promised to be with us whenever we are assembled in his name. Shall we then either by our aversion or indifference say to him, 'Let us alone?' Let us rather say, 'Lord, expel this evil spirit from my heart; take me under your care; and fulfill in me all your good pleasure.' Thus shall the "prince of this world be cast out:" and we, his poor vassals, be "brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

***~~#1489~~***

***~~Peter's Mother-in-law Cured~~***

***~~[Luke 4:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.38-39)~~***

"Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them."

*HOWEVER much we may be beloved of God, we are not to expect an exemption from those troubles which are the common lot of humanity.* Peter was one of the peculiar favorites of our Lord, and privileged to have more intimate access to him than almost any of the Apostles. Yet we find severe affliction in his family. This affliction however tended in the outcome (as all the trials of God's children will) to the glory of God and to his own personal benefit. This observation naturally arises from the account which we have just read respecting the miraculous recovery of his mother-in-law through the interposition of our Lord. In discoursing upon it we may notice,

***~~I. The service which Jesus rendered to her—~~***

***~~She was seized with a very dangerous illness—~~***

Peter, an utter stranger to the doctrine since established in the church of Rome respecting the celibacy of the clergy, was a married man, and an eminent pattern both of filial piety and conjugal affection. The aged mother of his wife was permitted to spend her declining years with him: but her near connection with this eminent servant of God could not preserve her from the common calamities of life; nor could her son-in-law restore her by a miracle without an express commission from God himself.

Perhaps the gift of miracles was not yet bestowed upon the church. But after it was, the Apostles could only exercise that gift when they were moved by God to do so. Why else did Paul leave Trophimus at Miletus sick, ([2 Timothy 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.20),) or suffer the sickness of his dear fellow-laborer Epaphroditus to proceed to such extremity? ([Philippians 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.27).).

The circumstance of her being detained from the ordinances of God must doubtless have been a great additional trial to her mind, especially at a season, when he who "spoke as never any man spoke," had come thither to instruct the people. The loss of divine ordinances was that which David chiefly regretted when he fled from Absalom, [Psalm 84:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-3). Peter however saw no necessity for staying from the synagogue when his mother was properly attended at home. He the rather went; and availed himself of his access to Jesus to intercede for his afflicted relative.

***~~At the request of Peter and his friends, Jesus restored her to perfect health—~~***

Jesus paid the same attention to the intercessions of *friends*as he did to men's *personal*applications. *It was the delight of his soul to relieve misery wherever he found it.*Nor did he think his work finished, when he had exercised his ministry in the house of God. He would not cease from labor while the continuance of his labors could be of any essential service. He could indeed have healed her by a word without going to her in person; but he delighted to visit the chambers of affliction. And behold! with what *condescension*he acted towards her: "he took her by the hand and lifted her up;" he, the Maker and Governor of the universe, administered unto her as if he had been her menial servant! Yet with what *authority*did he "rebuke" and dispel "the fever!" Who could act thus but God? Instantly did the disease vanish, and instantly did her former strength return; and the tears of sympathy and compassion were followed by universal joy!

In what manner she endeavored to requite this favor we shall see by considering,

***~~II. The service she rendered to Jesus—~~***

We are not to estimate services by the external worth of them, so much as by the intrinsic affection manifested in them. In this view her services were as acceptable as any that could be rendered; "she arose and ministered unto them." By this conduct she unwittingly revealed,

***~~1. The reality of the miracle—~~***

Had she merely joined her family, the departure of her fever might have been imputed to a fortunate coincidence of circumstances. Nor would they, who ascribed the expulsion of devils to the agency of Beelzebub, have been ashamed to adopt such a sentiment. But, if this had been the case, her body must have still continued in a state of debility; whereas she was able to exert herself as much as before her sickness. This then was an unquestionable proof of the reality of the miracle, [Matthew 9:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.6-8); and she became a witness for Jesus while she intended nothing more than to testify her love towards him.

***~~2. The goodness of her own heart—~~***

The hearts of all are, strictly speaking, most "desperately wicked." But our Lord tells us that "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things." In this sense she revealed much goodness of heart. So far from being puffed up with the favor conferred upon her, she was glad to execute the most lowly offices. Her heart glowed with a desire to honor her benefactor: nor was she unmindful of the obligations she owed to those who had assisted her, or interceded for her. She ministered not to him only, but to "them" also. She rejoiced in an opportunity to testify her gratitude to all.

How different was this from the conduct of the nine lepers, [Luke 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.17). Who does not reprobate them as the basest of mankind? Whereas she did not delay one moment to testify her sense of the mercy given unto her. The one thought of her heart was, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me, [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12)?" O that all were like-minded with her in performing a duty which is so "lovely and of such good report!"

***~~3. The duty of all who have received mercies from God—~~***

*God is to be acknowledged as much in the blessing given to our food or medicine, as in the more visible effects of his miraculous interpositions.*Have we then been preserved in health, or restored from sickness? Surely we stand indebted to God as much as if a miracle had been wrought in our behalf. And shall we be satisfied with making a few cold acknowledgments, and not render any active services to our benefactor? Or shall we pretend that there is nothing that we can do for him? Let us do what our capacity and situation enable us to do. However lowly the service, it shall be accepted of him.

But if we are too proud to stoop, or too idle to exert ourselves, we violate the plainest law of our nature, and render ourselves unworthy of the Christian name. Unthankfulness to God is specified as the summit of wickedness, even in the heathen world, [Romans 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21).

***~~The foregoing history may be improved,~~***

***~~1. In a way of reproof—~~***

*There is not one of us who does not stand indebted to God for an infinite multitude of mercies.*But in what manner have we requited him? Perhaps "in the time of trouble we have visited him, and poured out a prayer when his chastening was upon us, [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16)." But no sooner has his rod been removed, than, *like metal from the furnace, we have returned to our former hardness*. We have resembled the hypocritical Jews, and forgotten all the vows which we made in trouble, [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37). Ah! what a contrast between us and this pious matron! Let us be ashamed, and humble ourselves before God. Let us remember how awfully Hezekiah was punished for his ingratitude, 2 Chronicles 32:25. Let us instantly awake from our lethargy to the discharge of our duty, and "glorify Christ with our bodies and our spirits which are his."

***~~2. In a way of consolation—~~***

Whether we go up to God's house, or be confined on a bed of sickness, we may have access unto Jesus. He is with us at all times and in every place; and we may go to him with our petitions either for ourselves or others. What a rich source of consolation is this!

And have we no disorders, bodily or spiritual, which need his aid? If our body be healthy, is not our soul languishing? Or if we ourselves are healthy both in body and soul, have we no friend or relative that is in a sickly condition? Let us then apply to this almighty Physician, and we shall find him as condescending and as gracious as ever. He calls himself by this endearing name, "The Lord that heals you, [Exodus 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.26)." He will "send his word and heal us;" yes, he will strengthen us for the most active and difficult services. Let all of us then surround his throne, and cry with united voices, "Arise for our help, and redeem us for your mercy's sake, [Psalm 44:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.26)."

***~~#1490~~***

***~~The Catch of Fish~~***

***~~[Luke 5:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.8-11)~~***

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."

OUR blessed Lord from the time that he entered on his ministry, prosecuted it without intermission, preaching in the synagogues, and wherever the people were assembled to hear him. On the occasion before us, that he might not be obstructed by the populace that pressed upon him, he got into a small fishing vessel; and having pushed out a little from the land, addressed them to the greater advantage. The discourse he delivered is not recorded: but the *miracle*which he wrought immediately after it, is deserving of particular notice, and that in different points of view;

***~~I. As perverted by Peter—~~***

Peter, and his partners James and John, had been engaged in fishing all the preceding night, and had caught nothing: but at our Lord's command they let down their nets, and inclosed such a multitude of fish, that their nets began to break, and their ships, when filled with them, were almost ready to sink. Peter, overwhelmed with astonishment, saw that this was none other than the hand of God; and prostrating himself before the knees of Jesus, exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

***~~Now this was well meant on the part of Peter—~~***

He had a consciousness that he was "a sinful man;" and feared therefore that some heavy judgment would befall him in the presence of a holy God. Ever since Adam fled from the presence of Jehovah in Paradise, the presence of God has been rather a ground of fear and dread, than of hope and joy to fallen man. Manoah exclaimed to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God, [Judges 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 13.22). This kind of apprehension it was which arose in the mind of Peter, and dictated his unwise request. If the circumstance of his being a sinful man was a reason why the Lord Jesus should depart from him, what person is there on the face of the whole earth that can desire his presence?

***~~But his request should have been the very reverse of what it was—~~***

Was he a sinful man? he needed so much the more to receive instruction from the Savior respecting the way which God had provided for his deliverance. He should rather have said, therefore, 'Lord, I am a sinful man, and all my hope is in you alone; for, "to whom else can I go either for mercy or for grace to help me in the time of need?" You alone can bear with me; you alone can save me. My efforts to catch fish show me how little I can do of myself even in the way of my trade: and how much less can I do in the things that relate to Heaven! O, then, I entreat you, never, never leave me; never, never forsake me; but be with me as my Guide and Comforter, my Righteousness and Strength, even unto the end. Without you I can do nothing; but by strength communicated from you I shall be able to do all things.'

Thus, instead of making his sinfulness a reason for entreating the Lord to *depart*from him, he should rather have urged it as a *plea for mercy*, saying, with David, "O Lord, for your name's sake, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great, [Psalm 25:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.11)." This would have honored the Savior, whose mercy is equal to his power; and any other use of the miracle was, in fact, an ignorant and unfitting perversion of it.

The true intent of the miracle will appear, while we view it,

***~~II. As explained by our blessed Lord—~~***

He dissipates the fear of his trembling Disciple, saying to him, "Fear not;" and for his comfort assures him, that the miracle was designed as an emblem,

***~~1. Of the effects which should be produced by the Gospel—~~***

The whole world is like the ocean, where sinners range without control: and the Gospel is as a net, which the servants of the Lord spread in order to gather them for him, not that they may be destroyed, but that they may live under his protection, and be regarded by him as his peculiar possession.

The prophets in their endeavors succeeded to a very limited extent: but the time was fast approaching, when both of Jews and Gentiles, would be drawn to the Lord by the influence of his grace, and all nations be brought to the obedience of faith. True indeed, both bad and good are gathered by the Gospel now, and are brought to an outward profession of the faith; a separation of the one from the other being left to be made at the last day, [Matthew 13:47-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.47-50); but the scope of the miracle before us is rather to show the saving effects of the Gospel, without adverting to any minute particulars respecting those in whom a difference shall be found.

And here let me remind you, that the emblem is now realized among you at this very hour. While I preach to you the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, I am, in fact, spreading the Gospel net, that I may draw you from the midst of a wide and sinful world, and present you to God as a peculiar people, zealous of good works!

***~~2. Of the office to which Peter himself was now definitively called—~~***

Peter and his partners had followed our Lord before, but not so as to remain with him as his stated attendants. But now they were to abandon their worldly calling altogether, and to become exclusively the disciples of Jesus: they were henceforth to be by profession, as it were, "fishers of men, [Matthew 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.19)." In this office Peter was to be pre-eminently distinguished: nor was either his apprehended sinfulness or his lack of education to be any obstacle to his success.

Accordingly the promise now given him was very fully accomplished in the first sermon which he preached on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted to the faith of Christ. It was also again fulfilled, when he was made the honored instrument of first opening the kingdom of Heaven to the Gentile world, by the conversion of Cornelius and his company. From that time to the present hour the *Gospel net*has been cast with different measures of success in all the quarters of the globe: and we are looking for a period, not far distant now, when Pentecostal scenes shall be renewed in every place, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

That the miracle may produce its full effects, let us contemplate it,

***~~III. As to be improved by us—~~***

See what it wrought on Peter and James and John: this is the effect it is to produce on us. We should all of us without exception be led by it,

***~~1. To receive the Lord Jesus as the true Messiah—~~***

To his miracles the Lord Jesus himself appealed as demonstrative seals of his Divine commission. And what could convey clearer evidence of it than the miracle before us? For, while it did not admit of a possibility of collusion, it showed how unbounded was the power of the Lord over the whole creation, and consequently how "competent he was to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God by him." While this proved that he was the true Messiah, it proved to our comfort, that all which he has undertaken for us shall surely be accomplished.

***~~2. To trust in him under all circumstances, however discouraging—~~***

Peter felt discouraged on account of his sinfulness; and he had seen his incompetence to effect anything by any power of his own. Now the same grounds of discouragement often exist in reference to ourselves, whether as objects of the Lord's mercy, or as agents in his service. But behold what the Lord effected both for him and by him in an instant of time: and can he not accomplish either for us, or by us, whatever shall be deemed conducive to his glory? Yes, he can, and will. Our iniquities, if only we trust in him, shall be forgiven, and our needs of every kind shall be supplied: and through the communications of his grace we shall be made successful in all our efforts, whether to serve him ourselves, or to bring others to the enjoyment of his salvation.

***~~3. To serve and honor him with our whole hearts—~~***

These fishermen left their all to follow him. And this is what we also must do, in heart at least, and in act also, if fidelity to him require it: nor on any other terms than these will he acknowledge us as his disciples, [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33). And is he not worthy of being served thus? Did his disciples ever find cause for regret that they had forsaken all for him, [Luke 22:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.35). No! Nor shall we. The Apostle Paul counted all things but loss for Christ: and thus must we hold in utter contempt everything that may interfere with our duty to him, or impede us in his service.

I call on all of you then to make this improvement of the miracle before us. For those who minister in holy things the duty is indispensable: nor is it less so for those who are ministered unto: To follow him fully is the sure way to enjoy his presence both in this world and in the world to come!

***~~#1491~~***

***~~The Call of Matthew~~***

**[Luke 5:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.27-29)**

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them."

*IF we notice particularly who they are whom God has more especially selected as objects of his grace and mercy, we shall be struck with this plain and obvious truth, that "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways."* Had it been left to man to dispense the blessings of salvation, he would have imparted them to those whose previous qualifications and endowments seemed to have marked them out for this high distinction. But God has rather sought, by the preference which he has shown, to magnify his own grace and mercy.

The person here chosen to the apostleship was a "tax collector." Now the tax collectors were characters universally hated by the Jewish nation, because, as tax-gatherers, they aided the Roman government, by whom they were appointed, and whose interests they served. The persons who executed this office, knowing that, independently of their own character, they were hated and despised by their brethren, were intent only on advancing their own interests, and were guilty of exacting in many cases more than they were authorized to require; and thus by their oppressive conduct they rendered the office, and all who held it, objects of unqualified reprobation.

Yet of these persons did God select many, in preference to the Scribes and Pharisees, to participate in the benefits of the Redeemer's kingdom; as our blessed Lord himself says, "The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you, [Matthew 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.31)."

The person whom our text mentions as executing that office, is here called "Levi:" but in his own account which he gives of himself, he calls himself by the name of Matthew, [Matthew 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.9). Of his conversion we are informed in the words before us. He was "sitting at the receipt of custom," in the regular discharge of his duty, and, without any previous intimation or instruction, was called by our blessed Lord to a constant attendance upon him, as one of his disciples. This event will be found deeply interesting to us all, while we consider,

***~~I. His unexpected call—~~***

In this there was doubtless something peculiar. He was called to an office which was limited to twelve, and which now no longer exists. But still, excepting that peculiarity,

***~~1. The same call is given to every one of us—~~***

To us the Gospel speaks in the same authoritative tone as that in which Jesus addressed this busy tax collector: and in it the Lord Jesus Christ himself says to every one of us, "Follow me!" 'Believe in me as the true Messiah: receive me as sent of God to be the Savior of your soul: give yourself up to me as your Lord and Master: obey my commandments, and tread in my steps. Let no present considerations operate to retard your compliance with my will: come, leave all, and follow me.'

In all this there is nothing peculiar: it is the duty of every living man: the command is issued equally to all: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me".

***~~2. Wherever it is effectual, it is equally the gift of sovereign grace—~~***

To Matthew, the call came unexpected and unsought: and so it does in reality wherever it takes effect. The precise time of its operation may not, in all cases, be so distinctly seen, nor its power so deeply felt; but in all cases must its efficacy be traced to God, who, of his own good pleasure, dispenses his gifts to whoever he will. There may in some cases be a long season of gradual illumination, even as the early dawn, whose transition from darkness to light is imperceptibly progressive: but still, if we trace it to the first thought and first desire originating in the soul, we must without hesitation ascribe it altogether to God, who "gives both to will and to do of his good pleasure, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)."

Of all true converts it must be said, "You have not chosen me; but I have chosen you, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16);" "You loved me, because I first loved you, [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.19);" You did not "know me, until after you were known by me, [Galatians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9);" or "apprehend me, until you had first been apprehended by me [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12)." In reference to you all it must in this sense be said, no less than of Matthew himself, "I am found of them that sought me not; I am made manifest to them that asked not after me, [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1)." Whatever holy desires we feel, or good counsels we follow, or just works we perform, they all proceed from God; who by his grace in Christ Jesus saves us."

That this call of Matthew may have its due effect upon us, let us consider,

***~~II. His exemplary obedience to it—~~***

As in the call itself, so in his obedience to it, there was something peculiar. The office which he had held, he instantly resigned, and became from that moment a stated attendant on our Lord. In this respect it is not necessary that we should follow him, unless the occupation in which we have been engaged be criminal. We are rather to "abide in the calling in which we have been called:" yes, "therein to abide with God, [1 Corinthians 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.20), [1 Corinthians 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.24)." But in other respects our obedience must resemble his. It should be,

***~~1. Prompt obedience—~~***

There was in him no "conferring with flesh and blood." Elisha, when Elijah's mantle was cast upon him, [1 Kings 19:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.19-21), felt an irresistible attraction, and obeyed without hesitation or delay. So it should be with us. Does the Lord Jesus by his word and Spirit command us to follow him? We should not wait for a second call: we should so act, that we may be able to say with David, "I made haste and delayed not to keep your commandments, [Psalm 119:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.60)."

***~~2. Self-denying obedience—~~***

Lucrative as his situation was, Matthew resigned it without reluctance, determining that nothing should obstruct him in the path of his duty. And should not we also despise all earthly gains or prospects in comparison with Christ? Should we not be ready to shake them from us, as we would "the thick clay from our feet" when we were about to run a race, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6), Yes truly, we should be ready to "leave all to follow Christ;" and account not even life itself dear to us, if only we may honor him by the sacrifice of it, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24), [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20).

***~~3. Grateful obedience—~~***

Immediately Matthew made a great feast for his divine Master, and invited to it a number of his former friends, who were still prosecuting the line which he had just relinquished. In this he sought to honor his Lord in the face of the whole world, and to advance the interests of His kingdom, by bringing others to the knowledge of him. This, under any circumstances, was a just expression of his gratitude for the mercy given unto him.

It shows us how we also should use our influence, when once we have become followers of our blessed Lord. We should not only not be ashamed to confess him openly before men, but should exert ourselves to bring our friends and relatives to an acquaintance with him, that they also may be made monuments of his grace, and become partakers of the blessings which we enjoy. Our very feasts should now be ordered with that view, and be made conducive to that end. Nor should we make any account of either expense or trouble, if we may but testify in the smallest degree our love to Christ, or advance the ends for which he came into the world.

***~~4. Determined obedience—~~***

We never read of his expressing a wish afterwards to return to his former employment, or of his regretting that he had made so great a sacrifice. Nor should we ever "look back, after having once put our hand to the plough, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62)." The patriarchs, who had left their country and their kindred at the call of God, "had opportunities enough to return, if they had been so minded;" but they "looked forward to a heavenly country, [Hebrews 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.15-16)," and to their dying hour pursued their pilgrimage towards it with unabated ardor. And we also must go forward in a sweet and assured hope, that in the place of all that we resign or lose for Christ, we shall have "a better and an enduring substance in Heaven, [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34)."

***~~Reflect,~~***

***~~1. How strongly does this example reprove the whole professing Christian world!~~***

We are all called as he was, and have been called ten thousand times, to serve and follow Christ. But on whom among us have the same effects been produced? Who has not had many excuses to offer for declining to accept the invitations of his Lord? I may even say, who, if his own friend or relative had acted as Matthew did, would not have been ready to cry out against him as a weak deluded enthusiast? But this call must be obeyed, if ever we would be acknowledged by our Lord as his obedient people.

I do not say that we must actually renounce all our worldly interests for Christ; but this I say, that we must be ready to renounce them if they interfere with our duty to him, or if by the surrender of them we may more advance his glory in the world. On no other terms will he receive us: if we be not willing to "lose father and mother, and houses and lands, yes, and our own lives also for his sake, we cannot be his disciples." O that his power might now go forth among you, as it did in the case before us; and that all your "souls may be subdued to the obedience of faith!"

***~~2. How great is the benefit of obeying the Gospel call!~~***

Matthew in appearance was degraded and impoverished; but he was made an eminent servant of Christ, and a blessed instrument of diffusing the knowledge of him through the whole world. (Of all the Evangelists, not one marks so fully the Messiahship of Jesus, and the accomplishment of prophecy in him, as Matthew.) And what is his condition now? Has he not far better treasures than ever he possessed on earth?

Know then, that you also may appear to suffer loss by devoting yourselves to Christ; but if you have the honor of being his servants, his friends, his heirs; if he acknowledges you as members of his own body, yes, as his spouse, who shall participate in all his glory, and have the everlasting fruition of his love; you have made a good exchange.

Rejoice then in your high privileges; and be thankful to Him, by whose almighty power alone you have been made willing to accept them. Let your whole lives be henceforth consecrated, as Matthew's was, to his service: so shall you in your place be his witnesses to all around you; and before long be joined to that blessed society, where every loss shall be compensated with a proportionable weight of glory!

***~~#1492~~***

***~~The New Wine and Old Wineskins~~***

***~~[Luke 5:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.35-38)~~***

"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days." Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

THE cavils of objectors have been frequently overruled for the benefit of the church. They have given rise to many of our Lord's most instructive discourses, and thereby furnished us with a much clearer and more extensive knowledge of our duty. Thrice in this chapter do we see our Lord called upon to answer the objections that were either secretly entertained, or openly expressed, against him. His forgiving of sins, and associating with sinners, had given offence; but he vindicated his conduct with respect to both, and has afforded us herein a rich discovery of his power and grace.

In the context he was condemned for leaving his disciples so much at liberty respecting the duty of *fasting*. In reply to the queries put to him on this subject, he delivered the parables which we have now read: and in which are contained,

***~~I. A virtual acknowledgment of the duty of fasting—~~***

This duty, together with the attendant offices of humiliation and prayer, our Lord had forborne to insist upon so much as John had done: and for that he was blamed by the self-righteous Pharisees. But in his answer to the question put to him, he does not say that the guests of the bride-chamber were never to fast, but only not during the present season, "while the Bridegroom was yet with them."

Nor in the parables before us does he say, that the old garment should not be mended, nor the wine put into vessels at all, but only that discretion was to be exercised with respect to the manner of doing these things. These intimations alone were sufficient to establish the propriety of practicing the duty there spoken of: but they are enforced by many other passages of Holy Writ; and especially by the admonitions given by our Lord himself respecting our conduct when we fast, [Matthew 6:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.16-18). Indeed, in our text itself he says, that after his removal from them "they should fast, verse 35."

There being no doubt among us on this point, I proceed more particularly to notice that which is in fact the substance of both the parables, namely,

***~~II. A special direction for the performance of this duty—~~***

In inculcating or practicing this solemn duty, we are here taught to pay the strictest attention to the principal circumstances relating to it, such as the *time*, the *manner*, the *end.*

***~~1. The time of fasting—~~***

It is not every season that is suited to this duty. At a wedding-feast, for instance, it would be absurd to fast. But on occasion of any great calamity, whether public or private, a fit opportunity would offer itself. In a season of war, famine, pestilence—the deepest humiliation befits us. So under the pressure of any personal affliction, and especially in a time of spiritual distress, when corruptions are strong, and temptations powerful, and self-reproach is deep, and God has hidden his face from us—it befits us to betake ourselves to fasting and prayer. Respecting an unclean devil, which the disciples were not able to eject, our Lord said, "This kind goes not out but by fasting and prayer [Matthew 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.21)." And so we find on many occasions our lusts too strong for us; and therefore too strong, because we use not these means of obtaining the victory over them.

There are also in domestic life seasons when husband and wife may profitably separate from each other for a short time in order to address themselves more effectually to the discharge of this high duty of fasting and prayer, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7). And thus has Solomon informed us; "There is a time to weep, as well as a time to laugh, and a time to mourn as well as a time to dance, [Ecclesiastes 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 3.4);" and these seasons we ought more particularly to select, even "when the Bridegroom is taken away from us."

***~~2. The manner of fasting—~~***

Here also discretion is greatly needed. To carry our austerities so far as to injure our own health, is highly inexpedient. Such conduct, instead of fitting us the more for the Lord's service, would rather incapacitate us for it, and defeat the very object we had in view. The putting of new wine into leather bottles that were weakened by use and age, would lead to the ruining of the bottles themselves, and of the wine committed to them. And so would indiscreet austerities operate on us, and on all around us.

What would the world at large think of a religion that prescribed such things? Would they not cry out against it as a gloomy superstition? And what would an inquiring soul be ready to feel? Would he not be discouraged and disheartened, and, through a distaste for such self-tormenting exercises, be ready to relinquish it altogether? We must take care then, that in our mode of inculcating these self-denying duties, we do not give occasion for such unfounded sentiments, and such erroneous conceptions.

***~~3. The end of fasting—~~***

The Pharisees put these services in the place of true religion, not knowing that they are only as means to an end, and as the scaffolding to the edifice which it is employed to construct. Hence arose their bitter complaint against our Lord. But we must ever remember, that, to whatever extent we multiplied these services, they never could stand in the place of repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the great error of the Church of Rome: they place penance, that is, a round of observances prescribed by man, in the place of repentance as enjoined by God, and in the place also of the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose blood alone can cleanse from all sin."

But I charge you before God to be on your guard against this, since it will "make void the whole Gospel of Christ," and cause "the blood of Christ to have been shed in vain." As a discipline for the mortifying of the flesh and the quickening of the spirit, fasting is good: but as a substitute for an entire renovation of soul, and for a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a broken reed, which will pierce even unto death the hand that rests upon it.

***~~Learn then from this parable,~~***

***~~1. To judge with candor—~~***

The Pharisees through their pride and ignorance were led to condemn our Lord. And thus we also are apt to judge our unoffending brethren. We have a standard of our own; and by that we try all other persons: and, if they exceed that standard we condemn them as enthusiasts; or, if they fall short of it, we account them but lukewarm formalists. But the same standard cannot be applied to all. There are ten thousand circumstances which may not only justify a difference of conduct in pious persons, but may actually produce it.

The disciples of John, we readily acknowledge, did right in fasting often: but did the disciples of our Lord act wrong because they did not fast at all? No! the circumstances of the two parties were widely different, as our Lord informed them; and therefore both were right.

So it may be with many of our brethren, who differ from us in relation to this matter: and it does not befit us to judge them. "To their own Master they stand or fall:" and it is our part to commit them altogether unto God, who judges righteously, and who alone can estimate everything which is to be taken into the account.

***~~2. To give advice with caution—~~***

We ought to bear in mind the different situations and capacities of men, and not to be requiring of novices what is suited only to the strength of an established saint. Our blessed Lord spoke not all he knew, but only what his hearers were able to receive; and even from his own disciples he kept back much which they were not able at that time to comprehend, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12).

So Paul "fed his Corinthian converts with milk and not with meat," because they were yet in too carnal a state to enter into the deeper subjects which he would gladly have brought before them, [1 Corinthians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.2). Thus then should we also do. We should "feed babes with milk, and minister meat to those only who by reason of a more adult age are able to digest it, [Hebrews 5:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12-14)."

Nor let any one think this unfitting a minister of God. It is the true and proper office of love. Jacob would not drive his lambs too far, lest in one day he should kill them all, [Genesis 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.13). And our blessed Lord "carried the lambs in his bosom, and gently led those that were with young." And thus must we also exercise the same tender care in administering to the lambs of our flock, lest by undue rigor we "break the bruised reed," or by overwhelming exactions we "quench the smoking flax."

***~~3. To press forward with holy unremitting diligence—~~***

It was of his holy Apostles that our Lord said, that in the days after his removal from them they should fast. Who then are we that we should think ourselves at liberty to remit our exertions in our heavenly course? Never will there be in this life a moment when our vigilance can be dispensed with, or our most self-denying labors be relaxed. Nor, if Paul was "in fastings often," should we account that holy discipline unnecessary for us. On the contrary, we should by all possible means "keep our body under and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having ministered to others, we ourselves should be deemed unworthy the approbation of our God, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27).

***~~#1493~~***

***~~The Apostles Chosen~~***

***~~[Luke 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.12-13)~~***

"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles"

THE short period of our Lord's ministry on earth rendered it expedient for him to employ others as his helpers in the work. Accordingly, in reference to the twelve Patriarchs, who might be considered as the fathers of the Jewish Church, he selected twelve of his disciples, who would be his instruments for planting and establishing his Church. There were other seventy, whom at a later period he sent forth, two by two, for the purpose of preparing the minds of the people for his personal ministry among them, [Luke 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.1); but the Apostles were to be his stated servants after that he would leave this world and return to his heavenly Father. The circumstances of their appointment were peculiar, and deserve our most attentive consideration. The night previous to their appointment he spent in prayer to his heavenly Father; which remarkable occurrence it will be proper to notice in a threefold view:

***~~I. As an act for our benefit—~~***

***~~The appointment of the Apostles was a work of singular importance—~~***

They were to be employed in the Church as his messengers to declare his truth—his witnesses to attest it—as patterns also to illustrate—and as martyrs to confirm it. But whence could a number of poor fishermen attain "a sufficiency for these things?"

***~~Hence our blessed Lord continued the whole night in prayer for them—~~***

His heavenly Father was able to furnish them for this great work, and to give them success in it; and therefore our Lord importunately sought for them the grace which they stood in need of: nor would he cease from his exertions, until he had obtained all that their necessities required. The benefit of his prayer was fully manifested as soon as they were endued with power from on high: then nothing could withstand their wisdom, or subdue their courage: they were deaf to menaces, and regardless of death. Their success was rapid, extensive, permanent: and we at this day enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Through that prayer the Apostles were richly furnished unto every good work; and were enabled so to establish the kingdom of our Lord, that neither earth nor Hell have ever been able to prevail against it.

***~~II. As a lesson for our instruction—~~***

***~~The ordination of ministers is also a most important work—~~***

*On them, under God, depends the everlasting welfare of thousands.* We need only compare the state of those congregations where the Gospel is faithfully preached with those which are under the superintendence of careless ministers: in the one will be found little but ignorance and impiety; in the other, there will be many whose minds are enlightened with divine truth, and whose souls are quickened to a new and heavenly life.

But where shall persons be found duly qualified for the work—where are those who will be willing to undertake it? True; if the ministry of the word be made a source of temporal honors and riches, there will be multitudes ready to engage in it: but if the "signs of a minister," or accompaniments of the ministry, be like those in the Apostles' days, "reproaches, necessities, and distresses for Christ's sake, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10); [2 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.12)," and the only rewards be "labors, stripes, prisons, deaths, [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28)," there will not be many candidates for the office, nor will the qualifications for it be thought so common as they are at present.

How few are ready to go and preach to the heathen, where the labor and self-denial are great, and the earthly recompense is small! Large benefices, where little is to be done, or the work can be done by proxy, are caught up with avidity: but if nothing but a *future*reward be held forth, and God says, "Who will go for us?" there are few indeed that will answer with the prophet, "Here am I, send me! [Isaiah 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.8)."

***~~This, therefore, should be the subject of our most devout prayers—~~***

God himself has commanded us to commit the matter to him in prayer: "The harvest truly is plenteous, and the laborers are few; pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." And truly, all ranks and orders of men are concerned to "labor earnestly in prayer" concerning it.

How fervently should they pray, to whom the office of ordaining others is committed! for "if they lay hands suddenly on any man, they make themselves partakers of other men's sins, [1 Timothy 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.22)."

Nor should they be less earnest who are to be ordained. When we consider how arduous their work is, and how great their responsibility before God; when we reflect that their word will be "a savor of life to the life and salvation of many, or a savor of death to their death" and condemnation, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16); and that the blood of all that perish through their neglect will be required at their hands; methinks it is a wonder that anyone can be found, who, for the sake of filthy lucre, will dare to undertake it. Were the weight of the office duly considered, no one would presume to enter upon it without much prayer to God to qualify him for the discharge of it, and to bless his labors to the edification of the people.

But the people themselves also are no less concerned to pray that God would "send them pastors after his own heart;" for the welfare of their souls greatly depends (under God) on the kind of ministry which they attend: if Christ be not exhibited to them in his person and offices; if they be not encouraged to receive out of his fullness all the blessings of salvation; if they be not led into discoveries of the evil of their own hearts, and instructed in the nature of that change which the Holy Spirit will effect within them; if, in short, they have not "the whole counsel of God set before them," they will be left to rest in very low attainments, if not to "perish utterly through lack of knowledge."

This lesson then should be learned by all; and so learned, as to be reduced to practice.

***~~III. As a pattern for our imitation—~~***

***~~Prayer is both the duty and the privilege of all—~~***

Our blessed Lord had doubtless more intimate communion with his Father than we can possibly have; yet are we also authorized to call God "our Father;" yes, we are commanded to do it, and to "open our mouths wide, that he may fill them."

It is not, indeed, required of us that we should spend whole nights in prayer to God; for that would probably, unless in some very peculiar circumstances, render us unfit for prosecuting the duties of the ensuing day: but we are required to "continue in prayer, and to watch thereunto with thanksgiving, [Colossians 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.2);" and the more nearly we can approach to the example of our blessed Lord in the frequency and urgency of our prayers, [Psalm 22:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.2), [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7), the more remarkable will be the answers that we shall receive, and the more abundant the communications of God to our souls. If we wrestled more like Jacob, we should certainly prevail to a much greater extent than in general we do, [Genesis 32:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-26).

***~~We should therefore resort to prayer on every particular emergency—~~***

Though the particular object of our Lord's continuance in prayer does not occur to us—yet we all have some occasions that call for more than ordinary direction and assistance from God. On these occasions, whatever they may be, whether they relate to the body or the soul, to time or to eternity—we should go and spread our wants before God. His own command to us is, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." "In all our ways we must acknowledge him, and he will direct our paths."

In prayer then must all of us resemble the Lord Jesus Christ. In this has "he set us an example, that we should follow his steps:" and "we must walk as he walked." By prayer must all his followers be distinguished; for they are "a people near unto him." They are hypocrites, of whom it is said, "They will not always call upon God." All true Christians can say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Learn hence the real state of your souls before God.*Prayer has often been called the pulse of the soul*—and truly it is so; for by that you may discern the state of the soul, incomparably better than you can by the pulse the state of the body. If you are prayerless people, you are dead, altogether dead in trespasses and sins. If your prayers are habitually cold and formal, they are such as God will never accept. No prayer will enter into the ears of the Lord Almighty, but that which is offered "in spirit and in truth."

Let us then beg of God to give us a spirit of grace and of supplication; and let us interest ourselves with God for the welfare of his Church. Let us especially remember "those who are over us in the Lord," and "labor always fervently for them in prayer," that they may be enabled to fulfill their ministry with diligence and success. Thus shall we both ensure blessings to our own souls, and be instrumental to the hastening on of that day, when "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

***~~#1494~~***

***~~The Analogy Between Bodily and Spiritual Cures~~***

***~~[Luke 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.19)~~***

"And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all."

IN perusing the histories of ancient heroes, we may often be led to admire their skill and valor; but we shall much oftener be shocked at the means they used to exalt and aggrandize themselves; and, when we see them raising trophies to themselves on the ruins of slaughtered nations, we shall be induced to consider them rather as the plagues and scourges of mankind.

But how different will be our sensations, when we read the history of Jesus! There we shall meet with nothing which will not be delightful to a benevolent mind. If we trace him in his circuits through the country, and view in every place the objects that surround him, we shall behold:

at one time the *eyes*he has just now opened, gazing on him with wonder and amazement;

and at another time the *ears*he has unstopped, drinking in his words with insatiable eagerness and attention.

Here we shall behold the *hands*he has restored to use, stretched forth to proclaim his praises;

and the *feet*he has strengthened, leaping and dancing around him with inexpressible delight;

there we shall *hear*the tongues he has loosed, shouting with exquisite love and gratitude;

and see those whom he has dispossessed of *devils*, sitting with composure at the feet of their Benefactor.

Sometimes we shall see the very *dead*starting forth into life and vigor at his command, and either rapturously greeting their disconsolate relations, or rending the air with their acclamations and hosannas.

Such accounts as these, if considered only in a temporal view, cannot but excite in us a sympathetic joy, and afford the most pleasing sensations. But, no doubt, they were intended also to convey some spiritual instruction; in which view they acquire an additional, and almost an infinite, importance. Perhaps it may be too much to say that the*miracles wrought by our Lord, were types of the spiritual blessings he conveys*; but we may affirm without hesitation, that there is a very strong analogy between them: and therefore, *when we see what he did to the bodies of men—we have, at least, a very just occasion of considering what he will do for our souls*.

In this view we propose to consider the account given to us in the chapter before us. We are informed that a great multitude came to him out of Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases: and then it is said, in the words of the text, "And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all."

To illustrate this subject we shall,

***~~I. Trace the analogy between the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord on the bodies of men, and those which he yet works on men's souls—~~***

For the more distinct elucidation of this point, we may observe,

***~~1. There is resemblance between the disorders of the body, and the disorders of the soul—~~***

Many were brought to our Lord, who were blind, deaf, leprous, and possessed with devils. And such are men at this time, in a spiritual view.

Like the Laodiceans, however they may "think themselves rich and increased with goods, they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and **blind**; and therefore need to take counsel of our Lord, and to anoint their eyes with his eye-salve, that they may see, [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18)."

"Their *eyes*must be opened, before they will turn from the power of Satan unto God [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)."

The natural man too is represented as **spiritually deaf**; as having ears, and not hearing, [Matthew 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.15); as being unable to hear the voice of the good Shepherd, [John 8:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.47); yes, as like the deaf adder that stops her ear, [Psalm 58:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.4).

The **leprosy of sin**lies deep in our hearts; as the prophet intimates, when, in allusion to the convicted leper, he says of himself, and of all around him, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5)."

Though **demoniac possessions**were not properly disorders—yet are they always enumerated with them, when the miracles of our Lord are recited. And, however humiliating the truth may be, it is certain that we are all, while in an unconverted state, possessed by Satan. The unbelieving world are *blinded* by him, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4), *governed* by him,[Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2), and *led captive*by him at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26). And, whatever evil they are excited to commit, it is through the instigation of that wicked fiend, [John 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.27). [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3).

***~~2. There is a resemblance between the cures wrought by our Lord upon the bodies of men, and the cures which he will work upon their souls—~~***

Wherever the blessings of salvation are mentioned in the prophets, they are set forth in some highly figurative expressions; and by none more commonly than by those relating to bodily cures. Isaiah says, "In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind see out of obscurity and out of darkness, [Isaiah 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.18), [Isaiah 32:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.3)." And again, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing! [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6);" which figures are afterwards explained as relating to the spiritual salvation of the Church, [Isaiah 35:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.10).

The *application*which the inspired Apostles make of these prophecies further evinces the truth of our position. Matthew quotes a passage which beyond all doubt relates to spiritual benefits that were to be obtained through the death of Christ, and explains it, in a way of accommodation, as referring to the bodily cures which our Lord had wrought. Compare [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4) with [Matthew 8:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.16-17).

Further, our Lord himself, having healed a blind man, takes occasion to trace this very analogy between the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, and the bodily blindness which he had just healed: "For judgment I am come into this world, that those who see not might see, and that those who see might be made blind, [John 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.39)." And both the answer which the Pharisees made to him, and the reply which our Lord gave them, manifest that this analogy was intended to be pointed out, [John 9:40-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.40-41).

***~~3. There is a resemblance between the manner in which the diseased persons applied to our Lord for healing, and the manner in which we should apply to him for spiritual healing—~~***

Of all the multitudes that came to our Lord, there was not one who was not *sensible of his disease*. Moreover, they all came to him with *deep humility*, prostrating themselves before him in the most abject manner, [Luke 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.28), [Luke 8:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.41), and acknowledging the utter insufficiency of all other means [Mark 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.26), [Mark 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.33). And such was their *earnestness*, that they came from afar, [Mark 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.3), and could not be prevailed upon to hold their peace, [Matthew 20:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.30-31), nor would take a denial even from our Lord himself, [Matthew 15:22-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.22-28). It is worthy of notice also, that they all came in *faith*—some few indeed doubted his power, and some his willingness, to help them: but none doubted both his power and his willingness; and the greater part entertained no doubt at all.

Thus then should we go to him, "weary and heavy-laden" with our sins, and so *sensible of our spiritual needs*, that if he should ask us, What would you have me do for you? we may answer him immediately, "Lord, that this disorder may be healed, and that sin forgiven, [Matthew 20:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.33)."

We must also, with all *lowliness of mind*, confess our inability to obtain relief from any other quarter, and our dependence on him alone, [Hosea 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.1-3).

Moreover, in proof of our *earnestness*, we must not merely seek, but strive, [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24), determining to take the kingdom of Heaven by violence, [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.12), and not to let the Savior go, unless he blesses us [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26).

Lastly, we must be sure to exercise *faith*on Christ, believing him both able and willing to save us: for we are expressly told that, he who wavers and is of a doubtful mind, must not expect to receive anything of the Lord, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7).

***~~4. There is a resemblance between the manner in which our Lord cured their disorders and the manner in which he will cure ours—~~***

He sometimes healed the people *secretly*, as when he took the deaf man aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and said, Ephphatha, be opened, and then charged him to tell no man, [Mark 7:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.34), [Mark 7:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.36). So he has now many "hidden ones, [Psalm 83:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 83.3)," in whose hearts he carries on a secret work, and heals them without attracting the notice of the world.

At other times he performed the cures *openly*, and in the sight of all; as when he bade the man with the withered hand to stand forth, [Matthew 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.3), [Matthew 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.5). So he often converts the souls of profligate sinners, or bitter persecutors, in such a striking manner, as to fill all around them with wonder and amazement.

Sometimes he wrought his cures *instantaneously*; as in the man at the pool of Bethesda, [John 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.8); and so he effects a sudden change in the hearts of many, causing them to cry out like the first converts and the jailor, "What shall I do to be saved, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37); [Acts 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30)."

At other times he performed his cures *gradually*, as in the blind man, who at first saw men, as trees walking, [Mark 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.24); and so he often carries on his work in a gradual manner in our souls, leading us from progressive conviction to thorough conversion.

Sometimes he used *means*in curing them; as when he put clay and spittle on the blind man's eyes, [John 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.6); so he now converts many by the preaching of his Gospel.

At other times he used *no means*, as in the case of the ten lepers, who were cleansed as they were going in the way, [Luke 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.14); and so he often imparts the knowledge of himself by the teachings of his Spirit, without using any particular means or instrument to convey it.

But however *varied*his manner was with respect to these things, in one respect it was uniformly the same: whoever he cured, he cured *perfectly*. And thus he always carries on the work he has begun in the souls of men, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6), and perfects that which concerns them, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8).

Since then, without any forced interpretations, we may draw such instruction from the miracles in general, let us endeavor to,

***~~II. Improve the particular miracle recorded in the text—~~***

If, in the concerns of our souls, we desire either *direction*or *encouragement*, we cannot find them any where more suitably afforded than in the passage before us; where the conduct of the multitude suggests the former, and the conduct of Jesus the latter. Let us then improve it,

***~~1. For direction—~~***

We should not dare to exhort you in general to follow the multitude; since that would be to lead you in the broad road to destruction, [Matthew 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13). But in the present instance we say, Follow that multitude.

Follow them in the *conviction which they had of their own need of Christ*. Every one felt within himself that he labored under a disorder which needed healing; and, if each of them had been asked, 'What is your disorder? and what is yours?' they could all have specified the principal symptoms of the disorders under which they labored.

Now thus must we go to Jesus, feeling and lamenting the ravages which sin has made upon our souls. It is not sufficient for us to confess in general that we are sinners; we must open our case to him, and tell him, "Thus and thus have I done, [Joshua 7:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.20)." And, if the Spirit of God has truly convicted us of sin, we shall find no more difficulty in this, than a poor man does in opening his complaints to a physician.

More particularly, we should get our hearts impressed with the evil of our besetting sin; and, carrying it to Jesus, we should confess it, lament it, and implore both his mercy to pardon it, and his grace to subdue it: and, if we thus go to him laboring and heavy-laden, we have his promise that he will give us rest, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28).

Follow them also in their *earnestness*. We are told that the people pressed on Jesus, so that those who were nearest to him could not maintain their place by reason of the multitudes, who strove to get access to him, and to touch him, [Mark 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.10). They not only left their own business, but, in many instances, prevailed on their friends to relinquish their occupations also, in order to carry them to Jesus. In short, they postponed every consideration to that of obtaining a cure from him. And who could blame them? They felt their need of healing, and knew that they might obtain it by going to him, and therefore they would on no account lose the opportunity afforded to them: and, when they could in no other way get access to him, they would go up to the top of the house, and let down their diseased friends on a mat through the roof, [Luke 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.19).

Would to God that we were all thus earnest for the salvation of our souls! that no consideration whatever were allowed to detain us from the Lord! and that not one of us might delay another hour to go unto him! We are far more favorably circumstanced than they were, since we can go to him without removing from our chamber, or intermitting our earthly business. He is everywhere present to heal us; if we can only *break through the crowd of lusts and cares that are within our own hearts*, there is no other crowd that can keep us from him.

How anxious should we be to get immediate relief from an acute disorder, especially if there were but one physician able to heal us, and his continuance in our neighborhood were likely to be very short! Let us then show the same care for our souls, and go to Jesus without delay, knowing that "this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation."

Once more—Follow them in their *faith*. They were not only convinced of Christ's power and willingness to heal them, but were assured that, if they could but touch his garment, they would be whole, [Matthew 9:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.21). They did not stand reasoning about the matter, or go and try other means, but applied to him as their all-sufficient helper.

So must we go to him, not endeavoring first to heal ourselves by our repentance, or laboring to make ourselves fit for him by our amendments, or questioning whether he is willing to receive us*. We must go to him just as we are, altogether filthy and abominable*; and be firmly persuaded that we shall not seek his face in vain. To be reasoning and yielding to doubts and fears will be of little avail; but to go to Christ in faith, will prove an infallible remedy for every ill: whatever be our complaint, he will say, "Go your way; and, as you have believed, so be it done unto you;" and we shall be made whole from that very hour, [Matthew 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.13).

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

We cannot conceive anything more encouraging than the behavior of our blessed Lord to the people.

Behold his *condescension!* How wonderful was it, that he, the Lord of glory, should allow such a multitude of miserable and filthy objects to press upon him! yes, that he should go about through all cities, towns, and villages, for that very purpose!

And will he now be inattentive to our spiritual wants? When we rush, as it were, with holy violence into his presence, and seek to touch him, will he forbid us? Will he withdraw himself from us, or say, 'Stand off; you are too vile to be admitted to my presence?' Has he not said, on the contrary, that "whoever comes unto him, he will never cast out, [John 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.3), [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)." Let the trembling sinner then take courage; for his *sighing*shall soon be turned into that triumphant *song*, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name, who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases, [Psalm 103:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1-3)."

Behold also his *compassion!*There was not one of all the multitudes that came to him, dismissed without a cure. Though many of them probably had despised him, and though he foresaw that many of those very persons would join in that general cry, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him!" yet his compassion yearned over them. Many, no doubt, were as unthankful as the nine lepers; yet did he not withhold his mercy from their bodies.

How much more then will he have compassion on those who seek him for their souls! When he beholds them supplicating for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their hearts, will he turn from them, and shut his ear at their cry? No! he will rather fall upon their neck, and kiss them, [Luke 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.20). Or, as the prophet speaks, "He will save; he will rejoice over them with joy, he will rest in his love, he will rejoice over them with singing, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)." Only let us seek him in truth, and we shall find him rich in mercy unto all that call upon him, [Romans 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12).

Lastly, behold his *power!* However inveterate the diseases of many might be, the whole multitude were healed. And has he less power now that he is in Heaven? Has he not "the residue of the Spirit," yes, and "all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him?" Why then should any be discouraged? What though our sins be great? can he not forgive them? What though our evil habits be deeply rooted? can he not overcome them? What though our temptations be manifold? can he not deliver us out of all? Be our "enemies ever so mighty, he who dwells on high is mightier." Let us all surround him in expectation of his benefits; and "we shall find him able to save us to the uttermost!"

***~~To Conclude—~~***

Let us now picture to ourselves the state of the multitudes who had touched him. What joys! what raptures! what ecstasies! what congratulations from surrounding friends! what universal shouts and acclamations to the honor of the Lord Jesus! none ascribing their recovery to an arm of flesh; but all acknowledging Jesus as the sole author of their happiness!

And why should it not be thus with us at this time? Surely, if this whole congregation would but vie with each other in their endeavors to obtain his blessing, they would soon have far more abundant cause for joy, than ever they had, whose bodily health was restored: for their souls should be freed from the deadly malady of sin, yes, "virtue should come forth from him to heal us all."

***~~#1495~~***

***~~True Happiness Stated~~***

***~~[Luke 6:20-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.20-26)~~***

Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in Heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

Men who dislike the *doctrines*of the Gospel are no less averse to its *precepts*. They may both approve and practice heathen morality; but the morality of Jesus will appear to them unamiable and precise. The words before us will fully establish this assertion.

It should be observed that this passage has no direct reference to the deeper mysteries of our religion: it is altogether of a practical nature: and the terms are so full, that they scarcely need any elucidation, while they are at the same time so plain as to be almost incapable of perversion; they lead us to consider,

***~~I. The false notions which the world entertains of happiness—~~***

***~~Many have been the speculations of philosophers on this subject; but there are general views in which the world at large are agreed—~~***

They think that *wealth*must of necessity conduce much to our happiness: they think that a *freedom from care and trouble*will greatly augment it: they think that an easy access to *pleasurable amusements and carnal enjoyments*will abundantly promote it; and, above all, that universal *respect and honor*will complete it.

***~~These views, however, are very erroneous—~~***

We deny not but that these sources of enjoyment afford a present gratification: nor do we say that wealth, or ease, or pleasure, or reputation, may not be very innocently enjoined: but it is a great mistake to think that happiness consists in these things; or that, if possessed in ever so great abundance, they would compensate for the lack of spiritual blessings. There are riches of far greater value than the wealth of this world; nor can any one possess those, who is very solicitous about this, [Matthew 13:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.44). None can know his need of divine grace, and not pant after it, [Psalm 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.1); in such indigent creatures, a Laodicean state is abominable, [Revelation 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16-17). Moreover, God calls men to mourn and weep for their sins, [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10); is it desirable then to possess a light and vacant mind? Such too is the enmity of the world against God, that it is not possible to retain the friendship of both at the same time, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Should we then consider human estimation as of transcendent value? Surely these things may show us how erroneous the world's judgment is.

***~~Nor is there any delusion more fatal to the soul—~~***

Our Lord could not be mistaken in his judgment; yet he denounces the heaviest woes against the rich, the full, the mirthful, and the respected, and distinctly assigns his reason for each denunciation. They who are occupied with carnal gratifications, make no provision for their eternal welfare. Hence, when bereft of the things of this life, they will be for ever destitute. Having had their portion now with the men of this world, they will participate in their dreadful lot hereafter.

We may see these truths realized in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. No flagrant evil whatever is imputed to the Rich Man. He was not wholly destitute even of liberality, since Lazarus received his daily subsistence from his table. The reason of his condemnation was, that, while he abounded in wealth, ease, pleasure, and honor—he wept not for his sins, nor hungered after the blessings of grace and glory.

Having exposed error, we would establish truth, by showing,

***~~II. The representations of happiness given to us in the Scriptures—~~***

***~~Poverty, dissatisfaction, sorrow, and contempt, are, it must be confessed, not pleasing in themselves; nor indeed does any blessing necessarily attach to them; but under certain circumstances they may be a desirable portion—~~***

Poverty and sorrow often have been, and still are endured for Christ's sake; nor is there anything more common than for his servants to be reviled and despised for their fidelity to him. It should seem indeed that the world could not hate and execrate those whom God esteems and declares blessed; but the treatment which the prophets, and Christ, and his Apostles met with, proves the contrary. If we then are treated like them, we have no reason to be dejected; yes rather, we may consider it as an honor conferred on us by God, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29).

***~~In a spiritual sense, poverty, hunger, etc. are great blessings—~~***

No doubt there is a *spiritual*meaning also in our Lord's words. Compare [Matthew 5:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-12). And what is so desirable as to feel our need of Christ? And what is so desirable as to be hungering after his righteousness? And what is so desirable as to be mourning for our corruptions? And what is so desirable as to endure shame for his sake, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). Those who experience most of this state, find most delight in it; they are most fortified against the incursions of worldly sorrow, and most abound in spiritual consolations.

***~~All who now submit to the pressure of spiritual afflictions, shall be abundantly recompensed in the eternal world—~~***

In Heaven there is enough to repay all our labors. The riches of glory will compensate for all present losses. The fullness of joy in those blessed abodes will satiate the hungry soul. The inconceivable delights will far outweigh our transient sorrows, 2 Corinthians 4:17. The honor which God will put upon us in the society of saints and angels, will make us forget our short-lived disgrace. Christ, the true and faithful witness, has repeatedly affirmed this: and he who declares such persons blessed, himself will make them so.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The mistaken votaries of this world—~~***

All profess to seek after happiness; but how many mistake the shadow for the substance. We may even appeal to you to declare who are truly blessed.

The *world's*views are: "Woe to you who are spiritually poor, weep, persecuted, etc. Blessed are you who are rich, noble, honorable, etc."

O that we would take *eternity*into our estimate of present things! O that we would cease from circulating our fatal errors, and acquiesce in the unerring declarations of God! We can easily see, that a man who should drink a palatable but poisonous draught, would be no object of envy. Let us be persuaded then that *momentary delights can never constitute us as truly blessed. He alone is happy, who is happy for eternity.*

***~~2. The humble followers of Jesus—~~***

Let not your hearts envy the prosperity of sinners, [Psalm 37:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.1-2). Remember Christians, that you are the only blessed people upon earth. Your very griefs and sorrows are grounds of thankfulness. The time is shortly coming, when men's apparent states will be reversed. Then will be fulfilled that glorious prophecy of [Isaiah 65:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.13-14): "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit."

Be content then to "fill up the measure of Christ's sufferings," and take for your comfort that delightful promise [Psalm 126:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.5-6), "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."

***~~#1496~~***

***~~The Blind Leading the Blind~~***

***~~[Luke 6:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.39)~~***

And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?"

Ignorance is, in itself, more excusable than open vice; but in some cases its effects are equally pernicious. A person may ruin himself no less by imprudence than by debauchery; and a General may bring as great calamities on his army through unskilfulness, as if he had betrayed them into the hands of their enemies.

This is manifestly true in the concerns of the soul: a person, ignorant of the way of salvation, must fall short of Heaven; and if he undertake to direct others, will ruin all who follow him. To impress this truth on our minds, our Lord repeatedly uttered this parable, [Matthew 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.14).

***~~I. The scope of the parable—~~***

The Pharisees, through their professed sanctity, gained extensive influence, and were implicitly followed by the deluded populace. The consequences were extremely fatal to them both.

In this parable our Lord intended to reprove,

***~~1. The presumption of such guides—~~***

No man should undertake an office for which he is not qualified, much less so important an office as that of guiding men to Heaven. Yet many assume the pastorate for filthy lucre's sake, without any other qualification than that of a little human learning.

But what would be thought of a man, who, because he was conversant with the learned languages, and philosophy, should engage to navigate a ship? Yet he would only subject a few hundred people to temporal death; *whereas a minister that misleads his people, involves thousands in everlasting destruction!*

How horrible is such presumption! and how surely must it bring down upon the offenders the signal vengeance of God! 2 Chronicles 26:16-21. Let all who would not perish under such an accumulated load of guilt, examine well their *motives*for undertaking, their *qualifications*for discharging, and their *manner*of executing, this high office.

It should be remembered, that it is not human learning which can qualify a man for the ministerial office, but rather an experience of true religion in his own soul. The Pharisees were acquainted with the *letter*of the Scriptures, but they understood not the *spirit*of them: they saw not the *spirituality*of the moral law, nor the *typical*import of the ceremonial law. Thus being ignorant of their fallen state, and of the means appointed for their recovery, they were only blind guides. A man must be converted himself, before he undertakes to convert others: he must be able to adopt the language of the Apostle, [1 John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.1); [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3).

***~~2. The folly of such followers—~~***

The generality never once consider whether their guide be competent to direct them, nor inquire into the truth of the directions given them. They commit their souls to his care, as though there were no possibility of erring, or no danger in error. They even prefer such teachers as "prophesy unto them smooth things, [Isaiah 30:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.9-11), [Jeremiah 5:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 5.30-31)."

But would any man act thus in matters of less importance? Would any person who had a disorder to be healed, or a cause to be tried, employ a physician or a lawyer that was ignorant of his profession, if he could have access to one of approved ability? Would any blind person commit himself to the guidance of one who also was destitute of sight? Can anyone doubt what would be the consequence of such folly?

What madness then is it for men to rest satisfied with the instructions of those whose whole dispositions and conduct manifest, that they are ignorant of the way to Heaven!

That their guides will be partakers of their doom, will afford but little consolation to them, when they themselves are suffering the bitter consequences of their folly!

[The whole of this subject requires to be treated with peculiar tenderness, lest we appear to be bringing only a railing accusation against our brethren, when we should be seeking rather the edification of our flock. We must not indeed shrink from expounding any portion of God's word; but we must always be careful to "speak the truth in love."]

The truth asserted in the parable is too obvious to need either proof or illustration; we shall therefore proceed to consider,

***~~II. The lessons we should learn from it—~~***

Though the familiarity of our Lord's expressions appears at first sight calculated to produce a smile, they afford just occasion for the most solemn admonitions.

***~~1. Guard against error in the concerns of your souls—~~***

Many suppose that ignorance is an excuse for error: but God has sufficiently warned us against this mistake, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6), [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11), [Ephesians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.6). It is certain that there is a great diversity of doctrines among those who undertake to teach; and that error is more prevalent than truth: But the multitudes who throng the *broad*road, cannot procure safety for those who walk in it. We must dare to leave the beaten track of self-righteousness and formality, for the less frequented path of faith and holiness; nor must we hope to reach the fold of God, unless we follow the footsteps of his flock, Song of Solomon 1:8. [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14).

***~~2. Try what you hear by the touchstone of God's word—~~***

The Scriptures are the only proper rule of our faith and practice: to them we must refer everything as to an unerring standard, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20), nor must any human authority supersede the exercise of our own judgment, [Matthew 23:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.8-10). If an angel from Heaven were to preach, we ought to try his word by this test! This was approved in the Bereans of old, [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11); and it is expressly enjoined on us, 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

***~~3. Seek the instruction and guidance of the Holy Spirit—~~***

However plainly man may preach, God alone can enable you to profit, [Isaiah 48:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.17). *Of yourselves you will be far more ready to embrace the self-exalting tenets of deceivers, than the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel.*But the Holy Spirit shall be given to those who seek his influence, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13), and shall guide into all truth those who submit to his teaching, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13), [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20). Let all then, whatever be their capacity or attainments, implore his help: then, though babes in human science, they shall be taught the things that are hidden from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26).

***~~#1497~~***

***~~The Tree Known by its Fruits~~***

***~~[Luke 6:43-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.43-45)~~***

"For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

*It is of infinite importance to every man to attain a knowledge of his state and character before God*. For, as such a knowledge would be the best preservative against a self-exalting and censorious spirit, so would it keep us from deluding ourselves with a merely nominal and formal religion. In order to attain it we must examine our words and actions, and trace them to their proper source. Thus, *by discovering what is in the heart, we shall be enabled to form a just estimate of our own character*, and be guarded against a fatal presumption on the one hand, and a needless disquietude on the other. This mode of inquiry is suggested in the parable before us; which indeed deserves the more attention, because it was delivered by our Lord on several different occasions. There are two truths which it offers to our consideration:

***~~I. It is the heart that regulates the life—~~***

***~~The heart is, as it were, a fountain, from whence all our actions proceed—~~***

***~~In it there is a treasure either of good or evil—~~***

While we are unregenerate, we are full of erroneous principles, and sinful affections. We "think that God is even such a one as ourselves." We think that he will neither "do good" to those who serve him, "nor evil" to those who rebel against him, [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21). [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12). We judge sin to be light and trivial, and a worldly carnal life to be consistent with a hope of immortality and glory.

While such are our principles, what can be expected, but that "our affections should be set on things below, and not on things above?" Our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are excited only by the things of time and sense: and those invisible realities, which alone deserve our esteem, are disregarded and despised. What a "treasure of evil" is thus formed within us! [Mark 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-23). Who can number our rebellious thoughts, our unhallowed desires, our vicious indulgences? How has this treasure of evil been accumulating from our earliest infancy to this present moment! And we, alas! are as averse to part with it as if it rendered us really happy, or would "profit us in the day of wrath."

The regenerate person, on the contrary, has within him a "treasure of good." His principles and affections are the very reverse of what they once were. His views of God, of sin, and the world, are regulated by the Holy Scriptures; and his desires and pursuits are conformable to the dictates of religion. Thanks be to God, this treasure also is daily accumulating; and he esteems himself rich only in proportion as the love and fear of God increase in his heart.

***~~According as this treasure is, such will be the life—~~***

The "waters flowing from a fountain" must of necessity be "bitter or sweet" according as the fountain itself is good or bad. So where a treasure of evil is in the heart, the words and actions must be evil also. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak;" and by that great moving spring will all the members be actuated. Doubtless there may be a freedom from gross immorality, and a conduct in many respects amiable and praiseworthy, while yet the heart is unrenewed: but fruit that is really good can no more proceed from an unregenerate soul, than "figs and grapes from a thorn or bramble-bush."

On the other hand, where the treasure of the heart is good, the life will certainly be good also. *A holy practice must of necessity flow from holy principles and heavenly affections*. We say not indeed but that there may be found some faults even in the holiest of men, even as blighted or unsound fruit may be found upon the choicest tree. But the good can no more practice iniquity, so as to continue in it, than the bad can bring forth habitually the fruits of righteousness. John assigns the same reason as is suggested in the text, "He can not continually practice sin, because the seed of God remains in him, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9)," and, as an operative principle, regulates his life.

This truth being established, the other follows as a necessary consequence, namely,

***~~II. It is by the life that we must judge of the heart—~~***

Though we are not to scrutinize too closely the motives by which others are actuated, so as to form an uncharitable judgment respecting them—yet we may, and must in some cases, judge of men by their actions. Our Lord uttered the very parable before us on one occasion, expressly with a view to guard us against the influence of false teachers and false brethren, [Matthew 7:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.15-16). But *it is of our own hearts that we are principally called to judge*; and assuredly,

***~~The man whose life is good may know his heart also to be good—~~***

If "every tree is known by its own fruit," (and no man hesitates to call a vine, or a bramble, by its proper name when he sees the fruit) we need be in no fear of concluding that our hearts are good, when our dispositions and actions accord with the word of God. No man indeed is perfectly good, because we still carry about with us "a body of sin and death:" but he who reveals the renovation of his heart by the holiness of his life, is certainly possessed of a "good treasure," and may justly be called "a good man."

***~~The man also whose life is evil may conclude with equal certainty that his heart is evil—~~***

Many, when they cannot deny the sinfulness of their conduct, will yet affirm that their hearts are good. But what is this but to affirm, in spite of the most indubitable evidence to the contrary, that a bramble is a vine or fig-tree? Let any man put the question to his own conscience, Can a man who lives in a neglect of God and his own soul, have a good heart? Can the proud, the passionate, the revengeful, the lewd, the intemperate, the covetous, have good hearts? Then may a bramble bush be a fig-tree, notwithstanding it never bears anything but thorns and briers.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those whose fruits are evil—~~***

It is not the openly profane, or the grossly sensual alone, but all, who are not really bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and true holiness, that we now address. And what must we say? Shall we flatter you? We dare not: the Scripture speaks plainly; and it would be at the peril of our souls to conceal the truth: John expressly calls you children of the devil, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8); [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10); and our Lord declares that everlasting fire must be your portion! [Matthew 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.19); [Matthew 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.35-37). Shall it seem unreasonable that such should be the doom of the ungodly, while the righteous are admitted into Heaven? Are you at a loss to assign a reason why so great a difference should be put between persons, who, to outward appearance, do not differ very widely from each other?

Know that, if you trace the stream to its source, and examine their hearts, there will be found as great a difference between them, as between the portions that they shall hereafter receive. The one has nothing but a treasure of evil principles and evil affections within him; the other is a "partaker of the Divine nature," and is "transformed into the very image of his God." Seek then to have "a new heart and a right spirit renewed within you." "You must be born again;" and that too for this plain reason, because what you have by nature is altogether carnal; and you must receive a spiritual nature to qualify you for the enjoyment of a spiritual kingdom, [John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.6). You must become "new creatures:" "instead of the thorn must come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier must come up the myrtle-tree," if ever you would be monuments of God's saving mercy, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13).

***~~2. Those whose fruits are good—~~***

Doubtless you wish to have your evidences of conversion more and more clear. With this view it will be well to mark all your words and actions, and to trace them to their motives and principles. But do not forget that *though your own works are the evidences of your conversion, they are not the grounds of your acceptance with God*. It is Christ's obedience unto death that must be the one foundation of your hope. However holy your life be, your eyes must never be turned from Christ. He is your only, and your all-sufficient Savior. In him you are to hope, as well when your evidences are obscured, as when they are bright. Nevertheless you should endeavor to abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness, that you may have the comfort of an assured hope, and God may be glorified in your deportment.

***~~#1498~~***

***~~The Folly of a Fruitless Profession~~***

***~~[Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46)~~***

"Why do you call me,*'Lord, Lord,'*and do not do what I say?"

The honor of Christ and the salvation of our souls depend on our having right views of the Gospel: we cannot therefore too earnestly insist on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. Nevertheless we should constantly urge *the practice of good works as the fruits and evidences of our faith*. The folly of expecting salvation while we neglect them is strongly represented by our Lord in the text.

***~~I. Show who they are that deserve the censure in the text—~~***

The heathens have less to aggravate their sins than Christians. The greater part of those who live in countries that are evangelized are obnoxious to this censure.

***~~1. Mere nominal Christians deserve it—~~***

Many are Christ's, as having been devoted to him in infant baptism. By the appellation of Christians they profess themselves his followers; but they are in no respect subject to his will and word. Christ commands them to "seek *first*the kingdom of God," etc and they seek it *last*.

***~~2. Formal, self-righteous persons deserve it—~~***

Many will go far in the outward duties of religion: they will profess too a veneration for the name of Christ: but he calls them to regeneration, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3), and they deny their need of it. He bids them live by faith on him, and it proves a hard saying, [John 6:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53); [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60); they are *satisfied with the form of godliness, without the power*.

***~~3. False professors deserve it—~~***

None are so worthy of reproof as they: they will *talk*much of their dependence on Christ: they will *profess*perhaps to have experienced much of his power and grace: they may even glory in the recollection of his truth and faithfulness; but in the midst of all, they can be proud, covetous, passionate, censorious, unforgiving, deceitful, and dishonest. To such the text may be applied with peculiar energy.

Such persons ought to be addressed with all plainness of speech.

***~~II. Expostulate with them on the folly of their conduct—~~***

The service of God is justly called a "reasonable service;" but a fruitless profession is most unreasonable. No reason can be assigned "why" persons should rest in such a state.

***~~1. Is not a conformity to Christ's precepts practical?~~***

Many allege, that such strictness as he requires is unattainable. We allow that absolute perfection is not to be expected in this world; but an unreserved devotedness of ourselves to God is attainable. Thousands of the saints of old have walked thus with God: there is a cloud of living witnesses who exemplify this conduct. God has promised grace to all who seek it diligently.

***~~2. Is not obedience to him necessary?~~***

We may be good citizens if we possess only the virtues of heathens; but an sincere regard to Christ is necessary to constitute us Christians. Paul has fully declared the inefficacy of outward religion, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29). Judas and the foolish virgins awfully exemplified it, [Matthew 25:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.3); [Matthew 25:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.11-12). Our Lord has warned us all respecting it, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23).

***~~3. Will not a feigned allegiance be revealed by him?~~***

*We may easily deceive our fellow-creatures; but every motion of our hearts is visible to Christ*, [Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13); nor can the most specious appearances deceive him, [John 2:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.24-25). In his final judgment he will show that he was privy to our most secret thoughts and desires, [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5).

***~~4. Shall we not wish at last that we had been sincere and upright?~~***

The reproach which attends the exercise of real religion, may make us satisfied with the form of it at present; but in the day of judgment we shall see our folly. We shall not know what to reply to this question then. The vain excuses we now make we shall not even dare to offer.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let all then seek to become Christians indeed. Let us not be afraid to confess our Lord before men; and let us regard "what he says" not only above all, but in opposition to all that human counselors can suggest. Let us take care that our lives be consistent with our professions. Let us trust in the Lord as simply, as if obedience were not required. Let us obey the Lord as zealously, as if obedience alone were required.

***~~#1499~~***

***~~The Centurion's Servant Healed~~***

***~~[Luke 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.6-7)~~***

So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Nothing makes a wider breach among men than a difference in political and religious opinion: but mutual good offices would greatly counteract this evil. Though we can never hope to soften the rancor of all, we may by persevering kindness conciliate the esteem of many.

We have before us a remarkable instance of the efficacy of such conduct. The centurion was a heathen, an officer of a hostile nation, stationed in Judea to keep the Jews in subjection; but instead of oppressing the Jews he had showed them much favor. He, in his turn, needed their good offices on behalf of his servant; and they gladly became his advocates and intercessors; they even prevailed on Jesus to work a miracle on his behalf.

To elucidate this miracle we shall consider,

***~~I. The centurion's character—~~***

Soldiers, for the most part, are unfavorably circumstanced with respect to religion; but here was one, though a heathen, whose character may well put to shame the greater part of the Christian world. We may observe,

***~~1. His charity to his fellow-creatures—~~***

His servant was grievously afflicted with the palsy near unto death. Compare [Matthew 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.6) with [Luke 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.2). In this disorder, persons can do nothing for others, or even for themselves; and in such a state, even dear friends and relatives are ready to think the care of one a heavy burden; yet this Centurion administered to his servant with the tenderest affection, and interested all he could in the promotion of his welfare. He applied to some of the Jewish elders to use their interest with Jesus on his behalf. What could the servant himself have done more for the kindest master?

***~~2. His piety towards God—~~***

He had not embraced either the doctrines or discipline of the Jewish Church; but he had learned to acknowledge the only true God; and he was glad to promote the worship of God, even though he himself did not acquiesce in the peculiar mode in which he was worshiped. He even built a synagogue for the Jews at his own expense, verse 5. What an admirable pattern of liberality and candor! How different from those who will not do anything outside the pale of their own Church! Surely he never afterwards regretted that he had so applied his wealth.

***~~3. His low thoughts of himself—~~***

He did not arrogate anything to himself on account of his rank and authority; nor did he value himself on his benevolence to man and zeal for God. While others judged him worthy that a miracle should be wrought for him, he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest favor. This was the reason of his forbearing to wait on our Lord in person.

On our Lord's near approach to the house, the same humility that had kept the Centurion from going to him, compelled him, as it were, to go, lest he should seem guilty of disrespect. Compare [Matthew 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.13) with the text. How lovely does such a one appear in the eyes of God and man!

***~~4. His exalted thoughts of Christ—~~***

He judged our Lord to be too holy to admit of converse with a heathen. He believed also that Jesus could effect whatever he pleased, by a word, and at a distance, without the intervention of any means, verse 7. Nor did he doubt but that universal nature was subject to his will far more than the most obedient soldier could be to the commands of his officer, verse 8. Thus did he ascribe to Jesus a power proper to God alone, [Deuteronomy 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.39). Well might our Lord's address to the discreet Scribe have been applied to him, [Mark 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.34).

Such a character as this could never meet with a repulse from Jesus.

***~~II. The kindness given to him by our Lord—~~***

Instantly at the request of the elders Jesus set off to the Centurion's house. He who, though repeatedly importuned, declined to visit a nobleman's son, [John 4:46-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.46-50), went, at the very first summons, to attend upon a centurion's servant; and no sooner met the centurion, than he richly recompensed his assiduity—

***~~1. He expressed his admiration of the centurion's faith—~~***

We never hear of Jesus admiring the things of this world: he rather checked in his disciples such ill-judged veneration, [Mark 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.1-2); but when he beheld the Centurion's faith, "he marveled at it." Not that such exercise of grace was really unexpected by him. Jesus both knew what was in the Centurion's heart, [John 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.25), and had planted there the very grace which he exercised, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); but Jesus, as our exemplar, would teach us what to admire, and show us that the smallest portion of true faith cannot be estimated too highly, [2 Peter 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.1). Our Lord declared in his very presence, that this faith had not been equaled by any even of the Israelites themselves, verse 9. Such approbation from his mouth could not fail of comforting the afflicted Centurion.

***~~2. He wrought the desired miracle in confirmation of his faith—~~***

By a simple act of his will he restored the servant to perfect health, and told the Centurion that it should "be to him according to his faith." Thus he removed the distress of the family in an instant. Thus too he confirmed the faith which had shone forth so nobly, and showed that we could never expect too much at his hands.

What advantage for eternal life did the Centurion derive from hence! With what lively hope might he apply to Jesus for the healing of his soul! We can never suppose that such love and piety, such humility and faith, were left to perish. No, truly; that declaration shall be found true to all eternity, [1 Samuel 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.30).

***~~3. He declared that many such persons should be saved, while many, with clearer light and higher privileges, should be cast out—~~***

They who profess the true religion may be called "the children of the kingdom." But how many of them are destitute of the attainments this heathen had made! How many would have imitated that vile Amalekite rather than him, [1 Samuel 30:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 30.13). How many grudge the necessary contributions for keeping up the houses of God? What a contrast to him who, entirely at his own expense, erected a synagogue for people of another religion!

What doubting of Christ's power and grace, yes, what a proud conceit too of their own worthiness, is to be found among professing Christians! Surely what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews shall be realized in Christians of this character, [Matthew 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.12); and the humbler heathens, who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, shall be preferred before them. Nor can we doubt but that the Centurion, in reference to whom these things were spoken, shall be among that blessed number.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let us then learn to plead earnestly for ourselves; nor let a sense of unworthiness keep us from carrying our needs to Jesus. Let us also sympathize with, and intercede for, others. Job, like the Centurion, found benefit from his own intercessions, [Job 42:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.10); nor shall our supplications be in vain, either for ourselves or others.

***~~#1500~~***

***~~The Widow's Son Raised~~***

**[Luke 7:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.14-16)**

"Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

The more faithful any servant of God is, the more he will abound in labors. Of those who were men of like passions with us, none ever equaled Paul; but our blessed Lord far exceeded all the children of men. No day elapsed without fresh manifestations of his power and compassion. He had on the preceding day raised the Centurion's servant from a bed of sickness; now we behold him employed in restoring a dead man to life. We shall consider,

***~~I. The miracle—~~***

The Jews used to bury their dead outside the precincts of their cities. At the gate of the city of Nain Jesus met a funeral procession.

***~~The principal mourner that followed it engaged Jesus' attention—~~***

She was a mother following her own son to the grave. How afflictive is such an event to a tender parent! This son had grown up to the estate of manhood. We may see in David's lamentations for Absalom what an affliction this is! Her loss was further aggravated in that this was her *only*child. If one out of many had died, she would have been deeply grieved: how much more in losing him, in whom her affections had so long centered! That which added ten-fold poignancy to her sorrow was, that she was a widow. When her husband had died she had been consoled by her surviving child; but now she had none left to be the support and comfort of declining years. Destroyed both root and branch, she had no prospect but that her name would be extinct in Israel.

***~~Filled with compassion, he wrought a miracle on her behalf—~~***

Jesus, addressing himself to the mourning widow, bade her not weep. How vain, how impertinent had such advice been, if given by a common man! But, from him, it came as a rich cordial to her fainting spirit. He then stopped the procession, and said to the dead man, Arise! Nor were the hopes, occasioned by his interference, disappointed.

On other occasions he wrought his miracles at the request of others. Intercession was made for Jairus's daughter, by her own father; for the Centurion's servant, by his friends; for the paralytic, by his neighbors; but none besought him for this distressed widow. This he performed spontaneously, and *unsolicited*by any. Nothing moved him to it but that very compassion which brought him down from Heaven: nor did he exercise this power in the name of another. Elijah and Elisha obtained this power by prayer, [1 Kings17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings17.21), [2 Kings 4:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.33); and Peter wrought his miracles in the name of Jesus, [Acts 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6), [Acts 9:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.34). He spoke authoritatively, as one who could quicken whom he would, [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21); nor did he merely recall the soul without renovating the body, [2 Kings 4:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.34-35); the restoration to life and vigor was effected perfectly, and in an instant "He sat up, and began to speak." To complete the mercy, "he delivered the man to his mother;" and preferred the comfort of the widow to the honor he himself might have gained in retaining such a follower.

Such a stupendous miracle could not fail of exciting suitable emotions.

***~~II. The effect it produced—~~***

There is little in the Scriptures to gratify our curiosity. Hence we are not told what the man spoke, or how the mother was affected at the first interview with her son; but, if once she forgot her pangs, for joy that he was born, then how much more her sorrows now, that he was restored to life? Doubtless the scene must have been inexpressibly interesting—

We may conceive Jesus, meekly majestic, delivering the man to his mother: but it is not so easy to conceive the first emotions of their minds. *Nature*would stimulate the reunited relatives to expressions of mutual endearment. *Grace*, on the other hand, would rather lead them first to admire and adore their Benefactor. Perhaps, looking alternately on Jesus and on each other, they might stand fixed in silent astonishment. We need not however dwell on that which, at best, is mere conjecture.

The effect produced on the multitude is recorded for our instruction'

***~~1. They were all filled with fear—~~***

The people that attended Jesus, and those who followed the funeral, meeting together, the concourse was very great; and one impression pervaded the whole body. The fear which came upon them was a *reverential awe*: this is natural to man, when he beholds any signal appearance of the Deity. It is equally produced whether God appears in a way of judgment or of mercy. Compare [Acts 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.11) and [Luke 1:65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.65). Somewhat of this kind is felt by the seraphim before the throne, [Isaiah 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.2); and it would be more experienced by us, if we realized more the Divine presence, [Jeremiah 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.6-7). When it is excited only by some visible display of the Deity, it will generally vanish with the occasion; but when it is caused by faith, it will abide and influence our whole conduct. Happy would it be for us if we were continually thus impressed, [Proverbs 28:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.14).

***~~2. They glorified God—~~***

They did not know that Jesus was indeed a divine person; but they manifestly saw that he was "a great prophet," and that God, after suspending all miraculous interpositions for above three hundred years, had again "visited his people." In these tokens of God's favor they could not but rejoice. Doubtless they congratulated each other on this glorious event, and gave vent to their gratitude in devoutest adorations.

We have reason indeed to fear that these impressions were soon effaced. Happy had they been if they had retained this heavenly disposition; but who has not reason to regret, that divine mercies produce too transient an effect upon his mind? Let us at least profit by the example they then set us, and labor to "glorify God" for the inestimable mercies he has conferred upon us.

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. This history may teach us to sit loose to the things of this life—~~***

If we possess personal and family mercies, let us be thankful for them. The *continuance*of them is no less a favor than the *restoration*of them would be: but let us not inordinately fix our affections upon any created good.*We know not how soon our dearest comforts may become the occasion of our deepest sorrows.*The case of Job affords a striking admonition to men in all ages, [Job 1:13-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.13-19). Let us then endeavor to practice that advice of the Apostle, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31), and place our affections on those things which will never be taken from us, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2).

***~~2. It shows us where we should flee in a season of deep affliction—~~***

As no physician could restore the widow's son, so none could heal her wounded spirit; but there was one at hand, when she little thought of it, that could do both. That same Almighty Deliverer is very near unto us, and calls us to him-self when we are bowed down with trouble, [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15). [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28). Let us then call upon him under every spiritual or temporal affliction, and, above all, under the guilt and burden of our sins. And, with a conviction of his all-sufficiency, let us say with Peter, [John 6:68-69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.68-69).

***~~3. We may take occasion from it to bless God for the preached Gospel—~~***

The word of Christ is as powerful now in his Gospel as ever it was in the days of his flesh. It quickens many who were dead in trespasses and sins. It rescues them from the second death, and awakens them to an eternal life. How many have seen the souls, over which they had long mourned, called forth to life by the almighty voice of Jesus! Let the whole multitude of us then "fear the Lord and his goodness, [Hosea 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.5)." Let us "glorify him" for sending us such an adorable Savior: and let us seek, both for ourselves and others, fresh displays of his power and grace.

***~~#1501~~***

***~~The Perverse Children~~***

***~~[Luke 7:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.31-32), [35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.35)~~***

And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, And you did not weep.'

But wisdom is justified by all her children."

Though man is distinguished from all other animals by the faculty of reason, he is far from submitting readily to its dictates. In things that are agreeable to his mind he is easily persuaded: but where he is at all swayed by prejudice, or passion, or self-interest, he cannot be prevailed upon, even by the clearest arguments, to embrace truth, or to fulfill his duty.

Thus it was with the Pharisees in our Lord's time; on which account he compared them to perverse children, who could not be induced by their companions to participate in their amusements, notwithstanding every endeavor on their parts to accommodate themselves to their wishes.

It was customary to use flutes both at marriages and at funerals; at the one in cheerful, at the other in plaintive strains. And the children, in their play, are supposed to represent first the festivity of a marriage, and afterwards the lamentations of a funeral: in neither of which could they get their companions to join them.

In this parable our Lord intimates,

***~~I. The reception which his Gospel meets with—~~***

***~~God has used a great variety of means in order to recommend his Gospel—~~***

He published it to the Jews under *types*and *shadows*, and gradually unfolded it to them in a long series of prophecies. When the time came for its more general promulgation, he sent the Baptist to prepare their minds, and the Messiah himself to preach it to them, and to confirm his word by miracles without number. He endued also a few poor fishermen with miraculous powers, and sent them to publish the glad tidings, that their divine mission being unquestionable, their testimony might be universally received. Nothing was lacking that could in any wise promote the acceptance of the truth.

***~~But in every place the Gospel has been rejected by those to whom it has come—~~***

The Jews rested in the letter of their law, but hated the spirit of it; they embraced the shadow, but rejected the substance. By whoever the Gospel was preached, or under whatever form, the great majority of that nation could not be prevailed upon to receive it.

Thus at this day, the truth of God is generally disregarded and despised. Men, it is true, profess to be followers of Christ, and to approve of his religion: but they are not suitably affected with it in any respect; they neither rejoice in its *promises*, nor are humbled by its *threatenings*; "if we play the flute to them, they will not dance; and if we mourn to them, they will not lament."

Notwithstanding there is such a transcendent excellence in the Gospel, and such an exact suitableness to men's necessities—yet we still have reason to complain, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

It is a matter of no small importance to ascertain,

***~~II. The true ground of this reception—~~***

***~~The apparent ground, is that the Gospel is not properly administered—~~***

The Jews could not confute the arguments of the Baptist or of Christ; but they took occasion from the peculiarities of each to reject their testimony. John, agreeably to the dispensation under which he ministered, was austere in his manners; and Christ, agreeably to the dispensation which he came to introduce, was affable and social. Yet, so far were the people from being pleased with either, that of one they said, "He has a devil," and of the other, "He is a glutton and a drunkard."

Thus it is at this time. Men will not say, "I hate the Gospel, and therefore will not attend to it;" but they will find fault with the persons who administer it; and make their peculiarities a plea for despising their message. At one time they represent the ministers of Christ as speaking too much about faith, and thereby depreciating morality. At another time, as insisting so strongly on good works, that they drive men to despair. Sometimes they will object to the truth because it is not read to them from a written form, and sometimes because of the earnest and impressive manner in which it is delivered. Even the virtues whereby ministers endeavor to adorn and recommend the Gospel, are often made occasions of offence; and the strictness of their lives, the condescension of their manners, and their assiduity in labors, are stated as grounds of heavy complaint. And as no terms were too opprobrious to be applied to the Baptist and to Christ—so there is no name so ignominious, nor any treatment so harsh, but it is thought a proper portion for every faithful servant of the Lord.

***~~The true ground, however, must be found in the perverseness of mankind—~~***

We, at this distance of time, see clearly enough the perverseness of the Jews in their treatment of Christ and his Apostles—but we are not aware of the same principle operating in ourselves. Nevertheless the truth is, that we have imbibed notions which we do not like to have controverted; and have adopted practices from which we will not recede. *The Gospel proposes humiliating doctrines which we are too proud to receive; and self-denying rules of conduct which we cannot endure to follow.*Hence we must either acknowledge that we ourselves are wrong, or find some reason for rejecting the truth.

But we cannot altogether profess ourselves infidels and despise the Gospel as a fable; we therefore are constrained to blame the *mode*in which it is administered, and to condemn the *preachers*of it in order to justify ourselves. But the real ground of our conduct is, that "we love darkness rather than light;" and, if Jesus Christ himself were again to preach to us, the same conduct which he formerly pursued would give the same offence to his hearers, and be made a pretext for rejecting his testimony.

But in the close of the parable, our Lord suggests,

***~~III. The encouragement which ministers, notwithstanding this reception, have to preach the Gospel—~~***

***~~The Gospel of Christ, when justly stated, is the truest "wisdom"—~~***

It is called by Paul, "The wisdom of God in a mystery," and the wisdom of God does indeed beam forth in every part of it, whether we consider the mysteries it reveals, or the mode of its administration. Who can contemplate the method prescribed by God for effecting our reconciliation with him, or for fitting us to enjoy his presence—and not be filled with rapture and amazement? The more we consider the atoning sacrifice of Christ, or the agency of the Spirit, the nature of faith or the beauty of holiness—or, in a word,*the union of God's glory and man's happiness*in the whole scheme of redemption—the more shall we be overwhelmed with wonder at the depths of wisdom contained in it!

The progressive steps also by which it has been dispensed, together with the means by which it has been confirmed and propagated, yes, even the manner in which it has been brought home with power to our own hearts and consciences—will furnish abundant matter to increase our admiration.

And must not the consideration of this be a rich encouragement to ministers under all the contempt and calumny with which they and their ministrations are regarded? Yes, they know that what the world accounts foolishness, is indeed the wisdom of God, [1 Corinthians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23-24); and that "if they are beside themselves, it is unto God, 1 Corinthians 4:10 and [2 Corinthians 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.13)."

***~~Moreover, the children of wisdom will assuredly receive their testimony—~~***

They are "the children of wisdom" who are willing to "sit at wisdom's gates," and to obey her dictates; and, such are to be found in every place, notwithstanding that the generality of people prefer the ways of sin and folly. Now "of all these" the Gospel will be approved, embraced, "justified." They will show to the world, both by their profession and conduct, that it is indeed "worthy of all acceptance." While others pour *contempt*upon it, these will be *nourished*by it; and while others make it a *stumbling-block*, over which they fall and perish, these will be rendered by it "wise unto salvation."

What can a faithful minister wish for more? He knows that his labors shall not be altogether in vain, but that there shall be some who shall be saved by his means, and be "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore: and this far outweighs all the injuries and insults, which in the discharge of his office, he meets with at the hands of a perverse ungrateful world.

***~~To improve this subject, observe,~~***

***~~1. What enemies men are to their own happiness!~~***

What end had the Baptist or Christ in view, when they preached to the people? Was it to raise a party? to get a name for themselves? to gratify their own vanity? Was it not rather to instruct and save mankind? Yet, men everywhere set themselves against them. And of what concern was it to John or Christ that they were called by opprobrious names? But to those who thus despised them it was of infinite consequence; because they thereby ensured and aggravated their own eternal condemnation.

Thus it is of small concern to us to be loaded with ignominy and reproach: but to those who thus requite our labors, it is a solemn matter; for they despise their own mercies, and accomplish their own ruin. Let those who are thus disposed, remember, that *they are far greater enemies to themselves than they are to us.*

***~~2. What a blessing is "an honest and good heart!"~~***

They alone who possess this gift can profit from the Gospel. With such a disposition men will overlook the little peculiarities which there may be in those who minister the word, and will endeavor to derive benefit from the word they hear. They will consider that every minister has his proper gift; and that the method which they disapprove, may be well suited to others. They will be thankful that the glad tidings are sent to them; and will receive the word with the affections suited to it, [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11). They will either "dance or weep" according as the subject calls for humiliation or joy. Thus, instead of rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, they will "justify God, verse 29, 30" by a *sincere acknowledgment of his truth, and a ready compliance with his will*.

Let us then cultivate this disposition; so shall that which is to many "a savor of death unto death, be to us a savor of life unto life, [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16)."

***~~#1502~~***

***~~The Insolvent Debtors~~***

***~~[Luke 7:40-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.40-42)~~***

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

PARABLES are well calculated to convey reproof in the most convincing, and at the same time in the least offensive, manner. Nothing could exceed the beauty and efficacy of Nathan's parable to David: that also in the text was admirably adapted to the occasion.

***~~I. The parable itself—~~***

It presents to our view three important truths:

***~~1. We all, though in different degrees, are debtors unto God—~~***

There is not a man on earth who has not violated the law of God: but, though all are guilty in his sight, some are far more so than others. The profane and profligate sinner is doubtless worse than the more decent moralist. We must not, however, compare ourselves with others, [2 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.12), but try ourselves by the standard of God's law; and if we bring ourselves to this test, we shall find no cause for boasting, even though we may have been preserved from gross offences.

***~~2. No man, however little he may owe, can discharge his own debt—~~***

If we could obey the law perfectly in future, our obedience would no more compensate for our past disobedience, than our ceasing to increase a debt would discharge a debt we had already contracted: but we cannot fulfill all that is required of us, or indeed perform any one action that is absolutely free from all imperfection. How then shall we discharge our debt, when, with all our care, we cannot but daily increase it? Nor will repentance obliterate our offences against God's law, any more than it will those committed against human laws. If therefore neither obedience nor repentance can cancel our debt, we must confess that "we have nothing to pay!"

***~~3. But God is willing freely to forgive us all—~~***

There is no such difference between one and another as can entitle any one to a preference in God's esteem, or procure a readier acceptance with God.

The parable was not intended to set forth the doctrines of redemption, but merely the effect which a sense of great obligations will produce. And, if we would infer that we have no need of faith in the atonement, because the parable makes no mention of it, we must infer also that we may be forgiven without repentance, since there is no mention made of that. Every one who truly repents and believes in Christ shall surely obtain mercy: no recompense or composition is required to be offered by us, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1).

On the contrary, an attempt to offer any to God would absolutely preclude us from all hope of his favor, [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4). None can be accepted who will not come as bankrupts; nor shall any who come in this manner be rejected, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18); [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7).

Such being the import of the parable, we proceed to,

***~~II. The improvement that is to be made of it—~~***

Our Lord evidently intended to reprove Simon, while he vindicated both the woman's conduct and his own. Hence it seems proper to improve the parable,

***~~1. For the conviction of self-righteous Pharisees—~~***

Persons who think their debts small, feel little love to the Savior themselves, and are ready to censure those who do love him. While they approve of zeal in everything else, they condemn it in religion. But this disposition shows that *their seeming piety is mere hypocrisy*. If they had any true grace, they would delight to see Christ honored, and to honor him themselves.

***~~2. For the vindication of zealous Christians—~~***

We would not plead for a zeal that is without knowledge: but such a zeal as this grateful penitent manifested must be vindicated, though the whole world should condemn it. Are there any then who weep at the Savior's feet, and who seek by all means in their power to honor him? Let them go on boldly—yet modestly, fearing neither loss nor shame in so good a cause; and let them know, that he for whom they suffer, will soon testify his approbation of them before the assembled universe!

***~~3. For the encouragement of all penitent sinners—~~***

Our Lord, both in the parable, and in his address to the woman, showed that no sinner, however vile, would be spurned from his feet: he even declared to her accusers, and revealed to her own soul, that he had pardoned her sins. Henceforth then let no man despair of obtaining mercy at his hands. Only let us acknowledge to him our inability to pay our own debt, and he will say to us, as to the woman, "Depart in peace, your sins are forgiven!"

***~~#1503~~***

***~~The Sinner's Faith~~***

***~~[Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50)~~***

"And he said to the woman: Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

To associate with the ungodly world is by no means expedient for those who have been redeemed out of the world. Yet there is a certain degree of interaction with them which is both proper and desirable. There is a medium between an interaction with their society for our own gratification, and a contemptuous separation from them. *Our blessed Lord has exhibited, as in everything else, so in this also, a perfect pattern*. When invited by a Pharisee to dinner, he accepted the invitation with a view to instruct him and do him good: and when a woman who had been a notorious sinner came to him at the Pharisee's house, he did not refuse her admission to his presence, but received with kindness the expressions of her regard, and, commending her faith, imparted to her both the blessings and the comforts of his salvation.

The particular notice which our Lord took of the woman's "faith," and the reward he gave her on account of it, leads us naturally to consider,

***~~I. The marks and evidences of her faith—~~***

The first thing that calls for our attention is,

***~~1. Her zeal—~~***

She had doubtless seen many of our Lord's miracles, and heard many of his discourses; and though she was not yet one of his avowed followers, yet, having received good to her soul, she was desirous of honoring him to the utmost of her power. For this purpose she sought him out in the Pharisee's house, and went to him with a full determination to show him a signal mark of her regard.

Now this argued no little zeal. As being of the weaker gender, she was the more liable to be condemned as officious, impertinent, and obtrusive. And being of a notoriously vile character, she was particularly obnoxious to insult and contempt. But unmindful of these things, she went uninvited, to the house of a proud Pharisee (where she was least of all likely to meet with any favor) and (indifferent to the construction that might be put upon her conduct by any censorious spectators, or even to the treatment she might receive from any of them) in the presence of the whole company expressed to him all that was in her heart.

And what was it that enabled her thus to "despise all shame," and to triumph over the fear of man? Doubtless it was her faith: for the Apostle says, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

***~~2. Her humility—~~***

Though she was bent on executing her pious purpose, she was solicitous to do it in as private and modest a manner as she could. She therefore went behind him as he lay upon the couch. They did not sit at table as we do, but lay on couches, and, having easy access to his feet, placed herself there, without attracting the notice of the company, or interfering with the conversation that might be passing at table.

This also was a strong mark and evidence of her faith. She knew his august character, and felt herself unworthy to enter into his presence; yes, *she accounted it the very summit of her ambition to be permitted to kiss his feet*. It was in this way that the faith of the centurion and others showed itself, [Luke 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.6-7), [Mark 5:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.25-28); and though, through the remaining pride and ignorance of their hearts, young converts often, like Jehu, seek the notice and applause of men, *humility will always be found to exist in the soul in exact proportion to our faith*.

***~~3. Her contrition—~~***

No sooner had she placed herself near the Savior, than all her sins presented themselves to her mind, and filled her with deep compunction. Instantly she burst into a flood of tears, with which she bathed, as it were, the feet of her Lord, while she embraced them, in hopes of finding mercy from the friend of sinners.

It is the property of faith to "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)." Yes, the more lively faith any have possessed, the more abundant has been their self-loathing and self-abhorrence, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6), [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5), [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15). We cannot doubt therefore but that faith was the principle from whence her humiliation flowed.

***~~4. Her love—~~***

While she wept over the Savior's feet, she wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed them, and anointed them with fragrant ointment. *It was not possible for her to manifest stronger tokens of her affection.*

And was not this also an evidence of her faith? Had she been an unbeliever, she would have seen "no beauty or loveliness in Jesus" that deserved her admiration, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2); but believing in him, she accounted him "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely, Song of Solomon 5:10; [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16);" according to that declaration of the Apostle, "To those who believe, he is precious [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7)."

***~~5. Her confidence—~~***

She would not have ventured to approach the Pharisee in this manner, because she knew that he would despise her in his heart, and dismiss her with scorn. But she felt no apprehension of such treatment from the Savior. She well knew his condescension and compassion; and therefore without reserve, and without fear, she cast herself upon his mercy.

In this too she showed the strength of her faith. Unbelief would have suggested many doubts: Will he receive me? Will he deign to look upon such an abandoned wretch? But faith enabled her to approach him under a full persuasion, that "whoever came to him would never be cast out."

It was not in vain that she thus approached the Savior; as we shall see, while we consider,

***~~II. The fruits and consequences of her faith—~~***

Though despised and condemned by the Pharisee, she was well rewarded by her Lord. She obtained from him,

***~~1. The pardon of her sins—~~***

As numerous as her iniquities had been, they were all in one moment blotted out from the book of God's remembrance. Jesus, who "had all power on earth to forgive sins," pardoned all her offences, and "cast them, as it were, behind him into the very depths of the sea!" What a blessed fruit and consequence of her faith was this! Had she been subjected to all the evil treatment that could have been shown her, she would have had no reason to regret that conduct by which she had obtained so inestimable a blessing.

And was this peculiar to her? Shall not we also have our iniquities forgiven, if we apply to him in humility and faith? Shall the greatness of our sins be any bar to our acceptance with him, if we repent and believe? Let the word of God be deemed worthy of any credit, and all such apprehensions will vanish in an instant, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39), [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18).

***~~2. An assurance of her acceptance—~~***

Twice did our Lord repeat to her the joyful tidings, that her sins were pardoned, and that her soul was saved; and to confirm it, he bade her depart in peace. What a cordial must this have been to her drooping spirit! How transported must she have been with the joyful sound! And what comfort must she enjoy through life in a sense of the Divine favor!

But neither was this peculiar to her. It is true that many real Christians never attain to this high privilege: but it is owing to the weakness of their faith: if their faith operated as her's did, if it showed itself in such humility, such contrition, such love, such confidence, such zeal—they also would hear him say to them, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven." What though he should not utter it by an audible voice from Heaven, can he not reveal it to the soul by his Spirit, and enable us to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his! Song of Solomon 2:16." Yes, let us only glorify him to the utmost of our power, and he will give us a peace that passes all understanding, [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7), and a full assurance of hope unto the end, [Hebrews 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.11). See also 2 Timothy 1:12; [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8).

***~~3. Everlasting happiness and glory—~~***

In the declaration of Jesus she received a pledge of her eternal inheritance. Nor can we doubt but that, after waiting her "appointed time upon earth," she was admitted to the enjoyment of her Lord in Heaven, *not any longer to weep at his feet, but to sit with him on his throne, and to participate in his glory!*

Thus also shall it be with all who truly believe: "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life! [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16)."

***~~From this history we may learn,~~***

***~~1. The nature of saving faith—~~***

We cannot too carefully inquire into the nature of faith; for there is nothing respecting which so many, and such fatal, mistakes are made. Saving faith is not a mere assent to any doctrines whatever; but it is a living principle in the soul, which evidences itself by precisely such a regard to Christ as this woman manifested on this occasion. Would we then ascertain whether our faith be genuine and saving? let us inquire whether it leads us to Christ, in spite of all obstacles from without or from within, with humility and contrition, with love and confidence? For in proportion as we abound in these graces, or are destitute of them, we either possess, or are destitute of, a living faith.

***~~2. The excellence of saving faith—~~***

Admirable were the graces which this woman exercised; yet not one of them was noticed by our Lord: he overlooked them all; and noticed that only which was least apparent, and which every one else would have overlooked, namely, her *faith*. He knew that this was the root or principle from whence all her other graces sprang. It was this that led her so to honor him; and therefore he determined to honor it. And must not that be excellent which he so highly regarded, so studiously searched out, and so eminently distinguished?

But what is it that he here assigns to her faith? It is nothing less than the saving of her soul: he passes by all her other graces as having no weight or influence whatever in her justification before God, and specifies her "faith" as that which "saved" her. Is it possible to bestow a higher commendation on it than this?

If it be asked, why faith is thus distinguished above all other graces? we answer, it is because faith unites us unto the Savior, and interests us thereby in all that he has done and suffered for us. This cannot be said of any other grace whatever; and therefore, *though every other grace adorns the soul, no grace but faith will save it.*

Let us all seek to attain right sentiments on this most important point, and pray with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith!"

***~~3. The condescension of Christ to believing penitents—~~***

If a person of an abandoned character, however changed in his conduct, should come to us when in the midst of company, and that company of a higher order and Pharisaic cast, and should express such affection for us; while we blushed for the degradation we seemed to suffer, we would be ready to condemn him for his unseasonable intrusion, or perhaps to suspect that he was deranged in his mind.

But Jesus accounted himself honored by the testimonies of the woman's regard: and, though he could not but know what reflections would be cast upon his character on account of his kindness to her, he vindicated her conduct, and richly recompensed her kind attentions.

Thus will he do to every believing penitent. He will compensate the scoffs of an unbelieving world by manifest tokens of his approbation. He will not regard the quantity or enormity of a man's past offences; but will speak peace to his soul, and in due time "wipe away all tears from his eyes" forever! O that we might all consider this, and experience it to our eternal joy!

***~~#1504~~***

***~~The Lighted Lamp~~***

***~~[Luke 8:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.16-18)~~***

"No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Among the ancient philosophers there were some who instilled into their more immediate followers, principles different from what they avowed to the public at large. But there was no such insincerity in our Divine Teacher. He did indeed instruct his peculiar disciples more fully than others (for others were not capable of enduring the clear light of his Gospel) but it was his design that, in due season, the whole truth should be made known to the world; and of this his intention he made known his disciples, at the very time that he was explaining to them his public discourses.

In the parable before us he suggests the duty,

***~~I. Of those who preach the Gospel—~~***

***~~The Gospel is a light in the midst of a dark world—~~***

The world lies in utter darkness: nor has it any means of discovering the way of acceptance with God, but by the Gospel of Christ. Something of God may be learned from the visible *creation*. And *reason*may discover many things that are proper to that relation which we bear to God and to each other: but nothing can be known of Christ, nor can any means of reconciliation with God be devised, by unenlightened reason.

It is in the Gospel only that the Savior is exhibited, and that all the things belonging to our peace are fully revealed. Hence the word of the Gospel is represented as a light shining in a dark place, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19), and as that light to which the whole world must be indebted for life and salvation, [Isaiah 60:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.1-3).

It is the duty of ministers to *preach*this Gospel,

***~~1. With fidelity—~~***

It is not sufficient to amuse the people with moral essays, or with *dissertations that shall display our own learning*. We must preach Christ crucified. We must "determine to know nothing else among our people, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)." We must never omit any opportunity of setting before men that "light which God has sent into the world." We may indeed, yes we must, use discretion in our method of dispensing the Gospel, lest by an injudicious declaration of the truth we injure those whom it is our desire to benefit, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12), [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-2), [Hebrews 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.11), [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14). But, in this, we must be actuated, not by worldly policy or the fear of man, but solely by a love to the souls of our fellow-creatures. When no such necessity imposes a restraint, we must declare the whole counsel of God, [Acts 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.20); [Acts 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.27).

***~~2. With perseverance—~~***

As a man should not substitute anything else in the place of the Gospel, so neither should he withdraw from the engagements he has solemnly entered into to preach the Gospel, [Leviticus 27:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 27.28) with [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62), [1 Corinthians 9:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.16-17). Neither political ambition, nor worldly care, can ever justify a man in intermitting, much less in vacating, the paramount duties of the ministry, [2 Timothy 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.3-4); not even sickness itself is any excuse for neglecting to employ the strength we have in the service of our God, [1 Timothy 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.23). Paul does not say, Leave off preaching; but, Take care of your health. We do not say, that the education of youth is incompatible with the ministry: but it should never be allowed to make void the superior obligations which we owe to God, and to the souls of men. It may be made subservient to the ministry; but must never supersede it.

From the duty of those who preach the Gospel, we pass on to consider that,

***~~II. Of those who hear the gospel—~~***

***~~We should "take heed how we hear it"—~~***

We should be extremely careful *what*we hear, [Mark 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.24); lest we be led astray by those who profess to guide us into the way of peace, [Proverbs 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.27).

We must also be duly attentive to the *manner*in which we hear. We must not be indulging a vain curiosity, or a disposition to cavil; but must receive the word:

*humbly*, as the word of God itself, 1 Thessalonians 2:13;

*attentively*, in order to retain it, [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1);

and *obediently*, with a view to practice all that it enjoins, [James 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21-22).

If, like those to whom this injunction was given, we be already in the ministry, or are preparing for it—our obligations to profit by the word, whether in the Church or in the closet, are greatly increased.

***~~An attention to this duty is of infinite importance—~~***

***~~1. We shall invariably receive benefit in proportion as we rightly attend to the word—~~***

Who that has ever searched the Holy Scriptures in private, and waited diligently on the public ministration of the Gospel—has not found that, together with increasing views of the truth, his faith, his hope, and all his graces, have been strengthened and confirmed, [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12).

***~~2. We shall assuredly suffer loss in proportion as we neglect the word—~~***

From whatever cause we are led to slight the ordinances of religion, or to decline from the study of the sacred oracles, we shall soon find occasion for regret and sorrow. We may ask of all who have experienced such declension: Have you not lost much of the light and liberty which you once enjoyed in your souls? Have not . . .

your graces languished,

your corruptions gathered strength,

your spiritual difficulties increased,

your spiritual comforts vanished?

God has inseparably connected spiritual prosperity with diligence; and spiritual remissness with want, [Proverbs 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.4). [Matthew 25:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.28-29).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

If the true light now shines around you, be thankful for it, and walk in the light, lest the candlestick be removed, [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5), and you be left in utter darkness [John 12:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35). "Let all make their light to shine before men;" that, being "as lights in the world," they may "win by their holy conduct" those who have resisted the light of the written word, and shut their ears against the preached Gospel, [1 Peter 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1-2). [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16).

***~~#1505~~***

***~~Directions How to Hear Sermons~~***

***~~[Luke 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.18)~~***

"Take heed therefore *how*you hear!"

The office of a Christian minister is arduous. He is to explain and enforce every part of man's duty; he is to search out and censure every sin. After all his labors, he will see but little fruit. However faithfully he preaches, there are but few who will hear aright: this our Lord had just declared in the parable of the sower. He then enforced his declaration with this most important caution. In discoursing upon which, we shall,

***~~I. Assign some reasons for the caution—~~***

Our Lord elsewhere cautions his people to take heed what they hear: nor can anything be more necessary than to be on our guard against error. But the caution *how*we hear was also necessary:

***~~1. Because many hear in an unfitting manner—~~***

***~~The generality are careless hearers—~~***

They attend God's house merely in conformity with the customs of the country: they allow their thoughts to rove after earthly and carnal things: they discern very little difference in the doctrines which they hear: they, like Gallio, seem to "care for none of these things."

***~~Many are critical hearers—~~***

They can attend to nothing which is not composed with elegance; or they affect only what accords with their own views of religion: they judge of all they hear by a standard of their own. Hence they form parties, and set up one minister against another, 1 Corinthians 3:3-4.

***~~Many also are captious hearers—~~***

They will not hear anything which militates against their prejudices: they cannot bear to have their favorite habits condemned, [Luke 11:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.45); they are offended if their bosom lusts be faithfully reproved, [Mark 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.17-18); they too much resemble the Scribes and Pharisees of old, [Luke 11:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.54). While there continue such hearers, the caution will be necessary.

***~~2. Because God himself speaks to us by the preacher—~~***

Ministers are ambassadors for God, and speak in Christ's stead, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20). If they preach what is founded on the Scriptures, their word, as far as it is agreeable to the mind of God, is to be considered as God's, [Hebrews 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.7). This is asserted by our Lord and his Apostles, [John 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.20), [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8). We ought therefore to receive the preacher's word as the word of God himself, 1 Thessalonians 2:13. With what humility then ought we to attend to it! What judgments may we not expect, if we slight it, [Hebrews 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1-3). Surely therefore on this account also we need the caution in the text.

***~~3. Because every discourse increases either our salvation or condemnation—~~***

The word delivered is either a savor of life or of death, [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16). Our Lord himself intimates this reason for the caution, [Luke 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.18). Hence our Lord's preaching eventually enhanced the guilt of the Jews, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). The same awful effects will be felt by those who slight his ministers, [Hebrews 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.7-8). What stronger reasons for such a caution can possibly be imagined?

The necessity of such an admonition being evinced, we,

***~~II. Give some directions for obeying it—~~***

A humble mind will naturally receive instruction in a proper manner. We should hear,

***~~With candor—~~***

We cannot too carefully divest ourselves of prejudice: we should not "call any man master upon earth." We should rather weigh what we hear, in the balance of the sanctuary, 1 Thessalonians 5:21; but we ought to have our minds open to conviction. We should "receive the seed in an honest and good heart:" we should "receive with meekness the engrafted word:" nor can we hope to profit, if we do not cultivate this disposition.

***~~With a desire to profit—~~***

The word of God is profitable for many blessed purposes, [2 Timothy 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16-17); yet it cannot be serviceable to us, if it be not received in faith, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2); but when applied to the soul, its operation is very powerful, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12). We should therefore at all times apply it to ourselves: we should go to the ordinances, as the sick to Bethesda's pool. Nor do we ever hear aright, except when we attend in this spirit, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2); it is the practical hearer only that derives benefit to his soul, [James 1:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22-25).

***~~With a humble dependence on God's Spirit—~~***

It is God alone who "teaches us to profit." Human labors, without his blessing, will be vain, [1 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.7). *It is his work to open the understanding, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45), and the heart*, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14). To him therefore should we look for the teaching of his spirit, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18). We should plead the promise which God has given us, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11). In this way we shall experience much benefit from the word, [Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.7). No obstacles whatever shall be able to withstand its power, [2 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4). It shall be a rich source of grace and wisdom to us, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16). Let us then offer in sincerity that petition in the Litany "That it may please you to give to all your people increase of grace, to hear meekly your word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit."

***~~#1506~~***

***~~Jairus' Daughter Healed~~***

***~~[Luke 8:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.50)~~***

"But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying: Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well."

***~~Afflictions may well be deprecated by us as painful to flesh and blood; but they are often the means of humbling us before God.~~***

Multitudes came as suppliants to our Lord, who would never have regarded him if they had not felt the pressure of disease or trouble. The rich in general were the most backward to acknowledge him; but they found that in the hour of affliction none other could do them good. Hence occasionally we see the opulent presenting their supplications before him. Nor did he reject the suit of any, whether they were rich or poor. The answer he gave to the ruler of the synagogue is recorded in the text; and it will naturally lead us to *notice the ruler's faith:*

***~~I. How Jairus' faith was tried—~~***

***~~Jairus had much to try his faith—~~***

He had an only child (twelve years of age) in dying circumstances. Having heard much of our Lord's miracles, he applied to him on behalf of his daughter, and earnestly requested him to come and restore her to health. But while he was returning with Jesus to his house, his servant brought tidings that the child was dead. This was a dreadful shock to the parent's feelings, and might have utterly destroyed all his hopes.

***~~Just so, the faith of God's people is often tried—~~***

They are enabled to make application to their God and Savior. But the storm in the meantime gathers thick around them: their difficulties so increase, that their hopes seem almost blasted. They have cried for pardon, and find only an increasing sense of guilt. They have prayed for deliverance from corruption or temptation, and experienced the assaults of Satan more violent than ever. Thus they are almost ready to think that God has cast out their prayer, and shut up his tender mercies from them. It was in this manner that holy Job was tried. Yes, the experience of most, however diversified, is generally found to agree in this, [Psalm 107:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.5-6); [Psalm 107:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.12-13); [Psalm 107:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.18-19); [Psalm 107:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.26-28).

But this accumulated trouble was permitted for the further exercise of the ruler's faith.

***~~II. How Jairus' faith operated—~~***

***~~He was enabled humbly and confidently to depend on Jesus—~~***

It was his faith that first led him to Jesus for help: nor, when his case seemed desperate, did he give up his hope. It is probable that our Lord might perceive some rising apprehensions in his mind; but he sustained him instantly with those encouraging words, "Fear not." Jairus expected now that his child should be raised as from a sleep. The idea of sleep, however, only called forth the derision of the mourners. Such was the fruit of their ignorance and unbelief: but the ruler himself resembled the father of the faithful, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18); [Romans 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20-21).

***~~It is in this way that true faith will ever show itself—~~***

It will surely lead us to Jesus for relief: it will make us humble and importunate in our supplications to him. We shall not presently turn from him because our difficulties increase: we shall rather adopt the expression of holy Job, [Job 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 13.15). Unbelief may prompt us to deride what we do not understand; but faith will make us acquiesce in God's declarations, though we cannot fully comprehend them, and expect the accomplishment of his promises, however his providence may appear to contradict them.

***~~III. How Jairus' faith was rewarded—~~***

***~~Jesus answered the ruler to the full extent of all his wishes—~~***

Our Lord reproved the excessive lamentations of the people, and encouraged them to expect the restoration of the child; but he would not allow those who had derided him to be spectators of the miracle. He took with him, however, persons sufficient to attest it: he favored the believing parents with admission to behold it, and restored their daughter, as it had been from sleep, in their very presence. The child arose instantly, and walked as in perfect health. For their further conviction he ordered food to be given to the child. By this also he intimated that though she was restored by a miracle, she was to be kept alive by natural means. What a rich reward was this to the believing suppliant!

***~~Nor shall any one who asks in faith, be disappointed—~~***

Our Lord has commanded us to ask in faith, [Mark 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.24); and has assured us that petitions, so offered, shall be answered by him, [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.22). Things the most impossible to man, shall, if they will conduce to our good and to God's honor, be effected by the prayer of faith, [Mark 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.23); *crimes*the most atrocious that ever were committed, shall be pardoned, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39); *lusts*the most inveterate that ever enslaved a soul, shall be subdued, [Isaiah 59:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.19), 1 Corinthians 6:11. The *dead in trespasses and sins*shall be raised, like Christ himself, to a new and heavenly life, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20) with 2:5, 6; nor shall they fail of attaining eternal happiness in Heaven, [John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.15), [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

*Every man must expect trouble in this valley of tears.*The dearest friends must look forward to a day of separation; but let every trouble drive us to the compassionate Jesus, and every want be spread before him in prayer, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6). We are not now indeed to expect miraculous interpositions; nor ought we to ask for temporal blessings in an unqualified manner. *We should commit the concerns of this life to his all-wise disposal*; but for spiritual blessings we cannot be too importunate, nor can our faith in his word be too strong. What he said to Martha he still says to us, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40). The advice of Jehoshaphat is the best direction we can follow, [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20). Let us not then limit his tender mercies. If we resemble the Samaritan lord, we shall fare like him, [2 Kings 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.2); [2 Kings 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.17). Let us not in renewed troubles be like the unbelieving Jews, [Psalm 78:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.20); but let us bear in mind that encouraging declaration, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20), and determine henceforth to live like the Apostle, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20).

***~~#1507~~***

***~~The Five Thousand Fed~~***

***~~[Luke 9:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.12-13)~~***

"When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people."

With all our active services for the Lord it is proper to blend devotion and retirement; so that we may not neglect our own vineyard, while we are cultivating that of others. But there are calls which may properly supersede for a time our private duties; as God has told us by the prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

Our blessed Lord, wearied with his continual labors, had retired to a desert place for meditation and prayer. But the people still following him in great numbers, he denied himself those necessary enjoyments, and not only renewed his exertions with all his usual earnestness, but supplied by miracle the wants of all who waited on him. This event being replete with instruction, I shall set before you,

***~~I. The Miracle he wrought—~~***

***~~The multitudes who followed him were reduced to the greatest straits—~~***

The evening was closing in upon them, and they had no provision for the support of their bodies after their great fatigues. What their motives were for such a protracted attendance upon him we do not exactly know. It is possible that some loved to hear his instructions; while others sought to obtain either for themselves or their friends a miraculous cure of their disorders: and some possibly were actuated by no better motive than that of gratifying an idle curiosity.

But, however this might be, our Lord "had compassion on them," and determined to avert from them the evils to which their inconsiderate zeal had exposed them.

***~~But our Lord wrought a stupendous miracle for their relief—~~***

He ordered the multitude to be arranged in groups of fifty: and, that being done, he told his disciples to dispense to them all the food which they had, consisting of five loaves and two small fish. This was done: and every Apostle, while distributing the food, found the pieces in his hand still undiminished. And, after all were satisfied, he commanded the remnants to be gathered, to no less an amount than twelve baskets full; so ample was the supply, and so was indisputable the miracle that had been wrought for them.

Without dwelling on any of the smaller incidents of the miracle, we may proceed to consider,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it—~~***

Truly, it will be found very instructive—

***~~1. In a moral view—~~***

Many valuable lessons does it suggest to us. We may here learn **contentment**: for, when our blessed Lord would feast this whole multitude, he did it not by spreading before them a luxurious entertainment, but by giving them only such provisions as were suited to a laborious fisherman, some barley bread and some cold dried fish. Shall it then be a matter of any concern to us, if we are constrained to exist on coarser fare, while people in higher life are fed with dainties? I am persuaded that this meal was to their taste far sweeter, yes, and in their eyes, more splendid too, than the feast of King Ahasuerus to the heads of his one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

In fact, it is a small matter whether our tables be strewed with delicacies, or we have merely the food that is necessary for us. "Having food and clothing, though of the coarsest kind, we may well therewith be content;" and may say, as Paul, when his necessities were thus supplied, "I have all, and abound, [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18)."

And surely we may well learn from hence **liberality**also: for when our Lord proposed to his disciples to give to the distressed multitude all the food which they had, the answer made, was not, 'Lord, what then shall we have left for ourselves?' but simply, 'Lord, for so great a multitude our little store will be of no use whatever:' and when our Lord gave the order to distribute it all, the order was obeyed without the smallest hesitation or delay.

This kind of liberality would be but little approved by the Christian world in general. But it is highly approved in the Holy Scriptures; and the poor widow, who gave her whole substance for the use of the temple, was commended for it.

In truth, *there is no luxury under Heaven that can be purchased with money, that is equal to the luxury of doing good.* If only we give as unto the Lord, we shall never repent of having given too much: for "what we so give to the poor, we lend unto the Lord;" and at no distant period "he will repay us again."

Methinks, too, we may here learn **trust**also. Our Lord allowed these his followers to come into great straits, and then supplied their wants.

And us also he may permit to be encompassed with difficulties for a season: but he will only make them an occasion of manifesting his own watchful care over us, and of magnifying his mercy towards us. True, we are not to expect miracles to be wrought in our behalf: but *he has ten thousand ways of providing for his people*; and he will do it in the time and manner that he shall see to be best for us: for he has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all needful things shall be added unto you, [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33)."

Let him give us ever so much, we are to suffer no waste, but to preserve our very remnants for future use: on the other hand, let our wants be ever so great, we should never doubt but he will supply us in the time of need.

***~~2. In a religious view—~~***

Who does not see in the conduct of this multitude how we should seek the Lord? Did they press upon him thus for the sake of obtaining healing for their bodies, and shall not we for the healing of our souls? Did they forget the very necessities of nature, that they might reap the benefit of his instructions, and shall we account any self-denial too great for the obtaining of grace and peace at his hands?

I do not indeed think it necessary, or even right, for us to neglect our worldly callings as they did. They could not otherwise have gained access to our blessed Lord, whose august character fully authorized and called for those extraordinary attentions: whereas we have access to him at all times in his ordinances, and may therefore easily make our attendance on him consistent with the discharge of all our relative and social duties.

But in heart and affection, we may well "leave all to follow him:" nor should our own carnal ease or worldly interests ever be allowed to detain us from him, or to interfere with the concerns of our souls.

Here, too, we see what we may expect at his hands. See how richly he fed that whole multitude: and will he withhold "the bread of life" from you? Will he not abundantly supply all of you out of his own inexhaustible fullness? Methinks you are here waiting upon him, and seated, as it were, before him to receive at his hands the communications of his grace: and here am I dispensing to you the bread of life according to his command. True, it is but barley bread that you receive: yet shall you find it sufficient for all your necessities, if only you receive it as from Him, and feed upon it as the food of your souls.

You are told that, when "Jesus took the loaves and fish, he looked up to Heaven, and blessed them, and then broke and gave them to the disciples, and through the disciples to the multitude. Now, if you will beg of him to bless your provision also that is now dispensed by me, what may you not hope for? Truly your souls shall be fed, yes, and nourished too, unto life eternal.

And see that multitude when dismissed to their homes: was there one among them that did not adore and magnify their glorious Benefactor? O that it may be so with you at this time! that not one soul may be sent away empty, but every one of you depart refreshed and strengthened for all your future labors! Even so, Amen and Amen.

***~~#1508~~***

***~~The Transfiguration of Christ~~***

***~~[Luke 9:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.28-32)~~***

Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.

Those who were the immediate followers of our Lord, beheld him, for the most part, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" but, lest they should be tempted to forsake him, he sometimes spoke to them of "that glory which he had with the Father before the world was," and which he would resume as soon as ever the scenes of his present humiliation should be closed. On this occasion he condescended to give to three of them an ocular demonstration of his glory. The particulars are related in the passage before us; in opening which we shall consider,

***~~I. The time and manner of his transfiguration—~~***

***~~Our Lord was at this time engaged in prayer—~~***

God has on many occasions signally manifested his regard to prayer. It was at the beginning of Daniel's supplications that an angel was sent to reveal to him the period fixed for the Messiah's advent, [Daniel 9:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.20-23). The reason that God assigned for sending Ananias to open the eyes of Saul was, "Behold, he prays, [Acts 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.11)."

Thus Jesus was at this time engaged in prayer. He had retired to a mountain for that very purpose: and this was the season which God chose for distinguishing him in this most signal manner. It is worthy of remark, that every time that God was pleased to bear testimony to his Son by an audible voice from Heaven, it was either in, or immediately after prayer, [Luke 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.21-22) and [John 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.28). And*if we cultivated more holy intimacy with God, he would more frequently grant to us also the special tokens of his love.*

***~~"While he was praying," his form was visibly and wonderfully changed—~~***

In his transfiguration, as it is called, *the Godhead displayed itself through the veil of his human nature*, his countenance shone like the meridian sun; and his very garments were so irradiated by the luster of the indwelling Deity, that they were white and dazzling like the light, yes, "so white as no launderer on earth could whiten them, [Mark 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.3)." He had hitherto appeared only "in the form of a servant;" but now he appeared in his own proper form as God; at least, so far as his divine nature could be rendered visible to mortal eyes.

Nor was this transfiguration intended as a mere ostentatious display of his glory: it was necessary perhaps for his support as man; that, when he should come into the scenes of his deepest humiliation, he might not faint. It was also well calculated to prepare his disciples for that awful view of him, which they were afterwards to have, when they would see him in the garden, prostrate on the ground, bathed in a bloody sweat, and supplicating "with strong crying and tears" the removal of the cup which his Father had put into his hand.

The history further informs us respecting,

***~~II. His conversation with his attendants—~~***

***~~Moses and Elijah were sent from Heaven to attend upon him—~~***

The body of Moses probably had been preserved, as that of Elijah had been translated to Heaven, without suffering the total change which is usually effected by death. They were on this occasion arrayed "in glory," somewhat like to their divine Master, though, of course, they were but as twinkling stars in comparison with the meridian sun. And there was a peculiar propriety that these should be selected to wait upon him, not only because they had been faithful and highly honored servants of God, the one being the giver, and the other the restorer, of the law, but because *they fitly represented the law and the prophets*; and, *in bearing testimony to him, resigned, as it were, their authority into his hands*.

***~~These conversed with him respecting his own approaching death—~~***

One might have expected that they should have talked of Heaven: but they had a subject in which all were yet more deeply interested; a subject in which the inexhaustible treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge are contained; a subject which fills all Heaven with wonder, and which eternity itself will not be sufficient to unfold. Yes, that subject, universally exploded from the societies of men, was the one which occupied their attention during this delightful interview; "they spoke of his decease which he would accomplish in Jerusalem." O what do we lose by lending ourselves so entirely to other topics, and so totally discarding this! And how infatuated are men, that, even in the society of their dearest friends, they do not improve their hours by conversing on a subject of such universal importance!

Nor were his earthly followers wholly excluded. We read of,

***~~III. The peculiar privilege granted to some of his disciples—~~***

***~~Some more distinguished favorites were admitted to this heavenly vision—~~***

Christ has sanctified human friendships by manifesting the same attachments as are common among men. He not only chose twelve out of the body of his disciples to be his stated followers, but admitted three of them to more peculiar intimacy than the rest: and even of these three there was one, who lay, as it were, in his bosom, and was called, by way of eminence, "The disciple whom Jesus loved." But the three who had been taken up to the mountain to spend their time in prayer, had fallen asleep, and lost thereby much of the vision, which they might have seen, and of the conversation, which they might have heard.

Alas! What an irreparable loss did they sustain! Well might Jesus have said to them, "Sleep on now and take your rest." But the effulgence of his glory roused them at last, and they both beheld this bright assemblage of persons, and heard the sublime discourse which passed between them. Happy were their eyes which saw, and their ears which heard, such things!

Can we wonder that Peter should exclaim, It is good for us to be here! and that he should propose to erect tents for the accommodation of Christ and his heavenly guests, regardless of his own ease, if he might but protract his present enjoyments? But though well meant, it was an ignorant proposal; for it was needful both for themselves and for the world, that they should speedily resume their usual labors, and fulfill the work assigned to them. Peter however may well be excused, for "he knew not what he said."

***~~They also heard the testimony which the Father on that occasion bore to Christ—~~***

While the Apostles were wishing to rest in their present comforts, they were overshadowed with a cloud, and their joys were turned into fear and dread. The cloud perhaps was like that which guided the Israelites through the wilderness as a symbol of the Divine presence: and what can we expect, but that, as sinners, they should tremble at the near approach of the divine Majesty? But the testimony which they heard amply compensated their transient fears: their divine Master was proclaimed as the only beloved Son of God; and they were bidden to "hear him"—him *chiefly*, him *constantly*, him *exclusively*. Such was the singular honor conferred on him: and though they were forbidden to mention it for a season, lest it should provoke their enemies to wrath, and their fellow-disciples to jealousy—yet doubtless it tended much to support them in their subsequent conflicts.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How indisputable is the truth of our holy religion—~~***

This was a most remarkable testimony to the character of Jesus; and it was given by God himself. Would God interpose in this manner in order to deceive? Or could those disciples be mistaken in what they so plainly saw with their eyes, and heard with their ears? Surely, as strange as the tidings of the Gospel may be thought, here is evidence enough that it is "not a cunningly devised fable." It is remarkable that Peter selects this very event out of the many thousands to which he was a witness, in order to establish beyond a doubt the truth of that doctrine which he preached, [2 Peter 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.16-18). Let us then receive that Gospel which is so well authenticated, so firmly established. Let us "hear Jesus," our divinely appointed Teacher, and trust him as "our beloved" Savior, "in whom our souls are well pleased."

***~~2. How diversified are the states of God's people upon earth!~~***

These highly favored disciples were now upon the mount; but they were soon to descend into the valley again, and to go "through much tribulation on their way to the kingdom." Thus it is with all the Lord's people: the present is at best a chequered scene: nor is trouble ever nearer to us than when we are saying, "My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved, [Psalm 30:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.6-7)." Let us then be thankful for any seasons of joy; but never be so elated by them as to wish to set up tabernacles here, or to forget that we may soon experience a sad reverse: yes, let us rather improve our joys as means of strengthening us for future conflicts.

***~~3. What a glorious place must Heaven be!~~***

It must have been inexpressibly delightful to have beheld, though for so short a time, this heavenly vision. But what must it be to "see Jesus as he is," in all the full blaze of divine majesty; to see him, not attended with two only, but with ten thousand of his saints; and to hear, not a conversation about future sufferings, but songs of everlasting joy and triumph! What must it be to see and hear such things; ourselves resembling the Lord Jesus; our "bodies fashioned like unto his glorious body," and our souls "shining above the sun in the firmament;" our body no longer to become torpid through sloth, nor our soul to be agitated by surprise or terror; but in the perfect exercise of all our faculties to participate that glory, with a full assurance that it shall never end! Well may we then say, It is good for us to be here. Then we shall need no tabernacles, for "we shall dwell in the temple of our God, and shall never leave, [Revelation 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.12)." May we all be counted worthy of that honor! may we be admitted to the enjoyment of that beatific vision; that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory!"

***~~#1509~~***

***~~Against Mistaking Our Own Spirit~~***

***~~[Luke 9:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.55)~~***

"But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, You do not know what manner of spirit you are of."

When we consider what attainments men have made in science and philosophy; when we see them marshaling the stars, measuring their distances, tracing their courses, and ascertaining their influence—we are amazed at the strength of human intellect. But when we turn our eyes to their spiritual attainments, and inquire into their knowledge of their own hearts, we are altogether as much astonished at the extreme ignorance which they betray.

Even godly persons have but very limited and partial views of their own principles of action. The very Apostles, who had long enjoyed the instructions of Christ himself, showed on many occasions an unfitting spirit, while they supposed themselves actuated by the best motives. One instance in particular we have before us, where, under a cloak of zeal for their Master's honor, they would have called down fire from Heaven upon a whole village. Our Lord, however, rebuked them in the words we have now read; from whence we shall inquire,

***~~I. Whence is it that men are so liable to self-deception?~~***

***~~It is manifest, beyond a doubt, that many know not what spirit they are of—~~***

The various classes of ungodly men are universally laboring under self-deception. However they neglect every duty, or violate every commandment, they persuade themselves that, on the whole, they have good hearts; nor have they the smallest conception that they are "haters of God, [Romans 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.30), [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7), [Colossians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21)." Even the proud persecutor, so far from accounting himself an enemy to God, will imagine that he is doing God service, while he is opposing to the utmost the Redeemer's kingdom, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2), [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9).

Nor are the godly themselves exempt from similar delusions, though they are influenced by them in a less degree. The zealous are sometimes inflamed with an unhallowed fire, verse 54. And many, actuated by vanity, too much resemble Jehu, [2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16); and the *timid*are induced to cowardice, [Galatians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.12). The *confident*will resolve, when they should rather pray for strength, [Matthew 26:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.35); and the *faithless*will harbor fears, when they should rather be enjoying their security, [Matthew 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.26).

***~~This propensity to self-deception is not hard to be accounted for—~~***

1. There is a close affinity between good and evil—

Good and evil are in their own nature as opposite as light and darkness: but, through the imperfection of our knowledge, they appear very nearly allied.

Indifference assumes the garb of candor:

worldliness is dignified by the name of honest industry:

the fear of man puts on the mask of prudence:

a vindictive spirit passes for a sense of honor.

*There is scarcely any other disposition, however sinful, which does not assume the name of some corresponding virtue*, and thus conceal at least its own malignity, or perhaps obtrude itself upon the world as amiable and praise-worthy.

Hence there arises a great difficulty in distinguishing between the good and the evil that there is in our own actions, since *the very same thing may be either good or evil, according to the principles from whence it proceeds, and to the time, manner, or degree in which it is carried into execution*.

2. There is a backwardness in man to search out the evil that is in him—

There is in every man a self-love, which renders him averse to view his own actions in an unfavorable light; and a partiality that leads him to put the best construction upon them. If there is reason to doubt the purity of our own intentions, we do not like to bring matters to the test, and to weigh our actions in the balance of the sanctuary. If a friend attempts to undeceive us, we shrink from the probe, and would gladly avoid the painful scrutiny. Were we told that there was some hidden fire likely to consume our house, we would search into every corner, and thankfully accept every assistance to discover it, in order that it might be extinguished before it had gained too great an ascendancy. But*if a friend would point out the evil of our hearts, we are glad to conceal it from his view, and to harbor, rather than detect, the lurking foe*. Even in the public ministry of the word, we are apt to think how suitable such and such admonitions are for *others*, instead of applying them to ourselves. And hence we continue in an evil way, persuading ourselves that we are influenced by a good spirit, while our most discerning friends lament our delusions, faults, and sins which we harbor.

It will be of no small benefit to us to consider seriously,

***~~II. How we may counteract its baneful influence—~~***

***~~Doubtless, it is easier to prescribe means to others than to use them ourselves~~***

But, as God works by means, we would suggest such as may prove most effectual:

***~~1. Let every grace receive a due portion of our attention—~~***

Many in their concern for one grace, will trample upon another.

In the exercise of zeal, they will forget charity.

In maintaining confidence, will overlook humility.

The ungodly indeed are necessitated often to thwart one evil propensity, while they indulge another. To gratify their lusts, they must expose their character and dissipate their fortune; or if the love of reputation or of money preponderates, they must impose a restraint on their appetites.

But all the graces of Christianity may be exercised together, and in their highest perfection: every one tempers and limits that which appears opposite to it; and all, like the rays of the sun, must be combined, to produce their full effect.

***~~2. Let every part of Scripture be regarded with equal reverence—~~***

It is astonishing how even good persons will sometimes simply overlook those portions of Scripture which militate against their sentiments or practice. The plainest declarations of God are considered as "hard sayings," and are slighted, either as impractical in themselves, or as inapplicable to *their*case. But we must be careful to receive every word of God; and to improve it as "a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths:" for it is only "by taking heed to it" that we can ever effectually "cleanse our way, [Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.9)."

***~~3. Let Christ be set before us as our pattern and example—~~***

*Wherever we can trace the steps of our blessed Lord, there we are to follow*, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6), [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21). There were indeed some things in him which would not befit us, because we are not called to the high office which he sustained. But the spirit of his actions should be copied by us, even where the actions themselves would not be proper for our imitation. For example, we should not attempt to fast forty days and forty nights; but we should exercise self-denial. Nor should we speak of rulers in reproachful terms, [Luke 13:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.32), [Acts 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.5); but we should be bold and faithful in the discharge of our duty. In doubtful circumstances it will be profitable to *consider what he would have done if he had been precisely in our situation. By thus divesting ourselves of partiality, and proposing to ourselves his perfect pattern—we shall have our judgment assisted, and our conduct rectified.*

***~~4. Let us lean to the side that mortifies, rather than to that which suits, our natural inclination—~~***

In the present corrupt state of human nature, we shall rarely, if ever, find our natural desires drawing our line of duty correctly. *Self has too strong a bias*, even where its tendencies most accord with the word of God: nor does *self*ever fail to operate in some measure. If therefore we lean to that side, we may be hurried, before we are aware, to great extremes, without any prospect of recovery. But if we lean rather to the opposite side, we are in no danger of being transported much too far; and we have a bias uniformly operating to bring us back to the line of moderation. This rule is founded on the supposition that our natural inclinations may, in some instances, prescribe what is right. But in cases where the line of duty is at all doubtful, it will invariably be found safer at least, and in all human probability the only right way, to oppose and mortify self.

***~~5. Let us keep our minds open to conviction—~~***

If we will at all events conclude ourselves right, there is no hope of our being ever undeceived. We must he willing to suspect ourselves, and to listen to the counsel of our friends. Even Peter needed correction from his brother Paul, [Galatians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.11); and the duty of "teaching and admonishing one another, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16)," necessarily implies a readiness to receive, as well as to impart, brotherly admonition. And if we cultivate this disposition, we shall often be preserved from evils into which we might have rushed, and have reason to adore our God for the advice we have received, [1 Samuel 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.32-33).

***~~6. Let us pray constantly to God to search and test us—~~***

*Our treacherous hearts can put such glosses on our conduct as to deceive* both ourselves and others: but they cannot deceive God. "He searches the heart, and tries the thoughts," he "weighs the spirits;" and discerns with infallible certainty the smallest mixtures of evil, and the minutest deviations from his holy law. And, as he beholds, so he can reveal to us, the secret workings of our own corruptions. If he shines into our hearts, we shall be astonished to see the sinful delusions which we have held fast perhaps for many years, and of which our dearest friends could never convince us!

Let us then pray to him to search and try the very ground of our hearts, and he will not only make our senses more acute to discern good and evil, [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14), but will keep our feet in the way of his commandments, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9). "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life!" [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)

***~~#1510~~***

***~~Appropriate Addresses to Distinct Characters~~***

***~~[Luke 9:57-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.57-62)~~***

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

To investigate and unfold the expressions of Holy Writ is an office in the discharge of which a minister renders the most essential service to the Church of God: and hence it constitutes a very great portion of a minister's labors; so far, at least, as respects his public addresses to his people.

But the *eliciting of characters*, as portrayed in the inspired volume, is also a work of great importance; inasmuch as it enables a multitude of persons to behold themselves, as it were in a looking-glass, and to arrange themselves under the different classes to which they belong.

It is this latter office which I shall endeavor to discharge at this time. Here are three distinct characters brought to our view, with distinct addresses to each. On the particular terms that are used, I shall say but little; my intention being rather to take the subject in one collective view, and to suggest reflections upon it as a whole.

Let us, then, contemplate,

***~~I. The characters here presented to our view—~~***

They all express different measures of regard for Christ and his Gospel:

the first is all willingness;

the second is all reluctance;

the third is a compound of the two former, being partly willing, and partly reluctant, to obey the Gospel call.

***~~The first professes the utmost willingness to follow Christ—~~***

"Lord, I will follow you wherever you go." This is well spoken, on a supposition that it convey the deliberate purpose of the heart. Such a state of mind as this is a counterpart of Heaven itself; where all the redeemed are said "to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, [Revelation 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.4)." But, from the answer of our Lord to him, it is evident that the man knew not what he was undertaking. He had not considered what *conflicts*he would have to maintain, what *sacrifices*to make, what *self-denial*to exercise. The very confidence with which he expressed himself argued a sad ignorance of his own heart, and a very partial acquaintance with the duties which he was so ready to engage in. He seems to have been under an impression that the Lord Jesus was about to establish a temporal kingdom; and, like the mother of Zebedee's sons, to have contemplated a pre-eminence among his followers, as a post of worldly honor, and of enviable preferment.

Now, among ourselves, also, there are many who are under a similar delusion. They think of nothing in religion, but its joys and honors. As for "entering into it by a strait gate," and finding it "a narrow way," they seem never for a moment to have contemplated it in such a forbidding aspect. Like the stony-ground hearers, they have received the word with delight, and appear at once to experience all its fructifying powers. In a moment, as it were, they seem to have attained a high measure of grace, and to have made a considerable proficiency in the divine life: but their lack of "root in themselves" will soon be made manifest, and their profession speedily be found to have been nothing but an empty boast.

***~~The second manifests a great degree of unwillingness—~~***

It is here particularly to be noticed, that this second character had received from Christ an express command, "Follow me." This, therefore, should have been obeyed in the way that Matthew had obeyed it at the receipt of custom, and the sons of Zebedee amidst their father's nets. But he pleads for delay, as feeling that he had an occupation which, at the present at least, was of superior importance.

Whether his father was really dead, or only aged and in dying circumstances, is, among commentators, a matter of doubt. I confess I incline rather to the latter opinion; because the circumstance of his being engaged in attending the ministry of our Lord at that time, in a country where the funeral followed so closely on a man's decease, gives just reason to think that his father, though aged or sick, was yet alive. And in this view, the apparent harshness of our Lord's answer vanishes at once.

There were persons in plenty to perform the last offices for his father; and, however commendable the exercise of filial attention was, the immediate call of God was of sufficient authority to supersede it; and *"to love father or mother more than Christ," was to show that he was "unworthy of the kingdom of God."*

But of this description, also, are many among ourselves. They may, possibly, really feel the obligations due to parents: but, in making filial duty a plea for delaying to obey the Gospel, they betray a total ignorance of what they owe to God.

It is said of *Levi*, that, when commanded to go through the camp and slay the worshipers of the golden calf, he executed the commission without any partiality or reserve: "He said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, [Exodus 32:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.26-28), [Deuteronomy 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.9)."

Just so, however self-denying the office to which we are called may be, we are to discharge it instantly, without deference or regard to any human being. But many who hear the Gospel, and acknowledge their obligation to obey it, are yet kept back, from a mistaken idea, that respect even for a father, and that father in the most trying circumstances, will justify a delay in obeying the call of God. In saying, "Allow me first to do . . . " anything under Heaven, they actually rebel against God; who commands us "to seek, first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and to "hate even father and mother" in *comparison*with Christ, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26).

***~~The third professes a willingness to follow Christ, but pleads for permission to delay it—~~***

It is probable that the person who desired to "go home and bid farewell to his family" had in his view the history of Elisha, who had made this request to Elijah, and received his permission to execute his wish, [1 Kings 19:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.20). But the danger which this man would encounter was incomparably greater than Elisha's; for he might be sure that his family would exert all their powers to divert him from his purpose.

A similar mistake proves fatal to multitudes at the present day. They wish to conciliate the regards of their earthly relatives, and for that end subject themselves to temptations which they are not able to withstand. Their friends know not how to give them up to follow a course which, to say the least, is so unpopular, and, with respect to this world, futile also. And, in order to retain their hold of their vacillating friend, they use every effort of intimidation, of raillery, of contempt: and thus they prevail on the unstable Christian to relinquish his holy profession, and to go back again to the world.

These several characters will appear in their true light, while we consider,

***~~II. The appropriate answers successively addressed to them—~~***

***~~To the first, our Lord sets forth the difficulties attendant on the Christian life—~~***

The man, it should seem, had expected little but outward prosperity; and our Lord informs him how unfounded this expectation was; since he himself, though Lord of all, was destitute of every earthly accommodation: and it could not be expected that "the servant should be above his Lord."

The same would I say to those who are forward to engage in a profession of religion, and to number themselves among the Lord's people. In making a Christian profession, you are incomparably more likely to meet with want and shame, than fullness and honor. The Apostles of our Lord, and particularly the Apostle Paul, were exposed to cold, and hunger, and nakedness, and perils of every kind. And thousands of others, in different ages of the Church, have been called to experience the same: and though persecution for righteousness' sake is not carried to the same extent among us, we are not authorized to expect any earthly comfort, of which the men of this world can deprive us.

A pre-eminence in our Lord's kingdom will, in the eyes of the ungodly, entitle us to nothing but preeminence in sufferings and reproach. And the man that will not follow Jesus on these terms must relinquish Jesus altogether: for "if we do not take up our cross daily to follow him, we cannot be his disciples."

Let every one, therefore, that would be saved by Christ, be prepared to participate with Christ in his wants and sufferings; and let him "follow Christ outside the camp, bearing his reproach," yes, and "glorying that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake."

***~~To the second, our Lord declares that every earthly consideration must give way, when we are plainly called to serve and honor him—~~***

This I conceive to be the real meaning of that expression, "Let the dead bury their dead." Our Lord did not mean to discourage the performance of our relative duties, and least of all the duties which we owe to our parents. Both the Law and the Gospel concur in this, even in enforcing obedience to earthly parents. This was "the first commandment with promise;" and, "if we obey it not," whatever we may profess, "we are worse than infidels."

But our duty to God is of paramount obligation. And, if we say: Who then shall perform the duties which we neglect? I answer, *There will always be found enough of worldly people to attend to worldly duties*: and we may well leave them to discharge what they supremely desire. We may "leave the dead to bury their dead." If we have a clear call to preach the Gospel, or to embrace it in such a way as shall be incompatible with those carnal occupations which may as well be performed by others, we may well leave those occupations to others; and, at all events, we must never so follow them as to let them interfere with the discharge of our Christian duties: and if any one blames us for this, our answer must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge: for we cannot but do the things which he requires."

***~~To the last, our Lord administered a solemn caution—~~***

It seemed that this person was more sincere than the other two; though still by no means sufficiently aware of the danger to which, by the step which he contemplated, he would be exposed. The man who would finally be accepted of God, must "not only set out well, but must *endure*unto the end." *He must take care of hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt, which he has left.*"Lot's wife" is a standing monument to all ages, and warns us all, not so much as even to cast a look of regret at the vanities we have once renounced. A man at plough will execute his work badly, if he looks back in the midst of it. Just so, a man who is working for eternity will never be judged fit for the kingdom of God, if he be not continually intent upon that which is before him, and carefully prosecuting his destined work.

Let those, therefore, who plead for worldly gratifications, consider their tendency, and dread their effects. I grant that there are many things both seemly and innocent, if abstractedly considered, which yet a man in earnest for Heaven will do well to avoid; lest by means of them he should be ensnared, and diverted from his proper course. The man in a race will not only free himself from encumbrances, but will gird about his loins the garment that would obstruct his way. And in like manner we also should "cast away every weight, and the sin which either does, or may, more easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us." It were "better never to have known the commandment at all, than, after having known it, to depart from it."

***~~Permit me, then, to recommend to every one of you,~~***

***~~1. Consideration—~~***

Take not up religion in a light and thoughtless way; but consider carefully, what duties it prescribes, what exertions it requires, what sufferings it entails; and, "before you begin to build the tower, sit down and count the cost, and see whether you have with which to finish it." If you will possess "the pearl of great price, you must sell all that you have, and buy it!"

***~~2. Decision—~~***

Whether you be of a higher or a lower rank, it matters not; you shall surely find, that if you will live godly in Christ Jesus, you shall suffer persecution. David experienced this, after he sat on the throne, no less than while he fled from the face of Saul. Just so, you must expect it in its utmost possible extent, even to martyrdom itself. And you must be "ready either to be bound or die for the name of the Lord Jesus," if such a sacrifice should be called for at your hands. In nothing must you "consult with flesh and blood." *To "follow the Lord fully" must be the one deliberate and determined purpose of your soul.*

***~~3. Constancy—~~***

Never are you to be weary of well-doing. "If you draw back, God can have no pleasure in you!" "You will draw back to certain and everlasting perdition!" You must "be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain a crown of life!" "He alone who endures unto the end, ever will, or ever can, be saved."

***~~#1511~~***

***~~Against a Disposition to Relinquish the Lord's Service~~***

***~~[Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62)~~***

"But Jesus said to him: No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

So infinitely important is the service of God, that nothing can ever justify the withdrawing of ourselves from it, or the relaxing of our diligence in the discharge of our proper office. However innocent any earthly employment may be, yes, however decorous, or even necessary, in its place, it must give way to the more urgent calls of our duty to God. Of this our Lord constantly warned his hearers, in order that they might fully count the cost before they became his followers. His answers to three different persons upon this subject are worthy of our particular attention:

to the first, who voluntarily offered to him his services, Jesus replied that he must expect no worldly advantages in following him, but rather to expect to meet with poverty and disgrace.

In his address to the second, whom Jesus had enjoined to follow him, and who wished to defer his obedience until he should have performed the last offices for his deceased father, our Lord required him to leave those offices to others, who were not occupied in higher pursuits, and instantly to comply with the direction given him; because nothing, however proper in itself, should interfere with the execution of a positive command.

To the last, Jesus gave this caution; that since his earthly relatives would most probably prove a snare to him under his present circumstances, he must make up his mind to forsake all for him; for a wavering mind would unfit him both for the service of God on earth, and the enjoyment of God in Heaven.

The request of this last person seems to have brought to our Lord's mind the circumstances of Elisha, when he was called to serve Elijah: and it is to Elisha's occupation that our Lord alludes in the answer he gave him, [1 Kings 19:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.19-20). From his words we may deduce two important observations:

***~~I. When we engage in God's service, we should determine, through grace, to continue in it—~~***

***~~When we "put our hand to the plough" we engage in God's service—~~***

It is obvious that, as God's creatures, and more particularly as redeemed by the blood of his dear Son, we are bound to serve and obey him. Now the*obedience which he requires, is, that we renounce the world, and mortify sin, and yield up ourselves to him sincerely, and without reserve*. And when we begin to make a profession of religion, we do, in fact, declare, that henceforth we will walk conformably to the example of Christ, and the precepts of his Gospel. Our very putting of our hand to the plough is, as it were, a public declaration of our intention to prosecute and finish the work assigned to us by our divine Master.

***~~But it is of no use to begin the Lord's work, if we do not resolutely adhere to it—~~***

When first we turn to the Lord, we propose to ourselves two ends, namely, to glorify God, and to save our own souls: and while we continue faithful to our engagements, we find no reason to complain of disappointment. But the very instant we *recede*from our work, we proclaim, as it were, to all around us, 'I have tried religion, and found it but an empty name: I have served the Lord, and experienced him to be a hard Master: I have weighed the world and its services in a balance with God and his service; and I bear my testimony, that the world deserves our preference.' By such conduct as this a person pulls down all that he has built: he brings incomparably more dishonor to God than ever he brought glory, and sinks his soul into a far deeper condemnation, than if he had never known the way of righteousness, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24). [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21). As a man who should begin to plough, would render himself of no use, if he should relinquish his work as soon as he had proceeded to the end of a single furrow; so an apostate from religion renders his divine Master no service by a temporary obedience, but rather defeats, yes, most completely reverses, the ends proposed.

Nor is it an open apostasy only from our holy profession that is so fatal to us: for,

***~~II. A disposition to recede from it manifests us to be unfit for the kingdom of God—~~***

Not he only who indignantly throws away the plough, but he who, while he still professes to do the Lord's work, is "looking back" with a wishful eye upon the world, is in the state here mentioned. He is unfit for,

***~~1. The kingdom of God on earth—~~***

This is the primary import of the words of the text: nor can anything be more clear than the truth contained in them. The service of Christ, whether in ministering the word to others, or in obeying it ourselves, requires steadfastness. *We cannot adhere to Christ without opposing in many instances our carnal appetites, and worldly interests*; as therefore a man, who, instead of attending to his plough, looks frequently behind him, would soon prove himself unfit for the service in which he was engaged, so *he who should undertake to serve the Lord Christ, while his heart was yet set upon the world, would walk very unworthily of his profession*, and soon show himself unfit to execute the office assigned him. He might go steadily for a season; but he would before long feel the influence of the corrupt bias that was within him, and, like "Demas, forsake the way of truth from love to this present evil world." He must "be sincere, if he would be without offence until the day of Christ."

***~~2. The kingdom of God in Heaven—~~***

If any person be disposed to look back, after having put his hand to the plough, he shows that he has not a supreme love to God, nor any real delight in holy ordinances, nor any resemblance to the characters of the saints of old. Look at Abraham, at Moses, at Paul, or any others recorded in the Scripture; they left all for Christ, "counting everything to be dung and dross for him," and "esteeming even the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of the world;" nor could even death, in its most formidable shapes, divert them from their purpose to serve and honor him, [Hebrews 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8); [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26), [Hebrews 11:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.37), [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24), [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13). But how unlike to them are the irresolute and unstable! and how incapable of enjoying Heaven even if they were there! Could they be happy in God when they do not supremely love him? Would they not rather dread his presence from a consciousness that their hearts were known to him? Could they bear to spend an eternity in those employments for which they have no relish? Would not their exercises be an irksome task, and an intolerable burden? Could they have sweet communion with the glorified saints when they differ so widely from them? Would they not rather be so condemned in their consciences as even to wish themselves out of their society? Surely a wavering professor of religion is alike unfit for the church militant, and the church triumphant.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who never put their hands to the plough—~~***

How many are there who never set themselves in earnest to do the will of God, or even take pains to inquire what the will of God is! But such will comfort themselves with the reflection, that they are neither hypocrites nor apostates. Alas! how poor a consolation is this! Be it so; you have never made any profession of religion at all: but is that a ground of satisfaction and boasting? What must you say, but this? "Here is one, who has cast off all allegiance to his Maker, and lives without God in the world." Ah! boast not in such a distinction as this: for, whoever you be, God has assigned you a work to do, and will call you to give an account of your talent: and if you have hid it in a napkin, he will "cast you, as an unprofitable servant, into outer darkness." May God open your eyes, and interest you in his service before it be too late!

***~~2. To those who, having put their hands to the plough, are disposed to look back—~~***

We are apt to think lightly of *secret declensions*, if we do not openly apostatize from the truth. But what was it that rendered Lot's wife such an object of God's displeasure? Did she go back to Sodom, or refuse to proceed with the angel to the destined place of safety? No, she looked back, and thereby showed, that her heart was not thoroughly weaned from the things which she had left behind: and on this account it was, that she was instantly transformed into a pillar of salt, and made a monument of God's wrath and indignation to all succeeding ages! [Genesis 19:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.26). To impress this instructive lesson on our minds, our Lord bids us "remember Lot's wife [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32);" and it will be well to bear her ever in our minds, since, if we turn back, it will be unto perdition, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39); and our last end will be worse than the beginning, [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20). We must endure to the end if ever we would be saved! [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13).

***~~3. To those who are determined, through grace, to persevere in their work—~~***

Doubtless the work will often prove heavy and fatiguing. But God has promised "grace sufficient for us." And the more we labor, the greater our reward, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8). Yes, the very work itself is a source of much peace and joy, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17), and wonderfully conduces to fit us both for this world and the next. Who will make so distinguished a preacher of Christ, or will so adorn his Christian profession, as he who is altogether dead to the world? And who is so fit to join the saints above, as he who already emulates them in their love to God, and their delight in holy exercises? Go on then, "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14);" and soon you shall both "rest from your labors," and "enter into the joy of your Lord!"

***~~#1512~~***

***~~The Danger of Rejecting the Gospel~~***

***~~[Luke 10:10-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.10-16)~~***

"But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."

Notwithstanding all the care which our Lord took to prepare the minds of men for the reception of his Gospel, his success was very small, insomuch that after his resurrection and ascension to Heaven, his disciples amounted to no more than five hundred. He foresaw it would be so; and when sending forth his seventy disciples into all the places where he himself was about to come, he guarded them against the offence which the contracted influence of his word might occasion. He directed them how to act towards any city which should not receive them: they should express towards its inhabitants the indignation of God, and should make known to them both their iniquity and their folly. In confirmation of what he instructed them to do, he himself denounced his judgments against the cities that had rejected him; and then proceeded to give a general admonition to all to whom his Gospel should come.

Were we addressing ministers, we should consider the subject more immediately in relation to them: but in an address intended only for private Christians, it will be more profitable to wave what relates to the conduct of the ministry, and to suggest rather such reflections as are applicable to mankind at large, especially that part of them which is disobedient to the Gospel of Christ.

***~~I. How awful is their obduracy!~~***

Our Lord complained that the cities to which he had ministered had resisted such means as, if used for the awakening of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, or even of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have been effectual to bring them to repentance: "they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." Now, without stopping to inquire why God withheld from Sodom the means of grace which would have been effectual, and given them to Jewish cities, where he knew they would not be effectual, (a question which no human wisdom can solve,) we would call your attention to this fact as illustrated in the present day.

We acknowledge that the hearers of our Lord had many and great advantages which we have not: but on the other hand, we have great advantages which they had not. We admit, that they were instructed by One who "spoke as never any man spoke;" and that they saw the mighty works which he wrought in confirmation of his word: but on the other hand, the baseness of his appearance and of his followers was a stumbling-block, which it was exceeding difficult to get over, and which is entirely removed out of our way. Besides, *they saw the plan of Christianity only in a very obscure and partial light; whereas we see it in all its fullness and completion*: and the evidence we have from that great miracle of all, his resurrection from the dead, is stronger than all those which they beheld.

We may, therefore, justly say that our advantages are greater than theirs: and yet multitudes hear the Gospel now, and are unmoved by it: some sneer at it as folly and enthusiasm; and others rest in a mere formal profession of it, without any experience of its transforming power. What then shall we say of them? Are not they blind and hardened in a very awful degree? Are not they also more obdurate than the idolatrous Syrians, or the filthy Sodomites? Yes, far less evidence, and an obscurer statement of the Gospel, would have brought them to "repent in dust and ashes;" whereas the unbelievers of the present day are armored against an accumulated weight of evidence, and against the full splendor of evangelic truth.

Let this then be considered by us: and when we wonder at the blindness and obduracy of the Jews, let us remember how blind we ourselves have been, and how unaffected by the most stupendous miracles of love and mercy that ever were given to men.

***~~II. How heinous is their guilt!~~***

Unbelief is in general scarcely ever thought of as a sin: the open infidel justifies himself by a pretended lack of evidence; and those who maintain a form of religion fancy themselves possessed of saving faith: so that, whatever men have to condemn in their own conduct, they never think of bemoaning their unbelief. But behold what was Christ's judgment respecting this! *He considered unbelief as a more heinous sin than any which Tyre and Sidon, or even Sodom and Gomorrah, had committed*, and as involving his hearers in a deeper condemnation than any to which the vilest of those cities would be doomed. He also commanded his disciples to "wipe off the dust from their feet against those who received them not," in token of God's indignation against them, and his abandoning of them to the evil of their own ways, [Acts 13:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.51). Nor can we wonder at it, when Christ and his Father identify themselves with all the ministers of the Gospel: "He who hears you, hears me; and he who despises you, despises me; and he who despises me, despises him that sent me." What a view does this representation give us of unbelief! And how little idea have the unbelieving world of the light in which they are regarded by a holy God!

But when once the Holy Spirit is sent into their hearts to convince them of sin, they become convinced of this sin in particular; and view it in its proper colors, as a mixture of ignorance, impiety, and rebellion.

Let the towering imaginations of the formalist then fall to the ground: let the most decent among us see what guilt he has contracted: and let every one acknowledge that God is just in consigning over to perdition those who, either in theory or in practice, reject Christ, and thus eventually "make God himself a liar."

***~~III. How great is their folly!~~***

The seventy disciples were especially commanded to testify to those who rejected them, that the contempt which they manifested for their message did not at all invalidate the truth or importance of it: "Notwithstanding, be sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come unto you." Thus must we say to those who disregard the Gospel: "Your unbelief cannot make the faith of God of none effect." If your neglect of the Gospel could set aside its authority, so that you should stand excused for your disobedience to it, your folly would not be so great: but you cannot alter one single word in it: Christ will still be the only Savior of the world, though you should pour ever so much contempt upon him: and faith in his name will be the only means of obtaining a saving interest in him, though you should dispute ever so much against it: and that declaration, "He who believes shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned," will be carried into execution, however you may complain of its harshness and severity.

The ridicule and contempt poured on Noah while building the ark, did not at all affect the truth of his warnings: the flood came precisely as he had foretold, and swept away all the inhabitants of the earth! And so will it be in the day of judgment: the Gospel will prove true, and its sanctions will be executed, "whether men will hear it, or whether they forbear."

What folly and madness then is it to trifle thus with the words of life! Common sense, methinks, should lead men to consider what they hear, and to search the Scriptures daily whether these things be so. If they can disprove the truth of the Gospel, well: let them then despise it if they please: but if they cannot disprove it, let them obey it; and that not in a partial and formal manner, but unreservedly, and with their whole hearts.

***~~IV. How pitiable is their condition!~~***

Could we behold the present state of those who once inhabited Sodom and Gomorrah; could we see their weeping, their wailing, their gnashing of teeth, how would our affections yearn over them! Yet, grievous as their condition is, it is more tolerable than that which is prepared for the despisers of the Gospel. This is not declared once, but often; and that, too, by him who will assign to all their proper doom. Say, then, whether we should not be filled with pity towards the thoughtless, deceived, and deceiving world? Suppose them enjoying all that earth can give; yet, with such prospects before them, who must not regard them as objects of the tenderest compassion?

Behold a man just about to be racked upon the wheel, or to be burned on a slow consuming fire; give him what you will preparatory to his sufferings, you cannot but view him with most heartfelt grief. Thus then should we view the despisers of Christ, whether they manifest that contempt in a way of open infidelity or of secret disaffection. There will be degrees of misery, indeed, proportioned to the degrees of guilt which each has contracted; but the least miserable of those who perish under the light of the Gospel, will have a heavier doom than shall ever fall to the lot of Sodom and Gomorrah. O that our head were a fountain of tears to run down for them night and day; and that we might labor, all of us, while yet there is time, to pluck them as brands out of the burning!

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Let all who hear the Gospel consider their responsibility—~~***

The generality think little but of hearing such or such a man: but be it known to you, that the word you hear is "not the word of man, but of God," and is to be so received, if it be agreeable to his revealed will. You know that an ambassador is the representative of his king, and that the reception or rejection of his message is considered as affecting, not him, but his master who sent him. So it is with the ambassadors of Christ. O that whenever we attend upon the house of God, we might attend as if Christ himself were come down to instruct us, or as if God the Father spoke to us by an audible voice from Heaven!

***~~2. Let them improve their privileges—~~***

It is an inestimable privilege to have the Gospel faithfully administered to us. What if Sodom and Gomorrah had enjoyed that privilege? they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, and would probably "have remained to this very day." So, if millions that are now in Hell had heard what we have, they would perhaps have obeyed the truth and been saved by it. We are sure that many have made a far better improvement of it than we; and therefore we should humble ourselves on a view of our unprofitableness, and labor to bring forth fruits worthy of the culture bestowed upon us.

***~~#1513~~***

***~~The Enrollment of Our Names in Heaven, a Ground of Joy~~***

***~~[Luke 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.20)~~***

"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven."

There is a holy jealousy which well befits the ministers of God: for people are ever ready to pride themselves upon any distinctions which God may confer upon them, and to rest in the attainments they have made, instead of regarding them only as means to an ulterior good.

It should seem that the seventy disciples, who had been sent forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, were surprised when they found that devils and unclean spirits were subject unto them: and on their return to their divine Master, they could not help expressing the high gratification which this power had afforded them. Had their minds been more suitably affected, they would have rejoiced rather in the prospect which that circumstance afforded them of the final triumphs of their Lord.

Jesus therefore, in a kind and tender manner, corrected their views, and pointed out to them a more just ground of self-congratulation: assuring them in the mean time that their powers should be still more enlarged, and their victory over Satan be more complete.

The caution given to them is applicable to Christians in every age: their comforts and successes are doubtless a proper subject of joy and thankfulness; but it is the final success only that can make them completely happy; and *the only solid joy is that which arises from a well-founded expectation of happiness beyond the grave.*

In confirmation of this truth, we would observe,

***~~I. That the enrollment of our names in Heaven is a fact which may be known—~~***

***~~The names of all God's people are, as it were, written in his book—~~***

The names of all the tribes of Israel were registered in a book. It was of that book that Moses spoke, when he desired God to blot him out of it rather than not forgive his offending people, [Exodus 32:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.32). And as long as the Jewish states continued, such a book was carefully preserved, [Isaiah 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 4.3).

Such a register God himself is represented as having formed of all his chosen people. His book is called "the book of life, of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)." This book, as well as the books of God's remembrance, in which the actions of men were recorded, will be brought forth at the last day, [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12); and those who were written in it will be exalted to glory, [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27), while "those who were not written in it will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death, [Revelation 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.15)."

***~~Our enrollment in that book is a fact which may be known—~~***

Paul knew it respecting many, both men and women, who had united with him in endeavors to advance the kingdom of Christ, [Philippians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.3). And the same may be known also by those who are there enrolled. We cannot indeed go up to Heaven to examine that sacred record; nor can we have it brought down to us on earth—yet may we assuredly know its contents as far as respects ourselves. There are two ways in which this may be done:

first, by the testimony of the Spirit;

and next, by the evidence of our lives.

Respecting the *witness of the Spirit*, we do not say that the Spirit will bear any direct testimony to our souls, irrespective of anything that he has wrought in us; (this I conceive to be a very dangerous error;) but he will shine upon his own work, and cause us to see it. When we are regenerate, he will, as "a Spirit of adoption, enable us to cry, *Abba, Father!*" and will "witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom, [Romans 8:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15-17)." When we are regenerate, I say, he will do this, but not before; for he never did, nor can, attest a falsehood, which he would do if he were to witness to any unregenerate man that he was a child of God.

The *evidence of our own lives*also will enable us to ascertain this fact. There are certain "things which infallibly accompany salvation, [Hebrews 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9-10)," and which therefore warrant us to infer that we are in the number of God's elect, [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-4), and to assure ourselves of a final and everlasting acceptance with him, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14); [1 John 3:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-21).

The former evidence is the more delightful to our feelings;  
the latter evidence is the more convincing to our judgment.

But from whichever source we draw our conclusions, if only our premises be right, our conclusions are infallible. Hence Paul was so assured of happiness in the eternal world, [2 Corinthians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1). 2 Timothy 4:8; and hence every believer is authorized to adopt the words of the Church of old, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!"

Having shown that the fact of our enrolment in Heaven may be known, we observe,

***~~II. That when known, it is a ground of most exalted joy—~~***

***~~The expulsion of devils from the bodies of men was a just ground of joy—~~***

It was an evidence of God's presence with the disciples; (for who but God could cast them out?) it was also a strong confirmation of their word; (no stronger could be given,) it was, moreover, an unspeakable blessing to those who were thus delivered from Satan's power; (and who must not rejoice in the communication of so great a good?) above all, it was a pledge of greater victories over Satan, and the utter destruction of his kingdom. Our Lord's prohibition, therefore, must not be understood as absolute, but only as comparative; as when he bade his followers "not to labor for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto everlasting life."

***~~But the knowledge of our saving interest in the Divine favor is incomparably a greater ground of joy—~~***

Indeed nothing can for a moment be put in competition with this: this is infinitely beyond every other ground of joy.

It is the most **sublime** joy. What is the possession of thrones and kingdoms in comparison with this?*All earthly things are lighter than vanity itself when weighed against the glories of the heavenly world.*See the description of the Christian's state, [Hebrews 12:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-24).

It is the most **pure** joy. *Every earthly joy has a tendency to corrupt the mind; to fill us with pride; to foster evil dispositions; to rivet us to the world; and to retard our progress toward the kingdom of Heaven.*But who was ever corrupted by a view of his saving interest in the Savior? We do not ask, When did a corrupt man pretend to a saving interest in Christ, or boast that he was of the number of God's elect? for that, alas! may be found in every place and every age; but we confidently ask, Whom did the knowledge of his interest in Christ ever corrupt in any respect whatever?

Ignorant people imagine that a view of our election of God will puff us up with pride; or render us indifferent to the attainment of holiness: but every child of God is the more humbled by a conviction that God is pacified towards him, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63), and is the more determinately bent to fulfill the whole will of God. Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle, on whose testimony we may rely with most implicit confidence, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3).

It is the most **substantial** joy. Whatever other sources of joy we may have, they may all fail and disappoint us. Ask those who have attained the principal objects of their desire, whether they have found all the satisfaction in them that they once expected? and they will all be constrained to acknowledge, that *vanity and vexation of spirit is the sum of all created good*. In a little time our sweetest enjoyments cloy, and cease to afford us any material gratification: in a season of deep affliction they lose all their power, and are frequently turned into sources of the greatest sorrow.

But whom did the pardoning love of Christ ever fail to comfort? Who ever ceased to derive consolation from it under the heaviest afflictions? Who ever found it a source or an occasion of sorrow to his soul, except indeed that he sorrowed because he did not value it more, and improve it better?

Other joys embitter the thought of death, and avoid the moment that the soul takes its flight from the body: but the knowledge of our acceptance with God makes the thought of death delightful; and the joy arising from it is perfected in the very instant of our departure hence.

Lastly, It is that, without which no other ground of joy can exist. We will suppose that you possess health, and riches, and wisdom, and honor, and every gratification that your heart can wish, and that too in the highest degree that it can be enjoyed; what is it all, while you have no happy prospect beyond the grave? If you were sensible of your state, you would be like a person sitting down to a banquet, with a sword suspended over his head by a single hair; you would not know one moment's peace.

Who would envy a man, that after a few hours was to be burnt alive? Whatever he might possess, he would be regarded by all as a pitiable object. Such is that man who, after a few more days, must be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone: whatever of wealth or honor he may have attained, he is a wretched creature, and if he is at all sensible of his state, he would gladly exchange conditions with the most base and most afflicted saint on earth! "They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!" [Matthew 13:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.42)

What comparison then will earthly joys bear with this? Even that of casting out devils, and finding them subject to one's power, would be nothing, when it is considered that the person so honored may soon be cast out himself, and bidden to "depart accursed into everlasting fire, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23)."

***~~Learn then,~~***

***~~1. To seek this great blessing above all things—~~***

Some may be ready to say, 'If God has not, of his own sovereign grace, inscribed my name in his book from all eternity, how shall I get it done now?' To this I answer: The secret decrees of God are no ground of action to you: you are to act precisely as if all depended on your own personal exertion. Nay, more, God encourages you so to act, with an assurance that you shall not exert yourself in vain. Go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and cast yourselves at the foot of his cross, and then see whether it shall be in vain. He has said, that "Whoever comes unto him, he will never cast out;" and you may rest assured that that promise shall be fulfilled to you. However distant you have been from God, you shall be "brought near to him by the blood of the cross;" and "from being strangers and foreigners, you shall become fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God." This is the idea suggested in the text.

The enrolling of names has respect to citizens, whose rights are thereby ascertained and assured. This blessing its your duty to seek in God's appointed way; and if it be, as we have shown, incomparably the greatest that a human being can possess, seek it with a vigor proportioned to its worth.

***~~2. Never to grow weary in the pursuit of it—~~***

*Many persons are fond of perplexing themselves with the deeper doctrines of religion, when they should rather be edifying themselves with those which are more plain.* Some will argue, that if God have written our names in his book, he will never blot them out again, because "his gifts and calling are irrevocable." But though it is true, that "God will carry on his work," and "perfect that which concerns us," it is equally true, that "if we draw back, we draw back unto perdition, and God's soul will have no pleasure in us, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)." Of his faithful people he has said, that "he will not blot out their names from the book of life, [Revelation 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.5)." But he uses directly opposite language in reference to the ungodly, and to those who decline from his ways, [Exodus 32:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.33), [Psalm 69:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.28), [Jeremiah 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.13). It is "to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor, and immortality, that God will give eternal life, [Romans 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-7)."

Let no difficulties then discourage you; but "press forward for the prize of your high calling:" and expect assuredly, that, as already "your witness is in Heaven, and your record is on high, [Job 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 16.19)," so your unworthy names shall in due time be acknowledged by your Lord and Savior, and you shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

***~~#1514~~***

***~~The Gospel Revealed to Babes~~***

***~~[Luke 10:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.21)~~***

"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure."

Deep and mysterious are the ways of God, and "as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth." But the more they are contemplated, the more will they approve themselves to to us; even where they are most inscrutable, and where the heart of the natural man would be most ready to rise against them—a humble and pious mind will find abundant cause both for submission and joy.

Of our blessed Lord we are often told, that he groaned in spirit: for indeed he was altogether "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," as his daily and hourly companion. But on one occasion it is said, that "he rejoiced in spirit;" and it was in an hour when he had been particularly contemplating the dispensations of his Father in relation to his Gospel.

To the proud indeed this would be a subject of complaint and murmuring; but to the humble it was a proper ground of gratitude and thanksgiving. This is evident from the words before us; for the fuller understanding of which I will show,

***~~1. The conduct of God in relation to his Gospel—~~***

Two things are here specified:

***~~1. "He has hidden it from the wise and prudent"—~~***

By "the wise and prudent" we are not to understand those that are truly wise and truly prudent, but those who are "wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight," who are just objects of God's heavy displeasure, [Isaiah 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.21) with [Romans 12:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.16).

From these "God has hid" his Gospel. Not but that they have the same access to it as others, and might attain to the knowledge of it as well as others, if only they would seek it in a becoming spirit: for God does nothing either to withhold it from them, or to incapacitate them for the perception of it. God is said to do what he permits to be done; compare [2 Samuel 24:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.1) with [1 Chronicles 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.1); and it is not by any active exertion of his which man cannot withstand, but by such means only as leave men altogether responsible for their own blindness, that he hides his truth from the minds of any.

The Gospel is hidden from this description of persons, partly, through the very constitution of the Gospel itself: for it reveals such a way of salvation as a proud conceited mind cannot receive: "it is foolishness to the natural man; neither can he receive it, because it is spiritually discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." The doctrine of the cross is to the Jews a "stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23)." It was foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, that the same person who should "be for a sanctuary to his believing people, should be for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a trap and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, many among whom should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15)." And to the same effect was it said of Jesus, by the holy man who took him in his arms, that "he was set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35)."

It is yet further hidden from them through the agency of Satan, to whom the blindness of unbelievers is especially ascribed, and who labors incessantly to prevent "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, from shining unto them, 2 Corinthians 4:4."

Doubtless it is also still further hidden from them through their being given up by God to *judicial blindness*. "God's Spirit will not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3)." After having been long resisted, he will cease to "work upon their minds, [1 Thessalonians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.19);" they will then be given up to believe their own delusions, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, and to be taken in their own craftiness; and all "their wisdom and prudence will be brought to nothing, [1 Corinthians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.19); [1 Corinthians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.19)." In this way vast multitudes have been blinded in former ages, [Romans 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.7-8), and are blinded at this very hour.

***~~2. But "it is revealed unto babes"—~~***

The term, "babes," includes not only those who are weak in respect of intellectual attainments, but those also, who, though of vigorous and cultivated minds, are sensible of their inability to discern spiritual truths without having first a spiritual discernment imparted to them.

To these the Gospel is revealed; and they have such a perception of it as brings peace into their souls, and holiness into their hearts and lives. Of course, we must not suppose that the mere circumstance of any person's being weak in understanding will procure for him this blessing: but if he seeks this blessing in God's appointed way, the circumstance of his being of weak understanding shall not preclude him from the benefit. And in this respect persons of this description have an advantage, which is, that they are more easily convinced of their need of Divine teaching than persons of learning and refinement are; and are thereby more easily induced to seek of God the teaching of his good Spirit: and hence it is that many of them attain divine knowledge, while from the great mass of others it is hid.

That this preference is shown to them is evident, both from the records of God's word and from daily observation. Whom did our blessed Savior choose for his Apostles? Not the learned of the Scribes and Pharisees, but a few poor fishermen. To the proud he spoke in parables; which afterwards to his child-like disciples he explained; saying to them, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to others in parables; that seeing, they might not see, and hearing, they might not understand, [Luke 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.10);" and hence of the Rulers and of the Pharisees it is asked, "Have any of them believed in him, [John 7:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.48)."

In like manner the Apostles themselves found little success among the great and learned: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called: but God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty, yes, and things base and despised to bring to nothing those which were high in worldly estimation, that no flesh might glory in his presence [1 Corinthians 1:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.27-29)."

And is it not so at this day? Who are the people that experience the enlightening, comforting, and transforming efficacy of the Gospel now? Are they the rich, and the great, and the learned? Would to God they were! But it is not so: it is to "babes, and not to the wise and prudent, that the Gospel is revealed" at this hour, as well as in former days. The Gospel has still the same stamp and character upon it as ever, in that "it is preached chiefly, if not exclusively, to the poor, [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5)," and that "the common people hear it gladly, [Mark 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.37)."

That the Divine conduct in this respect may not be an offence unto us, let us consider,

***~~II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated by us—~~***

We should be duly sensible that this is indeed the conduct of God in relation to his Gospel, and we should evince,

***~~1. Our submission to it, as an act of sovereignty—~~***

Certainly in this matter *God acts as a sovereign, who has a right to dispense his blessings to whoever he will*, "it is even so, Father, for so it seems good in your sight." God might have revealed his Gospel to all, or hid it from all, if it had pleased him; and none would have had any right to complain. As well might the fallen angels complain that man alone had a Redeemer provided for him, as any child of man complain, that he has derived less advantage from the Gospel than another. Had any other of Paul's hearers reason to complain, because "the Lord opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things that were spoken by him?" Assuredly not. *God's grace is his own; and he may dispense it as he pleases, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure,*[Ephesians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.5), [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13). He himself asks, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" and if we claim such a right, much more may He, who is, as Jesus calls him, "Lord of Heaven and earth," and who consequently may dispose both of Heaven and earth according to his will, and "without giving to us an account of any of his matters, [Job 33:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.13)." When therefore we behold this, shall we presume to strive with God, or to say unto him, 'What are you doing?' Shall the clay arraign the conduct of the potter, or "the vessel say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? [Romans 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20-21)." "He who reproves God, let him answer it, [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2)."

Many, who see that *God does indeed dispense his blessings according to his own good pleasure and the inscrutable counsel of his own will*, endeavor to get rid of the notion of his sovereignty by asserting, that God has respect to some goodness in man which he has foreseen; and that he regulates his dispensations in accordance with some worthiness which he knows will at a future period appear in the objects of his choice, bestowing his favors on those who he knows will make a good use of them, and withholding them from those only who he foresees would abuse them. But, if this be so, how shall we understand those declarations of our Lord both in the preceding and following context? He turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them, verse 23, 24." In this place the sovereign grace of God in the disposal of his gifts is clearly asserted.

But you may say, 'True; God gave to some what he withheld from others: but he gave to those who he knew would duly improve his gifts: and the persons from whom he withheld them, were involved in no responsibility on account of them. In order to prove the doctrine which has been insisted on, you must show me that God has bestowed the means of salvation on those who would not improve them, and withheld them from those who would have improved them: show me this, and I grant that the point is established beyond a doubt. Look then at what our Lord asserts in the context respecting Tyre and Sidon, and Bethsaida and Chorazin. To these latter were means of conviction afforded, which were withheld from the former. Were these latter better than the former? Quite the reverse: had our Savior's miracles been wrought in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes; but when done in Capernaum, they had no other effect than thrusting her down the deeper into Hell, verse 13-15. Now all this must have been foreknown to God, else Jesus could not so positively have asserted it: yet here is evidence, that God withheld from some the very means which they would have duly improved, and imparted to others those very same means which he knew they would abuse to their own more aggravated condemnation.

What shall we say then to these things? God himself tells us what to say: "Be still, and know that I am God! [Psalm 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.10)." "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and have compassion on whom I will have compassion, [Romans 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.15); [Romans 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18)."

***~~2. Our gratitude for it as an act of mercy—~~***

Suppose that the Gospel were to be understood only as the deeper sciences are, by men of erudition and learning, in what a deplorable condition would the poor be! They have no time for laborious investigations, nor any of the endowments necessary for philosophical researches. They therefore could have no hope of ever attaining the knowledge of salvation. From absolute necessity their days must be consumed in making provision for the body: and unless they were so occupied, the whole world must be in a state of stagnation and poverty. But God has shown no such partiality for the rich as to confine the knowledge of his Gospel to them. Earthly comforts indeed he has given in richer abundance to them; but spiritual blessings he has rather reserved for the poor; as James has said; "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him? [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)."

Thus, where most there seems to have been an inequality in his dispensations, he has shown an impartiality, making up to the one in spiritual blessings what he has withheld in temporal blessings; and giving advantages in reference to eternity to those who have the less favorable lot in respect of the things of time and sense.

And is not this a ground, a just ground, of joy? Who, that sees what privations are often experienced by the poor, must not rejoice to be informed, that, taking both worlds into the account, there is a preponderance in their favor? Our blessed Lord rejoiced in this; yes, and leaped for joy. And we also, if our minds be constituted like his, shall from our inmost souls contemplate it with gratitude and thanksgiving.

***~~Let us learn then,~~***

***~~1. Rightly to appreciate divine knowledge—~~***

We would on no account utter a word that should detract from the excellence of human knowledge. We readily allow that learning does elevate and expand the mind, so as to raise its possessor far above his fellows in many respects. But when compared with spiritual knowledge, it is a poor, and low, and groveling attainment. Paul was excelled by none of his contemporaries in mental attainments: yet, as valuable as he once esteemed them, he, when truly converted to God, said, "Whatever things were gain to me, those I count but loss for Christ; yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord! [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8)." And such must be your estimate also of this knowledge; for it is this only that will render us truly happy, either in this world or in that which is to come.

***~~2. To seek it in God's appointed way—~~***

*Human sciences are to be attained by study, but the knowledge of the Gospel must be gained by prayer.* In the words immediately following my text, our Lord says, "No man knows who the Son is, but the Father; or who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." Know then that, though the study of the Holy Scriptures is necessary, it is not sufficient: for in the same place where you are told to "seek for wisdom as for hidden treasures," you are told to "lift up your voice, and to cry unto God for it; for that it is God alone who gives it, [Proverbs 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1); [Proverbs 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.6)."*Meditation and prayer must go hand in hand:*and if you will seek for knowledge in this way, though you be but a babe, you shall attain it; and, though you be a mere "fool in all other respects, you shall not err therein, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8)."

***~~#1515~~***

***~~The Blessings of a Preached Gospel~~***

***~~[Luke 10:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.23-24)~~***

"Then he turned to his disciples and said privately: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Of all things relating to the world around us, the most delightful is the progress of the Gospel, and the consequent augmentation of the Redeemer's empire.

This event had commenced through the ministrations of the seventy disciples, whom our Lord had sent as his harbingers throughout the land of Judea: and it had filled our blessed Savior himself with joy, in the midst of all the sorrows with which he was daily encompassed, verses 17, 21. His own more immediate disciples he particularly congratulated on the insight which they had into the mysteries of his religion; in which respect they were favored far beyond all the servants of God who had preceded them, not excepting the most distinguished of their kings, or the most enlightened of their prophets.

To impress this the more deeply on their minds, "he turned to them and privately whispered it, as it were, in their ears."

To you, publicly, I will offer the same congratulations, while I set before you the blessings of a preached Gospel,

***~~I. As enjoyed by the immediate disciples of our Lord—~~***

***~~The patriarchs and prophets were highly privileged in the light they enjoyed—~~***

They were instructed in the knowledge of the one true God, of whom all the rest of the world were ignorant. They had a view also of all his glorious perfections, of which the wisest philosophers could form no just conception. They knew, moreover, in what way a sinner might find acceptance with God; while all the rest of mankind were left in awful suspense respecting their future state; not knowing, certainly, whether they should live in an eternal world, or whether, if they did, they should partake of a happy or a miserable existence.

Of Abraham it is said, that "the Gospel was preached to him in that blessed promise, that in him, and in his seed, should all the nations of the earth be blessed." "He greatly desired to see the day of Christ; and he did see it, and was glad."

Succeeding prophets discerned it yet more clearly; for, with progressive accuracy and minuteness, they were inspired to describe his person, work, and offices; though, alas! they did not comprehend their own predictions, while they declared "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow."

Yet, compared with all the rest of the world, they were in Goshen, while all others were surrounded with "a darkness which might be felt."

***~~But the disciples were far more highly favored than they—~~***

They were permitted to see the Son of God himself; and that, not darkly, in types and prophecies, but clearly, and face to face. They were privileged to behold all his mighty works; and to hear from day to day the instructive discourses of Him who "spoke as never any man spoke." They enjoyed the yet further privilege of having his public discourses explained to them in private; and of being taught, by a fuller and more explicit interpretation, what to others had been communicated only in parables.

At the same time, they had the peculiar felicity to see a perfect exhibition of the whole will of God in the life and conduct of their Lord; and that, not in circumstances which were inapplicable to themselves, but in circumstances in which they themselves were soon to move.

Now, compare their advantages with any that were enjoyed by the patriarchs or prophets of former ages, and they must be acknowledged to have enjoyed privileges which kings and prophets might well desire, and which, in fact, they had desired, but in vain.

But the congratulations will be found still more due to us, if we consider the Gospel,

***~~II. As enjoyed by ourselves at this day—~~***

***~~Great as were the advantages of those who attended upon our Lord, they were not without considerable alloy—~~***

The very appearance of our Lord among them was such as to lay a stumbling-block in the way of his immediate attendants. How could they conceive him to be the Savior of the world, whom they saw exposed to hunger and thirst, and destitute of "a place where to lay his head?" Or, if from his miracles they entertained a hope, what must they think when they beheld him seized, condemned, crucified, entombed? Though he had often told them that he would be put to an ignominious death, and shed his blood as an expiation for sin, they never could comprehend his meaning: nay, they would not endure the thought of his being so treated. They were, like all the rest of their nation, deluded with the *expectation of a temporal Messiah*, who should deliver them from the Roman yoke; and, even after his resurrection, they could not divest themselves of this erroneous hope. On the day of Pentecost, indeed, their views were rectified in a considerable degree: but not even the Apostles themselves, for a very long period, were able to understand the design of God in his Gospel to save the Gentile world, nor the extent of the commission which they themselves had received to "preach the Gospel to every creature." When Peter was prevailed upon, by a series of special visions and express directions, to go and show the way of salvation to Cornelius, the whole college of Apostles called him to an account for it, as though he had transgressed a positive command of God. And *for many, many years did an opinion prevail very extensively through the Church, that the law of Moses was still obligatory on those who embraced the Gospel*; so contracted were their views of Christ, as having fulfilled the Law; and so imperfect their knowledge of his salvation, as excluding every ground of hope, except that which was founded on his atoning sacrifice.

***~~But to us is the Gospel preached under every advantage—~~***

Neither Jewish prejudice, nor Gentile philosophy, have any longer a footing among us, to distract and darken our views; at least, such delusions are found only among those who love to indulge them, and who wish for an excuse to reject the pure Gospel. *We see the whole plan of salvation in one entire view, as concerted between the Father and the Son, as carried into effect by the incarnation and death of the Lord Jesus, and as applied to the souls of men by the Holy Spirit*. We see all the *types*fulfilled in Christ, and all the *prophecies*accomplished. We behold the perfect model as delivered to Moses, and can compare it with the structure itself which is now completed. We behold the Person of Christ, as God and man; his *work*, as obeying the Law, and enduring its penalties for us; his *offices*of King, Priest, and Prophet; and the office also of the *Holy Spirit*, in applying to us the salvation which the Lord Jesus has wrought out for us.

We have the further advantage of seeing many *prophecies*fulfilled, in the destruction of the Jewish state and polity; the dispersion of that nation over the face of the globe, while yet they continue a distinct people in every place; and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the Gentile world.

I say, then, that the congratulations given to the disciples, are due in a very superior degree to us; since, while we are partakers of their privileges in all that they saw and heard, we are freed from many disadvantages under which they labored, and enjoy many advantages which they were not privileged to possess.

***~~Now let me commend this subject to the more particular attention of those who, like our Lord's disciples, are capable of estimating their high privilege—~~***

***~~1. What a debt of gratitude do you owe to Almighty God, for the mercies you enjoy!~~***

You would think, perhaps, that kings and prophets are objects worthy to be envied. But I declare to you, that not kings, with all their grandeur, nor prophets, with all their inspiration, are blessed in comparison with you. I will even go further still, and say, that not even the immediate attendants on our Lord are to be compared with you, in respect of the privileges you enjoy. A view of the Gospel salvation, and of the glory of God as revealed in it, is the highest privilege of man on earth, a privilege which even the angels in Heaven covet to enjoy. Alas! how little is a preached Gospel valued among you as it ought to be, and how unconscious are most of you of the distinguished mercies you possess! Do, my dear brethren, learn to estimate your blessings aright; and let the daily language of your hearts and lips be, "thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"

***~~2. What care should you take to improve these mercies!~~***

You must not be satisfied with *hearing*the Gospel. No, you must *embrace*it with your whole hearts: it should be your life, your joy, your all. Do but consider how glorious it is in itself, and what blessings it brings into the soul: consider the pardon of unnumbered sins, the mortification of deep-rooted lusts, the peace it gives you with your offended God, and the very pledge of Heaven which it pours into your soul. I say, consider these things, and lay hold on them, and glory in them, and let them be "all your salvation and all your desire."

***~~3. How earnest should you be in diffusing these blessings through the world!~~***

It is not for yourselves alone that you are thus instructed, but for the world around you. And see how many millions of the human race are ignorant of that Savior whom you worship, and of that salvation which you enjoy! The unhappy Jews have yet the veil upon their hearts, which you should endeavor to remove; and the Gentiles are yet bowing down to senseless idols, that can never profit nor deliver them. Labor, then, both for Jews and Gentiles, to bring them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Unite with the societies that are established for that end: and let no petty jealousies keep you from cooperating with those who are engaged in the blessed work of diffusing the Scriptures all the world over, and sending missionaries to every quarter of the globe. The sphere is large enough to occupy the utmost exertions of all. "The field is the world," and how few are the laborers to cultivate the ground!

Let a sense of gratitude to God stir you all up to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves have received. "Freely you have received; and freely you should give." Know, for your comfort, that, instead of diminishing your own blessings by imparting them to others, the more richly you distribute them, the more abundantly will they flow into your own souls!

***~~#1516~~***

***~~The Good Samaritan~~***

**[Luke 10:30-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.30-35)**

Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

Much wisdom is necessary in dealing with persons of a captious spirit: we should speak to them with faithfulness—yet avoid giving them any unnecessary offence. Our Lord was continually beset with persons of this description, but in nothing was his Divine wisdom more conspicuous than in the answers he gave them. The parable before us admirably illustrates this observation—

***~~I. Explain the parable—~~***

***~~We cannot enter into the full meaning of the parable without attending particularly to the occasion of it—~~***

A teacher of the law had interrogated our Lord respecting the way to life, and was asked by our Lord to state what the law required, verse 25-29. The lawyer gave a just summary of its requirements, not doubting but that he had fulfilled them all. Our Lord suggested in reply, that though obedience to the law would entitle him to life, he was little aware of the *extent*to which that obedience must be carried. The lawyer (whether from fear of conviction, or confidence of having fulfilled it, we cannot say) passed over the first commandment, and asked for an explanation of the second. To convey the desired information, and to correct his self-justifying spirit, our Lord spoke this parable.

***~~The circumstances of the parable deserve also to be noticed—~~***

A Jew is represented as having been robbed and wounded between Jericho, and Jerusalem. This was probable enough, as a desert much infested with robbers lay between them. A priest, and a Levite (thousands of whom dwelt at Jericho) are supposed to have seen him in their way to Jerusalem; but, though from their very office they were called to exercise compassion, they passed by him without administering any comfort or relief. The latter from curiosity "came and looked on him;" but turned away as the priest had done before him.

A *Samaritan*is then introduced as performing the kindest offices towards him. There was a most inveterate hatred between the Jews and Samaritans (compare [John 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.9); [John 8:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.48)), but the minute relation of the circumstances was well calculated to disarm the lawyer's prejudice, and as engaging for the whole expense of his maintenance and cure. His liberality was sufficiently manifest by his engagement to defray the whole sum that might become due.

Thus our Lord showed, that *any person, of whatever nation, or whatever religion, must be esteemed our neighbor.*By his artful statement also, he drew from the lawyer himself an express, though reluctant, acknowledgment of this truth. The lawyer, though compelled to give honor to the Samaritan, studiously avoided mentioning his name.

***~~But the peculiar suitableness of the parable to the occasion is that which most needs explanation—~~***

The lawyer was manifestly of a proud self-righteous spirit, verse 25. Though he knew the *letter*of the law, he was ignorant of its spiritual import. He supposed that he had merited eternal life by his obedience; yet he was far from showing a loving disposition even towards our Lord himself. The parable opened to him more extensive views of the law: it showed him that, so far from having practiced his duty, he had not even understood it. Thus it destroyed at once all his self-righteous hopes, and, at the same time, inculcated the necessity of practical, and universal benevolence. Mild as the rebuke was, it could not but convince his judgment; yet was it so conveyed that it could not reasonably give offence.

The parable thus explained, we may now proceed to,

***~~II. Improve it—~~***

***~~1. In a less appropriate way—~~***

This good Samaritan was not intended to represent our Lord; and to put such a construction upon the parable, is utterly to pervert it. Yet, when contemplating the love of a fellow-creature, we may, without any impropriety, bring to your remembrance the infinitely richer love of our most adorable Redeemer. We justly admire the conduct of the benevolent Samaritan; and the consideration that his kindness was shown to a detested Jew, greatly enhances its value.

How then must we admire the love of Christ towards our ruined race! We were robbed of the image of God in which we were made: we were left altogether "dead in trespasses and sins: no created beings could administer any effectual relief; but Jesus beheld us lying in our blood, [Ezekiel 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.6); yet, though we were his enemies, he pitied us, [Romans 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.6); [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8). He not only took care of us, but "laid down his life for us!" He has taken upon himself also the whole charge of our cure: there is nothing that we need, which he has not freely bestowed upon us.

Let us then magnify and adore our generous Benefactor. While we respect the exercise of love in a fellow-creature, let us study to comprehend the unsearchable love of Christ, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19); and let us make his love to us the model of our love to others, [John 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.12).

***~~2. In the way expressly intended by our blessed Lord—~~***

We have observed that *the parable was intended to correct the lawyer's self-righteousness, and to unfold to him the true nature and extent of Christian charity*. Let us therefore learn from it these invaluable lessons.

Let us learn the folly of self-righteousness. The law requires us to "love God with all our hearts, and our neighbor as ourselves," and if we obeyed it perfectly without the smallest defect throughout our whole lives, we might be justified by it. But who ever loved and served God to the utmost extent of all his faculties and powers? Who ever incessantly occupied himself in labors of love towards those who hated and despised him? Who has not felt some backwardness to communion with God, and some lack of sympathy with his neighbor? Yet the law can be satisfied with nothing less than perfect obedience: it denounces a curse against us if we transgress it in one single instance, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). Hence we are told that no flesh living can be justified by it, [Romans 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.20).

Let us then cease to expect life by our own obedience. Let us for ever shut our mouths and stand guilty before God, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19). Let us acknowledge ourselves to need mercy as much as the Apostles, [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16), and adopt the language of Paul in [Philippians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8-9).

Let us learn also the true nature of Christian charity. We are apt to imagine that persons of our own nation, sect, or party, are the proper objects of our love; but Christian charity extends itself to all mankind. The distinctions of religion or politics should be forgotten, whenever an object stands in need of our assistance; and we should sympathize as truly with our bitterest enemy, as with our dearest friend. Thus did Paul compassionate the unbelieving Jews, [Romans 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.2-3). Thus did our Lord weep over their murderous and devoted city, [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41). Let us then endeavor to mortify our narrow, selfish principles, and to abound in unselfish, self-denying offices of love.

***~~#1517~~***

***~~Martha and Mary's Characters Compared~~***

**[Luke 10:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.41-42)**

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But only one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

It is a generally prevailing notion, that religion should be confined to the Church and the closet, and not be brought forward as a topic of conversation in company. But our Lord's conduct completely refutes this absurd idea; and shows that we ought to improve our fellowship with men, by causing our light to shine before them, and by endeavoring to instill the knowledge of religion into their minds. If it be objected, "that Jesus' office was peculiar, and that therefore we ought not to imitate him in this respect," behold, the history before us introduces us to him in the house of a friend, where he had occasion to determine this very point in reference to the women whom he was visiting: one of them was applauded by him for embracing the opportunity afforded her to obtain religious instruction; and the other was reproved for the neglect of it; and that too at a time when such neglect would have been as excusable as it could be under any circumstances whatever.

To elucidate this subject, we shall,

***~~I. Compare the characters of Martha and Mary—~~***

***~~We may first notice wherein they were agreed—~~***

We are assured that both of them were disciples of our Lord. We could not, indeed, ascertain this from the circumstance of his visit to them; (for he sometimes associated with proud Pharisees and notorious sinners;) but we know it from the strong and mutual affection that subsisted between them. We presume, therefore, that both of them believed in him as the Messiah: both of them looked to him as the fountain and foundation of all their hopes: both of them confessed his name, and were willing to bear his cross: and lastly, both of them desired to make his will the rule of their conduct.

***~~We may next consider wherein they differed—~~***

*There are very different degrees of piety, where the same opportunities and advantages are enjoyed. Also, the very same persons are in different spiritual frames at different seasons.*The very best of men, if considered in the light in which some particular action would place him, would appear very unlike a true Christian. Though, therefore, we must not apologize for sin, we must make allowance for the operation of peculiar circumstances, when we are weighing the general characters of men.

Martha then, we observe, was unseasonably anxious about the affairs of this life, while her sister Mary treated them with befitting indifference.

The great Teacher and Savior of mankind had condescended to take up his abode with them: it might be expected, therefore, that they would lose as little as possible of his company, and devolve on others their domestic employments, rather than deprive themselves of his valuable instructions. And thus it was with Mary. She was so absorbed in her attention to his discourses, that she neglected secular matters as of inferior concern. But Martha, on the contrary, was so intent on providing for her guest, that she was quite forgetful of her spiritual interests.

We do not mean to justify a neglect of domestic duties; but we contend that there may be occasions so urgent as to demand our immediate attention, even though some points of less importance should be neglected. No one could doubt but that a disregard of dress would be very excusable, in case our life were in danger from fire: and, in the same manner, Mary's disregard of worldly formalities might well be excused, when she was called from them by duties of paramount obligation.

Martha, moreover, was unduly anxious about the affairs of this life. Granting that she meant nothing but to honor her Lord, and that her way of honoring him was proper; still, why did she suffer her temper to be ruffled? Why did she complain of her sister, for not uniting with her in such unprofitable employments? Why did she endeavor to interest Jesus himself in her quarrels; and even find fault with him for not interposing his authority to make Mary as worldly as herself? All this betrayed a petty mind, occupied with vanities, studious of show, and too susceptible of irritation from things which ought never to have gained such an ascendant over her. Mary, on the contrary, indifferent to earthly pomp, evinced the superior heavenliness of her mind, and thereby preserved the tranquility of it undisturbed.

We shall more accurately determine their respective characters, if we,

***~~II. Consider the judgment of our Lord respecting them—~~***

In his answer to MARTHA,

***~~1. He lays down a general position respecting the care of the soul—~~***

The care of the soul, by whatever terms we describe it, is justly called "the one thing needful." Were we indeed to judge by the conduct of the world at large, we should rather call it, 'the one thing needless;' since every pursuit, however trifling, is preferred before it. But there is nothing of such value as the soul; the whole world, in comparison with it, is a mere vanity. Nor is there any difference in this respect between the rich and the poor: the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God; all are equally concerned to secure eternal happiness. There is no situation where an attention to our spiritual interests can be dispensed with; no situation wherein the concerns of eternity should not be uppermost in our minds. Other things may be desirable; but *the care of the soul is needful, absolutely, universally, and indispensably needful.*

***~~2. He applies that position to the present occasion—~~***

He first applies it in a way of reproof. Though he loved Martha, he would not forbear to reprove in her what he saw amiss. He tells her, that she was acting in direct opposition to this obvious and established truth; and that her distraction of mind, arising from "many things," argued an unmindfulness about "one thing," which was of more importance than all other things put together. But, though he reproved her, he was far from showing even that severity which her petulance deserved. He spoke with a tenderness well calculated to conciliate her esteem, and with a directness fitted to impress her mind with the importance of the subject.

Happy would it be for us, if when we are too deeply involved in worldly cares, we would call to mind this beneficial reproof, and consider it as addressed immediately to ourselves.

Next our Lord applies this position in a way of approbation. The part which Mary had chosen is called by him, "that good part." Now what was it that Mary had done? She had been sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening with delight to his instructive conversation. *She had, in short, been more occupied about the welfare of her soul than about a vain parade of courtesy and compliment.*This might well be called a "good part:" it was good in the estimation of Jesus, and must be so in the opinion of all who judge according to truth. People indeed, when in the midst of gaiety and dissipation, ridicule it as absurd: but did ever any man that had chosen this good part find reason to condemn it? *Can we conceive of any pious man on his death-bed, cautioning his surviving relatives against loving their Lord too much, and feeling too deeply the interests of their souls?*

It was no little commendation of the part which Mary chose, that "it should never be taken away from her:" our Lord would not deprive her of it; nor would he allow any other, whether men or devils, to take it away. As for Martha's case, the effect of that would be as transient as the feast itself: but the fruits of Mary's attention should last for ever.

Let us only bear in mind this vindication of Mary's cause, and we can never doubt whose *character*we should prefer, or whose *conduct*we should imitate.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are wholly occupied with the pursuits of this life—~~***

What, do you think, would our Lord have said to Martha, if her state had been like yours? Would he have approved of it, and have told her that her attention to her social and relative duties was sufficient, though she took no care at all about her soul?

***~~2. Those who, though professing to be devoted to Christ, are of a worldly spirit—~~***

What a poor appearance did Martha make on this occasion! and what little encouragement you have to follow her example! Remember, that "you should be crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to you, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

***~~3. Those who are seeking with all earnestness the salvation of their souls—~~***

You must expect that lukewarm and worldly professors will condemn you as much as the ungodly themselves do: and the more nearly they are related to you, the more asperity, perhaps, they may show towards you. But commit your cause to Jesus; and he will vindicate you in due season. Positive duties, indeed, you must on no account neglect. But, *while the world has your hands, let Jesus have your hearts.*

***~~#1518~~***

***~~One Thing Needful~~***

***~~[Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)~~***

"One thing is needful."

Here we are introduced, as it were, into the bosom of a holy family; and hear, in part at least, the instructions given to them: "One thing is needful." Let us now suppose that we ourselves are that family; and that, in the place of our blessed Lord, I am called to instruct you. My subject shall be, that "One thing is needful:" and while I deliver that truth, so necessary to be received by you, I would deliver it as myself feeling its importance, and declare it with all the fidelity that such a subject demands.

Let me then,

***~~I. Show what this one thing needful is—~~***

In general terms, it may be called: *The care of the soul*. But, that we may have the precise view of it which was conveyed at that time, I will speak of it,

***~~1. In a way of example—~~***

Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his instructions. This was the thing complained of by Martha, and the thing applauded by our blessed Lord.

Now, this is the one thing needful for you also. True, you cannot have the same access to him that Mary had: but he speaks to you in the written word, and through the ministration of his servants. What, then, should you do in relation to the written word? *You should sit at the feet of Jesus there, from day to day, and ponder every truth that is there recorded.*

If you read, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me;" you should instantly determine, through grace, to come to God by Christ, and to make him all your life and your salvation.

Do you read that you are "not to live henceforth unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again;" you should determine, through grace, to devote yourselves altogether to the service of your Lord, and to live for him alone.

In like manner, when you attend upon the ministry of the word, you should "hear it, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." You should come in the very spirit of Mary, and sit as in the very spirit of Mary, and hear as in the spirit of Mary; not from curiosity, not in a caviling spirit, not to perform a customary duty, but to get instruction for your souls. Your whole soul should be swallowed up, as it were, in the subject proposed for your consideration; and every word that is spoken should be treasured up in your heart for the regulation of your faith and practice. This attention to the interests of your soul should be the one employment of your minds from day to day.

***~~2. In a way of contrast—~~***

The one thing needful is not contrasted with vice of any kind. The man who indulges in any evil course is far enough from the one thing needful: he goes in the high road to perdition, without so much as dreaming of the one thing needful. No, the thing of which Martha complained was, that when there were household concerns which called for her sister's attention, she was attending to the concerns of her soul. This was what she blamed; and what our Lord commended.

Let me not however be misunderstood, as saying that any person is at liberty to neglect his worldly duties; for an attention to that, in its place, is necessary for every living man: but it must not be allowed to interfere with the more important interests of the soul. On the contrary, where the two duties come in competition with each other, that must invariably be deferred.

We do not blame Martha for performing the rights of hospitality towards the Lord Jesus and his friends: but her care about this was excessive, and unseasonable too; inasmuch as, through her anxiety about this minor concern, she lost an opportunity for the benefit of her soul: and our Lord informs her that this was wrong.

This, then, is the comparative view of the subject. *The one thing needful is, to feel the paramount importance of eternal things, and to have the things of time and sense subordinated to the concerns of the soul.*

Having explained the one thing needful, I will now,

***~~II. Commend it to your choice—~~***

Mary had chosen it, as I wish you also to do. And that I may induce you to choose it, I will set before you,

***~~1. The importance of it—~~***

This is "needful," more needful than any other thing under Heaven. It is altogether needful both to your safety and happiness. Suppose you are ever so little engaged in worldly business, you may go to Heaven. Whatever relates to the world may be done for you: but no one can act for you in relation to the soul: if all the people in the universe were to unite their efforts, they could not supply your lack of services in the concerns of your soul. They must be attended to by yourself: and without the strictest possible attention to them, you never can secure Heaven, never can be approved of your God.

Nor can you be happy without this. You may be happy in the lack of earthly things, even if you were as destitute as Lazarus himself: but can you be happy without the favor of God? without a saving interest in the Savior? without a renewed heart? without a title to Heaven? No, you cannot! You cannot know what peace is: you cannot look forward with comfort to a dying hour: you cannot contemplate, with any kind of satisfaction, the terrors of a future judgment, or the realities of an eternal state.

Then, if without an attention to the one thing needful you can be neither *safe*nor *happy*, is it wise to neglect the concerns of your soul? It is well said, What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul? Methinks I have already said enough to engage you on the side of Mary, and to impress on you the necessity of following her example. Remember, this is "the one thing needful;" and, in this view, the only thing that is needful.

***~~2. The excellency of it—~~***

Two things our Lord speaks in commendation of it:

first, it is good; "Mary has chosen the good part,"

secondly, it is permanent; "It shall never be taken away from her."

Consider now these two points.

First, it is GOOD. Worldly labors, I grant, are good in their place, as means to some end: but there is nothing intrinsically good in any worldly office whatever. But spiritual exercises are good, irrespective of any end whatever. The love of *God*is good: the love of *Christ*is good: the love of *holiness*in all its branches, is good.

The world may cry out against these things as they will, and load them with every opprobrious name: but they are good. They are reputed good by *God*, who expressly calls them so; and by *angels*, who know it by sweet experience; and by all the *saints*that ever lived, and who chose them on this very account.

Yes, in the estimation of the ungodly too, even by the very men who hate and despise them, they are good: for it is in consequence of this conviction, that in their hearts they venerate a holy man, and wish to "die the death of the righteous," though they cannot be prevailed upon to live his life. What does every man feel on his dying bed? He may not feel any great desire to serve God; but he feels a secret wish that he *had*served him: and that clearly shows what his judgment of this subject is.

As for those who are gone into the eternal world, ask one of them what he now thinks of the one thing needful? There would be no difference of opinion between one that should come from Heaven, and one who should come from Hell: they would be equally decisive in their judgment, though, alas! with widely different feelings: and the very instant any one of you shall open his eyes in the eternal world, I will venture to say, he, if allowed to come back and deliver his sentiments, would speak more strongly and more decidedly upon it, than I ever have done, or ever can do.

***~~Will any of you, then, be so mad as to go on seeking the poor contemptible vanities of this world, in preference to what, by all in Heaven, earth, and Hell, is acknowledged as supremely good?~~***

But consider, also, its PERMANENCY: "If you choose this good part, it shall never be taken away from you." Can this be said of earthly things? Possess crowns and kingdoms, if you will: experience proves that, by popular commotion or the events of war, you may soon be hurled from your eminence, into a state of bondage and misery. But of common possessions, how soon may you be bereaved, by fraud, or violence, or flood, or fire! And how soon must you, at all events, be deprived of them by death!

But if you have sought for eternal happiness, who shall deprive you of that? God will not—and no other can. What can men do? All that they can do, is, to kill the body—they cannot touch the soul. And devils, what can they do? They can tempt, but they cannot force you to any single act. They could not even enter into the swine, without Jesus' permission; how, then, shall they destroy a child of God?

Your final enjoyment of the blessings you seek is secured to you by covenant and by oath: and *while others, at death, lose all their possessions, you at death come into the fullest possible enjoyment of yours, an enjoyment that shall endure through all eternity.*

Need I then say more? Surely, there can be but one common sentiment among you all. Would to God that there might be one determination also, a determination to devote yourselves unreservedly to God, and to mind from henceforth the one thing needful!

Think not, however, that this can be done without great and abiding efforts. For the ungodly world will surely cry out against you, as acting a most absurd part, and as carried away by a heated imagination. Yes, and even good people of a worldly cast, notwithstanding they be among your nearest and dearest relatives, will, like Martha, complain of you as carrying matters too far. And no doubt your minister also will come in for his share of the blame: for even Christ himself was blamed, and that by a pious person also, for encouraging Mary in an extravagant attention to her spiritual interests, to the neglect of her worldly business: "Lord, don't you care not that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me:" for I cannot but consider you as encouraging her to carry matters to excess. As for me, brethren, I am willing to bear my share of the blame: it is no pain to me to bear what my Lord and Savior bore before me.

But be not discouraged. You see in Mary what you have to expect. You see, however, on the other hand, what approbation she met with from the Lord himself. And that sufficed for her. Let it also suffice for you. Only approve yourself to him, and you need not mind anything that man can either say or do. It is decidedly "the good part" which I recommend to you; and therefore "choose it," and follow it, and adhere to it, under all circumstances. Never will you repent of this line of conduct. Sit now, with unwearied perseverance, at the feet of Jesus; and you shall, before long, receive his applauding testimony, and be seated with him on his throne of glory to all eternity!

***~~#1519~~***

***~~Forms of Prayer, Good~~***

***~~[Luke 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.1)~~***

"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him: Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

Scarcely anything can more strongly mark our defection from God, than our inability to pray. It might well be supposed, that, considering how many *sins*we have to be forgiven, how many *needs*to be supplied, and how many *blessings*to be acknowledged, that we should never be at a loss for matter in our addresses at the throne of grace, or for a suitable frame in drawing near to God. But the truth is, that *there is no duty more difficult than that of prayer*: for as, on the one hand, "we know not what to pray for as we ought;" so neither, on the other hand, are we able to plead with God as we ought, unless "the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, and assists us in relation to every part of this duty [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26)."

The Apostles themselves felt their need of instruction upon this head, and received from their Divine Master a form of prayer fitted for the use of the Church in all ages. From this circumstance, I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. The importance of sound formularies of instruction and prayer, for the use of the Church of Christ—~~***

Every society has some ground of mutual agreement, and some principle on which the members are formed into one collective body. Now the Church of Christ is a society collected out of the world, and united in one common sentiment of adherence to Christ, as their only Lord and Savior. There have been minor differences between the different parts of this body; and different societies have been formed, to confirm in their respective views the members attached to each. But on the subject of these differences I have at present no call to speak: my purpose, in this part of my discourse, being simply to show, that, by the common consent of all, certain formularies have been judged expedient, for the marking and perpetuating of their respective sentiments. Some, indeed, have limited their formularies to a statement of principles; others have extended them to forms of prayer: and it is of these latter that I intend more especially to speak. I mean not to condemn those who differ in this respect; but only to vindicate those who, in addition to a statement of their principles, have also adopted a form of prayer.

***~~A statement of principles is good—~~***

It forms a bond of union between the members of the same Church. Doubtless, if the principles themselves be false, the record that contains them cannot be good: but, supposing the principles to be sound, the forming of them into an accredited and unchanging standard cannot but be a signal benefit to the Church that is governed by them. Such a statement is a great preservative from error; it strengthens the hands of the faithful members, and is a witness against those who are unfaithful; and it serves, in perpetuity, as a rallying point, both for those who adhere to truth and those who have departed from it.

***~~A form of prayer is good also—~~***

That there are persons capable of conducting public worship in a truly edifying manner without a form, is readily acknowledged. But the great mass of those who lead the devotions of the people (I mean not to offend any, but only to "speak the truth in love,") are far from equal to the task: and even those whose gifts are sufficient, find themselves too often destitute of the grace of prayer. They can utter words, perhaps, with fluency: but their words betray the absence of the heart: and the barrenness felt by those who speak, is diffused over all who hear.

I grant that there may also be a hardness and barrenness in one who uses a pre-conceived form: but still, if that form expresses all that a devout spirit could wish, the persons who join in it may themselves, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, supply the unction, which the minister has failed to manifest.

In family devotions, a pre-conceived form is not only useful, but necessary, for the generality of Christians. *In ministers, a kind of official fluency is obtained by habit*: but in others, even in men of learning and of great intelligence, who can deliver themselves with ease in a popular speech, there is a straitness, both of conception and expression, when they come before God in prayer; and if they had not somewhat of a form prepared for them, they must abandon the use of family prayer altogether.

As to the lawfulness of such forms, I conceive that to be placed beyond a doubt, by the answer which our Lord gave to the request made to him in our text. His disciples desired him to teach them to pray, as John had taught his disciples: and our Lord gave them a prayer, which they were directed to use, either in form or substance, whenever they drew near to God at the throne of grace. This is a clear proof that forms are good; and that in the use of them we may "worship God in spirit and in truth."

Assuming that sound formularies are good, I proceed to point out,

***~~II. The peculiar excellence of those which are used and sanctioned by the Church of England—~~***

The Articles, the Homilies, and the Liturgy, are the standard of Divine truth, as embraced and professed by our Established Church. Now,

***~~The Articles are peculiarly excellent, both as to the soundness of their principles, and the moderation of their statement—~~***

They have evidently been drawn up with a view to comprehend all persons whose views, upon the whole, are right. The Calvinist and the Arminian meet upon the ground there stated, each being satisfied that his own sentiments are contained in them. And this, considering how unqualified the Scriptural expressions, on which their respective creeds are founded, often are, is very desirable. They are articles of peace, and not of war: and they serve to combine in one Church all that is truly good, while they repudiate those only who deny some fundamental truth of Christianity.

***~~The Homilies are a pattern of simplicity and godly sincerity—~~***

Never was truth more plainly stated than in them. The language in which they are written is indeed antiquated; in consequence of which, the use of them has been discontinued: but, in their mode of stating divine truth, and enforcing it upon the conscience, they never have been excelled by any composition whatever. It were well if they were more regarded as a pattern for popular addresses at this day: for, in comparison with them, the great mass of public addresses, if viewed with candor and with Apostolic zeal, would be found, it is to be feared, exceedingly defective, both in energy and in scriptural instruction.

***~~As for the Liturgy, no commendation can be too great for it—~~***

Being of human composition, it must, of necessity, partake of human infirmity. But, taken all together, it comes nearer to inspiration than any book that ever was composed. Only let a person be humbled as a sinner before God, and he will not find in the whole universe any prayers so suited to his taste. They express exactly what a broken-hearted penitent before God would desire to express—yet is there in them nothing of extravagance or of cant. All is sober, chaste, judicious; so minute, as to comprehend everything which the largest assembly of suppliants could wish to utter; and at the same time so general, as not to involve anyone to a greater extent than his own experience sanctions and approves.

Throughout the whole, the suppliant is made to stand on the only true foundation, and to urge every request in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, his atoning Savior, his all-prevailing Advocate. Throughout the whole, also, is the Holy Spirit's influence acknowledged as the only source of light and life, and implored as the gift of God to sinners for Christ's sake. In point of devotion, whether prayer or praise be offered, nothing can exceed the Liturgy, either in urgency of petition or in fervor of thanksgiving. In truth, if a whole assembly were addressing God in the spirit of the Liturgy, as well as in the word, there would be nothing to compare with such a spectacle upon the face of the earth: it would approximate more to Heaven than anything of the kind that was ever yet seen in this world.

Taking, then, the formularies of our Church in a collective view, I must say, that we have unbounded reason for thankfulness to Almighty God for the provision which has been made for the instruction of our minds, and the assistance that has been given to us for our advancement in the divine life.

Now, then, let me state to you,

***~~III. The claim which the Prayer-book and Homily Society has upon us in this particular view—~~***

Here a summary view was given of the services rendered by that Society to the world. And they were shown to be such as to deserve the countenance and support of every pious man. Its having translated our Liturgy into so many languages, renders it an institution of far greater importance than would, at first sight, be supposed: for, if Bible Societies and Mission Societies are useful in gathering Churches, this is useful in confirming, establishing, comforting, and edifying all who are so united.

Let me then recommend,

***~~1. That these formularies be duly estimated by yourselves—~~***

The *Homilies*are too much laid aside at this time. It is well that the attention of the world is now more called to them than it has been for the last hundred years. I would recommend you all to read them for your own edification, and to circulate them for the edification of others.

The *Liturgy*, also, is too much used as a form, without a suitable endeavor to enter into the spirit of it. But if we will, from time to time, compare our own frame of mind in prayer with the words which are provided for our use, we shall see how exceedingly defective we are in everything that is good; and how much we need a supply of the Spirit of God to bring us to any measure of that experience which we are bound, as Christians to attain.

***~~2. That your regard for them be shown by your endeavors to circulate them throughout the world—~~***

From the records of that society, you will see that nothing but a lack of funds has prevented a still greater extension of their labors than has yet taken place. If the generosity of the Christian public enables them to proceed according to their wishes, there will not be a country under Heaven that will not, in due time, be blessed with the same advantages as we enjoy.

***~~#1520~~***

***~~The Force of Importunity~~***

**[Luke 11:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.5-8)**

And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

*It is common with proud infidels when disputing against the doctrines of our holy religion, to reduce Jehovah, as it were, to a level with man; and to argue, that what would be unsuitable for man to do towards his fellows, must therefore be unsuitable for God to do in his dealings with mankind.*But what do we know of Jehovah, that we should presume to judge of him by our corrupt standards? or what claim have we on God, that we render him accountable to us for his dispensations towards us, when we might, every one of us, have been justly left, like the fallen angels, to have taken our portion in the abyss of Hell, if He, in his sovereign grace, had not determined to put a difference between us and them? To bring Jehovah to our bar, and to judge him there by a standard of our own, is impious in the extreme. His ways and thoughts are infinitely above ours; "nor will He give account to us of any of his matters." Our province, in reference to his revealed will, is, not to dispute, but to believe and to obey.

Yet there are circumstances wherein we may, with great propriety, draw a parallel between God and ourselves: as, for instance, if there be anything good which man will do, we may be perfectly assured, not only that God will do the same, but that he will infinitely exceed it.

Thus our Lord, having taught his disciples to pray, and wishing to encourage in them the utmost urgency and fullest confidence of success in prayer, he appeals to them respecting the effect of importunity between man and man, and teaches them to expect still greater effects from it in their addresses at the throne of grace. From this appeal of his, I will take occasion to show,

***~~I. The force of importunity in our fellowship with man—~~***

Our Lord supposes a sudden emergency to have arisen. A friend, on a journey, having lost his way, and wandered about until midnight, suddenly comes to our house, oppressed both with fatigue and hunger; and, while we joyfully afford him a lodging, we accidentally have no provision, not so much as a piece of bread to set before him for his refreshment. To what expedient would you have recourse? You yourself have a friend near at hand; and, while the weary traveler rests himself, you go to him, and knock at his door, and entreat him to lend you some bread for the occasion. This, though undesirable in itself, on account of the unseasonableness of the hour, you would feel justified in resorting to, on account of the greatness of the emergency. Your friend, who, with his children and servants, are all in bed, not liking to be disturbed at such an hour, and to have the disturbance spread over his whole family, excuses himself, and declines acceding to your request. (This is perfectly natural. What relates to *self*arises much more quickly in our minds than the concerns of others; and the trouble imposed on us, appears more immediately deserving our attention, than any which we are called upon to alleviate in others.) But you continue to plead with him the necessity of the case: and his friendly dispositions, which had not been sufficient to operate in your favor in the first instance, are awakened and called into exercise by your importunity; and he then arises, and gives you whatever you require. (In the whole of our fellowship with our friends, and indeed with the world at large, we find that a perseverance in urging our requests will prevail, when higher considerations have lain dormant, and been ineffectual for the attainment of our wishes.)

This case is so simple, that it would be obscured, rather than elucidated, by any amplification of mine: it commends itself at once as a very probable occurrence, and as well fitted to illustrate the great truth which it was intended to inculcate.

Let us, then, proceed to notice,

***~~II. The encouragement to be derived from it in our fellowship with God—~~***

Our blessed Lord himself shows us how to apply the subject:

First of all in a way of direct affirmation, "Ask, and you shall have," etc.

And then in a way of inference; namely, "If we, who are evil," will not refuse to supply the necessities of others, "much less will God," who is so infinitely good, verse 9-13. To mark this inference, let the following considerations be duly marked:

***~~1. Importunity, however urgent, will never offend our God—~~***

Man it may offend; and frequently does; and even irritates him to such a degree, as to draw from him expressions, which, in a calmer hour, he would not, on any account, have used. But God will never be offended: on the contrary, he tells us that "the prayer of the upright is his delight."

To what an amazing extent did he bear with the importunity of *Abraham*, when, in a long strain of consecutive petitions and arguments in behalf of Sodom, he urged the sparing of that guilty city for the sake of fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yes, even ten righteous persons, who might be there! Just so, we may be sure, he will never be displeased with us, though we "cry to him night and day," and "wrestle with him, as Jacob did, refusing to let him go until he blesses us, [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26)."

***~~2. Nor can our petitions ever be unseasonable—~~***

Unseasonable they may often be, if made to man. His occupations may not admit of his attending to them at the time they are offered. But no hour is unsuited for our supplications to God. He is never disinclined to listen to the case which we spread before him, nor ever so occupied as to defer it to a season of greater leisure. We find the Scripture saints "staying awake during the night watches" in their addresses at the throne of grace, [Psalm 119:148](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.148); and, however sudden the emergency that calls for his attention, he has shown himself, at all times, equally disposed to fulfill the desires which have been expressed even by a sigh, a look, a thought, [Exodus 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 14.15), [Nehemiah 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.4).

***~~3. Nor can they ever exceed either his power or willingness to give—~~***

The friend who was applied to for bread, might have been in the same predicament with him who made the application: or, as was the case, he might, on some account or other, be unwilling to grant the request. *But God is never either unable or unwilling to grant all that we can ask.*On the contrary, we are assured, that he is "able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or even think." The weakest or the vilest of the whole human race should "find mercy and grace to help him in the time of need," if only he sought it in Jesus' name. Nor should all the glory and felicity of Heaven be withheld from one who applied to God in penitence and faith. "However wide he opened his mouth, God would fill it!"

***~~4. Importunity is the very means which God himself has prescribed for our obtaining of blessings at his hands—~~***

He bids us not only to pray, but to "continue always in prayer;" yes, to "pray without ceasing," and to "give him no rest" until we have obtained the blessings which we have desired, [Isaiah 62:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.6-7). He has spoken a parable for the express purpose of showing us, that "we are to pray always, and not faint, [Luke 18:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1-8)." Immediately after my text, the encouragement given by our Lord to importunity in prayer is conveyed with such remarkable repetitions, as cannot fail to strike every attentive reader, and to show how urgent God is with us, to make us urgent in our supplications to him.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Seek friendship with God—~~***

A man may expect to prevail with a friend, for things which he could not hope for as a stranger. And what may we not expect to obtain at God's hands, if once we are reconciled to him in the Son of his love? *Having given us his own Son, what will he withhold from us*, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32). If, indeed, we continue enemies to God in our hearts by wicked works, we cannot hope to obtain any blessings at his hands; for we are warned, that "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us;" but, if we come to him in Christ Jesus, with penitential sorrow, "he will never allow us to seek his face in vain."

***~~2. Whatever you ask of God, ask it in faith—~~***

If you come with doubtful hearts, questioning whether God is able or willing to relieve you, you cannot hope to obtain an answer of peace, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7). But the prayer of faith shall surely prevail. Whatever be the petition which we offer, provided only it be really good for us, it shall be given to us, [John 15:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.13-14); [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7). True, the *cup*was not taken from the hands of our blessed Lord, nor was the *thorn*taken from the flesh of the Apostle Paul, though both the one and the other urged their petitions with repeated earnestness. But our blessed Lord was enabled to drink the cup of bitterness even to the dregs, and the Apostle had his affliction greatly sanctified to the good of his soul: and therefore, though the blessings asked were withheld from each, as to the matter of them, they were more effectually bestowed on each as to their ultimate effect. Thus, only leave to God to judge for you as to the gift that shall be conferred, and you shall be sure never, in any case, to ask in vain.

***~~3. Never be discouraged on account of any delay you may experience in the answers to your prayers—~~***

The importunate widow, though often repulsed, prevailed at last. Just so, though God may not answer us so speedily as we could wish, it shall, in fact, be "speedily," because it shall be at that precise moment when it shall be most for our eternal good. *There are many reasons known to God for delaying to answer our prayers; and which, if known to us, would lead us to acquiesce in, and even to desire, the delay.*

We need to be stirred up to more importunity in prayer, and to be made more deeply sensible of our need of mercy. We need also to be made more thankful to God for his answers to prayer: and all these benefits may arise from delay.

But, beyond the proper season, God will not withhold anything which, in his wisdom, he sees needful for us. His declaration to this effect may be fully depended on: "The vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie: though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3)." Only wait for the Lord, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope.

***~~#1521~~***

***~~Importunity Encouraged~~***

***~~[Luke 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.9-10)~~***

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

The prayer which our blessed Lord taught to his disciples, and which is contained in the verses before my text, is suited to the Church of God in all ages. It is a very encouraging circumstance, that, in approaching to the throne of grace, we are able to address the Most High God in words which he himself has dictated for our use. But *doubts are apt to arise in the mind, whether God will hear the prayers of such worthless and sinful creatures as we are*; and, to remove such apprehensions, our merciful and gracious Lord has made an appeal to us respecting our own readiness to assist each other, especially in cases of emergency, and when urged by repeated applications. The appeal, as made by him, carries conviction to the mind.

But the argument itself must not be pressed too far. We cannot, in all cases, infer from what man would do, that God will do the same: no, in truth; such a mode of arguing as that would lead, and often does actually lead, to the most fatal errors. I will therefore make the necessary distinctions on this subject; and show,

***~~I. In what cases this argument is valid—~~***

***~~Certainly it is an argument much used in Holy Writ—~~***

Our blessed Lord states it distinctly in the words following my text: "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! verse 11-13."

To the same effect he speaks in the parable of the unjust judge: "Hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily, [Luke 18:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.2-8)." From these and many other passages it is clear that the argument, if properly used, is weighty and conclusive.

***~~But it is an argument much abused by ungodly men—~~***

Nothing is more common than for ungodly men to state what they themselves would do, and to conclude from thence what they are authorized to believe respecting God. And, in fact, this is the strong-hold of atheism itself: for there is not a perfection of the Deity which is not practically denied upon this very ground.

Hear how God himself represents this matter: for he who knows the heart, and can interpret infallibly its most secret motions, thus declares, respecting the atheistical and ungodly world: "Son of man, have you seen what the ancients of the House of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord sees us not; the Lord has forsaken the earth, [Ezekiel 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 8.12); [Ezekiel 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 9.9). See also [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11) and [Job 22:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.13-14)." What is here, but a plain denial both of the omnipresence and omniscience of God? His justice also, and his truth, are alike questioned by them upon the same grounds.

Paul thus states the objections of an unbelieving Jew: "But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved! [Romans 3:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.5-8)."

Thus, as the *justice*of God is arraigned in reference to what he has threatened; so also is his *truth*, in reference to his execution of his threatenings: "There shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, 2 Peter 3:4; [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9);" construing thus the forbearance of God into an utter dereliction of his declared purpose.

*The sovereignty of God is that against which they set themselves with peculiar vehemence.* That God should exercise mercy according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, and not according to any desert of man, is an idea which they cannot endure. They consider that as a warrant to cast all the blame of their condemnation upon God himself; and will confidently say, "Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will?"

But Paul's answer to that objection must silence every human being: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? [Romans 9:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18-21)."

In a word, the whole that God has revealed to us respecting our fall in Adam, our condemnation by the law, our justification by faith alone, and the eternity of future punishment awarded to all who believe not in Jesus Christ; the whole of this, I say, is no better than "foolishness" in the eyes of unconverted! men 1 Corinthians 1:23. And the ground of their accounting it foolishness is, that *it is a different mode of proceeding from that which they themselves would follow towards one another*: for, as they would not punish to all eternity any offence committed against them, so neither ought God to punish sin in that way; and, as they would reward men according to their merits, so ought God to do. In short, they think "These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face. "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue! [Psalm 50:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.21)." For, however just a comparison between God and man may be in some respects, in other respects it can serve no other purpose than to lead us into the most fatal errors.

***~~Let me, then, mark distinctly, when, and in what cases, this argument is valid—~~***

There is a broad line of distinction to be drawn, and such a line as will suffice to keep us from any material error on the subject. When the comparison relates only to what is good and gracious, the argument founded on it is not only valid, but may be carried to an extent that would be utterly inadmissible on any other subject under Heaven.

For instance, we may not only say, if an earthly parent will be kind to his child, how much more will your heavenly Father be so? But we may put the argument thus: "If a man will show the smallest kindness imaginable to his beloved child, how much more will God exercise the greatest possible kindness towards a stranger, provided that stranger calls upon him in humility and faith?" This is, in fact, the very statement which our Lord himself gives in the verses following my text: for it is worthy of notice, that, in the latter part of the comparison, he drops the relation of a child, and says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto those who ask him. A similar statement we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews (9:13, 14.): "If the blood of bulls etc. will do the smallest thing, that is, will cleanse the body from a mere ceremonial defilement, how much more will the blood of Christ, etc. do the greatest, that is, cleanse the soul from all manner of moral defilement, and sanctify it wholly unto the Lord?"

But, when the comparison supposes or implies any claim on God, then is it not only vain, but impious in the extreme: for *man has no claim whatever upon God.*The very devils have as much claim upon him as we, unless we come to him in the name of Christ. On our fellow-creatures we have a claim; but on God we have none: and if we presume to say, I would not act so or so towards a fellow-creature; therefore God must not act so or so towards me; we reduce him to a level with ourselves; we bind him by laws to which he is not subject; and we prescribe rules to him which he will never follow. Of our duties to man we may form some judgment: but "we cannot by searching find out God, [Job 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 11.7);" who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man has seen, or can see, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16);" and if we attempt to speak of him, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledge, [Job 38:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 38.2)."

Having shown in what cases this argument is valid, I proceed to mark,

***~~II. The force of it, as here applied—~~***

Our blessed Lord here institutes a comparison between God and man, as moved by importunity to exercise kindness towards a suppliant friend. Hear,

***~~1. His statement—~~***

Who among us, if a friend came to him, even at midnight, for bread to set before one who had unexpectedly come from a great distance to take up his abode with him, would refuse his request? We might, probably enough, express reluctance at first, on account of the disturbance it would occasion to our family; but, on his urging his request, we would grant it: though the feelings of friendship should not suffice in the first instance to produce an acquiescence in his wish, his importunity would be sure to prevail.

The parallel between God and us is here so obvious, that our Lord forbears to state it; because everyone will naturally draw it for himself. For instance: *will an earthly friend act thus? What then will not our heavenly Friend do, whose love so infinitely transcends all that ever existed in a mortal bosom?*And will an earthly friend do this with such inconvenience to himself and family; and shall his reluctance be overcome by dint of importunity? What then will not He do, who, at whatever hour he is applied to, can experience no inconvenience, and who delights in importunity, as the best possible expression of our love to him? Here the argument is clear and strong; and such as must carry conviction to every mind. Hear then,

***~~2. His conclusion—~~***

Justly does our blessed Lord found on this statement an exhortation to us, to be in *supplication urgent*, and in *expectation confident*. Let us "ask" whatever our necessities require: let us "seek" it, too, in every way that we can devise: and, if our heavenly Friend appears inattentive to our suit, let us stand "knocking" at his door, until he comes to our aid. Let us take no refusal. Of his *sufficiency*we can entertain no doubt; nor should we for a moment call in question his *willingness*to help us. Delays, instead of discouraging us, should only increase the ardor of our suit: for, succeed we must. Our blessed Lord tells us, "You *shall*," "you *shall*," "you *shall*" succeed. "Ask, and you *shall*have; seek, and you *shall*find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Before we yield to any discouragement as to the outcome of our supplications, let us find an instance wherein such importunity was ever known to fail. Let us search the annals of the whole world: and if, from the beginning of the world unto this hour, we find not one single exception, yes, and are assured by Him who knows all things, that no exception ever did exist; then let us, like Jacob of old, wrestle with our heavenly Friend all the night; and tell him plainly, that "we will not let him go until he blesses us, [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28)." If we act thus, we may as well doubt the existence of a God, as doubt the outcome of our supplications: "for every one who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks (however unworthy he may be of the favor asked), it shall be opened."

Behold, then, the force of the argument as here applied; and know, that where goodness and grace are the points of comparison between God and man, the argument can never be too strongly put, or the inference be too securely drawn.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~Are there any here present who doubt the efficacy of prayer?~~***

Such existed in the days of old; even men who said, "What profit should we have, if we pray unto him, [Job 21:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.15)." But on what grounds can such a question be asked? If it be from an idea that God is *incapable*of attending to the concerns of men, then hear his indignant reproof of this atheistical conceit: "They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed." Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are vanity! [Psalm 94:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 94.7-11)." Yes, and you will find them vanity too, my brethren, if you persist in such conceits as these.

***~~Are there any who think they can be saved without prayer?~~***

Be assured that, however willing God is to bestow his blessings, he will be sought unto before he will impart them. For the condition he has imposed is this; "Ask" and you shall have. And if you will not comply with that, then know, that nothing awaits you but "destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power! [2 Thessalonians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.9);" for he has irreversibly declared, that "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)." If you say, "This shall not be;" then will I bring to your remembrance that awful admonition, "God is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and shall he not do it? has he spoken, and shall he not make it good! [Numbers 23:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.19)." God's promises, it is true, are free and full: but "he will be inquired of," in earnest prayer, before he will grant to you his offered blessings. [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37).

***~~Lastly, Are there any who are discouraged by the idea that God will not condescend to them?~~***

Persons too of this description were found in the days of old, who, in a desponding mood, complained, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me." But what was the answer of God to them? "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16)." Here is the very argument that is urged in my text, and with all the force which has been given to it. Let it come home to all your hearts, and make every one of you to "pray, without ceasing [1 Thessalonians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.17)," and without a doubt [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7).

***~~#1522~~***

***~~The Strong Man Armed~~***

**[Luke 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21-22)**

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."

The miracles wrought by our Lord were too manifest to be denied even by his most inveterate enemies. Some however endeavored to evade the force of them by ascribing them to a confederacy with Satan. Our Lord showed them the absurdity of such an idea. The expelling of evil spirits was a confirmation of our Lord's doctrine; consequently it tended to the destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the establishment of his own. This Satan could not but be aware of; he would therefore never concur in an act which must terminate in his own ruin. Hence it appeared that the power which Jesus exercised over the evil spirits, was not only without the concurrence of Beelzebub, but in spite of his utmost exertions to withstand it. To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us.

Extreme caution should be used in explaining the parables, that we refine not upon them too much, nor give to any part a sense which it was not designed to bear. But some parables were certainly intended to be minutely applied in all their parts, [Matthew 13:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.18-23); [Matthew 13:36-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.36-40). That which is now before us seems to be of that number; we shall therefore open it in a way of familiar exposition.

***~~Satan is fitly compared to a strong man armed—~~***

The strength and power of Satan are frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. His very names, Apollyon, [Revelation 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 9.11); the great Dragon, [Revelation 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.7); and the God of this world, 2 Corinthians 4:4; evidently characterize him as possessed of exceeding great power. As an angel, he excelled in strength, [Psalm 103:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20); nor, though he has lost his original purity, has his native energy been at all impaired. He is rendered more formidable too by "his armor." Alas! what fiery darts has he in his quiver, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16). With what inconceivable subtlety does he plan his seasons and methods of assault, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3), [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11). Nor can he have so long engaged in this warfare, without having learned much by experience.

***~~The hearts of unregenerate men are "his palace"—~~***

He has the most intimate access to the hearts of men: he entered into the heart of Judas, and prompted him to betray his Lord, [John 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.27). By the same invisible agency he urged Ananias and Sapphira to lie unto the Holy Spirit, [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3). In the same manner he stimulates all his vassals to the commission of sin: he rules within them as a monarch, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2), and lords it over them with most despotic sway, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26). Every room of the palace is occupied by his attendants: the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience—are all under his control. If seven spirits only possess some, Legion is the name of others, [Luke 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.26) with 8:30.

***~~While he takes up his abode in them, he keeps all in peace—~~***

One would think that a soul possessed by him should be filled with horror; but he contrives to divert the thoughts of men from all their spiritual concerns: he blinds their minds so that they cannot see their real state: he fills them with a presumptuous confidence that they shall do well at last. Compare [1 Kings 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.22) with [Jeremiah 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.14). Perhaps he makes them laugh at the idea of Satanic influence. *He suggests that God is too merciful to inflict eternal punishment, and that all apprehensions of divine wrath are the effects of superstition or enthusiasm.*If at any time they are impressed by the word of God, he snatches it away, lest they should believe it and be saved, [Luke 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.12). Thus he continually deceives his vassals, and lulls them asleep in a most fatal security.

***~~There is One however, even Jesus, who is stronger than he—~~***

Satan indeed is a roaring lion: but Jesus is the all-powerful Lion of the tribe of Judah, [Revelation 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.5). Satan is the serpent that bruised the heel of Jesus: but Jesus is the woman's seed that effectually bruised his head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). Jesus vanquished him in repeated combats, [Matthew 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.10), [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30); [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11), and at last triumphed over him upon the cross, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15); yes, and led him captive in his resurrection and ascension, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8); nor does he exercise less power in his people than he then did for them, [1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4). His grace is sufficient to fortify us against the fiercest assaults of Satan, [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-9); nor shall the weakness of his people counteract or retard his career of victory, [Revelation 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.2).

***~~Nor can Satan any longer retain his hold when Jesus comes to expel him—~~***

Satan strove indeed to the utmost to keep possession of the bodies of men; nor relinquished them at last without the most strenuous efforts to destroy them, [Mark 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.20); [Mark 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.26). Thus will he maintain a conflict with Jesus in their souls. If he be driven from the outworks, he will defend himself in the citadel. Sometimes he may appear for a season to defy Omnipotence itself; but in due season he is invariably overcome. His strongholds, one after another, are demolished, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5), and he is constrained to surrender the palace which he can no longer keep.

***~~Jesus, having driven him from the soul, will turn all its powers against him—~~***

A sinner, while under Satan's dominion, has many things which prove serviceable to that wicked fiend: his wisdom, riches, influence, are all pressed into the service of the devil; all are used to strengthen his power, and to undermine the authority of Christ.

But when Jesus has gained possession of a soul, he instantly secures all its powers, and turns the artillery of Satan against himself: whatever wealth or influence the man possessed, is now made subservient to the Redeemer's interests: the gold of Egypt is formed into vessels for the sanctuary of the Lord; and every talent is improved in promoting and establishing his kingdom, [2 Corinthians 10:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5-6). Thus does Jesus drive Satan from his fortress, [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18), and enable the once captive soul to trample on him as a vanquished enemy, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20).

***~~From the parable thus explained we may learn—~~***

***~~1. What true conversion is—~~***

Conversion does not consist merely in a change of sentiment: it supposes that our false peace has been broken, and that Satan has been made to yield to the victorious grace of Jesus. Jesus himself too is now become the sole monarch of our hearts, and we are cordially serving him with all our power. Let us try ourselves by this touchstone: let us see whether we be indeed new creatures: nor let us rest until we be turned from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18).

***~~2. Whence it is that any are converted—~~***

Men are in themselves the willing slaves of Satan: so far from desiring deliverance from him, they fight against their deliverer. Most assuredly therefore they are not the authors of their own conversion. *It is Jesus alone who chooses the objects of his favor: it is he alone who begins and carries on the good work within them*, [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9), [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). To him therefore must every redeemed soul ascribe the glory, [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7). None can boast as if they had effected anything by their own power, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7); nor need any despair as though their bonds could never be broken. To every one, who wishes to be made free, there is abundant encouragement in the Scriptures, [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25). May our eyes be so directed to Jesus that his power may be magnified in our deliverance, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22).

***~~3. What is the duty of those who are converted—~~***

As Satan never leaves a soul without reluctance, so does he ever watch for an opportunity to return to it: nor will he fail of accomplishing his purpose, if our hearts be not guarded by the Lord Jesus. Let none then be satisfied with purging out only some grosser sins, [2 Peter 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.9). In vain will the house be swept and garnished, if it be not occupied by the Divine inhabitant. Satan will return with seven devils worse than himself; and the last state of such men will be worse than the first, verse 25, 26. Let all then be on their guard, and commit the keeping of their souls to Jesus, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19). Then shall all the attempts of their enemy be baffled. He who never slumbers will surely preserve them, [Psalm 121:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.4-7), and they shall be made the habitation of God to all eternity, [Ephesians 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.22). What we say therefore to one, we say unto all, Watch! [Mark 13:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.37).

***~~#1523~~***

***~~The Blessedness of the True Christian~~***

***~~[Luke 11:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.27-28)~~***

"And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who *hear*the word of God and *keep*it!"

The words of our Lord, though made the continual subject of cavil and dispute among his obstinate opposers, carried conviction to the hearts of all who candidly considered them: nor was the gentleness of his manners less impressive than the wisdom of his discourses. He had been just exposing the folly of imputing his miracles to a confederacy with Beelzebub: and to such a degree had his discourse wrought upon one of his audience, that she exclaimed out of the midst of the multitude, "Blessed is the womb that bore you," etc. This was the most natural language for a woman to use in expressing her admiration of him: and it furnished him with an occasion to declare before all, who, and who only, could with propriety be accounted blessed.

In his answer he sets before us,

***~~I. The character of the true Christian—~~***

Numberless are the ways in which this is drawn in the Holy Scriptures. But there is a peculiar simplicity in the description before us, at the same time that it very sufficiently distinguishes the Christian from all others.

***~~1. He "hears the word of God"—~~***

Every true Christian considers the preaching of the Gospel as God's instituted means of converting and edifying the souls of men. Instead therefore of making frivolous excuses for staying at home, he will suffer many inconveniences rather than absent himself from public worship. And when he is there, he will "receive the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." He will listen to it as the word of God to his own soul in particular, and will apply to himself the truths which the minister, as God's ambassador, shall set before him.

In this he differs widely from all other persons: for though others may be regular in their attendance on divine ordinances, they do not hear the word of God with that reverence, that self-application, that submission, which befit sinners in the presence of their God.

***~~2. He "keeps it", "~~***

The godly keep it in their hearts us a ground of hope. They do not come to the word of God, determining to receive nothing but what accords with their own pre-conceived notions; but they desire to know what method God has prescribed for the reconciling of sinners to himself: and when they find that he has sent his only dear Son to die for them, they do not say, How can this be? but they acquiesce thankfully in the divine appointment, and trust in Christ as their only Savior. *They see his suitableness, and sufficiency, and excellency*, and say as Paul, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2), [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

They keep it also in their lives, as a rule of conduct. They will no longer regulate themselves according to the maxims of the world, but will inquire, What does my God require of me? What is the way in which he has directed me to walk? Having ascertained these points, he does not turn back because the world calls him precise, or because his own corruptions render his progress difficult; but he holds on in his course with firmness and uniformity. He finds many who endeavor to turn him out of the way; but he keeps the word of God, as "a light," that points out his path in general, and as "a lantern," that is to direct every step he takes.

It is scarcely needful to observe, that this part of the character is peculiar to the Christian; for there is no other person that can at all be compared with him in these respects.

Together with the character of a Christian our Lord proclaims also,

***~~II. His blessedness—~~***

We are not to take a general view of this subject, but to consider it in that particular light, in which it is represented in the text.

The Virgin Mary, beyond a doubt, was the most highly favored of women, in that she was honored with bringing into the world her incarnate God. So the angel told her; and so she expected that all future ages would consider her, [Luke 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.28); [Luke 1:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.48). But the true Christian, whoever he is, is incomparably more blessed than Mary, as a believer in Jesus, was doubtless a partaker of all the privileges that we enjoy through him: but, simply as his mother, she possessed none of them: and all our assertions respecting her must be understood with this limitation.

***~~1. He has a closer union with Christ than ever she had—~~***

The union which the Virgin had with Christ was that of a mother with her child. He was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, [Genesis 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.23).

Yet this, close as it was, cannot be compared with that which exists between Christ and his believing people: for "he is formed in their souls, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19);" "he dwells in their hearts by faith, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17);" "he in them is the hope of glory, [Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27);" and so inseparable is this privilege from the Christian character, that, "if he dwells not in us, we are reprobates, 2 Corinthians 13:5."

She was one flesh with him: but believers are one spirit with him, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17). Her union was like that which universally obtains between parents and children; but that which believers enjoy, resembles rather that which exists between Christ and his heavenly Father, [John 17:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.20-23).

***~~2. He has a more intimate communion with him—~~***

Doubtless, until he attained to the age of thirty, she must have enjoyed many sweet seasons of communion with him under her own roof: and during the four years of his ministry, she must have had familiar access to him on many occasions. But, after all, this was no other fellowship than what every parent, and every friend, enjoys. She beheld him only as a man; we behold him as God. She saw him merely as a prophet; we see him in the whole of his mediatorial character, as the King, Priest, and Prophet, of the universal Church. She heard only partial instructions, on particular occasions, with the outward ear: but we have access to him at all times, to hear the whole of his revealed will, and to receive instruction in our inmost souls.

How far preferable this is to his bodily presence our Lord himself informs us, [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7); and consequently our state is far more blessed than even that of his own mother.

***~~3. He has richer communications from him—~~***

She, as his mother, received nothing from him in this world, [Matthew 12:46-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.46-50); nor does she receive anything in Heaven on account of this relation to him, [Matthew 22:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.30). But every believer, as a believer, is blessed in him with all spiritual and eternal blessings, [Ephesians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3). Unspeakable are the benefits he imparts to all his people. Whatever grace they possess, they have received it all out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). In Heaven also their relation to him shall be acknowledged, and suitable honors be conferred upon them. A throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21); a crown, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8); a kingdom, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29)—are the inheritance that he has reserved for them, and will finally bestow upon them.

Let these things be considered, and, however blessed we may conceive the Virgin to have been on account of her relation to him, we shall see that incomparably greater blessedness is ours, provided we *hear*the word of God, and *keep*it.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who do not regularly hear the word of God—~~***

Upon what principle can you conceive that any blessedness belongs to you, when you prefer your ease, your business, your pleasure, to an attendance on God's ordinances? Can it be imagined that God is unconcerned about the honor of his word, and that he will not notice the contempt poured upon it? Has he not repeatedly declared the very reverse, [Deuteronomy 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.19), [Matthew 10:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.14-15), [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16), 1 Thessalonians 4:8, [Hebrews 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1-3). Whatever excuses then you may make, remember that you have not even the semblance of Christianity, so long as you remain indifferent to the public ministration of the word, and neglectful of it in your secret retirements.

***~~2. Those who hear the word, but without keeping it—~~***

There are many who are regular in their attendance on divine worship, but never regard one word they hear. They are taught to come to Christ as their righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24); but they still cherish self-righteousness and self-dependence. They are instructed to die unto the world, and to live unto God, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24), 2 Corinthians 5:15; but they still continue alive to the world, and dead to God. *But what will their hearing profit them, if they will not keep the word they hear?*To what purpose do they cry, *Lord! Lord!*if they will not do his will, [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46). Let such then know that they deceive themselves, [James 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22); and that they must *both embrace in their hearts, and exemplify in their lives, the word of God*, if ever they would be blessed in their deeds, [James 1:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-25).

***~~3. Those who both hear and keep it—~~***

Whatever the world may say of these persons, they are, and shall be, blessed. The Lord Jesus Christ pronounces them so, and will himself impart the blessedness that he has reserved for them. Go on then, holding forth, and holding fast, the word of life, [Philippians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.16). You will find numberless temptations to forsake the good way; but keep it steadfastly unto the end. You may meet with trials for your adherence to the word; but your consolations shall be sure to abound above all your tribulations, [2 Corinthians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.5); and strength shall be given you according to your day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25). Even in this world you shall have no reason to repent of your steadfastness; and in the world to come your blessedness shall be complete!

***~~#1524~~***

***~~Caution Against Hypocrisy~~***

***~~[Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1)~~***

"In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Rarely, if ever, can we find a greater instance of fidelity than in the history before us. Our Lord had been dining with a Pharisee, and, even while he was at dinner, he upbraided the whole sect of Pharisees, and accused them of the vilest hypocrisy. This might have been thought by some a breach of hospitality; but a sense of his duty to God was paramount to every other consideration.

The Pharisee had begun with expressing his wonder that our Lord had not washed his hands before he sat down to eat; for among the Pharisees this ceremony had been magnified into a religious observance. This superstition our Lord had not chosen to sanction: and as among the Pharisees it was accompanied with a scandalous neglect of internal purity, he exposed the folly of it, and condemned in the severest terms all who substituted such a rite in the place of vital godliness.

His reproofs, as might be expected, greatly irritated his indignant hearers: yet no sooner had an immense multitude assembled at the door, than he went out to them, and, in the presence of them all, enjoined his disciples above all things to beware of that grand feature of the Pharisaic character, hypocrisy. See chapter 11:37 to the end.

This caution, so boldly and so strongly given, deserves our attention, no less than that of the disciples to whom it was spoken. We propose, therefore,

***~~I. To consider the evil against which our Lord cautioned them—~~***

The nature of hypocrisy is far from being generally understood. Many would suppose that conduct which was notoriously evil, would, from its notoriety, be exempt from the charge of hypocrisy; and that there could be no hypocrisy, where the person was not conscious that he was deceiving others. But that term, according to the Scripture use of it, is very extensive: and under it may be included many different forms or degrees of hypocrisy.

***~~1. That which is known both to ourselves and others—~~***

*Hypocrisy consists in acting contrary to our professions:* and this we may do in such an open and shameless way as to manifest clearly to others, no less than to ourselves, that we are dissemblers with God.

How is it with the great mass of those who disregard religion? Do they cast off the Christian name also? Do they not rather account themselves Christians; and would they not be highly offended if their claim to that title were disputed? Yet have they in reality as little of Christianity in their hearts and lives as the very heathen! There is reason to believe, that they would have lived precisely as they have, if they had all the while known Christianity to be a fable; and that they would continue to live in the very same state, if now for the first time they should learn that our religion were founded in imposture. To them we may safely apply those words of the Apostle, "They *profess*that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16)."

It is precisely the same with many also who profess a high regard for religion. They are strenuous advocates for *decorum*, and are very observant of *outward forms*; but are as far from anything like vital godliness as the most profane! They may impose upon a few ignorant people, who have not an idea what religion is: but persons of the least education, who think at all for themselves, see that *all those forms are a mere farce, if unaccompanied with the affections of the heart*; and these formalists themselves know, and feel, and, among each other, will acknowledge them to be so.

Of such persons Paul says, that "they have a *form*of godliness, but deny the power thereof; that, like Jannes and Jambres, (two great opposers of Moses,) they resist the truth, being men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith; and that their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was, [2 Timothy 3:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5-9)."

Thus is the hypocrisy of many covered with so thin a veil, that everyone with the least perception may see it. And if their professions be treated with respect, it is merely from a desire which everyone feels to make the way to Heaven as easy as possible, and to lower the standard of religion to his own attainments.

***~~2. That which, though hid from others, is known to ourselves—~~***

It is a common thing for persons to *embrace certain religious principles, without ever attending to their sanctifying efficacy*. Such were Judas, and Ananias, and Sapphira: these did actually impose on others; they were considered by all as sound converts. But could Judas be ignorant that he was a thief? or Ananias and Sapphira that they were liars?

So it is then with many professors of religion, who pass for real Christians at this time: their exterior appearance is that of sanctity:

but one is dishonest,

another is addicted to falsehood,

another gives way to lewd desires and practices,

another is under the dominion of his evil tempers.

Now, notwithstanding the esteem in which they may be held, must not these persons, to say the least, have many secret misgivings, or rather, if they consider at all, *must they not know that their hearts are not right with God?*We may see the character of such persons drawn to the life by the Apostle Paul: all their high professions and evil practices are exhibited in contrast with each other, and stand as a monument of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart, [Romans 2:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.17-23).

***~~3. That which, though hid from ourselves, is known to God.~~***

It is but too possible for persons to "seem to be religious," and to think themselves so, at the very time that they are under the influence of some habitual evil, which proves that they "deceive their own selves, and that their religion is vain, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."*The characteristic mark of the true Christian is sincerity*. He is "an Israelite indeed, and without deceit, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47);" attending to all the commandments equally, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, 1 Timothy 5:21, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17). But the persons we refer to are partial in every part of their duty.

Their *repentance*is partial: they mourn, not so much for sin, as for the consequences of their sin; nor yet for the consequences, as they respect God and his honor, but only as they respect themselves and their happiness. Even in relation to themselves, they are not grieved that sin has defiled their consciences, and hardened their hearts, but only that it has injured their character, or brought guilt and misery upon their souls.

Their *faith*also is partial: it has respect to Christ as a Priest to atone for them, but not as a King to rule over them: it receives Christ for righteousness, but not for sanctification.

Moreover, while they profess to trust in God for spiritual blessings, they cannot stay themselves upon him for temporal things, but are as ready to sink under their trials, as if they knew not from whence they came, and to give way to despondency as if they had no God to flee unto.

Their *love*too is partial: it is confined to those of their own sect and party, and knows little of that expansive benevolence which was so exemplified in the Lord Jesus, when he laid down his life for sinners, not excepting even his bitterest enemies.

Moreover, their *zeal*is also partial: it is ardent in some things; in one it is violent against superstition and forms of man's appointment; and in another it exclaims against schisms, and heresies, and divisions: but it finds no scope for exercise in things which would bear upon their own peculiar habits: it is active enough in things that gratify their feelings, and that tend to exalt their character, but slow to engage in anything that appears humiliating and self-denying.

In a word, the hypocrite is neither uniform nor unreserved in any part of his obedience; but betrays his insincerity, whenever his interests, his habits, or his passions are to be sacrificed to God.

Seeing then that hypocrisy is so extensive an evil, and that our Lord judged it necessary to caution his own immediate disciples against it, we proceed,

***~~II. To enforce his caution—~~***

But what words can be sufficient for this purpose? What arguments can we use to impress upon your minds the necessity of being ever on your guard against so great an evil? Consider,

***~~1. Its subtle nature—~~***

We are told that "Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness, [2 Corinthians 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13); [2 Corinthians 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.15);" from whence we may infer, that there is no *person*in whom hypocrisy may not find an asylum, nor any *act*wherein it may not have scope for exercise. It is the continual aim of Satan to infuse it into us, and by means of it to defile our very best actions. The pretexts too under which it can hide itself, are innumerable. There is not any form which it cannot assume: and sanctity itself is its appropriate garb. What need have we then to watch against a principle which finds so easy admission into the heart—yet is *so hard to be detected, and so difficult to be expelled!*

Let not any of us imagine that we are out of its reach; nor be too confident that we are free from its influence. Surely we should have a godly jealousy over ourselves in relation to it, and not only "search and try ourselves," but pray that "God himself would search and try us, in order to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24)." Let us never forget that "there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, while yet they are not washed from their filthiness, [Proverbs 30:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.12);" and that there are many who "have a name to live, but are really dead" before God, [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1).

***~~2. Its defiling influence—~~***

As "leaven," a very small measure of it will soon "leaven the whole lump." It not only debases the act with which it is more immediately connected, but renders the whole soul abominable in the sight of God. We may profess ourselves to be the Lord's people, [Isaiah 48:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.1-2); and take delight in his ways, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32); and seem most exemplary in our conduct, [Isaiah 58:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.2-3); and yet have it all rendered vain and worthless by means of this accursed principle. What a painful thought is this, that *we may be apprehending ourselves most holy and most exemplary, and yet, after all, may be found to have deceived our own souls!*But so it is: "A man may think himself to be something, and yet in the sight of God be nothing but an hypocrite and self-deceiver, [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)." Let us then spare no pains to purge out the old leaven, that we may be a new lump: and, as the Jews at their Passover were indefatigable in their exertions to banish leaven from their houses, so let us, now that Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, labor to banish it from our hearts, and to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, [1 Corinthians 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.6-8)."

***~~3. Its fatal effects—~~***

Awful indeed are the denunciations of God's wrath against hypocrites, insomuch that to "have our portion with them" is to be exposed to his heaviest indignation, [Matthew 24:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.51). Nor is it gross hypocrisy only, such as is manifest to all, that so provokes his displeasure; but that also which is the most secret and refined: "the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath," and that too while they are flattering themselves perhaps, and expecting an accumulated weight of glory, [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13).

And oh how fearful will be their disappointment! How distressing too will it be to their more upright friends, to miss them in the regions of bliss, and to find that, after all their professions of godliness, they were not counted worthy of the kingdom of Heaven, [Job 20:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.4-7).

Consider these things beforehand. Consider that your state will be fixed by Him, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," who "searches the heart, and tries the thoughts," and who will give to every man according to his works. Know assuredly, that whatever be now thought of your state, you will then stand or fall, according to your real character, [1 Timothy 5:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.24-25).

***~~If you are disposed to ask, What shall I do to avoid this doom, I would suggest to you a few words of advice—~~***

***~~1. Be not too confident of your own integrity—~~***

However unconscious we may be of our latent hypocrisy, it is well to be untrusting of ourselves. Even Paul himself cultivated this kind of humility, choosing rather to cast himself on the mercy of his God, than to place too great a reliance on his own integrity, [1 Corinthians 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3-5). We say not that you may not rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience; for this the Apostle did, 2 Corinthians 1:12; but we recommend it to you to "rejoice with trembling:" for we are sure that such a frame of mind is most favorable to a discovery of our real principles, and most conducive to our ultimate salvation.

***~~2. Commit yourselves to the care of your gracious God and Savior—~~***

To whom can you look for support, but to that blessed Savior, who has promised to "keep the feet of his saints." He alone can "put truth in your inward parts," and keep you "sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ." Yet, however preserved by his grace, you will need to be washed continually in the fountain of his blood. Sprinkle yourselves then continually with his precious blood—from thence derive all your hope and peace; and doubt not but that he will both "keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24."

***~~#1525~~***

***~~God to Be Feared, Not Man~~***

**[Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5)**

"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into Hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

An undue regard to the good opinion of mankind operates to the production of two apparently opposite effects, namely:

a hypocritical assumption of the religious character,

and a cowardly concealment of it.

Moreover, the same persons may be alternately tempted to both of these evils, according as the one kind of dissimulation or the other may be best suited to their present circumstances. The persons most likely to feel their influence, are those who have lately begun to venerate religion, and to desire the attainment of it in their hearts. Hence our blessed Lord earnestly cautioned his disciples against them. He began with guarding them against *hypocrisy*, which was the leaven that pervaded all the Pharisees; and then he guarded them against the *fear of man*(which would induce them to put their light under a bushel); and, as the best antidote to it, to cultivate the fear of God, verse 1, 4, 5.

The subject of our text cannot be rendered more clear by any artificial arrangement of it, nor can the words be treated in any better order than that in which they stand: we shall therefore follow them simply without any particular division.

***~~The fear of man is a very powerful and prevailing evil—~~***

Scarcely does anyone begin to feel a desire after salvation, but he is beset immediately with this temptation: though perhaps he never at any time regarded the good opinion of men so far as to be deterred by it from the commission of any sin, now he is filled with apprehensions lest this or that person should despise him. He scarcely dares look grave, lest his friends should think him melancholy; nor will he venture to acknowledge any compunction for his past iniquities, lest they should say that he is going mad.

He is persuaded in his mind that those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are on the whole in the best way; but he dares not join himself to them for fear of participating in their reproach; nor dares he show any attachment to a minister of Christ, from whom he would wish to derive instruction, lest he should be classed with his followers. He dares not even go to a place of worship where Christ is more faithfully preached, lest he should be loaded with some opprobrious name. To bear an open testimony against sin, or to vindicate the ways of righteousness, would be an effort which he could not even contemplate without dread: so tied is he and bound with this *chain—*thegood opinion of the world.

If he have been enabled to surmount these first difficulties, he still is in bondage to fears of another kind. His father perhaps threatens to disinherit him, his master to dismiss him, his patron to turn his back upon him: the question then arises in his mind, How shall I sustain this trial? And then, to avoid the cross, he sacrifices his conscience, declines from the ways of God, and goes back again to the world: "tribulation and persecution arising because of the word, he presently is offended."

Nor is it uncommon for those who have appeared bold in the cause of Christ, to turn back, when they are called to "resist unto blood." When Paul was first called before the Roman Emperor, there was not found one single Christian that dared to stand by him: "Every one of them forsook him." And God alone knows how any of us should act, if, like Daniel or the Hebrew Youths, we were called to seal the truth with our blood.

***~~But to be governed by this principle, is both impious and absurd—~~***

God expressly commands us not to harbor it in our bosoms: "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled, [1 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.14)." He cautions us against it as a fatal snare: "The fear of man brings a snare, [Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25)." He represents it as quite absurd: "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and forget the Lord, your Maker, [Isaiah 51:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.7-8); [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13).

And in our text he shows how impotent man is, and unworthy to be regarded as an object of fear. Compare [Isaiah 51:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.13) with the text. Man may prevail so far as to kill our bodies; but this is the utmost that he can do. In doing this, he may exercise his ingenuity to put us to the most cruel torture: but God has graciously appointed that the body should not endure all that our enemies might wish to inflict: the soul will take its flight, if the body be too violently assailed, and will leave the body insensible to all that the most insatiate malice can devise, [Job 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 3.17-19).

Now we grant that this is an evil: the Christian cannot be indifferent to pain, and anguish, and death; but still these things are not so formidable as to justify his being influenced by the fear of man. If, indeed, there were no state beyond the present, and no Being that was superior to man, and able either to recompense our sufferings or to inflict others more severe—then there would be some reason why we should fear man.

***~~But God is the more proper object of fear—~~***

Him we ought to fear; indeed "he is very greatly to be feared;" for "with him is terrible majesty:" we should therefore "stand in awe of him," and "fear him always," and "walk in his fear all the day long." We should do nothing without considering first whether it will please or displease him: if we have reason to think that it will displease him, we should not for the whole world presume to do it; nor should we neglect anything which our conscience tells us will be pleasing in his sight. In everything that we do, we should have respect to his *will*, as the reason; his *word*, as the rule; and his *glory*, as the end—of our actions. In comparison with his favor, all earthly considerations should dwindle into nothing: *the allurements or the terrors of the world should be alike contemptible in our eyes*: they should weigh no more with us than the small dust upon the balance.

***~~There is very abundant reason why we should fear him—~~***

The circumstance of our being his creatures, formed by him for the promotion of his glory, should of itself induce us to regard him *chiefly*, him *continually*, him *exclusively*. And the circumstance of his having redeemed us by the blood of his dear Son, should constrain us irresistibly to live altogether for him. But the consideration urged in our text is that which we are more particularly called to notice.

God can destroy the body, as well as man, "After he has killed." He commissioned worms to execute his vengeance on a prince that robbed him of his glory, [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23). And on many of his own peculiar people also has he inflicted punishment, visiting them with sickness and death for their transgressions against him, [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30). In this respect then, to say the least, he is on a par with men, and is as much to be feared as they. But he can also wound the soul, which man can never touch. The saints of old, instead of being grieved at "the confiscation of their goods, took it joyfully." Paul and Silas, when their backs were torn with scourges, and their feet fastened in the stocks, so far from having their spirits hurt, were filled with unutterable joy, and "sang praises to God at midnight." Just so, every saint is privileged to "take pleasure in afflictions," and to "glory in tribulations;" so little is it in the power of man to hurt his soul.

But what punishment can God inflict? Look at Judas: look at many also at this day, who, like him, "choose strangling rather than life." Whence arise the numerous *suicides*that we hear of continually? God lets loose his wrath upon the souls of men on account of their iniquities; and then they are so miserable that they cannot endure to live. The saints themselves, too, are sometimes made to experience his frowns: and then how inexpressible is their anguish! "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Here then God shows his superiority over man, even in this life.

But God's power extends also to the future world: he can cast the soul into Hell; and can raise up the body also, and re-unite it to the soul, and make them monuments of his everlasting vengeance! Oh! "who knows the power of his anger?" Who can tell us what it is to lie down in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and to spend an eternity in that place, "where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched!" Read a faint description of their state, drawn by the hand of an angel, [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11); and you will then see that "it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Now judge whom you ought to fear, [Jeremiah 10:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 10.6-7). Now see why our blessed Lord so often, and so emphatically, repeats the same word, "Fear not man; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; Fear God; yes, I say unto you, Fear him." Alas! that the stupidity of our hearts should ever make such repetitions needful! But since our blessed Lord has condescended to make use of them, I pray God that our obduracy may not also render them ineffectual.

***~~We acknowledge that these considerations are awful; but we state them to you as proofs of our love—~~***

To speak of the wrath to come is always painful, and frequently offensive. Persons are apt to imagine that we take pleasure in alarming the minds of men; and they even conceive of us as disturbers of the public peace, and as enemies to the happiness of our fellow-creatures. But was this the character of our blessed Lord? or did he feel anything but love, while he gave these solemn admonitions? Yes, did he not account this fidelity to their souls the strongest expression of his regard? Hear how carefully he marks this in his address to them: "I say unto you, my friends." Permit me then to say, that, however men may be disposed to represent our fidelity as an indication of harshness, we are actuated only by a spirit of love, and are in reality your best friends. Many there are, indeed, who call themselves your friends, who would give advice directly contrary to ours: they would say, 'Do not indulge any foolish fears about the wrath of God; He is a very merciful Being; and you have nothing to fear at his hands. But think how absurd you will appear in the sight of all sensible men: think how you are ruining all your prospects in life: think what troubles you will bring upon yourself by these needless singularities: shake off all these groundless apprehensions: turn your back upon those who would fill you with false alarms: and act so as to ensure the approbation and esteem of all around you.' This, I say, is the common advice of parents, of brethren, and of many others who call themselves friends: but think a moment whether their counsel or that of Christ is to be preferred.

They say, "Fear man, but not God."

Christ says, "Fear God, but not man."

Truly, brethren, we must join in the advice of Him who has proved himself your friend; has proved it by laying down his life for you. We must declare to you that, while the fear of man is folly in the extreme, "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and the praise of it endures for ever."

***~~With this feeling, we urge them upon your minds with some additional arguments—~~***

The minor sorts of persecution are unworthy of the regard of a rational man. What signifies a reproachful name, or the contempt of those who despise God? You should rather account it your honor to be so treated, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14). But whatever be the cross you are called to bear, God has provided abundant consolation under it, 2 Corinthians 1:5, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12). Only submit to your trials with meekness and patience.

What dignity was there in that conduct of Jeremiah! [Jeremiah 26:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.14), and you may defy the confederate hosts of earth and Hell! [Isaiah 51:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.5-9). Think how your Savior suffered, not only "enduring the cross, but despising the shame;" and arm yourselves with the same mind, [1 Peter 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.1). [Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3), "rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake."

If you are tempted at any time to obey man rather than God, then look to the eternal world, and consider whether temporal joys or sorrows deserve a thought in comparison with those that are eternal. Think of the noble army of martyrs who are gone before, sent by men, as it were, in a fiery chariot to Heaven: do they regret that they loved not their lives unto death? Thus, setting eternity before you, implore help from your God and Savior: then shall you be found "faithful unto death, and finally obtain a crown of life."

***~~#1526~~***

***~~Caution Against Covetousness~~***

***~~[Luke 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.15)~~***

"And Jesus said unto them: Take heed, and beware of covetousness!"

The instructions which our Lord conveyed to his disciples almost always arose out of something that was immediately before him; so attentive was he to improve every occasion for their good. This was fraught with many advantages; for it tended to impress every truth more forcibly on their minds, and to show them how to render all events subservient to their own spiritual welfare. It was a trifling circumstance, which of itself did not seem to afford any particular occasion for remark, that gave rise to the discourse before us.

A man who had been listening to him for some time, apprehending that, as he spoke with such authority, he could easily prevail to settle a point in dispute between his brother and himself, requested his interposition; "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." But our Lord, seeing that the man was more intent on his temporal than on his spiritual advancement, not only declined the office, as not being within his commission, but began to caution his disciples against that covetousness, of which they now saw so striking an example.

A caution so solemnly given to them, cannot but deserve the attention of his followers in every age; and I pray God that the importance of it may be felt by every one of us, while we show,

***~~I. How we may know whether we are under the influence of this evil principle—~~***

It is not by overt acts of dishonesty merely that we are to judge of covetousness, but by the workings of our hearts in reference to the things of this world. We may judge of it,

***~~1. From the manner in which we seek them—~~***

Earthly things may certainly be desired, provided that desire is regulated by the necessities of our nature, and subordinated to the will of our heavenly Father. But if we desire them for themselves, or in an undue degree, then immediately are we guilty of that very sin which is reproved in our text. If we desire them for themselves, we show that we think there is some inherent good in them: whereas they are altogether worthless, except as far as they are necessary for our support, and for the strengthening of our bodies to serve the Lord. *All beyond mere food and clothing is an empty bubble. To invest earthly things with any inherent excellency, is to put them in the place of God, and to make idols of them*. Moreover, if our thoughts run out after them more than after God and heavenly things, if the pursuit of them be more delightful to us than the exercises of devotion, and, above all, if we will violate the dictates of conscience, or neglect spiritual duties in order to advance our temporal interest, what is this but covetousness? Can anyone doubt whether such a preference to earthly things be sinful?

Suppose, for instance, that any man follows an unlawful trade, or a lawful trade in an unlawful way, acquiring his gains from sources which he would be ashamed to confess, and afraid to have revealed to others; is he not under the influence of covetousness? Does he not prefer money before a good conscience, and the acquisition of wealth before the approbation of his God? Is this a "setting of his affections on things above, and not on the things on the earth?"

Hear what an inspired Apostle speaks respecting the criminality and danger of such desires: "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, because they *mind earthly things*, [Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)." It is not every degree of attention to earthly things that he condemns; but such a desire after them as is inordinate, and such a pursuit of them as militates against the welfare of the soul: and, *whatever we may call it, God calls it covetousness, and declares it to be idolatry*, [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5).

***~~2. From the manner in which we enjoy them—~~***

As all desire after them is not prohibited, so neither is all enjoyment of them; for "God has given us all things richly to enjoy." But what if we feel delight in the idea of wealth, and place a confidence in it as a barrier against the calamities of life; is not this the very sin against which the Prophet Habakkuk denounces a most awful woe? "Woe to him who dishonestly makes wealth for his house to place his nest on high, to escape from the reach of disaster! [Habakkuk 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.9)."

It is, in truth, to act the part of the Rich Fool in the Gospel, and to say, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry?"

We are very apt to imagine that the satisfaction which we take in the contemplation of our wealth, is nothing but an expression of thankfulness to God: but it is, for the most part, a "glorying in riches" (which is expressly forbidden, [Jeremiah 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.23).); and a "saying to the fine gold: You are my confidence." The sentiments of Job on this head were far more correct than those of the generality even of enlightened Christians: "If," says he, "I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much, this were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for then I should have denied the God that is above, [Job 31:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.25); [Job 31:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.28)."

If it be asked, How such a construction can reasonably be put on a sensation of the soul, which appears both innocent and praiseworthy? I answer, That God is the true and only Rest of the soul, [Psalm 116:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.7); and that, in proportion as we look to the creature for comfort or support, our hearts of necessity depart from him, [Jeremiah 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.5). To be the one source of happiness to his creatures, is his prerogative; and his glory he will not give to another: for "the Lord our God is a jealous God."

***~~3. From the manner in which we react to the loss of them—~~***

Christianity is far from inculcating a stoical apathy, or rendering us strangers to the common feelings of mankind: but it gives us a principle which is able to support us under trials, and to fill us with joy in the midst of tribulations. In a word, it presents us with a view of God as our God, and shows us, that nothing in this world can either add to, or take from, the happiness of him who has so rich a portion. This is the principle which enabled Job, under the loss of all his worldly possessions, to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

Now the lack of this *resignation*argues an undue value for the things of this world. If, under an apprehension of some loss, we are filled with anxiety, so as to be quite unfitted for an attention to our spiritual concerns; if, on having sustained that loss, we give way to vexation and grief, instead of rejoicing that we have in God an all-sufficient portion—do we not then in effect say, like Micah, when he had lost his idols, "They have taken away my gods! What more do I have?" Assuredly this is an undeniable mark of covetousness: indeed, God himself puts this construction upon it: "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be *content*with such things as you have, [Hebrews 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5)." When we are truly delivered from this evil principle, we shall be able to say with the Apostle, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content: I know both how to be abased, and how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)."

Our next inquiry must be,

***~~II. Why our Lord so earnestly guards us against it—~~***

The terms in which he expresses the caution, are exceeding strong, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness!" But there is abundant occasion for such earnestness; for covetousness is,

***~~1. A common principle—~~***

The man who came to desire our Lord's interposition, seems not to have had the smallest idea that he was actuated by this unworthy principle; and probably would have complained of a lack of charity in anyone who should have imputed it to him. And so it is at this time. *However ready we may be to notice it in others, we all overlook it in ourselves, and cloak it by the name of industry or prudential care*; so that, if we were to give credit to every man's account of himself, we would not find this principle of covetousness in the world. But it is deeply rooted in the heart of man, [Mark 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21), and as naturally adheres to the soul as the members to the body, [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5). Even good people still feel its existence and operation within them. Who has not to lament, that in his interaction with the world he feels somewhat of an undue bias at times, inclining him to lean towards his own interests, and to decide a doubtful point in his own favor? We do not say, that a good man will indulge this principle, but that he will feel it; and that he will find within himself a necessity of being *much upon his guard, to prevent it from warping his judgment and influencing his conduct*. If this then be the case with respect to those who are crucified to the world, much more must it be so with those who are yet carnal and unrenewed.

***~~2. A delusive principle—~~***

We are apt to think that earthly things will make us happy: but our Lord tells us, in the words immediately following our text, that "a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses." The truth is, that *man's happiness is altogether independent of earthly things*. Hear how the Prophet Habakkuk speaks on this subject: "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! [Habakkuk 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 3.17-18)." This clearly proves, that, however destitute we may be of all earthly comforts, our hearts may overflow with peace and joy: "we may be sorrowful—yet always rejoicing, having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

On the other hand, it is certain that a man may possess all that the world can give him, and yet be miserable; or, as Job expresses it, "In the midst of plenty, they will run into trouble and be overcome by misery, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22)." How often do we see persons, after attaining more than they had ever expected or desired, far less happy than they were at the commencement of their career! We may appeal to the experience of all, whether the increase of their happiness has kept pace with the augmentation of their wealth? We are well assured, that the more hopeful any person's expectations of happiness are from the acquisition of wealth, the greater will his disappointments be; and that every human being must sooner or later confess with Solomon, that all below the sun is "vanity and vexation of spirit."

***~~3. A debasing principle—~~***

It is worthy of observation, that the word*'lucre'* occurs but four times in the New Testament, and every time has the term *'filthy'*annexed to it. Nor is this without reason; for *covetousness defiles and debases the soul as much as any principle of our fallen nature*. Wherever it exists, it eats out every good principle, and calls forth and strengthens every bad principle, in our fallen nature. How feeble are the operations of honor, friendship, love, compassion, when covetousness has gained an ascendant in the heart! On the other hand, what injustice, falsehood, wrath, and malice will not this horrid principle produce! Well may it be said, "The love of money is the root of all evil;" for there is scarcely an evil in the world which may not arise from it.

The opposition between this principle and every Christian virtue, is strongly intimated in the advice given by Paul to Timothy, [1 Timothy 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.10-11). Mark the connection between these two verses. The utter abhorrence in which covetousness is held by God, is marked, [Psalm 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.3), yes marked with an emphasis not exceeded in any part of the sacred volume: "they are experts in covetousness—an accursed brood! [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)." O that we were all duly sensible of its hatefulness and baseness!

***~~4. A destructive principle—~~***

See it, in whoever it prevails, how it militates against the welfare of the soul, and destroys its eternal interests. The Rich Youth, in despite of all his amiableness, renounced all hope in Christ, rather than he would part with his possessions, [Matthew 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.22). The hearers of the Prophet Ezekiel, notwithstanding all their approbation of his ministry and their professions of personal regard, could never be prevailed upon to renounce and mortify this evil propensity, [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31); and we read of some in Isaiah's days, whom neither the frowns nor chastisements of Jehovah could reclaim from it, [Isaiah 57:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.17).

The great proportion of those who make a profession of religion in our day, are like the thorny-ground hearers, in whom "the good seed is choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, so that they bring forth no fruit to perfection, [Luke 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.14)." But the most terrible of all examples is that of Demas, who, after having attained such eminence in the Christian Church as to be twice joined with Luke by Paul himself in his salutations to the saints, was turned aside at last, and ruined by this malignant principle, "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present world! [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10)." Thus it will operate wherever it is indulged: it will have the same effect as "loading our feet with thick clay," when we are about to run a race; and will shut the door of Heaven against us, when we apply for admission there.

Of this God has faithfully warned us: and, to fix the warning more deeply in our minds, he even appeals to ourselves respecting the justice of the sentence, and the certainty of its execution: "Don't you know that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-10)."

***~~To improve the subject, and assist you in mortifying this corrupt principle, we recommend you to consider,~~***

***~~1. The shortness of human life—~~***

Who knows not, that our life is but "a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away?" Shall we then be anxious about matters which will be so soon terminated? Should we not rather live as pilgrims and sojourners who are journeying onward towards their eternal home? It will soon be of not the smallest consequence to us whether we were rich or poor. The instant that the Rich Man's soul was required of him, his riches profited him not; they could not procure so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue. Nor did the troubles of Lazarus leave any sting to interrupt or lessen his joys, when once he was safely lodged in Abraham's bosom. Let us then, like the holy Apostle, "die daily." "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

***~~2. The vanity of those excuses by which men justify their sin—~~***

Everyone has some cloak with which to cover his sin.

One says, "I only desire a competency." But a competency, in God's estimation, may be a very different thing from what it is in ours: we may be desiring so many hundreds a year; but he says, "Having food and clothing, be therewith content."

Another says, "I care not for myself, but only for my family: and must not I provide for them?" But we must no more covet an earthly portion for *them*than for ourselves: the welfare of their souls should be our great concern for them, as well as for ourselves.

Another says, "I am poor, and therefore cannot be supposed to be under the influence of covetousness." But the principle of covetousness may be as strong in a beggar as in any other person: for envy and discontent are as much branches of covetousness, as dishonesty or avarice can be.

To all then, I would say, *beware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of your own hearts!*Be afraid, lest, after being acquitted by your fellow-creatures, you should at last be condemned by your God See [1 Timothy 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9). This passage is not generally understood. It speaks of the inclination or principle. And the danger of self-deceit in relation to it is fully stated, [Ephesians 5:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.5-7).

***~~3. The infinite excellency of eternal things—~~***

As the Apostle says, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." So I would say: Covet not earthly things, wherein is excess; but covet heavenly things, even to the utmost possible fullness; for in them there is no excess. It is not possible to desire too earnestly, or to seek too diligently, a saving interest in Christ: nor can you take too great delight in the enjoyment of him, or fear too much the loss of his favor. Here is scope for all the energies of our minds. In reference to heavenly things then I would say, Covet earnestly the best gifts: enlarge your desires to the utmost extent of your capacity to receive, and of God's ability to bestow. However wide you open your mouth, God will fill it.

***~~#1527~~***

***~~The Rich Fool~~***

***~~[Luke 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.20-21)~~***

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Is this the voice of a gloomy enthusiast, a deluded bigot, or an imperious tyrant? Are these reproachful words, the wild effusions of intemperate zeal? No! the text presents to us the just expressions of Jehovah's indignation. Covetousness, in whoever found, cannot fail of provoking his utter abhorrence!

A young man had applied to Jesus to procure him an equitable share of his paternal inheritance; our Lord declined any interference, as foreign from the purposes of his mission; and, knowing the disposition which had assumed the garb of equity, reproved it, verse 13-15.

The parable before us was spoken to enforce that reproof; and the address of God to the character there delineated, strongly intimated the danger to which the youth himself was exposed. There are, alas! too many still who are actuated by similar principles, [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31). For their conviction we shall inquire,

***~~I. What were the grounds of God's indignation against the Rich Man?~~***

No evil could attach to the Rich Man on account of the fruitfulness of his ground; nor was he altogether to be blamed for devising prudent means of securing his property. He should indeed have remembered, that there were objects enough around him whose want should be supplied from his abundance. It was wrong therefore to think of hoarding up "all his fruits." Perhaps too there was too much anxiety implied in, "What shall I do?"

His offence principally consisted in two things—

***~~1. An idolatrous regard to the world—~~***

He imagined that the world was capable of rendering him happy, and that the enjoyment of it would be permanent for many years, verse 19. But what could be more absurd than such expectations as these? Can affluence secure freedom from pain either of body or of mind? Can it ward off personal afflictions, or compose domestic troubles? Is there more real happiness in palaces, than in the humble cottage? Does not the experience of Solomon attest the reverse of this, [Ecclesiastes 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 2.11), and has not our Lord himself affirmed the same, verse 15.

But if wealth were capable of making us happy, can we secure the continuance of it a single day? Are not all exposed to such calamities as reduced Job to poverty, [Job 1:13-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.13-19). Is not the *instability of riches*declared in the strongest terms? [Proverbs 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.5). Or, if they were more stable, can we prolong our own lives? Has not the voice of Inspiration warned us against any such vain idea, [James 4:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.13-15). And did not the outcome manifest the folly of the Rich Man's expectations "This night," etc. Well then might God address him by that humiliating appellation "You fool!" Well might he deride his fruitless anxieties, and delusive hopes "Whose shall those things be," etc; and justly did he cut him off as a warning to others.

***~~2. An utter disregard of God—~~***

Amidst his prospects of carnal happiness he had no thoughts of God. He addressed his *soul*as though it had no existence beyond the body, nor any capacity superior to the beasts. Had he regarded God, how different would his speech have been! 'Soul, you have hitherto been too solicitous about the body; but now the body, through the bounty of Providence, is amply provided for. From henceforth therefore banish all anxiety about worldly things, and occupy yourself about your spiritual and eternal interests. You shall now be the one object of my care and attention; and the body shall be altogether devoted to your service. *God has provided for you a far richer portion than this world can give*. Now therefore set yourself to serve him with all your faculties and powers. Bless him that he has not summoned you unprepared; and the more time you have lost, exert yourself the more to redeem the moments that may still be allotted you.'

Such an address would have been a just requital of the divine goodness; nor would it ever have brought upon him the judgments experienced. But such reflections were far from his mind. The *bounties of Providence served but to confirm his sensual habits*, and the donor was eclipsed by the very gifts which he bestowed. Surely then the Divine displeasure was not more than adequate to his demerits!

The improvement which our Lord made of this parable leads us to inquire,

***~~II. Whether there be not among ourselves also similar objects of God's displeasure?~~***

***~~A man anxious about the world, and regardless of his soul, is a very common character in every place—~~***

To make provision for ourselves and families is by no means sinful, [1 Timothy 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.8); such prudent care will very well consist with fervent piety, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11); but *our concern about earthly things should not preclude an attention to the soul*. Our first duty is to "lay up treasure in Heaven." By embracing Christ and his promises, we may be "rich in faith;" and by exerting ourselves in his service, we may be "rich in good works." Thus, however poor with respect to this world, we may be "rich towards God." But how few among us make this their chief employment! How languid is our desire after "Christ's unsearchable riches," when compared with our anxiety about the unrighteous mammon! How cheerful, constant, and indefatigable is our labor for the body; while our labor for the soul is at best feeble, occasional, and reluctant!

***~~Every such person resembles the Rich Fool in the parable,~~***

***~~1. In his folly—~~***

He shows that he disregards his soul in comparison with his body, and that the concerns of time appear to him more important than those of eternity. What can exceed the folly of living in such a state? How will such a one, if not stupefied by sin, condemn himself in a dying hour! How will he stand dumbfounded when he shall appear at the tribunal of God!

***~~2. In his punishment—~~***

Every worldling indeed is not cut off without a previous warning: but, whenever he is taken away, he is summoned before God in wrath: he is torn from the idols which he had cherished in his bosom: not the smallest portion of his former comforts is left to him: he is called by an incensed master to give an account of his stewardship, and for his folly is consigned over to everlasting burnings!

***~~We cannot conclude without remarking, how widely different God's sentiments are from those of men—~~***

Men account us wise in proportion as we prosecute our temporal interests, [Psalm 49:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.18), and consider a diligent attention to our eternal welfare as a mark of weakness and folly.

But God forms a very different estimate of human actions: the amassing of wealth is in his eyes like the "loading of oneself with thick clay, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6);" but the laying up treasure in Heaven is the very beginning of wisdom, [Psalm 111:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 111.10).

Let us then study to be like-minded with God; and let us be content to be despised by man, if we may but receive a plaudit from our Judge.

Let us not however carry our disregard of the world to a criminal excess. While we are in the world we should diligently perform the duties of our station, [1 Corinthians 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.24); but our first and greatest care should be to obtain an eternal inheritance. So, whenever our soul shall be required, we shall give it up with joy, and possess our eternal heavenly portion when the vanities of time shall be no more!

***~~#1528~~***

***~~The Privileges of Christ's Flock~~***

***~~[Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)~~***

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

Among the many faculties which exalt man above the brute creation, that of being able to *look into futurity*is by no means the least: but while this in many instances elevates him with hope, in many other instances it depresses him with fear. Hence he is often filled with anxiety to secure the good he hopes for, and to avert the evil which he dreads.

To discountenance this solicitude, and to teach men to live dependent upon God, is the scope of our Lord's discourse before us. And, in the text, he fortifies his own peculiar people against fear and anxiety, by reminding them of the distinguishing favor of God towards them, and the glorious provision he has made for them. To elucidate his words we shall show,

***~~I. What the Lord's people have to fear—~~***

***~~The Lord's people are but "a little flock"—~~***

They once "went astray like sheep that are lost:" but they have been brought home by Christ, the great and good shepherd, and have been united together by him in one fold. They are kept enclosed, as it were, and distinct from the world: they "hear their shepherd's voice and follow him: he "leads them into pastures" which he himself has provided for them: "he administers to all their wants," "strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, and binding up the broken, [Ezekiel 34:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.16)." The lambs he carries in his bosom, and gently leads those who are with young, [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11); and, however they may feed in different pastures, he considers them all as under his peculiar care.

But they are "a little flock." In every age and every place their numbers have been small: they are "the few that find the narrow way." When indeed they shall be all assembled at the last day they will be more than the stars of Heaven or the sands upon the sea-shore for multitude, [Revelation 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9). But before that period they will receive an astonishing increase: the whole earth shall be overspread with them; and that too in successive generations for a thousand years, [Revelation 20:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.4). Until that day of God's power; they will be a little flock when compared with the herds of the ungodly. At present they are only "like the gleanings of the olive-tree, two or three upon the topmost branch, [Isaiah 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 17.6)."

***~~Weak as they are, they have much to fear—~~***

They are not exempt from the common calamities of life. In some respects they are more exposed to them than other people.

They have reason to fear **poverty**. In making provision for themselves, they labor under many disadvantages: they cannot use those means of acquiring wealth which the generality of the world employ without any scruple: they cannot devote all their time, and all their attention to secular engagements: they dare not neglect their soul, even if they could gain the whole world by it. Moreover, they have many in the world who would be glad enough to ruin them; but few, very few, that will exert themselves much to help them forward. On these accounts they may at times be tempted to indulge excessive care, and to harbor fears of poverty.

They have also to dread **sufferings**. The flock of Christ are not only subject to the trials incident to our present state, but are liable to many sufferings peculiar to themselves. They are "as sheep in the midst of wolves:" often among themselves are found some that are "wolves in sheep's clothing:" above all, there is "a roaring lion ever seeking to devour them."

Now Christians are not only weak when opposed to Satan, but also when opposed to the world: they cannot contend with carnal weapons, [2 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4); "The servant of the Lord must not strive." The rebuke given to Peter when fighting for his Master, sufficiently ties their hands from standing in their own defense, [Matthew 26:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.52). Their only weapons are faith and patience: they are to conquer indeed, but it is by suffering even unto death, [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11). Well therefore may they entertain fears respecting these things: for if they are not well armed with the mind that was in Christ, [1 Peter 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.1), they will faint in the day of adversity.

But the exhortation in the text leads us to notice,

***~~II. The antidote provided for them—~~***

***~~God has provided for them a "kingdom"—~~***

God condescends to call himself their Father, and deals with them as his children. He has "prepared for them a kingdom" that is infinitely superior to all the kingdoms of this world. The glory of it cannot be expressed or conceived; nor will the duration of it ever end, [Hebrews 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.28). This he has given to them for their inheritance. It is his determination to invest them with it, and his delight to preserve them for it: His almighty power is ever exercised for this purpose, 1 Peter 1:4-5; yes, his whole heart and soul are engaged in accomplishing his gracious intentions, [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41).

***~~This is a very sufficient antidote to all their fears—~~***

Why should they be afraid of want, who have God for their Father, and a kingdom for their inheritance? Can it be supposed that he who provides for the evil and unthankful, and sustains the ravens that call upon him—will neglect his own children? Will he, who of his good pleasure bestowed upon them all the glory of Heaven, refuse them what is necessary for their present sustenance? Why too should they be afraid of sufferings, since "not a hair of their head can perish," "nor can even a sparrow fall to the ground, without the permission of their Father?" If he sees fit to let loose the enemy for the trial of their faith, will he not support their courage, and make them "more than conquerors?"

Besides, will not their "light and momentary afflictions work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" And will not a kingdom abundantly compensate all their trials? Surely then they should dispel all fears; and commit themselves into the hands of a faithful God, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The flock of Christ—~~***

God would have you without worry, [1 Corinthians 7:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.32). He bids you cast all your care on him who cares for you, [1 Peter 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.7). And shall God be so concerned about relieving your fears—and you not be concerned to honor him? O chide your unbelieving thoughts, and say, Why are you disquieted, O my soul? Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want; Jehovah is my Father, I will not fear! [Psalm 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1); [Psalm 23:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.4). Surely if you reflect on the promises he has made to you, it will be impossible for you ever to be cast down again. "You, my flock," says he, "the flock of my pasture, are men; but I am your God, says the Lord God, [Ezekiel 34:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.31)." "But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior! [Isaiah 43:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.1-3)."

Consider, "If God is for you, who can be against you?" O be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7).

***~~2. The herds of this world—~~***

Shall we address you in the language of the text, "Fear not"? Alas! not only the Scriptures, but also your own consciences, would condemn us. You may possibly have no particular cause to dread either wants or sufferings in this world, though you cannot tell what may befall you before you die. But may you not have to "dwell with everlasting burnings," and want even "a drop of water to cool your tongue" in that world of punishment to which you are hastening? Know assuredly, that your numbers will not screen you from the vengeance of an angry God. If you be not of those who have put themselves under the care of the good shepherd, you will be considered as goats, and be for ever separated from the flock of Christ, [Matthew 25:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.32-33). "He will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left." You will then find to your cost, that not God, but Satan was your father; and that with Satan must be your portion! [John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44). It is not without much regret that God now gives you up to that misery, [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8). But in the last day *he will find as much satisfaction, and be as much glorified, in your destruction, as in the salvation of his elect.*He *now*complains, "You have wearied me with your iniquities:" but *then*he will say, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.24)." Seek then to become the sheep of Christ. Beg him to bring you home to his fold, and to feed you in his pleasant pastures. Thus shall we all become one fold under one shepherd, and feed beside the living fountains of water to all eternity.

***~~#1529~~***

***~~The Watchful Servant~~***

**[Luke 12:35-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.35-37)**

"Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them."

Such is the *uncertainty of life*, and such the *importance of eternal things*, that one would suppose every one should feel the necessity of standing ready for death and judgment, even though no injunctions had been given to us to that effect. But our Lord frequently insisted on that subject, and, in parables as well as in plainer terms, inculcated the duty of continual watchfulness. In the parable before us he mentions,

***~~I. Our duty—~~***

All of us are servants of one common Lord and Master. He is absent, and has commanded all of us to wait for his return:

***~~1. In certain expectation that he will come—~~***

The time of his return is the time of death and judgment. This may be protracted, so that scoffers may say, Where is the promise of his coming, verse 45 with [2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-4). But "he is not slack concerning his promise." He is only exercising his patience and long-suffering toward the ungodly world, [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9); and at the expiration of the time allotted them, he will surely come.

***~~2. In constant readiness to receive him—~~***

This is the more immediate import of the metaphors in the text. It was the custom to wear long garments, which they girded up when they were about to do anything that required activity and exertion. And lights or torches were used at their nuptials, which were usually celebrated in the evening.

We should gather in the desires which too often entangle our feet. "Unite my heart to fear your name," should be our daily prayer. Whatever obstructs us in the way of duty should be put away. Our graces too should be kept in lively exercise; and the one desire of our soul should be so to have everything within us regulated according to our Master's will, that the very instant he shall knock, we may receive him gladly and without fear.

To enforce the practice of this duty our Lord subjoins,

***~~II. Motives to the performance of it—~~***

The motives suggested in the parable are of very different kinds:

***~~1. Encouraging motives—~~***

Thrice does our Lord pronounce the watchful servant "blessed, verse 37, 38, 43." Indeed what can be more blessed than to be prepared to meet our God? To such servants he promises the most exalted honor.

We do not indeed conceive that Jesus will repeat in Heaven any such act of condescension as he once submitted to on earth. The Romans waited on their slaves at the feast of Saturn; but we do not suppose that our Lord alluded to this, because his hearers probably were not acquainted with the fact; but there is no expression of kindness which the most base servant could manifest to the most beloved master, which Jesus will not manifest to his faithful servants in Heaven.

He has prepared the richest banquet for them; and will "feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters, [Revelation 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.17)." And should not this prospect stimulate us to watchfulness? Who would not perform the work when they are promised such wages?

***~~2. Alarming motives—~~***

What indignation would a nobleman feel, if, having ordered his servants to be ready for his reception, he should be kept a long time knocking at the door at midnight, and find not a servant awake, or so much as a light in his house! And will not Jesus be justly indignant, if he shall find such a reception from any one of us? He tells us that he will scourge that servant with such severity as to "cut him asunder," and that he will assign him his portion among his open and avowed enemies, verse 46. Nor will he treat in this manner those only who are riotous and debauched, but those also who neglect to prepare for his arrival, verse 47.

He will, however, make a distinction between the punishment of different servants, proportioning the stripes to the opportunities he had afforded them of knowing and doing his will, verse 48. But the fewest stripes will be dreadful, and the pain of them eternal. How should such a solemn consideration as this awaken us! Surely our hearts must be harder than adamant, if they be not impressed by it.

***~~We may improve this parable,~~***

***~~1. For self-examination—~~***

Peter asked whether it related to the disciples? and our Lord directed them to examine themselves whether they were such servants, verse 41, 42. This is a proper direction for us. Are we then "like" such servants? Let us remember that to such, and such alone, will our Lord's coming be a source of joy: to all others, what a terrible surprise will his coming be! Let us then resolve, with God's grace, to watch! [Habakkuk 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.1). Who would not watch, if he knew that his house would be assaulted by thieves? And shall we not watch to preserve our souls, verse 39, 40. Whatever be our station among men, our duty to Jesus is the same. O that we may all meet his approbation, and receive his blessing!

***~~2. For consolation—~~***

The time of his coming may appear long; but it is only as one or two watches of a single night, verse 38. How soon will this be past! and how sweet will be our rest at the expiration of it! Let us then "exercise ourselves unto godliness." Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober, [1 Thessalonians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.6). Let us, as dear fellow-servants, strive to keep each other awake and lively; and soon shall we hear the wished-for knock. Blessed period! May we all be found ready for it; and welcome our divine Master with songs of gratitude and triumph! [Isaiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.9).

***~~#1530~~***

***~~Punishment Proportioned to Men's Desert~~***

**[Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48)**

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

If there be much spoken in Scripture concerning the necessity of *faith*in Christ—so is there much spoken also concerning the necessity of *obedience*to him. The two are never to be separated: they are indissolubly connected together in God's purpose; and must be also in our attainments: *they are the root and the fruit, or the foundation and the superstructure*. The importance of good works is marked with peculiar force in the words before us; wherein our Lord makes known to us,

***~~I. The ground and measure of our responsibility to God—~~***

***~~The ground of our responsibility to God is, that we are his servants—~~***

Every living man, from the highest to the lowest, is a servant of the Most High God. In this respect there is no difference between the king upon his throne and the beggar on a dunghill. Every one of us has his proper office to perform for him, and every one has that measure of talent which He has seen fit to commit to our care. Had we been independent of him, we would have had no responsibility: but, having received everything from him, and for him—we must, of necessity, give up an account to him of all that we have received, and of all that we have done.

***~~The measure of our responsibility depends on the knowledge we have of our Master's will—~~***

A steward has much communication with his master, and an intimate acquaintance with his will; while a laborer is but very partially and imperfectly informed. Of course, therefore, much more is expected from the steward, than from the laborer.

Just so, it is in God's family. There is much more expected of a Christian, than of a Heathen, who has never received any revelation from God; and much more from one who has the Gospel faithfully administered to him, than from one who has never had its riches unfolded to him. The two different persons will be judged by a different law: the Heathen "being a law unto themselves;" but Christians being judged according to the opportunities of instruction that have been afforded them.

Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that, "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but that now they would have no cloak for their sin [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22)." And on the same ground he warned them, that they would have a more tremendous doom than Tyre and Sidon, yes, than even Sodom and Gomorrah, because they had possessed advantages which the inhabitants of those cities had never known, and had abused privileges which they had never enjoyed, [Luke 10:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.12-14).

Agreeable to this view of our responsibility will be,

***~~II. The rule of God's procedure towards us in the day of judgment—~~***

Under the law, certain offences were to be punished with stripes, which were awarded to malefactors according to their desert, [Deuteronomy 25:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 25.2-3). Now, in a family, every servant ought to know his duty; and, therefore, if he violates it through ignorance, he is deserving of blame: but if he violates it knowingly and willfully, he is, of course, worthy of a more severe reprehension. This, under the law, was particularly marked as a rule whereby to estimate and punish the faults of men: "The priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sins ignorantly, when he sins by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him: and it shall be forgiven him. But the soul that does anything presumptuously, the same reproaches the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people, [Numbers 15:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.27-31)."

***~~His judgment of cases will be most exact—~~***

The advantages of every person for knowing and doing his Master's will, will be distinctly marked, and weighed, as it were, in the most precise balance. We form some idea of this from the offerings which were required by the Law for sins of ignorance. If a priest sinned through ignorance, he was to offer a bullock for his offence; as were also the whole congregation, if they erred: for the advantages possessed by a priest for knowing his duty were so superior to that of others, that an error in him was equal in enormity to the same evil when committed by the whole people of Israel. If a ruler sinned through ignorance, he was to bring a male goat for his offering: but if one of the common people erred, a female goat or lamb would suffice for him, [Leviticus 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.3); [Leviticus 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.13); [Leviticus 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.22); [Leviticus 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.27-28); [Leviticus 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 4.32). Ignorance was a sin in any one of them, and demanded an atonement to be made for it Leviticus, 5:17-19; but its enormity varied according to the means which different persons possessed of acquiring information.

Conformably with this rule will justice be administered in the day of judgment. Ministers have, beyond a doubt, by far the greatest measure of responsibility; and, if they are unfaithful to their office, must receive by far the heaviest condemnation. Magistrates too, inasmuch as their duties call for the greater, and their errors produce the more pernicious effects upon society, must be considered as deeply accountable to God for their conduct, and as involving themselves in a peculiar measure of guilt, if they wrongly execute the trust reposed in them. Indeed, every member of society, according to the extent of his information and his influence, will be responsible to God for the discharge of his appropriate duties; and, in the event of his neglecting to fulfill them, will receive from God a corresponding punishment. Such will be God's mode of judging: and

***~~His sentence, too, will be pronounced in perfect equity—~~***

"Stripes," to whoever administered, will be proportioned, not merely to the offence committed, but to the circumstances under which they were committed. This is the rule of conduct among men. "Unto whoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they expect the more." If we ourselves have committed five talents to a servant, we expect a greater increase than from him to whom we have committed only two. And if there be a servant to whom we have entrusted only one, we expect a suitable improvement even of that one.

This is what God also does: and, while to those who have approved themselves faithful he will give a suitable reward, he will say concerning the unprofitable servant, "Cast him into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth! [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.30)."

***~~Consider now, beloved,~~***

***~~1. What is the application of this passage upon your state—~~***

Not only the heathen world, but thousands of Christians also, possess not the privileges which you enjoy. Not only must you, but God himself also will, bear me witness, that I have not "withheld from you anything that was profitable for you." "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." so that, if you have neglected to fulfill it, you are altogether without excuse.

Call to mind, then, the instructions that have been given to you: and compare with them the state of your souls before God, [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17); Do this, and say whether you have not reason to fear that "stripes" will be your deserved recompense, [Luke 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.15).

***~~2. What is your duty in relation to this passage—~~***

Rise to the occasion. Remember whose you are. You are the Lord's: you are his by creation: you are his by redemption: "you are not in any respect your own: you are bought with a price; and therefore are bound to glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)." Think not that ignorance will excuse you: "Say not before the angel or messenger of the Lord, that it was an error: why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands, [Ecclesiastes 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.6)." Search out, with diligence, the mind of God: lose no opportunity of obtaining a further acquaintance with it: and, whatever you know to be his will, "do it with all your might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

***~~#1531~~***

***~~The Bloody Baptism of Our Lord~~***

***~~[Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50)~~***

"I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how distressed I am until it be accomplished!"

Anyone who understands the true nature of Christianity would suppose that the religion of Jesus must of necessity approve itself to the heart and judgment of every person to whom it is proclaimed; and, above all, that the Founder of it, in whom every species and degree of excellence were combined, must, so far as his character is made known, be an object of universal approbation. But the very reverse of this has proved to be the fact, even as our blessed Lord himself declared it would be.

In the verse before my text, he says, "I am come to send fire on the earth." And in the verse after my text, he puts the question to us, "Suppose that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division;" and such a division, too, as shall separate from each other the nearest and dearest relatives, verse 49, 51-53. As to himself, he states, that he had nothing but the bitterest persecution to expect, so long as he should continue upon earth: and that, in fact, he longed for the period when the storm should burst upon him: "I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how distressed I am until it be accomplished!"

In discoursing on these words, it will be proper for me to show,

***~~I. What a fearful "baptism" awaited him—~~***

In baptism, the whole body was frequently immersed under water: and, in reference to this, our blessed Lord calls his own sufferings "a baptism;" because he was about to be wholly immersed in sorrow, and to become, to an extent that no other person ever did or could become, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, [Isaiah 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3)."

***~~Inconceivably great were the agonies of his body—~~***

We forbear to notice his privations during the course of his ministry: when he, on many occasions, "had nowhere to lay his head." We will notice only his sufferings during the short period of one single day. Follow him, after his seizure by those who were sent to apprehend him, and see how he was treated at the tribunals of his judges. See him arrayed in mock majesty, insulted in every possible way, spit upon, smitten in the face, and the crown of thorns driven into his temples. See him scourged, so that "long and deep furrows were made upon his back." See him fastened to the cross by nails driven through his hands and feet; and the cross, with him suspended on it, descending with such violence into the hole prepared for its reception, that almost all "his bones were dislocated" by the shock, [Psalm 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14). See him left thus in the midst of all imaginable indignities, until he should be relieved by death. Surely "his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men, [Isaiah 52:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14);" so that it may well be asked, "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow? [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12)."

***~~But it was in his soul chiefly that his pains so much exceeded those of all other men—~~***

Who can conceive the agonies he endured in the garden, before his body had been subjected to any suffering from man? Then it was that the cup of affliction was put into his hands by God himself; and he was constrained to drink it even to the very dregs, until, through the agonies of his mind, the blood issued from every pore of his body, and he was, literally as it were, baptized in blood.

Nor can we by any means conceive what his pure and holy *mind*must have endured, while he encountered such "contradiction of sinners against himself, [Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3)," both in the courts of justice and on the cross. Hear him, under the hidings of his Father's face, crying, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" Can any finite imagination conceive of the agonies he then sustained, when the sins of the world were laid upon him, and the debt of the whole human race was exacted at his hands?

But if this baptism was so terrible, what reason can be assigned,

***~~II. Why he so earnestly longed for its accomplishment—~~***

Were it only as a woman longs for the pains which shall soon terminate in the birth of her child, he might well desire their speedy arrival, in order to their speedier termination, [John 16:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.21). But he had far higher reasons for the desire which he expressed. He longed for this baptism,

***~~1. Because by it the Father would be glorified—~~***

This, in particular, operated upon his mind, at the time that he deprecated the bitter cup: "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause I came unto this hour. Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again, [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28)." It was by this event that all the perfections of the Godhead were to be displayed: and therefore our adorable Savior longed for the time when this most desirable object should be consummated.

***~~2. Because by it his own work, so far as it was to be carried on in this world, was to be completed—~~***

Christ had undertaken to "make his soul an offering for sin, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)," and, by death, to expiate the sins of our fallen race. Without this, all his previous labors and sufferings would be in vain. For this, therefore, he longed, that he might be able to say, "It is finished! [John 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.30)."

***~~3. Because by it salvation would be wrought for a ruined world—~~***

This was the great work which Jesus had come to effect: and so intent was he upon it, that, when Peter would have persuaded him to spare himself, he reproved his infatuated disciple in the most indignant terms: "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence unto me! [Matthew 16:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-23)." This was, in fact, "the joy that had been set before him;" in the prospect of which he not only "endured the cross, and despised the shame, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)," but desired both the one and the other; fully "satisfied, if only he might see at last of the travail of his soul" in the happiness and salvation of his redeemed people, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11).

***~~Think now, Brethren,~~***

***~~1. What obligations we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ!~~***

How amazing is it, that ever He should undertake such a work for us; and that he should persevere in it, until it was altogether accomplished! He knew from the beginning all that would come upon him: yet, so far from drawing back, "he went before his timid disciples, and, to their utter amazement, led the way" to the place that was to be the scene of all his sorrows, [Mark 10:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.32-34).

He showed, throughout, that the whole of his sufferings were voluntary. When, by his word, he struck to the ground the whole band that came to apprehend him, he showed, that he could as easily have struck them all dead upon the spot, [John 18:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.4-6), and, in liberating his disciples, he showed that he could with equal ease, if it had pleased him, have liberated himself also, [John 18:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.7-9). He himself tells us, that, if it had pleased him, he might have had "more than twelve legions of angels" to deliver him, [Matthew 26:53-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53-54). But "having loved his own, he loved them to the end;" and drew not back, until by his own obedience unto death, he had "made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness! [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24)."

How "surpassing the knowledge, whether of men or angels, was this unutterable, incomprehensible love!" Seek, my dear Brethren, so far as your feeble capacities will enable you, to comprehend it; so that, being transported with the view of it, "you may be filled with all the fullness of God! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

***~~2. How willingly, if occasion require, we should suffer to any extent for him!~~***

We, his followers, must expect to be conformed to him, [Matthew 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24-25); "drinking of the cup which he drank of, and being baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with, [Mark 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.38-39)." But shall we account this a hard matter? *Has he endured so much for us, and shall we be averse to suffer for him?*

Shall we not rather "rejoice that we are counted worthy" of such an honor, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41), and bless our God for conferring it upon us, [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14). Be prepared then, every one of you, for that "fire" and that "sword" which he has taught you to expect, [Matthew 10:34-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-39); and, to whatever extremities you may be reduced, be ever ready to "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.12-13)."

***~~#1532~~***

***~~Judging What Is Right~~***

***~~[Luke 12:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.57)~~***

"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?

It appears truly wonderful, that any who beheld the miracles of our blessed Lord should be able to resist the evidence which they afforded of his being the true Messiah. Our Lord appealed to them, that they could judge with some degree of certainty about the weather: if they saw a cloud coming from the west (the Mediterranean Sea), they judged it a prognostic of rain: and if the wind blew from the south (the Arabian Desert), they expected that heat would ensue: and in these things their expectations were, for the most part, realized. Yet, though "they could thus discern with some degree of precision, the face of the sky and of the earth, they could not discern the signs of that time, verse 54-56;" which were so clear, that it was scarcely possible to mistake them. Hence he reproved them, in the expostulation before us, "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?

Let me, from these words,

***~~I. Show that man, though of himself he cannot find what is right, can yet form a good judgment of what is right, when once it is fairly proposed for his consideration—~~***

Man, doubtless, could not of himself devise a way in which he might obtain reconciliation with God. This it was not within the reach of any finite capacity to conceive: Nor could he tell how to render acceptable service to his God. The nature and extent of perfect holiness were far beyond the utmost stretch of his imagination.

But when God had revealed a way of salvation for man through the mediation of his only-begotten Son, and through the operation of his blessed Spirit, man, though he could not comprehend such a mystery, must say at once, 'This, if true, is worthy of God, and fully adequate to the necessities of man,' and the more deeply he considered it, the more fully would this conviction flash upon his mind. He would say, 'I can never atone for one sin; but here is a sufficient atonement for the sins of the world. I can never work out a righteousness wherein to appear before God; but here, in the obedience of my incarnate God, I see a perfect righteousness, clothed in which, I may stand before God without spot or blemish. I can never restore to my soul that likeness to God, in which it was at first created; but the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, is able to effect it, and to transform me into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness. I see then, that, supposing this revelation to be from God, there is in the salvation there proposed, a suitableness, and a sufficiency, that commends it to my judgment, and must for ever endear it to my soul.'

In answer to this, that affirmation of Scripture may be adduced, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." But this is not owing to his incapacity to judge, provided he would judge with candor; but to his prejudices and passions, which pervert his judgment: for, of those who believe not, it is said, "The god of this world has blinded their eyes, through the instrumentality of their own prejudices and passions, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4)."

Hence the rejection of the Gospel is always represented as aggravating the guilt of persons, "who would have had, comparatively, no sin, if they had not heard it, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22)." And hence was that solemn warning given, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19)." Light would commend itself to men, if they would but open their eyes to behold it: but they choose to shut their eyes, and therefore are fully responsible for the incapacity which they wantonly and perversely bring upon themselves.

This point being proved, I will now,

***~~II. Address to you the expostulation which is founded on that hypothesis—~~***

"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?"

***~~1. In reference to the sentiments you shall embrace?~~***

You have heard, times without number, the mystery of redemption set before you: and you are no strangers to the absurd ways of salvation proposed by an ignorant and ungodly world. And can you halt between these two opinions? Can you see in man's righteousness anything that can be compared with Christ's perfect righteousness, so as to doubt on which you shall rely for acceptance with God? Compare the two ways of salvation with the Scriptures of truth: Can you doubt which of the two is revealed there? which of the two appears more suited to the justice and holiness of God? which more suited to the necessities of fallen man? "And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" Is it anything short of madness to reject that which God the *Father*has devised, and God the *Son*has wrought, and God the *Holy Spirit*has revealed; and to rest satisfied with the unauthorized surmises of short-sighted man?

***~~2. In reference to the conduct you shall pursue?~~***

You are taught to "give up yourselves as living sacrifices to your God," and to aspire after "perfection" both of heart and life, [2 Corinthians 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.9). On the other hand, the world tells you, that this is all enthusiasm, and that "a mere form of godliness" will suffice. Well, Are you at a loss to judge which is the better way? Let any one tell you, that you may win a race, or gain a victory, by sitting still; or that, if you take one step forward daily and another backward, you will as certainly arrive at your journey's end, as if you were pressing forward daily without any intermission: you would find no difficulty in forming a judgment on those subjects.

How, then, can you, for a moment, suppose lukewarmness to be the proper frame of a Christian? or that, while indulging it, you have any prospect of bearing off the prize of victory, even eternal life? If you can entertain no doubt of what is required for the attainment of temporal things, how can you hesitate in relation to heavenly things?

But turn to the Scriptures: see what they prescribe. See what was the course of the holy men of old, Prophets, Apostles, and the primitive saints: or *think what you will wish you had done, the very moment you open your eyes in the eternal world.*Judge thus; and you cannot hesitate to declare which is right; the advice that urges you to "give yourselves wholly to these things," or that which teaches you to be satisfied with outward forms and partial attainments.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who exercise no judgment at all—~~***

You will bitterly regret this supineness at last.

***~~2. Those who act not in accordance with their judgment—~~***

Your guilt is still more aggravated. "The man who knew his lord's will, and did it not, will be beaten with many stripes." Better would it have been for you never to have heard the Gospel at all. The condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah will be less severe than yours!

***~~#1533~~***

***~~Repentance~~***

***~~[Luke 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.5)~~***

"Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish!"

Twice are these words repeated by our Lord within the space of three verses. And why are they so repeated? Our Lord intended to check that common propensity which we all have to judge others; and to lead us rather to judge ourselves, and to prepare for that awful judgment which shall before long be passed upon ourselves. Some of his hearers, taking occasion from what he had just spoken, respecting the danger of persons delaying to seek reconciliation with God until they were hurried unprepared into his presence, told him of the Galileans, who had been slain by Pilate in the very act of offering their sacrifices, and whose blood had been thereby mingled with their sacrifices.

Our Lord, seeing that they intended to insinuate that this calamity was a judgment from God on account of some enormous wickedness, rectified their error, and taught them to look to themselves instead of judging and condemning others. Such *calamities as these, he observed, fell indiscriminately on the righteous and the wicked*: but there was a day coming when a just discrimination would be made, and the impenitent would be subjected to God's heaviest judgments.

After seeing what stress our blessed Lord laid upon these truths, we cannot be thought uncharitable if we open them to you according to their true import. In order to this we will point out,

***~~I. The nature of repentance—~~***

All are ready to imagine that they know what repentance is; though, in truth, very few have any just notions respecting it. It consists in,

***~~1. A humiliation before God on account of sin—~~***

Though this will not be disputed, few are aware what kind of humiliation is required.

It must be **deep**. It is not a slight superficial sorrow that will suffice. Sin is a dreadful evil, and must be lamented in a way suited to its enormity. Hear in what manner God himself teaches us to deplore the commission of it: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, [James 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8-10)." Such was the compunction felt by the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37); such also was the overwhelming sense of guilt which David felt, [Psalm 38:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.4); [Psalm 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.3); and such in every view was the contrition of Ezra, when he confessed before God his own and his people's iniquities, [Ezra 9:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 9.5-6). This is the humiliation which God requires; and everything that falls short of this will he despise, [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17).

It must be **sincere**. There is a sorrow, like that of Felix or of Judas, arising from convictions of the natural conscience, and ending in despair. But this is in no respect acceptable to God; for it will consist with a love of sin, and a hatred of God's law; and the person who is impressed with it *would prefer a life of sin, provided only he might be assured of escaping the punishment attendant on it.*Our sorrow should resemble that of the Corinthian Church, when they had seen their error, and were humbled for it, with "a sorrow which wrought in them a repentance not to be repented of." "For behold," says the Apostle, "this self-same thing, that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yes, what clearing of yourselves, yes, what indignation, yes, what fear, yes, what vehement desire, yes, what zeal, yes, what revenge! In all things you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter, [2 Corinthians 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10-11)." In them we behold what we consider as eminently characterizing true repentance, namely: *a sincere shame on account of their past conduct, a readiness to justify God in any judgments he should inflict on them, a hatred of their sin, and a determination through grace to walk more circumspectly in future*. Wherever such an experience is, there is the grace of God in truth, [Ezekiel 20:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.43-44).

It must be **abiding**. Transient emotions, of whatever kind they be, can never be regarded as constituting true repentance. *Pharaoh's*confessions, [Exodus 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 9.27); [Exodus 10:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 10.16-17); and *Saul's*[1 Samuel 24:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16-18); [1 Samuel 26:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.21), appeared to indicate a change of heart: but no real change was wrought in them, as is evident from their reverting almost immediately again to their former ways. The generality, if they had attained the humiliation of Ahab, would be ready to account themselves real penitents: but his subsequent conduct showed the insincerity of all his professions, [1 Kings 21:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.27-29); [1 Kings 22:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.27).

Far different from this must our contrition be, if ever we would be accepted of our God: we must retain the impressions which have been made upon us: we must say with Hezekiah, "I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul, [Isaiah 38:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.15);" and, instead of accounting our acceptance with God a reason for putting off this frame of mind, we should regard it rather as a motive to still deeper humiliation. This is the design of God in exercising mercy towards us, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4); and it is the inseparable effect, where that mercy is received aright, [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63).

***~~2. A turning to God in newness of life—~~***

This also will be acknowledged as essential to true repentance. But let not this change be mistaken:

It must be **willing**; not the service of a slave under the influence of fear and dread, but the result of a conviction that sin is an intolerable bondage, and that the service of God is perfect freedom. *Whatever change proceeds not from the heart, is mere hypocrisy*, [Jeremiah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.10); that which characterizes sound conversion, engages all the faculties of the soul, [Jeremiah 24:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 24.7). Thus it is represented by Solomon in his intercessory prayer, [2 Chronicles 6:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 6.37-38); and agreeable to their representation is the direction given to us by the prophet Joel: "Turn even to me with all your heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning [Joel 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.12)."

It must be **progressive**. Conversion is not a work that is accomplished all at once, or ever so perfect in this life, but that we need to be pressing forward for higher attainments. Even Paul himself, towards the close of his life, did "not consider himself as having attained perfection, or apprehended all for which he had himself been apprehended of Christ Jesus: and hence he, like a person in a race, forgot all that was behind, and reached forward for that which was before, [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14)." As the body, though perfect in its parts even in the earliest infancy, grows in every part until it arrives at manhood; so does the new man advance toward "the full measure of the stature of Christ, [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13)."

We should "grow in grace;" and so grow as to make our "profiting to appear." We may not indeed be able to see any actual advance at very short intervals, any more than we can see the advance of the sun every minute: but yet we perceive after a time that the sun has proceeded in its course; and in like manner must our path be like the shining light, which "shines more and more unto the perfect day." We must be "going on unto perfection," and aspire after that which is proposed to us as the proper object of our ambition; namely, "to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

It must be **uniform**. Nothing under Heaven is to divert us from our duty. We are not ever to be influenced by times or circumstances, so as to decline a positive duty through fear of man, or to commit a positive evil for the sake of any earthly advantage. The changes which we see in the conduct of Paul, did not proceed from any deviation from principle, but from a strict adherence to principle. His one object was to save the souls of men: and in things that were non-essential, he accommodated himself to their habits and prejudices, in order to promote his main design: but when he saw that any evil was likely to arise from a particular act of conformity, he was as immoveable as a rock. Thus we may vary our conduct on particular occasions, provided we can appeal to God that we are actuated by a regard for the welfare of others, and not by any personal considerations of our own. But in no instance whatever must this principle be extended so far as to violate any known duty or the dictates of our own conscience: life itself must be of no value in our eyes in comparison with God's honor, and the preservation of a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

It must be **unreserved**. Not only must we labor to undo what we have done amiss, by making restitution of ill-gotten gain, and warning those whom we have led into sin, but *we must strive to mortify sin of every kind in every degree*. Every man has some "sin that more easily besets him," and to which he will be more strongly tempted. This sin is different in different persons; in one, pride; in another, passion; in another, lust; in another, covetousness; in another, ambition and the love of praise: in another, sloth. But, whatever it is, our victory over it is a just criterion of our state. If it leads us captive, we are yet carnal and unrenewed: whatever repentance we may imagine ourselves to have experienced, it has all been ineffectual; we are yet in our sins; we are "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." A right eye must be plucked out, if it causes us to offend; and a right hand must be amputated*. No alternative remains to us, but to part with that—or to suffer the miseries of Hell!*[Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48).

Such is the view which God himself gives us of repentance; and to this alone does he annex any hope of salvation: "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin, [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.30)."

These views of repentance will appear in all their importance, if we consider,

***~~II. The necessity of it—~~***

The word which we translate 'likewise,' may possibly be intended to mark a resemblance between the calamities that awaited the impenitent Jews, and those which had befallen the persons just spoken of in verse 3. But, as we are more interested in what relates to ourselves, we shall rather take a general view of the subject, than attempt a parallel, which would be more curious than useful. We say then, in reference to repentance, that the necessity for it is,

***~~1. Indispensable—~~***

On this, eternal happiness and eternal misery depend; "unless we repent, we must all perish." It is not for us to say what God might do: it is sufficient to know what he will do. He has appointed repentance, as the means of obtaining reconciliation with him: and he has given his own Son to die for us, in order that, the guilt of sin having been expiated by the blood of the cross, he may be able to receive returning sinners in a perfect consistency with the demands of law and justice.

Let this matter be clearly understood. He has not appointed repentance to atone for sin; for if we could shed rivers of tears, they never could wash away the smallest sin. It is the blood of Christ only, that can cleanse from sin: no other fountain ever was, or ever can be, opened for sin and for immorality, but that which issued from the wounds of our adorable Redeemer.

But repentance is necessary in order to prepare our souls for a worthy reception of the Divine mercies, and for a suitable improvement of them. Though therefore it cannot atone for sin, or merit anything at the hands of God, It is indispensably necessary; and, if we do not repent, we must for ever remain in the snare of the devil, and the gates of Heaven will assuredly be closed against us, [2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26). The declaration in our text will certainly be fulfilled: and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it ever fail. Know then, that whatever is implied in the "perishing" of an immortal soul, must be the portion of every impenitent sinner.

***~~2. Universal—~~***

There are authors, of no mean name, who have endeavored to prove that there are some who need not to repent. Because our Lord says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance;" and, that "there is more joy among the angels over one sinner that repents, than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." They imagine, there is a class of persons whose natures are so pure, and their conduct so blameless, as not to have given any occasion for repentance. But the former of these passages relates to those who thought themselves righteous, and who, from a conceit of their being "whole," despised the offered aid of a physician. See [Matthew 9:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.12-13).

It might be interpreted of those who were renewed and made righteous by the Holy Spirit. But the former sense is more agreeable to the context; the latter evidently refers to those who have already been converted to God, and are as sheep living in the fold of Christ. Such persons are considered as secure, while those who are unconverted are in most imminent danger: and, as the recovery of a lost sheep affords more sensible pleasure to its owner, than the possession of a hundred that have not strayed; so the angels are filled with pre-eminent joy at the conversion of one, whom they had considered as in a lost and perishing condition. See [Luke 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.7). If this be interpreted as though it referred to sheep that have never strayed, it must then mean that they have not strayed to such an extent as others.

But the other interpretation is far preferable. That these passages cannot be understood as sanctioning the idea that there are any persons so good as not to need repentance, must be evident to every one who considers what the Scriptures elsewhere speak respecting the universal state of man.

Paul collects a multitude of texts, to prove that "there is none righteous, no not one: that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: and that therefore every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God, [Romans 3:9-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.9-19)." "There is not a man that lives and sins not,"says Solomon. "In many things we offend all," says James. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," says John, "and the truth is not in us."

But where shall we find these persons who need no repentance? Will the advocates for this strange opinion venture to point out a person that possesses this high attainment? If they did, the person himself, unless peculiarly blinded by the devil, would contradict their testimony. But we will suppose this paragon of excellence produced: is he more righteous than Job, of whom God himself testified, that "there was none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil, [Job 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.8)." For argument sake, we will suppose him equal to Job: would he then not need to repent? Hear what Job says of himself, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect—yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands ever so clean—yet shall you plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me, [Job 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20-21); [Job 9:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.30-31)." Let those then who will maintain such an unscriptural sentiment lay to heart that warning of the Almighty, "You say, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with you, because you say, I have not sinned, [Jeremiah 2:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.35)." *If they will not humble themselves now, let them prepare to maintain their own cause against God in the day of judgment.*

We say then that the necessity of repentance is universal: and we entreat every one to apply the declaration to his own soul, "Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish!"

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who think themselves penitents—~~***

What has been spoken on the nature of repentance, may well lead us to examine ourselves, and to fear lest we should deceive our own souls. We entreat you all therefore to bear in mind the particulars which you have heard, and to try yourselves by them. If in anything we appear to have pressed the point too far, let the confession which we always utter at the Lord's supper, be taken in connection with it; and it will be found that we have not uttered a single sentiment which is not contained in that formulary.

And here we cannot but entreat all who are in the habit of frequenting the Lord's table to inquire, whether their repentance be such as, in that prayer, they profess it to be. We are told by our Church what is required of those who come to the Lord's supper, namely, To examine themselves whether they repent truly of their former sins. This examination we now most earnestly recommend; lest in the midst of all "your sacrifices" the wrath of God breaks forth against you and you "perish" in a far more fearful manner than ever the "Galileans" did verse 1.

***~~2. To those who desire to repent—~~***

Delay not one moment to execute your purpose, lest death find you unprepared to meet your God. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would "persuade" you so to turn to him that you may have no reason to dread them. Yet remember not to address yourselves to the work of repentance in your own strength: for it is God alone who can give it to you; and he has "exalted the Lord Jesus to his own right hand on purpose to give you repentance and remission of sins, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31)." If you are tempted to doubt whether he will bestow it upon you, know that "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)."

In proof of that, we need only consider what is implied in the words of our text. When it is said, that "unless we repent we shall all perish," we may fairly take the converse of it to be true, and conclude, that those who do repent shall not perish. O blessed truth, confirmed by thousands of positive declarations! Not to insist on that instructive parable of the Prodigal Son (which yet may be a source of comfort to every contrite soul); let that representation of God's love to penitents, which is given to us by the prophet Jeremiah, be duly considered, and you will need no other encouragement to turn unto God with your whole hearts, [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20). Behold, then, our parting exhortation to every one among you is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7)."

***~~#1534~~***

***~~The Barren Fig-tree~~***

**[Luke 13:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.7-9)**

"Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

*People who can least bear a scrutiny themselves, are apt to pass the severest censures upon others.* But we can never form a just estimate of men's characters from the dispensations of Providence towards them; nor, though our conclusions were more certain, would it befit us to place ourselves on the seat of judgment: we are far more concerned to prepare for the account which we ourselves must render unto God. Such was the advice which our Lord gave to his censorious hearers: he bade them to repent of their own sins instead of presuming to judge others verse 1-5, and enforced his admonition with an appropriate and instructive parable. We shall inquire,

***~~I. In what respects we resemble a barren fig-tree?~~***

Humiliating as the comparison before us is, it is but too just.

***~~We have enjoyed every advantage that could conduce to fruitfulness—~~***

The fig-tree is represented as planted in a vineyard where the soil was good, and every attention was paid to it. Thus we have not been left in the open field of the heathen world: we have been planted in the enclosed vineyard of God's Church. His word and ordinances have been regularly administered to us: we have participated both the stated and occasional labors of his ministers; nor has anything been wanting which could render us fruitful. God may appeal respecting us, as he did respecting his Church of old: "What could I have done more for them than I have done [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4)."

***~~Yet notwithstanding all our advantages, we have hitherto been found barren—~~***

For three successive years was the fig-tree destitute of fruit: and have not we been barren a much longer time? The fruits which God expects are repentance, faith, and obedience, [Matthew 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.8). [Luke 18:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.8) and [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.11); but have we mourned over our sins with deep contrition? Have we fled to Christ as the only refuge and hope of lost sinners? Have we presented ourselves to him as a holy and living sacrifice? Has it been the labor and ambition of our souls to abound in these fruits? Have we not even to this hour been "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ?" Have we not rather, as cumberers of the ground, been harmful to those around us? Have not those who have been planted near us, reason to complain that they have been retarded by us, rather than furthered, in the spiritual life? Surely too many of us deserve the name once given to Israel of old, [Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.1); "Israel is an empty vine, (a barren fig-tree,) that brings forth fruit to itself alone, and none at all to God."

We may justly wonder therefore that we are allowed to occupy our respective places, and inquire,

***~~II. Whence it is that, notwithstanding our unfruitfulness, we have been spared to this time?~~***

***~~We are not spared because our state is inoffensive to God—~~***

The owner of the vineyard noticed all the pains bestowed on the fig-tree, and felt his disappointment greater every successive year: hence he spoke of its unfruitfulness with astonishment and indignation "Behold—Why," etc. convey these ideas very forcibly. And must not the heavenly vine-dresser wonder, that*in the midst of so many advantages we remain unfruitful? And has he not declared that unprofitable servants are objects of his utter abhorrence*, [Matthew 25:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.26); [Matthew 25:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.30).

***~~Much less are we spared because we are better than others—~~***

Doubtless there are degrees of sinfulness and guilt: as among men, so in the sight of God, there are some worse than others. But what good can be in him who answers not one end of his creation? The description given of such persons by the prophet is strictly just, [Ezekiel 15:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 15.2-4). (There is scarcely anything in the creation so worthless as the wood of a barren vine.) And to them may be addressed those humiliating words of Moses; "Not for your sakes have these mercies been given to you; for you are a stiff-necked people, [Deuteronomy 9:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 9.4-6)."

***~~The intercession of Christ is the true reason of God's forbearance towards us—~~***

The fig-tree was spared only at the request of "the vine-dresser." The order given would certainly have been executed, if he had not obtained a respite: and little do we think how often death has had a commission to cut us down. Surely our continued provocations must often have incensed our God against us: but, as in former times, he often revoked his word at the urgent request of his servant Moses, [Exodus 32:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10-11); [Exodus 32:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.14). so beyond a doubt has the Psalmist's declaration been often verified in our great Advocate and Intercessor, "He has stood in the gap, to turn away God's indignation, lest he should destroy us, [Psalm 106:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.23)."

The respite however which is yet prolonged, will not last for ever. Know therefore,

***~~III. What doom we must expect if we still continue barren—~~***

***~~God will deal with every man according to his works. If now at last we begin to bear fruit it will be well—~~***

The vine-dresser undertook to bestow still greater culture on the fig-tree, and intimated that, if his labors should succeed, it would be a source of much satisfaction to him.

But how much more is this true in reference to our souls! At this moment we may consider the trench digging, and the fertilizer applied to us. And what a source of comfort will it be, if these means be blessed with success! The owner of the vineyard, the dresser of it, yes, and the inferior laborers too, will greatly rejoice [Luke 15:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.5-7); [Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10).

And what a blessing will it be to the tree itself! Instead of being cut down as useless, we shall be an ornament to the vineyard; nor will God himself disdain to regale himself with our fruit, [Song of Solomon 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 4.10). In due season, too, we shall be transplanted to that richer vineyard above, and bring forth fruit to God's glory for evermore. Yes, our past unfruitfulness should be no obstruction to our bliss; but joy and honor shall be our everlasting portion.

***~~But if the culture be still in vain, we must be speedily cut down—~~***

The intercessor himself approved of this in reference to the fig-tree: and can anything else be expected by those whom the Gospel does not profit? Can any think that they shall be left to cumber the ground forever? Must not even the patience of God himself be at last exhausted? Shall He not before long definitively say, *Cut them down!*Must we not then be consigned over to everlasting burnings? And must not our Intercessor, yes, our own souls also, approve the sentence? Let every one then attend to the warning given to the antediluvian world, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3);" and let not one among us defer until the morrow, what, if left undone, must involve him in everlasting ruin!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How thankful should we be to our great Advocate and Intercessor!~~***

Many since the last year have been cut off by death. What a mercy should we esteem it that we have been spared! How dreadful must our state have now been if we had been taken unprepared! We should have been irrevocably doomed to dwell with the fallen angels; nor should we ever have heard one more offer of mercy from our offended God. Let us then bless and adore our Lord for this distinguishing favor; and let his love constrain us to turn unto him with our whole hearts, [2 Peter 1:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5-8).

***~~2. How earnest should we be in improving the present moment!~~***

Many are dead who lately seemed as likely to live as ourselves: but, when their time was come, they could not resist the stroke of death; nor can any who are now alive tell how long a respite shall be granted them. It is probable that many of us will be gone before the expiration of this year. Perhaps one in thirty or forty; and whenever the fixed period shall arrive, all intercessions will be in vain. Let us then redeem the time with all earnestness and zeal, and accomplish the great work, before the night comes to terminate our labors.

***~~#1535~~***

***~~The Infirm Woman Cured~~***

***~~[Luke 13:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.15-16)~~***

"The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"

The command to sanctify the Sabbath was given to man in Paradise, and was perpetuated to all generations when it was engraved on stones by God himself, together with the other precepts of the law. But the sanctification of that day consists, not in a mere abstinence from bodily labor, but in a suspension of all temporal cares, and an application of soul to spiritual duties. This appears from the conduct of our Lord himself: he never was more active than on the Sabbath-day; and when censured by superstitious hypocrites, he vindicated himself by showing that *works of necessity and mercy were perfectly compatible with that holy rest which God had enjoined*. To this effect he spoke in the passage before us; in discoursing upon which, we shall consider,

***~~I. The miracle he wrought—~~***

***~~There was in the synagogue a woman much afflicted in body—~~***

By the force of some disorder her whole frame was so crippled, that she was utterly incapable of standing upright. This disorder had been, in some way or other, inflicted on her by Satan. The same wicked spirit who smote Job with boils, and possessed the bodies of many in our Savior's days, had exerted his power over her; and she had been no less than eighteen years in this deplorable condition; yet as she was not ashamed to go to the synagogue on account of her deformity, so neither would she be detained from it by her weakness.

Alas! how many among us absent themselves from the house of God under far less plausible pretexts, notwithstanding our ordinances are so incomparably superior to those which she was privileged to attend.

***~~Our Lord, well knowing her case, afforded her a miraculous relief—~~***

He needed not to have his compassion moved by earnest entreaties. Unsolicited he called her to him, and by the imposition of his hand conveyed an instantaneous cure. Thus he showed how easily he could "destroy the works of the devil, [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8);" and that *neither length of time nor inveteracy of disorder could at all obstruct the efficacy of his word*.

The censure which he incurred on account of this benevolent act, called forth,

***~~II. His vindication of it—~~***

***~~The Ruler of the synagogue expressed his indignation at this exercise of power—~~***

That which in reality hurt his feelings was the popularity of Jesus. He could not endure to see him followed by such multitudes, and confirming his divine mission by such miracles. But, because he could not with the smallest appearance of reason condemn the miracle he had seen, he pretended to be offended at its being wrought on the Sabbath-day. He proceeded to reprove the people for paying so little regard to that holy day; and thus obliquely cast reflections on our Lord himself. *What an evidence of his enmity against Christ, and of his being altogether destitute of compassion to his fellow-creatures!*And how thin the veil under which he endeavored to cover these detestable qualities!

***~~Our Lord, however, vindicated his own conduct in a most unanswerable manner—~~***

He tacitly acknowledged the necessity of sanctifying the Sabbath; but appealed to his hearers, whether such a work as he had performed were any breach of it. If they universally considered themselves at liberty to loose an ox or a donkey from the stall in order to give it water on the Sabbath-day, how much more justifiable was he in loosing the far sorer bands of a rational being, yes, of a daughter of Abraham, on that day; more especially, when it was Satan himself who had bound her; when she had been no less than eighteen years in that state; and when he had effected her cure simply by a touch of his hand. Such was our Lord's argument; and it flashed conviction upon every mind. Thus, while the ruler's hypocrisy was detected, and the adversaries, who had sided with him, were put to shame, our Savior's character rose in the estimation of all the people.

And this speaks loudly to us, if we will attentively consider,

***~~III. The reflections suggested by it—~~***

***~~1. What blindness and hypocrisy are there in the human heart!~~***

Every one sees in an instant how deservedly our Lord reproached the Ruler for his hypocrisy; and we are ready to suppose that we would never have indulged so vile a disposition. But there is nothing more common than the very spirit which he manifested. He condemned people for seeking the healing of their bodies on the Sabbath-day.

And are there none who are offended at men for seeking the salvation of their souls on the week-day? I know that these will plead a regard for order, and for the institutions of man; but the Ruler had a still stronger plea, namely, a regard for the Sabbath, and the express commandments of God. Yet, whatever they may think, neither the one nor the other are upright before God. The objections of both originate in the same evil disposition, a want of regard for the Savior's honor and for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. On this account the Judge of the living and dead called him a hypocrite. By what name will he call you, when you shall stand before him at his tribunal?

Is not the soul of as much value as the body? and are we not as much justified in promoting its welfare on a week-day, or on the Sabbath evening, as a diseased person is in seeking relief for the body upon the Sabbath-day? Let us all then acknowledge the evil of our own hearts; and give God the glory if we are in any measure freed from the prejudices by which so many in every age and place are blinded.

***~~2. How desirable is it to embrace every opportunity of waiting upon God!~~***

The woman broke through every difficulty that she might honor the public institutions of religion. And was she not well repaid for her trouble at last? Surely the restoration of her body to health and strength was a blessing that would have abundantly compensated for still greater toil than she ever endured.

And have none among us received a still richer recompense? If your bodily disorders have not been removed, have you received grace both to bear and improve them? Have none of you been delivered from the bonds in which Satan held your souls? Has not your guilt been removed, and the corruption of your hearts been in some measure healed?

Let this encourage all to wait upon God. Let it make you fearful of yielding to any excuses, lest you be absent from the ordinances at the very time that Jesus shall manifest his presence there: worldly business, worldly pleasure, dinner company, and such like engagements, will ill repay you for the loss of spiritual and eternal good. Say not, 'I can serve God as well at home;' for it is not the means we use, but the blessing of God upon them that renders them effectual to our benefit; and God's blessing cannot be expected, if we seek it not in the way of his appointment. And if proud and envious hypocrites condemn you, regard it not. Your Savior himself will vindicate your conduct, to your honor, and to their confusion.

***~~3. With what comfortable hope may we look to Jesus under all our troubles!~~***

It is alike easy to him to save from bodily or spiritual disorders. A touch of his hand, or word of his mouth, will convey the blessing we desire. Are we then laboring under any affliction of mind or body? Are we, like David, "bowed down greatly, and do we go mourning all the day long, [Psalm 38:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.6)." Behold, it is the Savior's office to bind up that which is broken, to heal that which is sick, and to raise up those who are bowed down, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1). [Psalm 146:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.8). Nor can we doubt but that he, who received the application of this afflicted woman, will come at our entreaty, and impart the aid which we implore. Let us all, then, direct our eyes unto him, and may we all become monuments of his power and grace, for his mercy's sake! Amen.

***~~#1536~~***

***~~The Last First, and the First Last~~***

***~~[Luke 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.30)~~***

"Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

This is a declaration frequently made by our blessed Lord; and therefore we may be sure it contains some very important truths that deserve our deepest attention. Persons who are addicted to theological systems will put an exceedingly different construction upon these words; some pressing them to an unwarrantable extent; while others limit them, so as to enervate and destroy all their force. We, however, desire to treat them, not in a proud and controversial spirit, but in a spirit of humility and love; equally avoiding both extremes, and endeavoring to deduce from them such practical instruction as our Lord himself intended them to convey. With this view, I will,

***~~I. Show to what an extent they have been realized—~~***

That God acts as a Sovereign in the communication of good, we have no doubt; but not so in the distribution of evil. Therefore, while we see in this passage a clear evidence of electing love, we cannot for a moment admit that there is any ground for the doctrine of absolute reprobation. If the last are made first, it is by the grace of God. But if the first are made last, it is altogether by their own fault. This will appear in every part of the subject; while I show that the truth here conveyed has been realized in all ages, and is yet daily realized among men, in whatever light they be viewed.

***~~1. View "those who are first" in their national privileges—~~***

The Jews were God's peculiar people. Never did any nation under Heaven enjoy such privileges as they. They, for the space of two thousand years, were "the first" in everything that related to eternal life. As for the poor benighted Gentiles, they were left in darkness and the shadow of death, given over to follow their own evil ways, and to be led captive by the devil at his will.

But in the apostolic age the case was altogether changed; the Jews being cast off from God; and the Gentiles being admitted into covenant with him, and made partakers of far higher privileges than were ever accorded to the Jews. There is, in fact, scarcely any comparison between the mercies given to us, and those of which God's ancient people partook: so true is it, that "we, who once were last, are now first; and the Jews, who were once first, are last." In fact, that is now fulfilled which our blessed Lord foretold, that multitudes now "come to him from every quarter of the globe, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven; while the children of the kingdom, the poor infatuated Jews, are cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, [Matthew 8:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11-12)."

***~~2. View "those who are first" in their civil station—~~***

The rich and great and noble appear to have immense advantages for Heaven, because they can employ a great portion of their time in heavenly pursuits; while the poor, who are necessitated to earn their bread by some earthly occupation, have but little time to spare for the acquisition of divine knowledge. But "the rich, for the most part, are too wise in their own conceit, [Proverbs 28:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.11)" to suspect their own ignorance, or to submit to divine teaching: and they have such a fullness and sufficiency of earthly gratifications, that they are not disposed to seek after happiness in things above.

The poor, on the contrary, are more willing to receive instruction, and to listen to advice in relation to spiritual and eternal riches. This has been the case in all ages. In our Lord's day, it was said, "Have any of the Rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him?" But "the common people heard him gladly." In like manner, Paul says of those in his day, "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called." And in every age, James informs us, "God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom, [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)."

***~~3. View "those who are first" in their intellectual attainments—~~***

Certainly knowledge, beyond everything else, elevates man above his fellows. Yet, when his aspect is viewed in reference to religion, it is frequently found rather hostile, than friendly, to heavenly pursuits. Hence it is said, in a fore-cited passage, that "not many wise men after the flesh are called; but, instead of them, the foolish, the weak, and the base, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28)." Indeed, God has said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world, [1 Corinthians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.19-20)."

The truth is, that the wisdom of this world is so deeply impregnated with pride, that it cannot submit to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). "The wisdom of God is foolishness with man: and the wisdom of man is foolishness with God, 1 Corinthians 1:21-25;" and *the only way for any man to become truly wise, is to become a fool in his own estimation, and to receive with child-like simplicity every word that God has spoken*,1 Corinthians 3:18-20.

And if any think it hard that such contempt should be poured on human wisdom, let him know that our blessed Savior saw nothing in it but ground for praise and thanksgiving: "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight, [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)."

***~~4. View "those who are first" in their moral habits—~~***

These, above all, we should suppose to be favorable to the reception of the Gospel. But really experience is far from confirming this sentiment: for the Scribes and Pharisees were externally moral; yet the tax collectors and harlots entered into the kingdom of Heaven before them [Matthew 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.31)." "The former justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John; whereas the latter rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him, [Luke 7:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.29-30)."

As the fruit of these different dispositions, the Pharisee, who thought himself righteous, and despised others, went from the Divine presence with all his guilt upon him, while the self-condemning Publican was justified from all his sins, [Luke 18:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.10-14).

Where can we find a more impious character than Manasseh? or one more bitter than Saul? or one in a more desperate condition than the dying thief? Yet all these found mercy from the Lord, that "in them, as in the chief of sinners, God might be the more glorified, [1 Timothy 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15-16)."

Thus it frequently is at this day: "where sin has abounded, grace much more abounds; that as sin has reigned unto death, so grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 5:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20-21)."

Thus, in all these respects, are our Lord's words fully verified; not only the *Gentiles*occupying a higher station than God's ancient people; but the *poor*, the *illiterate*, and the *depraved*being raised to a participation of God's kingdom and glory, to a far greater extent than the rich, the learned, and the moral. So true is it still, as in former ages, that "God raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory, 1 Samuel 2:8."

Having endeavored to elucidate the words before us, I will now,

***~~II. Suggest the improvement which, in my judgment the subject calls for—~~***

I cannot conceive any subject more calculated,

***~~1. To put down presumption—~~***

Let any person be as elevated as he will in national privileges, or civil station, or intellectual attainments, or moral habits, yes, I will add also, in religious experience; let him be the admiration of all around him; yet will I say, that if he is lifted up with pride, he will fall into the condemnation of the devil; and, *from being the first in human estimation, he will become the last in Divine acceptance*.

Look at Demas: so eminent was he in the estimation of Paul, that twice did the Apostle join him with Luke, in his salutations to the saints: "Greet Lucas and Demas." Yet we find this man at last forsaking the way of godliness, and turning back to a state of utter worldliness and carnality, [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10).

And where shall we find a Church in which such instances have not occurred, to the disgrace of true religion, and to the grief of all who held fast their profession?

I say then to every soul of man, however advanced in piety he may appear, "Be not high-minded, but fear." Yes, though he may have attained the eminence of Paul himself, I will bid him "keep his body under control, and bring it into subjection; lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away! [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)."

***~~2. To prevent despair—~~***

Let not anyone tell me that his guilt is too great to be forgiven, or his depravity too inveterate to be subdued. I will grant that the disadvantages under which a man may labor may be so great as to render his conversion, in all human appearance, impossible; yet I will say, that though he be the last—yet may he become the first!

What cannot He do, who formed the universe out of nothing, and reduced the chaos to the order and beauty in which we behold it? If only we remember who it is that is engaged in our behalf, we shall never despond. For what is there that God cannot effect? If there ever was anything to be despaired of, it was, that Jesus should be restored to life after he had been committed to the tomb. But did not "the stone which the builders had disallowed become the head-stone of the corner?" And shall not He who was "crucified through weakness" "put all his enemies under his feet?"

Then I say, let no man entertain desponding thoughts, as though he were beyond the reach of mercy: for however "far off we may be from God, we may be brought near by the blood of Christ." Only let us call on Him "who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were;" and let us, "against hope, believe in hope, [Romans 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.17-18);" and, like Abraham, we shall be made "friends of God," yes, and sit down, at last, with Abraham in the kingdom of our God, for ever and ever!

***~~#1537~~***

***~~The Man Cured of the Dropsy~~***

***~~[Luke 14:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.1-4)~~***

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

Although the Gospel requires those who embrace it to become dead to the world, it does not forbid us to maintain occasional and friendly fellowship with unenlightened men. Paul rectifies a mistake which had arisen in the Church upon this very subject, and tells us that to renounce all connection with the ungodly, would be to exclude ourselves from the world altogether, [1 Corinthians 5:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.9-10). But peculiar caution is necessary when we are in their company; and the most effectual way of counteracting their pernicious influence is, to labor to do them good. This we may learn from our Lord's own example in the history before us. He was in a Pharisee's house, where he had been invited to dinner; and his conduct there will afford us many useful lessons. We shall consider,

***~~I. The character of those who entertained our Lord—~~***

The lawyers and Pharisees professed a high regard for religion, and on this occasion appeared to act a very friendly part. But they soon manifested,

***~~1. Their inveterate malignity—~~***

Under the mask of friendship they were traitors at heart. They "watched" our Lord's words and actions, not with a desire to receive instruction, but with a determination to seize an opportunity of traducing his character and destroying his life. Such was their employment on the Sabbath-day, when they should have been more particularly in the exercise of all holy affections. Such was their return to our Lord for all his condescension and kindness.*And such was their conduct while they wished to be esteemed as patterns of sanctity and virtue*.

Would to God that this spirit had died with them! But are there none in this day like-minded with them? Do none, who appear friendly in their outward conduct, occupy themselves with watching the words and actions of a godly person, marking any frailty with critical acuteness, and criticizing it afterwards with malicious pleasure? Do none even on the Sabbath-day attend the public ministration of the word, with this captious disposition, disdaining to receive instruction, and seeking only to find some expressions which they may report and ridicule?

***~~2. Their utter want of candor—~~***

Our Lord put a simple question to them, "in answer" to what he knew to be passing in their minds. There was but one answer that could possibly be given to it. But they knew that a just reply would subvert their own superstitious notions, and justify our Lord in a conduct which they wished to condemn. Unable to maintain the sentiments they professed, and unwilling to acknowledge their error, they held their peace. What a base and disingenuous spirit was this! Yet, how many resemble them!

If we address the consciences of some, how backward are they to acknowledge the plainest and most unquestionable truths! If they be compelled to give their assent to any position which militates against their practice, they show, in the very mode of assenting, a fixed determination to resist every inference that may be drawn from their concession. If invited to consider calmly the most important and most obvious truths, they will "shun the light lest their deeds should be reproved." *They have no ears to hear, no eyes to see anything that condemns themselves; but are all eye, and all ear, when a religious person is to be exposed*. Nor is this character found only among the profane; but often among those who affect a great regard for religion, and sometimes even among those, whose office calls them to propagate and defend it. The lawyers, as well as Pharisees, are mentioned in the text.

Difficult as the path of Jesus was hereby rendered, he was enabled to preserve himself unblamably in

***~~II. His conduct towards them—~~***

In every part of our Lord's demeanor he was a pattern of all perfection. On this occasion in particular we cannot but admire,

***~~1. His wisdom—~~***

Conscious as he was of the rectitude of his ways, he was nevertheless concerned to obviate the prejudices which existed in the minds of others. On this account he put the question respecting the sanctification of the Sabbath, before he proceeded to work the miracle; and again, after he had wrought it, appealed to them respecting their own practice. Thus, though he did not convert, he at least confounded them, and prevented those clamors which they would otherwise have raised against him. Worthy is this example to be followed by all who embrace the Gospel.

We cannot extirpate the prejudices of men; but we should blunt the edge of them. We should condescend to reason even on the most obvious truths, and to defend, by argument, the most blameless conduct. We should endeavor to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion" against us, [2 Corinthians 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.12). We should "show out of a good conduct our works with meekness of wisdom, [James 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13);" and prevent, as much as possible, "our good from being evil spoken of, [Romans 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.16)."

***~~2. His fortitude—~~***

When he saw their obstinacy, he was not deterred from doing his Father's will. He would do good, even at the peril of his life, rather than lose the opportunity afforded him. He therefore healed the man of his dropsy, and dismissed him, lest he also should be exposed to their murderous rage.

Thus should we act, whenever we are opposed in the way of duty. *While we labor to disarm our adversaries by a meek and gentle behavior, we must not fear them*. We should say, like Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" We should be ready to face any danger and suffer any extremity rather than decline from the path which God, in his word or providence, has marked out for us.

***~~Three cautions naturally arise from this subject:~~***

***~~1. Let us be on our guard when in the company of the ungodly—~~***

The more friendly the world appears, the more are we in danger of being ensnared by them. *While they continue carnal, they cannot but retain a rooted enmity against spiritual things*. Though, therefore, considerations of honor, interest, or kinship, may restrain their anger, they will "watch for our halting, [Jeremiah 20:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 20.10);" they will seek to find some matter of offence in us, that they may seem the more justified in following their own ways, [Psalm 35:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.19-21); [Psalm 35:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.25). Let us then be doubly on our guard when in their company. Let us "keep our lips as with a bridle," and pray to God to "lead us because of our observers.

***~~2. Let us study that not even our good may be evil spoken of—~~***

A thing may be good in itself, and yet be imprudent as to the manner in which it is carried into execution. The primitive Christians were at liberty respecting the eating of foods offered to idols; yet in the use of their liberty they might offend their weaker brethren, and sin against Christ. *It is a great part of Christian prudence to discern persons, times, and circumstances, that we may be able to adapt ourselves to the exigencies of the occasion*. Let this, then, be our endeavor; let us "walk in wisdom toward them that are without," and endeavor to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well doing, [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15)."

***~~3. Let us proceed without fear in the way of duty—~~***

Daniel and the Hebrew Youths would not conform to the sinful practices of others, notwithstanding they were threatened by the tyrants of their day. Our Lord also was continually opposed by the most malignant adversaries; yet both he and they chose to persist in what was right at the risk of their lives, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience. Thus let us be ready to live or die for God. Let us willingly "endure the contradiction of sinners against ourselves." Let us put away that "fear of man which brings a snare, [Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25);" and continue "steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~#1538~~***

***~~The Ambitious Guests~~***

**[Luke 14:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.7-10)**

"When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests."

The Christian is not prohibited from occasionally joining in carnal festivity; but he should carefully watch his own spirit and conduct when he ventures upon such dangerous ground, and should improve his fellowship with worldly company for the spiritual edification of himself and others.

Our blessed Lord was sometimes present at feasts; but his conversation at those seasons was always pious and instructive. The things which occurred never failed to furnish him with abundant matter for useful observation. Having noticed at a wedding the indecent ambition of the guests, he challenged their conduct in the parable before us—

***~~I. The principle here inculcated—~~***

Our Lord did not intend these words merely as a maxim for the regulating of our conduct in one particular, but as a parable that should be applied to the whole of our deportment in social life. The scope of the text, whether as originally delivered by Solomon, or as quoted and applied by our Lord, is to recommend humility. Compare [Proverbs 25:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 25.6-7) with verse 11. But to enter fully into its meaning, we must analyze, as it were, the principle here inculcated; which implies,

***~~1. A deep sense of our own unworthiness—~~***

If we stand high in our own estimation, we cannot but expect a degree of homage from others, and shall be ready to claim precedence among our equals; but if we have a humiliating sense of our own extreme vileness, we shall readily concede pre-eminence to others, and take the lowest place, as that which properly belongs to us. Such a disposition cannot but spring from self-knowledge; nor can it fail of operating in this manner, [Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3).

***~~2. An utter contempt of worldly distinctions—~~***

While we "love that honor which comes from man," we cannot but aspire after it, when it comes within our reach. But we are taught to be dead, yes crucified to the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14); and, this once obtained, we shall despise the baubles that are so much the objects of rivalship and contention.

***~~3. A readiness to give honor to whom honor is due—~~***

Though religion teaches us an indifference to man's applause, it does not warrant us to level the established orders of society. God requires us to "honor those that are in authority," as well as to serve and honor him, [Romans 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.7). While therefore a sense of duty will keep us from coveting human distinctions for ourselves, it will induce us cheerfully to pay to others the tribute due to their rank and station.

***~~Excellent however as this principle is, it needs to be limited by prudence, and exercised with care—~~***

Though this principle can never operate to too great an extent, it may exert itself in a very absurd manner. There are certain decencies in society that ought not to be violated, as would be the case if the great and noble should literally take the lowest place among those who are of very inferior rank: besides, *it is possible that we may be actuated by pride, while we thus put on an appearance of humility*. We need therefore take heed both to our hearts and ways, that in obeying this precept we act with sincerity and discretion.

Having endeavored to explain the principle, we shall point out,

***~~II. Its importance in human life—~~***

Humility is to the graces of a Christian, what holiness is to the attributes of the Deity—the beauty and perfection of them all!

***~~1. Humility conduces in the highest degree to the comfort of mankind—~~***

Nothing tends more to the happiness of our own minds. What a source of vexation and anguish is pride! With what *envy*are they beheld, to whom precedence has been given! What *indignation*do they excite, who overlook our superior claims! This idea will be fully understood by those who have ever mixed in public assemblies. A slight, whether real or supposed, will often fill us with rancor as much as the most serious injury could have done. But let humility possess our minds, and this source of uneasiness is destroyed. If we be willing to give honor to others, and be indifferent to it ourselves, and especially if we count ourselves unworthy of it, we shall feel no pain at seeing others preferred before us.

Nor does anything more tend to the peace and comfort of society. What is it but pride that makes every neighborhood a scene of contention! [James 3:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-16). What is it but pride that creates such factions in a state? What is it but pride that involves nations in war and desolation? [James 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.1). *Even the Church of God itself is often torn and distracted by this fatal principle*. Let humility once gain a proper ascendant in the hearts of men, and universal harmony will reign. Surely the importance of this principle cannot be too highly rated, or expressed in too energetic terms.

***~~2. Humility is that whereby men most eminently adorn the Gospel—~~***

The avowed scope of the Gospel is to improve the principles and practice of mankind; and *those who receive the truth are expected to excel in everything that is amiable and praiseworthy*. How unseemly did the ambition of the sons of Zebedee appear, [Matthew 20:20-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.20-28). *The ungodly themselves do not hesitate to pronounce them hypocrites who, while they profess religion, are under the dominion of pride and ambition.*

On the other hand, humility irresistibly commends itself to all. Who does not admire the concessions made by Abraham to his nephew Lot, [Genesis 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 13.9). Who does not adore the condescension of our Lord in washing his disciples' feet, [John 13:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.4-5). Even those who are most elated with pride themselves, are constrained to applaud humility in others; and though nothing but the grace of God can induce any to embrace the Gospel, *a suitable deportment in its professors will often silence the cavils, and disarm the prejudices, of those who ignorantly reject it*, [1 Peter 2:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.13-15).

***~~This subject will naturally lead us to contemplate,~~***

***~~1. The folly of sin—~~***

There is really as much folly, as there is sinfulness, in sin. In how many instances do men attain by integrity and humility, what others in vain seek for by dishonesty and arrogance! This is well illustrated in the parable before us. *Let us then simply endeavor to glorify God by a holy conduct, and leave our temporal interests to his all-wise disposal*.

***~~2. The excellence of religion—~~***

*Religion does not merely impose rules for our conduct towards God, but should regulate every disposition of our minds, and every action of our lives.* Where it has its full influence, it gives a polish which is but poorly mimicked by the refinements of modern politeness: it will not indeed convert a clown into a courtier; but it will teach every one to act as becomes his station. Let us then exhibit in our respective spheres that simplicity of mind and manners, that, while it adorns the Gospel, shall disarm the malice of our enemies, and, if possible, conciliate their esteem, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10), [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5).

***~~#1539~~***

***~~Liberality to the Poor Recommended~~***

**[Luke 14:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.12-14)**

"Then Jesus said to his host: When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Ii is a thing yet to be learned in the religious world, that there is no part of Christian duty beneath the attention of those who hear the Gospel, or those who preach it. The Church is a building which must be carried forward until its final completion. Its foundation must be laid; but in laying it, we must not imagine that it is of any use of itself; it is laid, in order to have a superstructure raised upon it; and the builder must advance in his work until he has "brought forth the top-stone." Paul would "not be always laying the foundation of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but would go on unto perfection." Thus we would do: and whatever our blessed Lord inculcated on his disciples, that would we also inculcate on all who profess to belong to him.

Our Lord, dining at the house of a Pharisee on a Sabbath-day, set himself to correct some evils which he saw peculiarly predominant there. Among the company he perceived a spirit of ambition and self-preference; which he endeavored to correct by a parable suited to the occasion. It should seem, too, that the feast was sumptuous, or, at least, that none but rich people were invited to it: he therefore, to counteract the pride which such a banquet fostered and displayed, told them what kind of feasts he approved; and that, instead of laying out their money in sumptuous entertainments, he would have them rather to spend their money in making provision for the poor. In conformity with this precept, we shall endeavor to set before you some rules and reasons for a proper expenditure of our money.

***~~I. Some rules—~~***

Two are mentioned in our text;

***~~1. Do not waste your money in giving entertainments to the rich—~~***

We must not construe this so strictly as to decline all friendly fellowship with our richer relatives or neighbors, or to refuse them the rights of hospitality; for kindness is due to them as well as to the poor, and doubtless may occasionally be exercised towards them in the way apparently forbidden in our text. But we must not seek wealthy company, or spend money unnecessarily in entertaining them. Hospitality indeed is good; and we should not "be forgetful to entertain strangers; because some have thereby entertained angels unaware, [Hebrews 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.2)."

But still this is essentially different from *a fondness for parade and feasting*; which, however vindicated as necessary to form connections for one's children, and to promote social fellowship, and to keep up one's station in the world—is little else than sensuality and pride! To feast the rich will involve us in great expense, which of course must lessen our means of doing good to the poor. Therefore, though occasions may occur wherein we may not improperly exercise hospitality towards them, we must not find our pleasure in such feasts, nor should we devote to them any considerable portion of our income. The generality of persons account the keeping of rich company, and the being able to entertain them in a splendid way, as the chief use of wealth; and they launch out into these kinds of expenses the very instant they have received enough money as will enable them so to do. But we must show ourselves of a different spirit, and not sanction by our example any such evil practices.

***~~2. Devote your money rather to the relieving and comforting of the poor—~~***

God has ordained that there shall always be poor among his people, in order that graces of every kind may be called forth into exercise among them, [Deuteronomy 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 15.11). These poor therefore are to be the special objects of our care; but especially those among them whom God in his providence has visited with afflictions which incapacitate them for labor; "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." The talents which God has committed to our care, are to be laid out with a particular reference to *them*. Under the law, it was appointed that every person should lay up the tithe of his increase every third year, for the express purpose of helping "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, in the courts of the Lord," that all of them together might "eat and be satisfied, [Deuteronomy 14:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 14.28-29)." In a similar manner, we also are enjoined at stated periods to "lay by us in store as God has prospered us, [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.2);" and even those who are forced to work with their hands for their own maintenance, are yet required to labor the more, in order "that they may have to give to him that needs, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28)."

It is true, that there is no need of throwing down all distinctions in society, and feasting with the poor on terms of strict equality; but to make them happy, should be an object near our hearts. Indeed it is, if I may so express myself, a godlike employment: for God himself has shown a marked respect for the poor, in that "he has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)."

He has set us an example of this very thing in the dispensation of his Gospel. In the verses following the text, he represents himself as having made a great feast, and invited many: and, because his invitations are slighted by the rich, the mirthful, the worldly, he says to his servants, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Yes, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled verse 16-23." Thus, as by his Gospel he makes them preeminently partakers of his spiritual blessings, so we also, as far as our circumstances will admit of it, should make them partakers of our temporal blessings.

This, though felt and acknowledged by us as a duty, needs yet to be enforced upon us, in order that it may be reduced to practice; we will therefore proceed to enforce it by,

***~~II. Some reasons—~~***

The two things which men aim at in the disposal of their money, are pleasure and advantage: and it is from an idea that these are more to be obtained by feasting with the rich, that people almost universally prefer that method of expending their property. But we do not hesitate to say, that the mode of expending it which has been recommended to you has greatly the superiority in point,

***~~I. Of gratification—~~***

We do not deny but that there is considerable pleasure in entertaining one's friends: we must however assert, that that pleasure is carnal in its nature, and transient in its duration. But *the delight which arises from providing for the poor, and making them happy, is solid, refined, permanent*. If it were nothing more than the thought of contributing *to lessen the miseries to which human nature is exposed*, it would be very delightful; the very sensation of sympathy is exquisite: but the thought of being God's messenger to them for good, and the hope that "by our means thanksgivings will abound to God, [2 Corinthians 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.12)," and that our heavenly Parent will be adored and magnified through us; this is a sensation which even an angel might envy.

We can easily conceive the comfort which an indigent fellow-creature feels in being relieved from his distress; yet is that not to be compared with the happiness excited in the bosom of him who administers the relief: for One who cannot err has told us, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." The comfort of the relieved continues only while the pressure of his calamity is removed: but the donor may look back at the distance of many years, and feel again the same delights which he experienced at the first communication of his alms.

Among the many considerations which tend to perpetuate his comfort, one in particular is, that, *in administering to the poor, he has ministered to the Lord Jesus Christ himself*. Christ has condescended to identify himself with his poor members, and to regard everything which is done for them, *not only as done for him, but as done personally to him*,[Matthew 25:35-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-40). O what a thought is this to one who feels his obligations to Christ! I suppose there is scarcely an enlightened Christian in the universe, who has not envied the women who had the privilege of "ministering to him of their substance, [Luke 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.3);" but the man who delights in comforting the poor, occupies their province; and is privileged to view, as it were, the very person of Christ in all such guests. Truly, he can have but little love for his Savior who does not feel more delight in this thought, than in all the gratifications which high company and a well-spread table ever afforded.

***~~2. Of benefit—~~***

All the benefit that the feasting of the rich brings with it, is, the getting a good name among them, and the being invited to their feasts in return. The latter of these is what our Lord rather teaches us to avoid, inasmuch as it cancels the obligation we have conferred, and makes our expenditure in vain, verse 12. It is to be lamented, however, that among his reputed followers, the being invited to feasts is no great object of dread. But the man who feasts the poor, can look for no recompense from them; (except indeed in their blessings and their prayers;) but from God, he shall be recompensed a hundred-fold.

The communications of grace and peace shall abound towards him whose delight is in doing good: "having watered others he shall be watered himself." This is declared by an inspired writer in the most express and most eloquent terms: "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. [Isaiah 58:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7-11)." What a glorious recompense is this!

But there is a time coming when his recompense shall be complete. "At the resurrection of the just," God will acknowledge all that has been done for the poor as "a loan lent to him; and he will repay it" all with interest, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17), [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19).

We take for granted indeed that the person is a believer in Christ, and that, in relieving the poor, he does it for Christ's sake, and not from an idea of establishing a righteousness of his own. This must certainly be supposed; else the liberality, however great, will only turn to the confusion of him who exercises it, and prove a foundation of sand to him who builds upon it. But, supposing the person's state to be right before God in other respects, and his motives to be pure in the distribution of his alms, we do not hesitate to say that he treasures up a rich reward for himself in the day that Christ shall judge the world; insomuch that only a cup of cold water that has been given by him from right principles, "shall never lose its reward."

Jehovah himself in that day shall make a feast, a marriage-feast for his Son: and to it will he invite those who for his sake provided for the poor. There shall they sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and be regaled with all the delights of Paradise. Well is it said in reference to that day, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb [Revelation 19:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7-9)." Yes; in the words of our text it is said, "You shall be blessed;" but how blessed the liberal man shall be, none but God himself can fully declare.

***~~We sum up the whole in two words of advice—~~***

***~~1. Accept God's invitations to you—~~***

You have already heard that in his Gospel he has spread a feast, even "a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6)." The persons whom he invites are, not "the rich who think themselves in need of nothing, but the wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18)." As his servants, we invite you all; and declare to you, that the poorer you are, and the more unworthy in your own apprehensions, the more acceptable you will be at his table. Need I say how much God will be delighted to see his table furnished with guests? Hear his own invitation: hear how he pleads with you, and entreats you to accept it; hear how he expatiates on the delicacies he has provided for your feast, [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2). He sets before you nothing less than the body and blood of his dear Son; which Christ himself says, is "food indeed, and drink indeed, [John 6:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.55)." Think of this, and let nothing for a moment delay your coming.

***~~2. Conform your invitations to his—~~***

We are enjoined to "be followers (imitators) of God as dear children:" "to be merciful as he is merciful, and perfect as he is perfect." Behold then at what expense he has made provision for our needy souls! "he has not spared even his own Son, but has delivered him up for us all." *Let not us then grudge any sacrifice for the comfort and support of our afflicted brethren*. Economy should be practiced, in order to liberality; and self-denial, in order to an enlarging of our ability to supply the wants of others. You well "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich—yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich, [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9). "Let the same mind be in you that was in him." Let the happiness of others be your happiness, and *the luxury of doing good*be your daily food. Thus will everything you have be sanctified to you, [Luke 11:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.41); and the blessing of God will rest upon you . . .  
in life, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10),  
in death, [Psalm 41:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1), and  
to all eternity! [Luke 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.9).

***~~#1540~~***

***~~The Great Supper~~***

***~~[Luke 14:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.16-18)~~***

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'"

Persons who are very ignorant of true religion, often express a desire to participate its blessings. Wherever we find them thus open to instruction, we should endeavor to teach them the way of God more perfectly. This was the uniform practice of our blessed Savior. See [John 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.15); [John 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.21); [John 6:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.34-35). The person who addressed our Lord, seemed but little acquainted with the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, verse 15. Our Lord took occasion to rectify his apprehensions on that subject, and to show him, under the idea of a feast, that the provisions of his Gospel would be slighted by that whole nation.

The parable in this view declares the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles; but it is also applicable to nominal Christians in all ages. Its import, as it respects us, may be comprised in two observations:

***~~I. God invites us to partake of the blessings of his Gospel—~~***

***~~The Gospel dispensation is fitly compared to a sumptuous feast—~~***

In feasts everything is set forth that can gratify the palate. Thus in the Gospel there is everything that can administer delight or vigor to the soul. There is *pardon*for all the sins that we have ever committed. There is *strength*against all the corruptions or temptations that can assail us. There is *communion*with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. There are *foretastes*and pledges of the heavenly glory. On these accounts the prophets also spoke of it under the image of a feast, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6).

***~~God sends his servants to invite men to his gospel feast—~~***

The first persons that were invited to it were the Jews. Upon their rejection of the Gospel the Gentiles were to be called in, [Romans 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.11). The invitation to us Gentiles is still continued: the servants of God are sent to hasten your tardy steps. We are to inform you, that "all things are now ready, and, as it were, waiting for you. The blood, which is to cleanse you, is already shed. The Spirit, that is to renew you, is already poured out. God is reconciled and is ready to receive you: nothing is wanting, but that you come and fill the place prepared for you; we are moreover to urge you to accept the invitation: we are to take, as it were, no denial from you.

It is the force of persuasion which we are to use; not the force of penal statutes: such compulsion as that, is as abhorrent from reason, as it is from religion. Such is God's desire to bless us with all spiritual blessings.

***~~Nor are any, however base or abandoned, to be overlooked—~~***

We are to go and call people of all ranks and descriptions. We are to search out the persons most distant, most obscure, most impious. This seems intimated by the streets and lanes of the city, and the highways and hedges outside the city; we are to bring them in, however laboring under infirmities of body, or distress of soul. "The poor, the halt," etc. may refer to their spiritual as well as temporal condition. God will have his "house to be filled:" nor are his servants to desist from their labors until that work be accomplished; and, thanks be to God! "there is yet room" for more!

One would suppose that such rich blessings would meet with universal acceptance: but,

***~~II. People ungratefully reject God's invitations with vain and frivolous excuses—~~***

***~~Few find any inclination to accept the invitations of the Gospel—~~***

The Jews in their day withstood the solicitation of the Apostles: so now, all, however importuned, "begin to make excuse." Some plead the importance of their earthly business; others urge that they must attend to the concerns of their families. *Thus earthly cares, or carnal ease and pleasure, stupefy the world*.

***~~God will resent the contempt poured upon his mercy—~~***

The pleas urged in the parable are not sinful in themselves: but nothing, however good, should keep us from attending to the one thing needful. Every concern becomes sinful, when it is inordinately followed. Hence God declares that he is "angry" with those who offer such pleas. He threatens that they shall never partake of the feast they so despise, nor even "taste" of his bounty to all eternity. "None," however attentive to their worldly callings, shall find an exception in their favor. How awful is their state, who are never to taste of pardon, peace, or glory! May we never bring upon ourselves so terrible a doom!

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are averse to accept the invitations of the Gospel—~~***

Every one is forward to offer pleas in extenuation of his guilt; and, while some civilly beg to be excused, others roughly answer, "I will not come." But whatever be our plea, and in what way soever it be offered, God will discern its fallacy. Indeed the very persons who refuse our invitations, know that their excuses will avail nothing in the day of judgment "I can not," and "I will not," will then be found to have meant the same thing. What folly, then, is it to offer that in justification of ourselves now, which will serve only to condemn us in the last day! Let us no longer cherish such fatal delusions. We may give to the world and our family a due portion of our care; but let nothing keep us from the gospel feast which God has prepared.

***~~2. Those who are afraid to come at the bidding of their Lord—~~***

Many are kept from Christ by an apprehension of their own unworthiness. They think it would be presumption in them to accept his invitation: but it is not possible to describe more clearly the persons invited. If we be poor, or halt, or maimed, or blind—we are expressly called; nor is our distance or unworthiness any ground of exclusion. Let none then yield to unbelieving fears.

We would "compel" you all, by every argument we can devise. Reflect on the greatness of the host that invites you, and the excellence of the feast he sets before you. Consider the blessedness of partaking of it, and the certain consequences of absenting yourselves from it. Let all come, and "delight their souls with fatness." The command given to the Church is yet addressed to you, "Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers!" [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1).

***~~#1541~~***

***~~The Foolish Builder and the Inconsiderate King~~***

**[Luke 14:28-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.28-33)**

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

Mankind in general, *when they want us to engage in their pursuits, are apt to exaggerate the advantages, and to hide as much as possible the difficulties, that will attend the adoption of their plans.*

Our Lord, on the contrary, declared plainly to his followers, the conflicts they must engage in, and the losses they must sustain, if they would be his disciples. In the verses preceding the text, he states in very strong language the only terms on which he would admit them into his family; and, having cautioned them by two familiar parables against engaging rashly in his service, he again reminds them, that they must forsake all, if they will follow him. To elucidate the passage, we shall consider,

***~~I. The scope of the parables—~~***

Both of them have the same general tendency to *guard men against a hasty and inconsiderate profession of religion*. But,

***~~The former points out the folly of such conduct—~~***

Everyone sees that a builder, who, through neglecting to count the cost, should be compelled to leave his structure unfinished, would be universally derided as a foolish man. But incomparably greater is his folly who begins to follow Christ, and afterwards by his apostasy shows, that he had never duly considered how much was requisite to make us Christians indeed. The very people who have turned him aside, will be the first to deride him for his instability; and while they reverence him who maintains a firm and consistent conduct, they will despise in their hearts the man who proves unfaithful to his God. The saints indeed will not "mock him," because they know what a "fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God;" but they will pity him, as a poor foolish creature, who has "left off to behave himself wisely," and reduced himself by his folly to the extreme misery. Nor is it long before he himself will see his folly in its true light; when he will behold afar off that Heaven upon which he turned his back, and inherit that dreadful portion which he so thoughtlessly preferred.

***~~The latter leads us rather to contemplate the danger of such conduct—~~***

A king who should inconsiderately plunge himself into a war with an enemy that was too powerful for him, would expose both his kingdom and his life to the most imminent danger.

Thus it is also with a man who commences a warfare with sin and Satan without knowing how he shall make head against them: for as a hasty profession of religion exposes him to self-deception, so a hasty dereliction of it will subject him to the heavier condemnation. It is true that all must perish who do not enlist under the banner of Christ; but it is equally true that cowardly soldiers, who forsake their standard, are far more guilty than if they had never been enrolled upon this list: "It is better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from it:" their end is worse than their beginning; and they shall be punished with more stripes, in proportion to the advantages they have enjoyed, and the professions they have made.

These parables will afford still further instruction, if we consider,

***~~II. Our Lord's improvement of them—~~***

Our Lord did not amuse his hearers with speculative truths, but brought them home to their conscience by a direct and personal application—

***~~1. We must count the cost—~~***

Here the cost is plainly told us that "We must forsake all;" that is, forsake all comparatively in respect of affection, and absolutely, whenever it stands in competition with our duty: nor, if we refuse these terms, can we be his disciples. We are not indeed to cast away our possessions for no reason; but so to withdraw our affections from them, as to be willing to resign them whenever the retaining of them shall be inconsistent with our allegiance to him. This we ought to weigh in our minds, and to consider whether the benefits of religion be sufficient to counterbalance its trials. We must be ready to part with our reputation, our interest, our carnal ease and pleasures, our friends, our liberty, our life.

But in return for them we may expect, "the honor that comes of God," "the riches of Christ that are unsearchable," "the pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore." We shall even now possess that "peace which passes all understanding," together with the liberty of the sons of God; and soon we shall inherit eternal life and glory in his immediate presence. We should dispassionately balance these against each other, that we may see which scale preponderates, and whether the pearl be worth the price demanded for it.

***~~2. We must pay it without reluctance—~~***

All have not the same trials to endure; but all will meet with some which shall prove a test of their sincerity. Whenever, or in whatever degree, we are tried, we must show our decided purpose, our fixed determination. We must "hate" (that is, we must esteem as worthless and of no account) our nearest friends, our dearest interests, yes, our very lives, when they stand in competition with our duty to God. Nothing must tempt us to draw back from him. If once we draw the sword, we must throw away the scabbard. If we slay not our spiritual enemies, they will destroy us. We must "endure to the end if ever we would be saved."

On the other hand, we have every encouragement to "war a good warfare;" for, if we go forth in the strength of the Lord God, we shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

***~~We conclude with an address to,~~***

***~~1. The inconsiderate Christian—~~***

Men promise at their baptism that they will renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; but never afterwards think of fulfilling so much as one of their engagements. *They expect wages without work, and victory without a conflict.*But such conduct will expose them to "everlasting shame and contempt," and will ultimately involve them in irrecoverable ruin. Let it be remembered then, that, *as it is no easy matter to be a Christian, so nothing but real Christianity will be of any avail*. If we accept not salvation on the terms which God has prescribed, it is in vain to hope that we shall ever participate in the blessings it affords.

***~~2. The mistaken Christian—~~***

It is too common to imagine that we can retain the friendship of the world, and preserve at the same time our fidelity to Christ. But we are plainly warned to the contrary. Our Lord elsewhere assures us, that we cannot serve God and mammon. And James affirms the friendship of the world to be enmity with God; and that whoever desires to be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the enemy of God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Would to God that this were more considered! But many, because they make some sacrifices, suppose that they come up to the terms which Christianity demands, when in fact, *they retain their bosom lusts, and sacrifice only those sins which their change of situation, or their more advanced age, has rendered less importunate*. Instead of being jealous of their own sincerity, they are over-confident: and instead of being filled with shame and sorrow on account of their defects, they are ever pleading for indulgence, and laboring to persuade themselves that they come up to the mark prescribed to them in the Scriptures. Let such persons beware, lest, while they value themselves on their more liberal and enlarged sentiments, they deceive their own souls, and be found wanting in the day of final retribution. *If when Christ calls them to forsake all, they are striving to forsake as little as possible—they have good reason to fear that they have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus*.

***~~3. The timid Christian—~~***

Many, when the hour of trial comes, are ready to faint and draw back. But what are our trials when compared with those of thousands who have gone before us? We have not yet resisted unto blood. Besides, have we not been told repeatedly, that if we have no cross we must not expect a crown? Let us recollect, that, "if we turn back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in us;" and, that *the whole world will be a poor exchange for an immortal soul*. "As soldiers we must expect to endure hardness." Let us then "be strong and very courageous:" let us "fight the good fight, and act like men:" and let us reflect for our encouragement, that, though our "enemies may encompass us like bees," "there are more for us than against us."

***~~4. The steadfast Christian—~~***

Have any ever found cause to regret that they endured the cross? Will any complain that they ever suffered too much for Christ? Has not a rich reward been invariably enjoyed by them in the testimony of their own conscience, and in the consolations of God's Spirit? Yes, whatever they have suffered, have they not had "a hundredfold more given them even in this present life; and will they not have life everlasting also in the world to come?" Surely the intrepid Christian has "chosen the good part; nor shall it ever be taken away from him." Go on then, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "See that you lose not the things that you have wrought; but that you receive a full reward." "Be faithful unto death, and God shall give you a crown of life."

***~~#1542~~***

***~~The Lost Sheep~~***

***~~[Luke 15:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.3-7)~~***

"Then Jesus told them this parable: Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

There is nothing more injurious to ourselves or others than *prejudice*. While it operates as a bar to our own improvement, it leads us to put a perverse construction on everything we see or hear: it will extract matter for censure even from the most innocent or laudable actions.

The malignity of it cannot be seen in more striking colors than in the conduct of the Pharisees towards our Lord: he conversed familiarly with the most abandoned sinners for their good; such condescension ought to have been regarded with the highest approbation, but it provoked only the spleen and malice of the haughty Pharisees. Our Lord however took the best method of silencing their murmurs. By appealing to their own consciences he forced them to condemn themselves.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The parable—~~***

The scope of the parable is not so much to mark the resemblance between a sinner and a lost sheep, as between our Lord and a faithful shepherd—

The parallel between them will appear, if we consider,

***~~1. A shepherd's concern for his sheep when lost—~~***

Though a man had ninety-nine other sheep, he would not be indifferent about the loss of one. If he missed one, he would immediately begin to make inquiries about it: he would not expect it ever to trace back its steps unto the fold again. If he gained news respecting it, he would go in quest of it, leaving the rest in the pasture. He would seek diligently until he found it: and the more it was in danger of being devoured by wolves, the more assiduously would he exert himself for its recovery.

Such is the conduct of our Lord towards our ruined race. We all are fitly compared to sheep wandering from the fold, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6). Never do we think of "returning to the great Shepherd of our souls," though every moment we are exposed to the assaults of a devouring lion, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

Our compassionate Shepherd came from Heaven itself to seek us. His solicitude for us is well delineated by an inspired prophet, [Ezekiel 34:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.11-16). He moreover sends his servants into every part of the world. By his word and Spirit he endeavors to apprehend us: nor does he account any labor too great, if he may but succeed at last. Though he has myriads in his fold above, he cannot endure to lose one; nor, while so much as one of his sheep is wandering from him, will he relax his endeavors to bring it back.

***~~2. His joy over it when recovered—~~***

When a shepherd has found his lost sheep, he seizes it with his crook: the more it struggles for liberty, the more he labors to secure it: rather than lose it again, he brings it back upon his shoulders: exulting in his success, he announces it to every one he meets, and receives with pleasure the congratulations of his friends.

Do we not here also see the *benevolence*of our blessed Lord? Having apprehended us by his grace, he overcomes our resistance: having prospered in his labor, he regrets not the pains he has bestowed: he is satisfied with all the travail of his soul when he beholds us safe. With joy he brings us to the society of his peculiar people, and calls on them also to rejoice together with him. This is beautifully described by the pen of inspiration, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17), and gloriously realized in every quarter of the globe.

Our Lord himself elucidates the parable by suggesting,

***~~II. The improvement of it—~~***

***~~Nothing could be more pertinent than this parable to the occasion on which it was delivered—~~***

"Repentance" is properly represented as the return of the soul to God.

While we remain impenitent we are afar off from God: we wander further and further from the path of life. But in repentance we are made to see our guilt and danger: we gladly embrace the mercy offered to us in the Gospel, and give up ourselves to God to be governed by his will, and be saved by his grace.

***~~Hence the repentance of sinners becomes a matter of joy to all the holy angels—~~***

Whether the glorified saints take any interest in our welfare we know not; but we are sure that angels are not unconcerned spectators of us, [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14); they greatly delight both in God's glory, and our good. The perseverance of established saints is a permanent source of happiness to them: but the conversion of a sinner fills them with more abundant joy.

The more desperate his condition had appeared, the more exquisite is the delight they feel in his recovery. So Jacob on account of his son Joseph, [Genesis 45:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 45.26-28); [Genesis 46:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 46.30). Even "in the presence of God" himself they are attracted by this sight: not all the glory of the godhead can divert their attention from it; nor all the felicity of Heaven indispose them for rejoicing in it. However strange this idea may seem, it is truly scriptural. Nothing can be plainer than the affirmation in the text. See also verse 10; nor can we doubt it without greatly dishonoring the character of Christ "The faithful witness." [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5).

***~~In this view the repentance of men should excite joy in us also—~~***

This, though not expressed, is evidently implied in the words of our text. The chief scope of the parable was to reprove the envious spirit of the Pharisees. And what could so forcibly condemn it as the contrast here exhibited? Does Christ rejoice at the return of a sinner, and shall we repine? Do all the angels in Heaven exult at such a sight, and shall we make it an occasion of offence? Are we then indeed better judges of what is good than they? or do we well to oppose what they so desire to see accomplished? Let us take heed lest we be found at last to have "fought against God:" let us rather encourage others both by precept and example: let us adore our Savior for his condescension and grace toward sinful man; and let that, which was urged as an objection against him, be the greatest commendation of him to our souls, verse 2.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

While some are turning unto God, others are striving to draw them back. But let those, who have scoffed at religion, confess their folly; and those, who have discouraged repentance in others, repent of their iniquity.

On the other hand, let the humble penitent go to God with confidence. Who can read this parable and doubt Christ's willingness to save him? If there were but one penitent among us all, the angels would rejoice over him. How then would they shout for joy if we all began to implore mercy! Our past iniquities would rather enhance than diminish their glorying on our account. Not because they take pleasure in sin, but because *they regard us as brands plucked out of the fire*.

Let not those therefore, whose cases appear most hopeless, despond: let them forbear to trample any longer on the Savior's love: let it be their ambition to give joy to those whom they have so often grieved. Thus also shall they join in the general chorus at the last day, and ascribe the "glory to him who loved them, and gave himself for them! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."

***~~#1543~~***

***~~The Lost Silver Coin~~***

***~~[Luke 15:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.8-10)~~***

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

There is nothing in which we are so deeply interested, as the extent and riches of the Redeemer's grace. His familiar converse with tax collectors and sinners affords the richest encouragement to us, when we are bowed down under a sense of guilt. His condescension towards them indeed excited only disgust in the proud Pharisees; but Jesus was the more careful to vindicate the conduct which they condemned, and in repeated parables assured them, that it was the joy of his heart to save even the vilest of mankind.

The parable of the lost piece of money very nearly resembles that which precedes it: nevertheless it suggests many useful thoughts which are appropriate to itself. Its import may be unfolded under the following observations:

***~~I. There are none so worthless but the Lord is deeply concerned about them—~~***

***~~The woman expressed very great concern about the piece of silver she had lost—~~***

The piece of silver was but of small value in itself; yet she felt much solicitude about it in her mind; nor was she content to lose it, notwithstanding she had several others left.

***~~Thus is our blessed Lord concerned about the souls of men—~~***

In some points of view the soul is undoubtedly of great value, nor can the whole world itself be put in competition with it: but to Jesus the souls of men are not of the smallest importance. If they were righteous, their goodness could not extend to him, [Psalm 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.2); they could never profit him, nor add to his happiness, [Job 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.2-3).

If all that ever existed were annihilated, God would suffer no loss: if men were necessary to his honor or happiness, he could create millions in an instant. But the souls of men are inexpressibly vile and guilty in his sight: until they have been washed in his blood, they are exposed to his wrath and indignation; nor is it anything but his marvelous compassion that preserves them from everlasting destruction, [Lamentations 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.22).

Nevertheless he is greatly concerned about the loss even of one among them. Though he has myriads that are now safely lodged in his hands, he cannot rest satisfied about those that are yet in danger. By the prophets he expressed his deep regret for those that were in a perishing condition, [Jeremiah 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.27), [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8); in the days of his flesh he wept over the most abandoned of the human race, [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41); and to this hour he is grieved at the thought of any dying in their sins, 2 Peter 3:9.

Nor is his concern for them expressed only by inactive wishes:

***~~II. There are no exertions, however great, which he will not use for their recovery—~~***

***~~The woman is represented as doing everything which could be devised for the recovery of her lost piece of silver—~~***

She instantly lighted a candle, that she might search in every dark corner of her house. She moreover swept her house, that, if it were hid under any dirt or rubbish, she might find it: nor did she relax her endeavors until they were crowned with success. What more could she have done if the lost money had been of the greatest value?

***~~Thus our Lord uses all possible means for the recovery of lost souls—~~***

Were we lying in utter darkness? he has brought the light of his Gospel: this light he has sent into all the darkest corners of the earth, [Isaiah 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.2). In the days of his flesh he used all diligence himself: since that time he has commissioned his servants to go into all the world. He has enjoined them to "be instant in their work, in season and out of season:" he has even threatened that, if one perish through their negligence, he will "require his blood at their hands:" he has moreover sent his Spirit to aid them in their endeavors, and to search the very inmost recesses of our benighted souls. However fruitless their exertions may have been, they are never to give up any for lost, as long as there is a possibility of their being found. May he not well say, "What could I have done more for them than I have done? [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4)." If he appeals to us about the conduct of a woman who had lost her money, how much more may he appeal to us respecting his own conduct?

When his labors are successful, then his kindness appears in its brightest colors—

***~~III. There is nothing so pleasing to him as the recovery of one from his lost state—~~***

***~~The woman is represented as inviting all her neighbors to rejoice with her—~~***

The cause of her joy seems very inadequate to such expressions of it: but women, being conversant mainly with domestic matters, are apt to be affected with small things. Her whole property also being small, she may be supposed to feel the more at the recovery of that part which had been in danger; and the circumstance of its having been lost would render the subsequent possession of it more pleasant.

***~~Thus our Lord and all the angels in Heaven rejoice over a repenting sinner—~~***

This is the main scope of this parable, as well as of that which precedes, and that which follows it; hence it is strongly marked in every one of the parables: we must not therefore omit it, or think the repetition of it tedious.

Our Lord well knew the misery of a soul that perishes in sin: the angels too are doubtless well informed on this subject. Were it never to be sensible of its loss, there would be the less reason to regret it: but, if not put among the treasures of God, it must be for over miserable.

To prevent this is the joy and delight of our blessed Savior. For this he came down from Heaven, assumed our nature, and died upon the cross. For this he is dispensing to us continually his word and Spirit. The effecting of this is the consummation of all his wishes and purposes: hence, however inadequate a cause of joy this may seem, he accounts it his highest honor and happiness. He is "satisfied with the travail of his soul," when one that was lost is found; and all the angels that surround his throne rejoice together with him. As all Hell is moved with triumph at the condemnation of one sinner, [Isaiah 14:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.9-10), so does all Heaven exult in the elevation of one to happiness and glory.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How strange is it that men should have so little regard to their own souls!~~***

The generality of men are as careless of their souls as if they were of no value. But should we disregard that which the Son of God seeks with so much concern? Should we be so indifferent about our own happiness, when all the angels of Heaven would shout for joy at the prospect of it? Let us never be satisfied with being immersed in darkness and wickedness. Let us rather be ambitious to have a place among the Lord's treasures. And let us be thankful that, though lost, we are not yet gone beyond recovery.

***~~2. How blessed are the effects of a faithful administration of the Gospel!~~***

It is by the Gospel that Jesus comes to search for lost sinners. If indeed it be delivered only in a general way, it will scarcely ever prove effectual for men's salvation: it is only the close application of the word, that will ever reach the conscience. But, when faithfully preached, and accompanied with God's Spirit, it will find out men in their darkest recesses. O that God may now make use of it to sweep away the rubbish under which we have laid: and that we may be found of him, before he "sweep us away with the broom of destruction!"

***~~3. What reason have we to adore the condescension and grace of Christ!~~***

If he did not seek for us, we would lie in our sins to all eternity, and when found at the last day, that word would be verified in us, [Jeremiah 6:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.30). What kindness then is it in him to use such means for our recovery! Let us never forget what obligations we owe to him. Let us acknowledge ourselves his, that he may do with us as he will. He will then keep us that we may not fall from him any more, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28), [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5), and will lodge us safely in his coffers amidst the treasures he has been collecting from the foundation of the world! [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10), [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14), [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17).

***~~#1544~~***

***~~Angels Rejoice over Penitents~~***

***~~[Luke 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.10)~~***

"I say unto you: There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

However paradoxical the observation may appear, *man is really an enemy to his own happiness*. He loves sin, which is the source of all misery: and hates repentance, which is the only remedy for that misery. He cannot persuade himself that that which he professes to seek after, is to be found in penitence and self-denial. But, had we no other proof of the blessedness which attaches to true repentance, it were sufficient to know, upon the authority of Jesus Christ himself, that the very angels in Heaven rejoice over any sinner in whom this good work is begun.

We will take occasion from our text to show you,

***~~I. What is that repentance which causes joy in Heaven—~~***

It is not every kind or degree of repentance that produces this effect: none but that which is effectual to the sinner's salvation, will excite these benevolent emotions in the bosoms of angels. It consists in,

***~~1. Sorrow for sin—~~***

This is absolutely necessary. *If sin be not our burden and grief, we have not the smallest spark of true repentance*. There is a great difference indeed between the sorrow of the world, and that which is caused by a sense of sin. But in this there must be an agreement, that sin must lie as a heavy burden upon the soul; and under a sense of it we must experience brokenness of heart and contrition: for it is "the broken and contrite heart, and that only, which God will not despise."

***~~2. Hatred of sin—~~***

Many will be sorry that they have brought themselves to shame and trouble, when they have no aversion to the sins which they have committed. Many also will hate sin in others, when they do not hate it in themselves. When David, for instance, was totally unhumbled for his own enormous wickedness, he was so indignant against the man who was supposed to have taken the poor man's lamb, that he would have had him put to death for his offence. And Jehu was extremely zealous against the idolatry of Ahab, while yet he was very indulgent to his own crimes. But if we are truly penitent, we shall hate our own sins more than any; and shall be *disposed to seek their utter destruction, even though they be dear as a right hand, or a right eye*. It will teach us to say with David, "I hate *every*false way."

***~~3. A loathing of oneself on account of sin—~~***

Sin is a disorder that defiles and debases the whole soul. That is no exaggerated description of the prophet, who says of us, that "from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Now we may conceive in a measure, what loathing we would feel if we saw a person full of sores and ulcers—and such is the disgust which a view of our own souls should create within us. This is repeatedly mentioned as the experience of the Lord's people, even after God is pacified towards them, [Ezekiel 20:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.43); [Ezekiel 16:63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.63); and every one who really knows himself, will exclaim with Job, "Behold, I am vile, I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes! [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6)."

***~~4. A fleeing to Christ from the guilt and power of sin—~~***

As long as we retain a hope of healing our own souls, we have not that "repentance which is unto life:" we evidently have low thoughts of sin, both of its guilt and power. We must be brought to an utter despair of washing away our sin by our tears, or of breaking its force by our resolutions. We must see that there is no hope for us but in the atoning blood of Christ, and in his all-sufficient grace: and we must rely simply on him, saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

The importance of this to man is obvious: but it is not so clear,

***~~II. Why the angels take so deep an interest in it—~~***

Whether the spirits of departed men have any knowledge of what passes in this world, may well be doubted: but it is certain that the angels are intimately connected with mankind, and take a lively interest in the things relating to them. They view the return of a penitent with peculiar delight;

***~~1. Because it tends so greatly to the benefit of man—~~***

The angels cannot but be apprised of the misery into which the once happy, but now apostate, spirits are fallen: and they know that a participation of that misery is reserved for impenitent sinners. Whether they feel any pity towards a sinner in the midst of his rebellion, we cannot say: but we apprehend that they rather look upon him with holy indignation, and stand ready to execute any judgment that God may see fit to inflict upon him, [Acts 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.23). But their benevolent hearts rejoice, if they see anyone fleeing from the impending judgments, and setting his face in good earnest towards the heavenly kingdom. They congratulate him in their minds, and exult in the thought of having him to all eternity as a partner of their felicities.

***~~2. Because it opens fresh scope for the exercise of their own love—~~***

It is essential to benevolence to delight in opportunities of exerting itself for the benefit of the objects beloved. Now, as soon as ever a sinner repents and becomes an "heir of salvation, angels are sent forth to minister unto him." "They encamp round about him" for the purpose. If they behold him turning out of the path of duty, as Balaam; or lingering in a place of danger, as Lot; or in any respect likely to "dash his foot against a stone;" they will lend him their friendly aid in such a way as shall tend most to his eternal welfare.

*How*they act upon us, we are not told: but of their agency there can be no doubt. It is highly probable that they are busily employed in counteracting the devices of those wicked spirits, who are ever seeking to destroy us. In a dying hour, we are sure they encompass the bed of a true penitent, and watch for the dismissal of his spirit from its house of clay, in order that they may bear it in triumph to the realms of bliss. Nor are their labors of love then terminated: for in the day of judgment they will gather together the saints wherever they were scattered, in order to present them before the throne of their Judge, and expedite the final completion of their happiness. These offices being so congenial with their own feelings, they rejoice in everything that affords them an opportunity to perform them.

***~~3. Because it brings the highest glory to God—~~***

The contemplation of the Divine glory is doubtless the highest source of their felicity. Now in the return of a penitent sinner they behold all the persons of the Godhead shining forth in the brightest splendor. They behold all the *wisdom*and *power*and *grace*of the Father glorified, whenever his eternal counsels respecting the salvation of a soul are accomplished. They behold the infinite virtue of the Son's atonement, whenever the iniquities of a repenting prodigal are blotted out. They behold the wonderful "love of the Holy Spirit, and the invincible efficacy of his operations, when a creature, once bearing the impress of Satan himself, is transformed into the image of his God. When they had first a clear prospect of these things at the incarnation of our Lord, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest;" and every fresh manifestation of this mercy has filled them with additional and increasing joy.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To the impenitent—~~***

Think what painful reflections your state suggests to those benevolent spirits: 'There are those infatuated people, laden with sins; on the brink of eternity; followed with overtures of mercy; assured that if they die in their present state they must perish forever; and yet continuing impenitent! What a miracle of mercy it is that God does not instantly cut them down, and assign them the portion they deserve!'

Think too how the evil angels are exulting over you: 'There they are; we have them fast in our chains; we shall soon have them as partners of our misery; then how shall we triumph over God! Yes; the Father's counsels with respect to them will all be frustrated; the blood of Christ will have been shed in vain; the Spirit's operations will have been successfully resisted: though we shall be in Hell ourselves, we will enjoy our triumphs even there; for we shall have robbed man of his happiness, and God of his glory.'

O brethren, consider whether you are willing to afford such a triumph to your bitterest enemy: and beg of Jesus, who is "exalted to give repentance and remission of sins," that he will bestow these blessings upon you.

***~~2. To the penitent—~~***

Let others deride or condemn your change, we will congratulate you upon it, [Psalm 126:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.3). The angels would feel no joy at your acquiring a large estate: No, "if a beggar were elevated from a dunghill to a throne," they would not account it worth one single thought. But if the poorest or vilest person in the universe repent, it fills them with sincere joy. They have not so much joy in the very presence of God, but it is capable of being augmented by such a sight as this. Nor is it a day of Pentecost alone that attracts their attention. Even a solitary instance of conversion is sufficient to exhilarate their souls. Go on then, my brethren, sowing in tears; and you shall before long, in conjunction with the holy angels, reap a harvest of eternal joy!

***~~#1545~~***

***~~The Prodigal Son~~***

***~~[Luke 15:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.23-24)~~***

"Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

The willingness of God to receive sinners is abundantly declared in Scripture; but in no place is it so amply, or so beautifully described as in the parable before us. The reference which the parable has to the Jews and Gentiles will be more properly noticed, when we come to consider the conduct of the elder brother: at present we may view it as a lively representation of a sinner's return to God.

The text leads our attention to three points (which are also the three distinguishing parts of the parable) namely, the Prodigal's departure from his father, his return to him, and his reception with him.

***~~I. His departure—~~***

***~~He went from his father's house, little thinking of the ruin he would bring upon himself—~~***

The occasion of his departure was that he hated the restraint of his father's presence, and longed for independence, that he might gratify his own inclinations. Hence he desired his father to divide him his portion. But little did he think to what extent his passions would carry him. Scarcely had he received his portion, before he left his father, and departed to a distant country, where his actions would pass unnoticed. Having thus thrown the reins upon the neck of his appetites, he was carried on with irresistible impetuosity. From one degree of sin to another he rushed forward without restraint; nor stopped until he had wasted his substance in riotous living.

At last he began to feel the *consequences*of his folly: he was reduced to a state of extreme wretchedness; yet he determined to do anything rather than return to his father. Though a Jew, he submitted for hire to the ignominious employment of feeding swine: his wages however, there being a grievous famine in the land, would not procure him even necessary subsistence. In vain did he attempt to fill his belly with the husks intended for the swine. In vain did he solicit assistance from those who had known him in his more prosperous days. "No man," either from gratitude or compassion, "gave him" any relief.

***~~Such is the departure of sinners from the presence of their God—~~***

They have experienced the restraints of education, but have sighed for liberty and independence. *With their growing years, they increasingly abuse the mercies which God has bestowed upon them. Their reason, their time, and other talents, they employ in the service of sin*. Though they do not all run to the same excess of riot, they live equally at a distance from God. At last perhaps they begin to feel the misery which their neglect of him has brought upon them. His providence too concurs with his grace to make a deeper wound in their conscience: but they try any carnal expedients rather than return to God, nor can ever be prevailed on to turn unto him, until they have fully proved the insufficiency of the creature to afford them help. Whatever they may think of themselves in such a state, they are really "dead" and "lost."

But the Prodigal was not gone beyond recovery, as is evident from,

***~~II. His return—~~***

During his departure he had been as a person destitute of reason. At last however, "coming to himself" he thought of his father's house.

***~~The various steps of his return are worthy of notice—~~***

He first reflected on the folly and madness of his former ways, and on the incomparably happier state of those who lived under his father's roof, and whom perhaps he once despised for submitting to such restraints. He then resolved that he would return to his father, and implore his forgiveness: having formed the purpose, he instantly arose to carry it into execution, and set off, destitute as he was, to obtain, if possible, the lowest office among his father's servants.

***~~These exactly describe the steps of a sinner's return to God—~~***

He first begins to see how madly and wickedly he has acted. He feels that he has reduced himself to a wretched and perishing condition. He considers how happy are those once despised people, who enjoy the favor of his heavenly Father, and how happy he himself would be, if he might but obtain the most base place in his family.

With these views he determines to abase himself as a vile, self-ruined creature. There are no terms so humiliating, but he finds them suited to his case. He is rather fearful of not humbling himself sufficiently, than of aggravating his sin too much. He resolves that he will go to the throne of grace and ask for mercy; nor will he wait for any more convenient season, lest he should perish before the hoped-for season arrives. He is ashamed indeed to go in so mean and destitute a condition; but he despairs of ever going in any other way. He therefore breaks through all the engagements he has made with sin and Satan, and goes, with all his guilt upon him, to his God and Savior. He now perhaps may be deemed mad by his former companions; but he should rather be considered as now "coming to himself."

The effect of the Prodigal's repentance appears in,

***~~III. His reception—~~***

His father, it seems, was wishfully looking out for him; and, on his first appearance, ran to testify his good-will towards him.

The sight of his returning child caused the father's affections to yearn over him; nor would he allow an upbraiding word to escape his lips. When the Prodigal began his confession, the father interrupted him with kisses; and not only would not hear the whole of his confession, but would not even hurt his feelings by saying that he forgave him. He ordered the best robe, with shoes and a ring, to be instantly put upon him, and killed the fatted calf in order to celebrate the joyful occasion.

What a delightful representation does this give us of the reception which penitents find with God!

God longs for their salvation even while they are at a distance from him. He notices with joy the first approaches of their souls towards him. Instead of frowning on the prodigal, he receives him with joy. Instead of upbraiding him with his folly, he seals upon his soul a sense of pardon. He arrays him in robes of righteousness and garments of salvation. He adorns him in a manner suited to the relation into which he is brought. He provides for his future comfortable and upright conduct. He rejoices over him as recovered from the dead, and makes it an occasion of festivity to all the angels in Heaven. Thus do even the vilest sinners find their hopes, not only realized, but far exceeded. They come for pardon, and obtain joy. They come for deliverance from Hell, and get a title to Heaven. Their utmost ambition is to be regarded as the most base of God's servants, and they are exalted to all the honors and happiness of his beloved children.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Who would not wish to resemble this Prodigal in his reception with his father? But, in order to it, we must resemble him in his penitence and contrition. Let none think that, because they have been more moral than the Prodigal, they do not need to repent like him. All of us without exception have walked after the imagination of our own hearts, without any love to God's presence, or regard for his authority.

Let all of us then cry for mercy, as miserable sinners.*The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more acceptable shall we be to God.*Some perhaps may fear to return, because they have been so exceedingly vile: but let none imagine that they have gone beyond the reach of mercy: the promise of acceptance extends to all without exception, [John 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37). "There is bread enough and to spare" for all that will go to God. Let all then accept the Savior's invitation, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28). Let us this day afford an occasion of joy to all the hosts of Heaven; then shall we ourselves be soon made partakers of their joy, and dwell as dear children in our Father's house forever and ever!

***~~#1546~~***

***~~The Prodigal's Elder Brother~~***

***~~[Luke 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.28)~~***

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him."

*It is an undeniable fact, that many who have lived a profligate life are received afterwards to God's favor; and that many who have been externally moral are excluded from it.*But this ought not to be a stumbling-block to us, since there will always be found a corresponding difference of character in the persons rejected or received. The Prodigal had been an odious sinner; but was renewed in the spirit of his mind. The elder brother had been moral; but was proud, envious, discontented, querulous. The character of the latter well deserves a distinct consideration. We shall notice,

***~~I. The disposition of the elder brother—~~***

Some think that he was intended to represent a pious character; and doubtless there have been good men, who too nearly resembled him, [Jonah 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 3.10); [Jonah 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 4.1); [Jonah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 4.9). [Acts 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.2-3); and, on this supposition, his father's address to him will have no difficulty, verse 31.

But the parable in this case would not have been suitable to the occasion, verse 1-3; yes, it would rather have tended to mislead the Pharisees, and to foster the conceit they had of their own piety. *His character rather represents that of the murmuring Pharisees*, as that of the Prodigal does of the repenting Publicans. It might indeed have some further reference to the Jews and Gentiles, [Acts 13:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.42); [Acts 13:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.44-45); [Acts 22:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.21-23); but it accurately *portrays the character of Pharisees in every age*. The two things noticed in the text especially demand our attention:

***~~1. His displeasure at the reception of the Prodigal—~~***

On being informed of his brother's reception, "he was angry." When entreated by his father to join in the festivity, he began to boast of his own blameless and meritorious conduct. He complained that sufficient respect had not been paid to his services; he rehearsed with envious triumph and malicious exaggeration the misconduct of the Prodigal; and disdained to acknowledge him as a brother, whom his father had received and entertained as a son.

How strongly does this exhibit the disposition and conduct of modern Pharisees! It affords them pain rather than pleasure, to hear of the conversion of notorious sinners. When urged to embrace the salvation offered in the Gospel, they deny that they are in danger of perishing, or that they have ever merited the wrath of God. When told that their own righteousness can never justify them before God, they complain that their works are undervalued, and that all inducement to perform them is taken away. The recital of a penitent's joy fills them with envious rage and malignant jealousy: they take occasion from his former misconduct to represent his change as mere hypocrisy; and, instead of regarding him with brotherly affection, they pour contempt upon him as a weak deluded enthusiast. With what bitter contempt and sarcastic virulence, will they sometimes exclaim, 'That is one of your saints!'

***~~2. His unwillingness to participate in the happiness provided for him—~~***

The invitations given to him by his father were rejected with disdain. As the feast was not made in honor of him, he could find no pleasure in partaking of it. Thus it is with Pharisees in every age. When we invite them to come to the feast provided in the Gospel, they put us off with excuses. However rich the feast, or sublime the joy, they have no appetite for it, no desire after it. If we were to tell them that their own good works should be the objects of admiration and applause, they would be delighted with the idea, and eagerly embrace the honor offered them. But when they find that all the praise is to be given "to God and to the Lamb," they have no ear for such music, no taste for such employment.

Having seen the disposition of the elder brother, let us notice,

***~~II. The conduct of the father as contrasted with it—~~***

Nothing can be more odious than the character we have seen; or more amiable than that which we are going to contemplate. Behold,

***~~1. His forbearance—~~***

How justly might the father have closed the conference on the first refusal, and given orders for the final exclusion of this insolent complainant! But, as he had borne with the Prodigal in his departure, so now he bears with the pride and obstinacy of his envious brother.

And how long has he exercised his patience towards *us!* Times without number has he entreated us to accept of mercy; yet his invitations have, in many instances, excited nothing but disgust. Still however, with much long-suffering, he continues to strive with us by his word and Spirit.

***~~2. His condescension—~~***

He did not send a servant, but went out himself to entreat his son; and, instead of controverting, as he might well have done, the statement of his son, he argued with him on his own principles.

He affectionately reminded him, that if no such feast had been made for him, there had not been anything withheld from him that he had desired: that the favor shown to the Prodigal did not proceed from any undue partiality, but from the peculiar circumstances of his return; and that nothing would be more gratifying to him, than to have both his sons partakers of the same happiness. He showed him further, that there was a fitness and propriety in the joy manifested on that occasion; and that he, as a "brother" ought to join in it with his whole heart. Such is the condescension which we also have experienced at God's hands. How has he argued with us to overcome our reluctance, and labored to convince us, when he might justly have left us to our own obstinate resolves!

***~~3. His love—~~***

The love shown by him to the returning Prodigal excites our admiration; but that was no less which was manifested to his ungracious brother: the solicitude expressed was not at all inferior to the joy.

And is God not showing to us also the same parental tenderness? Is he not as unwilling to give us up to our own delusions? Yes, his language to us is precisely that which he used to Israel of old, [Hosea 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8).

***~~Surely then this subject may teach us,~~***

***~~1. The evil and danger of self-righteousness—~~***

*Self-righteousness is a more complicated evil than is generally imagined.*It frequently is accompanied with pride, envy, discontent, and a thousand other evil tempers reigning in the bosom; and it always involves in it a high conceit of ourselves, a supercilious contempt of others, and a rooted aversion to the Gospel method of salvation, [Luke 18:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.11). Moreover, if persevered in, it will infallibly leave us self-excluded from the kingdom of Heaven. Let us pause then, and solemnly examine whether we be not under its dominion? *Let us inquire whether we more resemble this elder brother or the repenting Prodigal?*And, instead of justifying ourselves before God, let us thankfully accept his offered mercy.

***~~2. The blessedness of true penitents—~~***

While the elder brother was agitated with evil tempers, the Prodigal was filled with peace: and while the elder brother was self-excluded from the scenes of bliss, the Prodigal had "food to eat which the world knows not of," and "joy with which the stranger intermeddles not." Such is the harvest which all shall reap who sow in tears.

Who that compares the state of the two brothers would not prefer that of the penitent, even in this life? And how much more will its superiority appear, when the happiness of admission to the Father's house, and the misery of exclusion from it, will be consummated! Let us then, if we determine (as we must) in favor of the Prodigal, go instantly, and prostrate ourselves before our offended God!

***~~#1547~~***

***~~The Unjust Steward~~***

**[Luke 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.8)**

"So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light."

The parables never were intended to focus upon every particular: some admit of a fuller, and others of a more partial application: some are to be interpreted solely in reference to the *principal idea*contained in them. It is of great importance that we should read them under this impression. If we endeavor to accommodate all their incidental parts to the main scope, we shall both mar their beauty, and deduce from them the most fatal errors. This observation is particularly to be attended to in considering the parable before us. It will instantly remove all the cavils which have been raised against our Savior as a minister of sin; and it will enable us to collect much useful instruction from this valuable portion of Holy Scripture.

The text leads us to consider,

***~~I. The wisdom of the unjust steward—~~***

He had frequently betrayed the trust reposed in him by his lord and master. If he had not purloined, he had profusely wasted, his master's substance; and for this he was now to be discharged from his stewardship.

*It is in vain for persons to hope that they shall always escape detection.* Dishonesty may be practiced for awhile; but it will generally defeat its own ends. This steward had hoped to derive pleasure, if not profit, from his dishonesty; but in the outcome it involved him in much distress and poverty. No sooner was it discovered, than it exposed him to shame, and provoked his master to dismiss him from his service.

***~~But he contrived a way to remedy, in a measure, the evil he had brought upon himself—~~***

As soon as he had received warning, he began to say, What shall I do? nor ceased from his inquiries, until he had devised a happy expedient. He felt in himself that he was too lazy to work, and too proud to beg: nor had he any hopes of obtaining another situation of trust and confidence. It was probable, therefore, that he might soon experience the pressure of extreme indigence. An artful plan for supplying his wants speedily arose in his mind. He determined to make all his master's debtors accomplices in his iniquity: he remitted to every one a considerable portion of the sum he owed. Thus he secured their present friendship and future recommendations. They would not dare to oppose him, lest their own dishonesty should be revealed by him. He would be able to make them afterwards accede to any of his proposals. He cared not how much guilt he contracted, or how many souls he ruined. All which he desired was to secure a home until he should be otherwise provided: and doubtless his contrivance was well adapted to the end proposed.

***~~This device was commended by our Lord—~~***

Christ himself seems to be the person who gave the commendation. It was the same person who uttered the words in the text; but it was the ingenuity, and not the dishonesty, that he commended. The very epithet which he gave the steward showed his disapprobation of the act. The text itself explicitly declares the only ground of our Lord's applause "He had acted wisely."

It admirably illustrates (what alone our Lord intended to illustrate),

***~~II. The comparative folly of God's own children—~~***

"The children of this world" are very indefatigable in prosecuting their *temporal*interests; and "the children of light" ought to be incomparably more earnest in pursuing their *spiritual*interests.

They are called "children of light," because they are enlightened by God's word and Spirit. They have been "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light" of the Gospel. They see the vanity of all things that are visible and temporal, and the infinite importance of those that are invisible and eternal, [2 Corinthians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.18). They know what a strict account they must shortly give of their stewardship, and the necessity of improving every hour in securing an "everlasting habitation." They know how much more important are their interests, more honorable their work, more certain their success, and more glorious their reward. They therefore should be more concerned about their souls than others are about their bodies; and "labor more for the food that endures, than others for that which perishes, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)."

It must be owned however that the children of this world discover more wisdom in the prosecution of their interests:

***~~They seek them more earnestly—~~***

What quickness in conceiving, eagerness in maturing, and promptness in executing his plans, did the unjust steward discover "What shall I do?—I am resolved—so he called—every one— sit down quickly!" Thus worldly men in general find it easy to put forth the whole energy of their souls.

But where is the Christian that displays such ardor in his pursuits? How rarely can the spiritual man thus engage in his work! Alas! what backwardness to duty, what languor in it, and what readiness to disengage himself from it, does he feel! Happy indeed would he be who could fully equal the zeal of worldlings: but Christians have to oppose the tide of their corrupt nature, while others have only to commit themselves to its impetuous current.

***~~They follow them more uniformly—~~***

The children of this world have at all times an eye to their own advantage. Though their thoughts be not immediately engaged about business, they can turn them into that channel the very instant that prospects of gain arise.

But the children of light are often wholly indisposed for spiritual exercises, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17). Too often do they find occasion to adopt the language of Paul, [Romans 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.13); [Romans 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.15); [Romans 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-19); [Romans 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.21-23). And frequently are they ready to compare themselves with the very beasts that perish, [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3).

***~~They contrive for them more ingeniously—~~***

If a worldly man has prospects of advancement he will devise a thousand means to attain his end. If he have reason to fear a loss, he will try many expedients to avert, to mitigate, or to remedy the evil. He will rarely lose anything which his cunning will enable him to secure.

But how often does the Christian suffer loss purely through his own folly! How often does he see infallible means of gain, and yet neglect to use them! and infallible means of injury, which he is not careful to shun! Many times is he forced to adopt that most humiliating confession, [Psalm 73:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.22), [Proverbs 30:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.2).

***~~To prevent misapprehension, we subjoin a word of caution—~~***

Let not any one suppose that one fraud may be committed in order to prevent the consequences of another. This is too often practiced: but it plunges the offender in deeper guilt and shame. God has warned us in many places what will be the reward of dishonesty, [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-10). It is impossible that those who defraud an earthly master can be accepted of God. However their ingenuity may be admired, it will prove folly in the outcome. Let every one then, who professes to be a child of light, remember the Apostle's words, [1 John 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.6).

***~~To enforce the subject we conclude with suitable advice—~~***

***~~1. Be faithful to your Lord and Master—~~***

If you are Christians indeed, Christ is the Master whom you serve. Be faithful to him, then, whether you have little or much, [Proverbs 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 23.26). Especially honor him in the distribution of the unrighteous mammon, verse 13. He is a kind and liberal Master, that does not grudge you anything that is good. Nevertheless he expects that you improve for him the talents he has committed to you.

***~~2. Be diligent in his service—~~***

We see how diligent worldlings are in the service of the world. Let not us be surpassed by them. We have a far better Master, and an infinitely richer reward.

***~~3. Stand ready to give up your account to him—~~***

We know not how soon he will say, Give an account of your stewardship: but it will be a joyful word to those who shall be found ready. Let us then be daily inspecting and balancing our accounts. He will then give us the true riches, verse 11; and will bestow upon us what shall to all eternity be our own, verse 12. [Matthew 24:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.45-47).

***~~#1548~~***

***~~Pressing into the Kingdom~~***

**[Luke 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.16)**

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it."

Wherever the Gospel is preached with fidelity and earnestness, the places of worship are, for the most part, well attended. And this is often made a ground of joyful congratulation. But if, instead of comparing the attendance of persons at such places of worship with that which is seen at other Churches, we were to compare it with what took place at the first introduction of Christianity, we should see in it nothing but an occasion of shame and sorrow.

Under the law and the prophets, that is, during the Mosaic dispensation, there was but little of preaching: but when John, the forerunner of our Lord, came, he preached much and often; and so powerful were his ministrations, that persons of all ranks and orders pressed into that kingdom, which he sought and labored to establish. Let us then, for our humiliation, consider,

***~~I. The effects of John's preaching—~~***

***~~"He preached the kingdom of God"—~~***

By "the kingdom of God" I understand, the *kingdom of the Messiah, or the reign of Christ in the world and in the heart*. He declared that Christ was come: and he pointed him out to the people as "that very Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." He called men to repentance, and to an acknowledgment of the Savior, by being baptized in his name; and announced that as the sure and only way of obtaining the remission of their sins, [Luke 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.3).

***~~Immediately, such was the impression on all descriptions of persons, that "everyone pressed into it"—~~***

Most surprising was the effect of his ministrations. Persons flocked from every quarter, to be baptized by him. Pharisees and Sadducees, distant as they were from each other in their principles, equally felt the power of his word, and came to be baptized by him. Nay, all Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, were so wrought upon, that they actually submitted to his baptism, making public confession of their sins, [Matthew 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.5-7). They sought instruction also from him, everyone (soldiers, tax collectors, and the people generally) *being willing and desirous to approve his sincerity before God, by abandoning all the evils to which he had been particularly prone, and by practicing those duties which would most adorn his holy profession*,[Luke 3:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.10-14). Many of them, it is to be feared, went back afterwards: but such, at the time, was the power of the Gospel as ministered by him.

Let us compare with this,

***~~II. The effect of Gospel ordinances in our day—~~***

***~~We preach the kingdom of God, even as he did—~~***

Our blessed Lord commanded, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47);" and the Apostles obeyed this injunction, preaching this doctrine to the *Jews*first, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31), and afterwards to the *Gentiles*, [Acts 20:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.21). The same injunction, also, do we obey. You yourselves will bear us witness, that the great subject of all our ministrations is, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, like Paul, "we have determined to know nothing among you, only Jesus Christ, and him crucified, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2). We proclaim the Lord Jesus to be "King in Zion:" we call upon you to submit yourselves to him: we declare that "his blood was shed for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2);" and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, [Acts 13:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-39)." In this respect we have even the advantage of John the Baptist: for he could only proclaim what the Lord Jesus *would*do; whereas we declare to you what he *has*done.

***~~And what is the effect of our ministrations?~~***

Do we see *everyone*pressing into this kingdom? I had almost asked, Where do we see *anyone*pressing into it as he ought? Alas! the word which we preach, "comes," to the generality, "in word only, and not in power:" with many it is regarded only as "a cunningly-devised fable:" with many who approve of it, it has no practical effect: they are pleased with it only "as with the melody of one who plays well upon an instrument, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32);" and, of those who feel somewhat of its power, how few press into the kingdom with that earnestness which befits them!

Look and see around; are there any "flocking unto the Lord, as doves to their windows, [Isaiah 60:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.8)." Where do we find people "pressing," as it were, through all the obstacles which the world, the flesh, and the devil, can lay in their way, and "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8)." Let the state of our hearers in general be viewed, and there is reason to weep over them with floods of tears. And let even the more approved among us be brought to the test of Scripture experience, and of by far the greater number we must "stand in doubt, whether Christ be indeed as yet truly formed in them, [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are but little influenced by what they hear—~~***

Ah! how many of you are of this description! And are you content that it shall be always thus? Will you still hold fast *the delusion that you shall win the race without running, and gain the victory without fighting?*If success is not the portion of those who so demean themselves in relation to earthly things, how can you imagine it will in reference to heavenly things? Will it be no matter of regret to you in a dying hour, that you have been so supine and careless? Or, if Satan be permitted to blind you, then will it be no grief to you when you shall open your eyes in the eternal world? O awake from your stupor: and "today, while it is called today, harden not your hearts, lest God should swear, in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest, [Hebrews 3:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-11)."

***~~2. Those who feel some desire to enter into the kingdom—~~***

I thank God, if there be in any of you a good desire. But did you never hear what our blessed Lord has said, that "many shall seek to enter into the kingdom, and not be able Luke, 13:24." How is this? They *seek* with good desires; but they do not *strive*with the full bent and determination of their hearts. But this is necessary, indispensably necessary, to the attainment of God's heavenly kingdom. The pursuit of it must be regarded by you as "the one thing needful, [Luke 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.42)." It must be entered upon with the same spirit as David manifested, when he said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will seek after, [Psalm 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.4)." You must engage in it "with all your might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10);" and, instead of ever looking upon your attainments with delight, or feeling yourselves at liberty to relax your ardor, you must, with Paul, "forget what is behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14)."

There must be "no looking back, after you have once put your hand to the plough, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62);" "no weariness in well-doing, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9);" you must "endure unto the end, if ever you would be saved, [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22);" and, like the manslayer, never rest a moment, until you enter the gates of the heavenly city! [Numbers 35:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 35.11-12).

***~~#1549~~***

***~~The Rich Man and Lazarus~~***

***~~[Luke 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.25)~~***

"But Abraham said: Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish."

*The more strongly the discourses of a minister bear upon the prevailing vices of the day, the more will they, whose besetting sin is pointed out and reprobated, pour contempt upon the preacher and his message.* Our blessed Lord had spoken the parable of the unjust steward, in order to show, that every one should consider himself as responsible to God for the use he makes of that which is entrusted to him. "The Pharisees, who were covetous, immediately derided him, verse 14." Our Lord, however, was not to be deterred by their derision; on the contrary, he addressed to them a personal and severe reproof, and added another parable, that should enforce, with tenfold energy, his preceding admonitions.

He represented a rich man, after a short enjoyment of his worldly pleasures, doomed to eternal misery in Hell; and a poor man, after a transient scene of sufferings on earth, exalted to a state of everlasting felicity in Heaven.

In opening this parable we shall present to your view,

***~~I. Their different conditions in this world—~~***

***~~The Rich Man enjoyed all that could gratify an earthly mind—~~***

High titles, stately mansions, superb clothing, pompous equipage, numerous attendants, sumptuous entertainments, courtly friends, and flattering sycophants—were his distinguished portion, his daily enjoyment. These were the things in which he took delight; nor had his vain earthly heart a thought or wish beyond them "Your good things." Doubtless he was to many in his day an object of admiration and envy.

Just so, many among ourselves are ready to say, Give me but such a portion as his, and I desire no more.

***~~The Poor Man was as destitute as a human being could be—~~***

He lacked even the most common necessities of life. In addition to this, he was "full of sores" from head to foot; without medical aid to cure them, or even a friendly hand to bind them up; so that "the very dogs came and licked them." Unable to walk, he was carried, and, as if no man cared what became of him, was cast at the Rich Man's gate, to gather a scanty and precarious subsistence from the crumbs which fell from his table. Thus *destitute of food, of health, of friends, a very outcast from society, he protracted a wretched existence, until death relieved him of his sorrows.*

Who would have thought that these two men were of the same species, or that, if they were, a just and merciful God should put such a difference between them?

But our minds will be reconciled to this seeming inequality of state, if we survey,

***~~II. Their still more different conditions in the invisible world—~~***

***~~The Rich Man was reduced to a state of deserved misery—~~***

We read not of any enormous crimes that he committed; and therefore we cannot justly impute any to him. His elegant clothing and costly fare were not in themselves sinful, provided they were such as were suited to his station in life. That which constituted his guilt in the sight of God was that his heart was set upon them; that he sought his happiness in them rather than in God; and that he lived solely for himself, to the neglect of those whose necessities he should have delighted to relieve.

And behold, what fearful punishment this iniquity brought upon him! His career of sin was soon terminated; and nothing of all his happiness remained to him but the *guilt*which he had contracted by it. He was buried indeed in a sumptuous manner; but what pleasure could he receive from funeral processions, sepulchral monuments, or flattering inscriptions? *Alas! his body was insensible of the honors paid to it, and his soul was enduring unutterable anguish in the flames of Hell.*He prayed indeed, but his prayer was now too late. Had he called upon God when he was on earth, he might have obtained all the glory of Heaven: but now he was refused, though he asked no more than a momentary mitigation of his pain. He begged that a messenger might be sent to warn and to convince his five surviving brethren, who were probably walking securely in his delusive steps: but neither could this be granted him; nor indeed would it have been of any use to those who disregarded the testimony of the sacred records. Instead of finding any relief, he was upbraided with his having sought an earthly portion, while he neglected those things which were to endure for ever; the remembrance of which folly could not but greatly aggravate his misery. Ah! how altered now his state:  
from honor to ignominy,  
from pleasure to pain,  
from affluence to extreme impoverishment!

***~~The Poor Man, on the contrary, was raised to a state of unspeakable felicity—~~***

As death put a speedy end to the enjoyments of the one, so it soon also terminated the sorrows of the other. Nothing is spoken of the burial of the Poor Man; he was carried unnoticed, unregretted, to the silent grave. Or rather, his fellow-creatures probably rejoiced that they were rid of a public nuisance.

Not but that he was honored in his death; for though disregarded by men, he was attended by angels, who gladly received his departing spirit, and bore it on their wings to the regions of light and glory!

Let our eyes now follow him to his blessed abode: behold, he, who once had scarcely enough to satisfy the cravings of nature, is now sitting next to Abraham himself at the heavenly banquet. At feasts they lay on couches; so that one seemed, as it were, to be in the bosom of the person next to him. In this view, the circumstance of his being in Abraham's bosom is well worthy of notice; while the man who had "fared sumptuously every day" on earth, has not so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue!

Nothing now remains to him of all his former sorrows, except indeed their sanctifying influence upon his soul. Now he has the good things which he sought on earth, the things in which alone he found delight. The enjoyment of the Divine presence was then his only consolation; and now it is his abiding, his ever-blessed portion.

Now let us contrast the two; and we shall confess that Lazarus with all his poverty was, on the whole, an object of envy; while the Rich Man with all his indulgences was, on the whole, an object of the deepest commiseration.

***~~Let us learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. How vain are riches without grace!~~***

What could the Rich Man's wealth procure him in this life? Nothing but food and clothing: nor were his delicacies more sweet to him, than to the cottager his homely meal. His riches could not ward off for a moment the stroke of death: much less could they "profit him in the day of wrath." They served only to witness against him, and to "prey upon his flesh like fire! [James 5:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.1-5)." Let not any then envy the great and mirthful; but rather seek to be rich in grace, and happy in the enjoyment of their God.

***~~2. What consolation will religion afford under the severest trials!~~***

Though Lazarus appeared so destitute, he doubtless had his comforts as well as his sorrows. He would console himself with such reflections as these: "I have no earthly treasures; but I have treasures laid up for me in Heaven. I am diseased in body; but my soul flourishes in health and vigor. I am scantily supported with refuse crumbs; but I have food to eat which the world knows not of. I am without a human friend to minister unto me; but God is my friend, and angels are my ministering servants. I have nothing that I can call my own in this life; but I have all the glory of Heaven in the life to come."

Yes, thousands of such considerations would raise his drooping spirits, and often render him happier than all the gratifications of sense could possibly have made him. And all who possess real religion in their hearts shall find it as conducive to their happiness in this life, as it is to their eternal felicity.

***~~3. How earnestly we should improve our time in preparation for eternity!~~***

***~~Whether we are in prosperity or in affliction, we are hastening to the grave! The whole of this life is but as a dream! Death will soon terminate our present joys or sorrows: and our condition in the future world will depend entirely on the manner in which we have lived in this state of probation.~~***

God has drawn aside for a moment the veil of the invisible world; and shown us what we shall all be in a little time. Yes, all of us shall be banqueting in Heaven—or agonizing with inexpressible, unintermitted anguish in Hell; and in whichever state we are, all transition from it will be prevented by an "impassable gulf." Let us endeavor to realize these awful truths. Let us believe what the Scriptures have told us respecting the outcome of a worldly life. Let us pity those who, like the five brethren, are hastening in the delusive paths of ease and pleasure to the place of torment. And let us live now, as we shall wish we had lived, when our state shall be for ever fixed!

***~~#1550~~***

***~~The Hopeless State of Those Who Disregard the Scriptures~~***

***~~[Luke 16:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.27-31)~~***

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

*It is painful to reflect how men follow the footsteps of their forefathers, without ever seriously inquiring where they tend.* If we examine the records of those who have gone before us, we find that, for the most part, they lived to themselves, rather than unto God. "Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. [Psalm 49:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.11-13)," and, like their predecessors, rush forward thoughtlessly to their own destruction.

A very *striking illustration*of this is given to us by one who was himself a spectator of the fact which he records: a flock of sheep, while going over a bridge, were frightened; and one of them jumped over the side of the bridge: the rest, imagining that he who led the way was safe and happy, followed in succession; and were all carried down a rapid river, and involved in one common, but unsuspected, ruin. Thus the different generations of men pass away; and each surviving race, concluding of course that those who went before are happy, follow the same fatal track, until it is too late to remedy their error!

The passage before us will illustrate this. It is part of a parable, wherein our Lord represents a rich man as living in luxurious indolence, until he is surprised by death, and made to feel the wrath of an avenging God. He had left his riches among five surviving brethren, who were all walking in his delusive steps, without ever once considering in what they would issue. The Rich Man, unable to prevail for even a drop of water to cool his tongue, requests, that if Lazarus may not be sent to him to mitigate his torment, he may be sent to his brethren to warn them of the danger in which they were, and to guard them against a continuance in their fatal security. But neither could this be granted: Abraham tells him, that they had the Scriptures in their hands; and that, if they would not attend to them, any message from the dead would be of no avail.

From this solemn declaration we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. The use and office of the Holy Scriptures—~~***

This is plainly intimated in our text. The Rich Man had solicited that Lazarus might be sent to warn his brethren, lest they also should come into that place of torment. The reply was, that they had the Scriptures, and should attend to them: whence it appears that,

***~~The use of the Scriptures is to guide men to Heaven—~~***

They are intended to show us the way thither, and to guard us against every erroneous path. This they do with the utmost plainness and fidelity; insomuch that, if studied with diligence and prayer, they will assuredly "make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus."

There certainly are passages in them difficult to be understood: but the great and essential truths are stated in so clear a manner, that he who runs may read them. Who that searches the Scriptures can doubt the outcome of a carnal and worldly life? "To be carnally-minded is death." Or who can doubt the acceptance of a sinner who humbles himself before God, and flees to Christ for refuge? Will it be found that any one was ever cast out, who came unto God through Christ? In a word, there is no instruction wanted, which is not contained in the sacred volume, and conveyed too in the most edifying manner.

Its *warnings*are most solemn,  
its *invitations*are most earnest,  
its *expostulations*are most affectionate,  
its *promises*are most enlarged.

If only we pay attention to them, we shall infallibly "be kept from the paths of the destroyer [Psalm 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.4)," and have "our feet guided into the way of peace."

***~~For this end they are fully sufficient—~~***

Nothing is lacking in them, God himself being witness. The Old Testament writers and the New, alike declare the sufficiency of Scripture for every end that can be desired, [Psalm 19:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.7-11). [2 Timothy 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16-17); It is "the rod of God's strength, whereby he effects his work upon the souls of men:  
quickening the dead, [Psalm 119:93](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.93). [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18),  
sanctifying the unclean, [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.3). [Ephesians 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.26),  
comforting the afflicted, [Psalm 107:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.20),  
and saving the lost, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21).

All that is needed to render the word effectual, is to get it applied to our hearts by the Spirit of God, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5); when so applied, it becomes "the power of God to the salvation of our souls, [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

It must be remembered, however, that while the Scriptures are so powerful to save those who use them aright, they declare most unequivocally,

***~~II. The hopeless state of those who disregard them—~~***

The Rich Man imagined, that, if some new method were used for the conversion of his brethren, it would be successful; but Abraham informed him, that, where the Scriptures were ineffectual, not even a messenger from the dead would be of any avail:

***~~1. To convince the unbelieving—~~***

Though a messenger from the dead might be instrumental to awaken the attention of a person to the Scriptures, he could not convince him of any one truth contained in them. For what could he say that is not contained in the Scriptures? He could only affirm, that the truth of what they declared was now ascertained and felt by him, and placed beyond the reach of doubt. But this has been already declared by all the inspired writers, who in successive ages sealed the truth with their blood. Besides, the Scriptures corroborate their testimony by a thousand other proofs, which a person coming from the dead could not supply: and consequently, he who rejects the weightier evidence, would not be likely to be convinced by that which would he comparatively light.

But the experiment has already been made. *Lazarus*was raised from the dead: but many who saw him after his restoration to life, so far from being convinced by the miracle, sought to put him to death, lest a conviction should be wrought by it in the minds of others.

Moreover, when *our Lord*rose from the dead, the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, went and announced it to the Jewish rulers: but they, instead of being suitably impressed by it, and acknowledging the truth of Christ's Messiahship, instantly fabricated a falsehood, and bribed the soldiers to attest it; and the soldiers actually accepted the bribe, and attested the falsehood, and joined in denying the truth of Christ's resurrection, even within an hour after they themselves had beheld it: so little power has any sight, however terrific or unquestionable, to convince a mind that is biased by prejudice, and blinded by the devil.

***~~2. To convert the impenitent—~~***

The sight of a person clothed with the splendor of Heaven or the terrors of Hell, would surprise and alarm; but it would never convert a soul. The same lusts that counteract the influence of the written word, would soon efface the impressions which any such spectacle might produce. The love of sin would still remain as strong as ever; and a desire to defer to a more convenient season that work of repentance, to which men are so radically averse. The effect of such a sight might be strong at the time; but it would gradually wear away; and probably before long become a subject of derision.

We know how frequently such declensions are found after a person has been alarmed by some awful providence or some awakening; we know also how the Israelites "forgot the Lord at the Red Sea, even at the Red Sea:" and we are well assured, that those who can withstand the voice of God in his word, would equally withstand the voice of a fellow-creature, whether he should come down from Heaven, or ascend from Hell. Even if Heaven and Hell were opened to their view, the impression would be only transient; for, to convert a soul, is the work of God! [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10); and his power alone can effect it! [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7); [1 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.4).

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. In what an awful condition are the impenitent hearers of the Gospel!~~***

Many *hear*the Gospel, and *approve*it, who yet are never truly *converted*by it, never stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, never quickened to lay hold on eternal life: religion never becomes the one business of their lives: they never engage in it as the voluptuary in his pleasures, or as the worldling in his pursuits: they may go on in a round of observances; but they lack the life and power of godliness; their religion is destitute of zest, and earnestness, and uniformity. Now these persons withstand the most powerful engine which God himself employs for the conversion of the world. If they had never heard the sound of the Gospel, there might be hope that they would submit to it as soon as it should reach their ears: but they have heard it, and continue to resist its power, or to yield to it only a feigned and limited obedience.

Let such persons consider the warning given them by James, for, while they are "hearers only, and not doers, of the law, they fearfully deceive their own souls: it is the *doer*of it only, that shall be blessed in his deeds, [James 1:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22-25)." Let us then examine what effects the Gospel produces upon us; let us see what conformity there is in our spirit and conduct to the examples of Christ and his Apostles: it is not by a mere outward morality that we must judge of ourselves, but by the spirituality of our minds, and the heavenliness of our lives. It is to this that "Moses and the Prophets" invite us; and, if we hear them not to this end, we hear them altogether in vain.

***~~2. How inexcusable are those who will not hear the Gospel!~~***

Various are the grounds on which men slight the everlasting Gospel: some think it too early in life to pay any attention to it; others are too busy; others take up a prejudice against it; others are deterred by the fear of man.

But what would they say to us, who are now fixed in their eternal state, if they were permitted to come and declare their minds?

Would the blessed inhabitant of *Heaven*tell us, that his reward is too small a compensation for his labor, and that he regrets having paid so much attention to the concerns of his soul?

Or would the wretched companion of devils and damned spirits represent his sufferings as unworthy to be regarded, and tell us that we need give ourselves no trouble to escape them?

No! whether it should be the Rich Man from Hell, or Lazarus from Heaven, that should come to us, his testimony would be, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding." Beware therefore, brethren, lest you allow anything to divert your attention from the Gospel of Christ. Be thankful that it is not yet too late for you to lift up your voice in prayer to God. Read the Scriptures, with prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, and improve every opportunity of hearing them explained to you in public: they are given you as "a light shining in a dark place;" and it befits you to "take heed to them" without delay, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19). With our Lord, therefore, I say, "Search the Scriptures;" or, in the words of our text, "You have Moses and the Prophets, hear them."

***~~3. What cause of thankfulness have those who have heard it with effect!~~***

This is a mercy to you from God, the richest mercy that God himself could bestow. It is God alone can "give us an understanding, that we may know him that is true:" and if he had not opened your understandings, you would still have been as blind as ever. Know then to whom you are indebted: and let it be the labor of your lives to express a just sense of the obligations conferred upon you.

But how shall you do this to the best purpose? I answer, Look around you, and see how many there are regardless of the Scriptures, and of the state to which they are hastening. Unhappy creatures! they have many friends or relatives that would gladly come from Heaven or from Hell to warn them: but no such fellowship can be allowed. They have the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament; and if they disregard these, no other means of salvation will be afforded to them. But it is not prohibited to *living*saints to warn them: you may have access to them as often as you please, and even a more favorable access, than a disembodied spirit could have. To you they may listen without any terror or dismay. Improve then the opportunity that is afforded you. "Freely you have received, freely give." It is not for yourselves only that God has given you light, it is for others also; that you may put it on a candlestick, and give light to all around you. You have some brethren or friends; go to them as an angel of light: and may God succeed your endeavors, to the salvation of many souls!

***~~#1551~~***

***~~The Importance of Faith~~***

***~~[Luke 17:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.5-6)~~***

"The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."

The Gospel is truly "a doctrine according to godliness." Its precepts are as much superior to heathen morals, as its doctrines are to the heathen mythology. The forgiveness of injuries is required of the followers of Christ, to an extent that unassisted reason would have deemed neither practical nor desirable. Our Lord told his disciples, that they must not only forgive any occasional offence, but forgive it, however often it might be committed; provided the offender acknowledged his fault, and professed a determination to amend it. This seemed to them "a hard saying," and a requisition which far exceeded the powers of human nature to comply with: they therefore entreated him to "increase their faith." Now such a petition, so introduced, appears absurd: but it was, in reality, most judicious. In proof of this we shall show,

***~~I. The reason of it—~~***

At first sight we are ready to think that they should have prayed for an increase of patience or of love; since those graces appear far more intimately connected with the forgiveness of injuries than faith: but they were correct in their judgment, and right in their petition: for, respecting *faith*, it must be said,

***~~1. It is the root of all acceptable obedience—~~***

We may perform works that shall appear good, though we have no faith—but none that are really good in God's sight; for, in order to be good and acceptable to God, they must:

flow from a principle of love to God;

they must also be performed with a readiness of mind, as to the Lord:

and with a sincere desire that he may be glorified by them.

But whence can we obtain this principle? or how can we act in such a manner, or for such an end, if we have not been led by faith into a view of his glorious character, and to the knowledge of the obligations we owe him in Christ Jesus?*We might as well expect to find fruit on a tree that has no root, as such actions without a humble and living faith*. Our Lord himself tells us, that "without him," that is, without a union with him by faith, "we can do nothing:" and Paul tells us, that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Indeed all holy actions and affections are called, "the fruits of the Spirit," but it is by faith alone that we obtain the Spirit: consequently, they must all be traced to faith, as the proper root from whence they spring.

***~~2. It is particularly influential in the production of a forgiving spirit—~~***

Until we know what we ourselves merit before God, and what mercy is given to us in the Gospel of his Son—we shall be disposed to resent any injury that is done to us: at least, if we abstain from any vindictive acts, we shall feel an inward bitterness, when the remembrance of the injury occurs to our minds.

But let a person have a just view of redeeming love, and it will soon calm all his angry passions. When pained with the recollection of the evil treatment he has received, he will call to mind his own conduct towards God. When disposed to complain of others, he will think what reason he has given to God to complain of him. And when called upon to exercise forgiveness, he will bear in mind what mercy he himself has received at the hands of God. This, I say, is the necessary fruit of faith: for, "having been forgiven ten thousand sins, can he take a fellow-creature by the throat for a few pence, [Matthew 18:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.32-33)." No! "having been forgiven much, he will love much."

Having on these grounds presented to their Lord a petition for an increase of faith, he approved of their petition, and proceeded instantly to mark,

***~~II. The importance of it—~~***

Two things he intimates to them;

***~~1. That faith was an irresistible principle—~~***

What could convey an idea of difficulty more than the plucking up of a mulberry-tree by the roots, and casting it steadfastly in the tempestuous ocean? Yet our Lord told them, that faith would be able to effect even that; and, consequently, it could pluck up by the roots their most inveterate resentments, and establish their minds even in the midst of the most tumultuous scenes.

Accordingly we find that faith has done all these things, Hebrews 11. throughout; and what it has done for others, it can, and shall, do for us. Indeed, faith brings, if we may so express ourselves, a kind of omnipotence into the soul, inasmuch as it interests Omnipotence in our behalf: and God himself says concerning it, "All things are possible to him that believes."

Nor is this true only of faith in its most enlarged measure, and its strongest exercises: if it exist only in a small measure, it shall operate nevertheless to the production of the greatest good. Doubtless its effects will be proportioned to the measure of its existence in the soul: but still its operation will be exceeding powerful, even though it be as small "as a grain of mustard-seed;" for *the weakest faith, if genuine, unites us to Christ, and makes us partakers of all his fullness*, even as the branch of a vine participates all the virtue of the stock and root. Moreover the smallest faith brings the Holy Spirit into the soul, and secures to us his almighty operations as far as they shall be necessary for our welfare. It also interests us in all the promises; every one of which shall be fulfilled to us in their season. Though therefore *strong faith will bring more glory to God, the weakest faith shall ultimately prevail to the saving of our souls*.

***~~2. That they had done well in asking it at his hands—~~***

Our Lord did not decline the honor which they offered him. On many occasions they had asked of him what none but God could bestow: and, had he not been God, as well as man, he would have rectified their error, and taught them to pray only and exclusively to his heavenly Father. When John mistook an angel for the Deity, and "fell at his feet to worship him, the angel forbad him, saying, Don't do that! I am your fellow-servant: worship God, [Revelation 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.10)." So our Lord himself, when a certain lawyer, who conceived of him only as a man, gave him a title due only to God, reproved him, saying, "Why do you call me good? there is none good but One, that is God." But here he so commended the subject of their petition as manifestly to intimate his approbation of the petition itself.

In like manner, when Paul, some years afterwards, prayed to him for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, Jesus answered him, "My grace is sufficient for you, [2 Corinthians 12:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-10); thereby leaving no room for doubt but that we may address our prayers to him, and that "he will fulfill all our petitions."

"Do we then need faith; or, possessing it already in a small degree, do we need to have it strengthened and increased?" Let us remember, that "whatever we shall ask of him, or of the Father in his name, that will He do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13)." He has "all fullness treasured up in him;" yes, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." and "out of his fullness shall we all receive, even grace upon grace." As repentance is his gift, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31), so is faith also his gift, [Acts 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.27). [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8). [Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.27); wherever it exists, it is He who has wrought it in the heart, [Colossians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.12); for he is both "the Author and the Finisher of faith, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." Let us then from day to day present to him the petition in our text, "Lord, increase our faith!"

***~~Now from this subject we may clearly learn,~~***

***~~1. The true order of Christian duties—~~***

The Apostles asked for faith in order to produce in them a suitable practice: and this is what we also must do. We must not set ourselves, as many ignorantly do, first to perform good works, in order that they may serve as a warrant for believing in Christ: but we must believe in him, in order that we may be enabled to perform good works to his honor and glory. This may appear an unnecessary distinction; but it is of infinite importance: it lies at the very foundation of all our hopes, and of all our comforts. If we attempt to reverse this order, we shall be like persons who should prepare a superstructure without laying a foundation, or expect fruit from a tree that had no root. The Scripture is very express on this subject: we must lay hold on the promises first, and then make use of them for the purifying of our souls, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1); *we must first behold the glory of the Lord in the Gospel, and then by virtue of that sight be changed into his image*, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

***~~2. The proper tendency of faith—~~***

Why did the Apostles ask for faith? Was it to set aside the duties that had been just inculcated? No! it was, that they might be able to practice them. Perverse people will, though instructed to the contrary ten thousand times, represent the duty of faith as having a licentious tendency. But look into the Scriptures, and see how it wrought on the saints of old: or look to the fruits that are uniformly ascribed to it in the Scriptures. Is it not "by faith that we overcome the world?" Is not faith also represented as "working by love" and "purifying the heart?" Perhaps it may be thought to bring us to duties in the first instance, and to set us above them afterwards. But behold its operation in its more advanced state; and hear what Paul says of the Thessalonian Church; "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fit, because that your faith grows exceedingly, and (what? you are therefore above attending to good works? No! but) the charity of every one of you all towards each other abounds, 2 Thessalonians 1:3." Know then, that the prejudice which so generally obtains both against the grace and the doctrine of faith, is without any just foundation: and that, though a counterfeit grace will produce only a semblance of fruit, *a living faith will uniformly operate to the production of good works*.

***~~3. The folly of calling ourselves believers, while we exercise an unforgiving spirit—~~***

It must be confessed, that many will pretend to faith, who yet indulge very unhallowed dispositions. They are proud, and wrathful, and vindictive; if not to the same extent as others—yet sufficiently to show that they are yet unsanctified and unrenewed. And what shall we say to such persons? Shall we encourage them to think that these tempers are to be regarded only as the *infirmities*of saints? No, in truth, "they are not the spots of God's children," but the proper character of the devil's. The criterion given of his people is universal and infallible, "By their fruits you shall know them: a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, nor a good tree bad fruit." Therefore our Lord repeats the admonition, "By their fruits you shall know them, [Matthew 7:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.16-20)." Excuse not then yourselves, you morose, quarrelsome, fretful, unforgiving people; for you are trees that shall be "cut down and cast into the fire, [Matthew 7:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.16-20);" you are "trees, whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever Jude! verse 12, 13." Talk not of grace: for grace, that is not effectual to change our thoughts and lives, is no grace; and faith, that produces not holy tempers, is no better than the faith of devils! [James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19-20) with 1 Corinthians 13:2.

If you complain that you cannot overcome your tempers; I would say, Set about it in the right way. You make resolutions perhaps; and break them as soon as made: but go rather and exercise faith on God, and on his great and precious promises: go and contemplate the incomprehensible love of Christ in dying for you: go and sprinkle his blood upon your conscience, and get a sense of his pardoning love upon your soul: Go, I say, and get your faith increased, and exercised; and you shall no longer have to complain of want of power to do the will of God: let him "perfect that which is lacking in your faith;" and you will then be enabled to perfect that which is lacking in your practice: "through him strengthening you, you will be able to do all things! [Titus 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.8)."

***~~#1552~~***

***~~The Obedient Servant~~***

***~~[Luke 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.10)~~***

"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

*Pride is deeply rooted in the heart of man.*It was that which first instigated him to disobedience; he wished to be as God, [Genesis 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.5). Since his fall it leads him openly to cast off his allegiance to the Supreme Being, and to become a God unto himself, independent, self-seeking, and self-sufficient. This principle operates even in the renewed mind, and endangers God's acceptance of our persons and services, [1 Timothy 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.6).

Our Lord frequently cautioned his disciples against it. He had just inculcated the arduous duty of forgiving injuries, verse 3, 4, and had assured them that, however difficult it might be, faith would enable them to fulfill it, verse 3, 6; but, aware that such obedience might serve as an occasion for pride and vain-glory, he now teaches them, by a just comparison, verse 7-9, *what thoughts they should ever entertain even of their best services*. We shall consider,

***~~I. The comparison—~~***

*The extent of God's authority over us is not sufficiently considered.* There is no slave so much at his master's disposal as we are at God's.

***~~The Jews exercised a most despotic power over their servants—~~***

Some of the servants among the Jews were captives taken in war: others were slaves bought with money. Over these, their master had unlimited authority. They were regarded by him as his stock, and, like his cattle, were transmitted to his children as a part of their inheritance, [Leviticus 25:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 25.44-46). They were employed in all kinds of services: nor did their master esteem himself indebted to them for any services they might perform. This was perfectly well known to those whom our Lord addressed. Perhaps many of his hearers had servants whom they so treated. Hence our Lord appealed to them respecting the truth of his statement.

***~~But God has an infinitely higher claim to our services—~~***

He originally *formed*us in the womb. We have not a faculty which we did not receive from him. This gives him an entire right over us, [Isaiah 44:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.21). He, upon this very ground, has an unlimited authority over the greatest monarch, as much as over the most base slave, [Job 31:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.13-15).

He has *preserved*us every moment since our first existence in the world. However he may have made use of second causes, he has been "the author of every blessing" we have enjoyed. The beasts are not so dependent on their owner as we on him. On this ground he claimed the homage of his people of old, [Exodus 20:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 20.2-3), and may justly demand our utmost exertions in his service.

He moreover has *bought*his people with a price: he has paid down a sum which exceeds all calculation. Silver and gold were insufficient for the cost: nothing would suffice but the blood of his only dear Son. Behold, he withheld not the mighty ransom, [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19). He delivered up his Son for us, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32). And has not this given him a right over us? Can we say in any respect that "we are our own?" or, is not the Apostle's inference just, That we should therefore glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20).

***~~Hence it is evident that we can never confer an obligation upon him—~~***

Even hired servants do not confer an obligation by the services they render. Much less do they, who belong to their master as his purchased possession. Least of all can we make God our debtor. We can do no more than what is our absolute duty to do. Works of supererogation exist only in the conceits of blind superstitious papists. The idea of performing them is arrogant in the extreme. None can entertain it in their minds without involving their souls in utter ruin. The point is decided for us by the voice of inspiration, [Romans 11:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.35-36).

The justness of the comparison being made to appear, we proceed to consider,

***~~II. The command grounded upon it—~~***

The injunction in the text is manifestly grounded on the preceding comparison. It imports,

***~~1. That we should not be puffed up with a conceit of our high attainments—~~***

There is no notice taken of our manifold defects. It is supposed that we actually do all that is commanded us; yet even on that supposition we have nothing to boast of. *However perfect our obedience were in all other respects, pride would at once debase it all*: God will have no flesh to glory in his presence. The very angels, who never fell, are constrained to give all the glory to God, [Revelation 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-12). The Seraphim around the throne veil their faces and their feet as unworthy to behold or to serve their Maker, [Isaiah 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.2); and the glorified saints cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, ascribing all their happiness to him alone, [Revelation 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.10). Sinful man therefore can never have whereof to glory before God. His zeal and holiness can be of no account with God if once they be made the grounds of his confidence. God, so far from approving such a proud boaster, would abhor him, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6), and would surely abase him in the day of judgment, [Proverbs 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.5).

***~~2. That we should be humbled under a sense of our unprofitableness—~~***

It is not possible that our works should profit God, [Psalm 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.2). Nothing that we can do can render him more happy or more glorious, [Job 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.2-3). We should live and act under a sense of this. The Apostles themselves were directed to consider their best works as worthless. Indeed, the truly enlightened in all ages have judged thus of themselves. *Job*abhorred himself in dust and ashes, [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6). *Isaiah*seemed to himself like a poor leper, at the very moment that he was favored with a heavenly vision, [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). *Paul*accounted himself "less than the least of all saints," yes, the very "chief of sinners, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8). [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)." In this light should we continually view our best performances, and acknowledge that "our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags, [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are looking for acceptance through their own works—~~***

How manifestly is your spirit contrary to that which the Gospel recommends! You are endeavoring to establish a righteousness of your own: you not only think to compensate for your sins, but to have a degree of merit sufficient to purchase Heaven. Perhaps you profess only to rely on your works in part; but in whatever degree you expect them to weigh, you so far make God your debtor. Hear, I beg you, the voice of Christ in the text. Renounce from henceforth all self-righteousness, and self-dependence, and learn to say with the great Apostle, "I count all things but dung for the knowledge of Christ! [Philippians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8-9)."

***~~2. Those, who, professing to trust in Christ, are indulging self-delight—~~***

*It is inexpressibly difficult to maintain a truly humble spirit. Pride will rise in spite of our better judgment, and often operate when we are least aware of it. Our love of man's applause too often appears even under the garb of humility.*Let us guard against self-deceit. God sees through the veil of our hypocrisy, and will leave us to feel the sad effects of our corruption: he has warned us plainly of our danger, [Proverbs 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.18). "Let him therefore who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12);" let him "not be high-minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)."

***~~3. Those who are dejected because of their unprofitableness—~~***

It is well to be humbled under a sense of our infirmities; but the feeling of them is an effect of divine grace. *Our contrition therefore should be tempered with thankfulness*. Let us not forget that such a state of mind is approved by God. Instead of desponding, let us cleave more steadfastly to Christ, [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23).*The viler we are in our own eyes, the more precious let him be to us. Thus will he increase, as we decrease,* [John 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.30); and we ourselves shall be exalted in proportion to our self-abasement, [Matthew 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.12). Let us in the meantime do all that we can to serve him. If we cannot profit him by fulfilling his commands, we may please him. Let that be our constant ambition, [2 Corinthians 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.9). Then, though we have no claim upon him for a reward, he will requite our services; nor shall the smallest attempt to honor him be overlooked! [Ephesians 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.8).

***~~#1553~~***

***~~The Ten Lepers Healed~~***

***~~[Luke 17:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.17-18)~~***

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

As the miracles of our Lord were greatly diversified, so were the effects produced by them. Sometimes they were regarded with stupid indifference; at other times they were made effectual to the conversion of sinners: we have an instance of both in the history before us—

***~~I. Consider the various circumstances mentioned in the context—~~***

***~~The leprosy, though little known among us, was very common in Judea: ten persons infected with it made application to Jesus for relief—~~***

Jesus had just been refused admission into a Samaritan village, [Luke 9:52-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.52-53); [Luke 9:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.56) with verse 12. On his entrance into another village the lepers saw him. How graciously was the bigotry of the Samaritans overruled for good! Had they used the common rights of hospitality, perhaps the lepers might never have had the opportunity that was now afforded them.

It was not permitted to lepers to approach even their dearest friends. They therefore "stood afar off," crying earnestly for relief.*A sense of need will make us importunate in our supplications*. But, alas! *the generality are far more anxious for the removal of bodily disorders, than of spiritual maladies*. Happy were it for us, if our fervor were most expressed in the concerns which most demand it!

***~~Jesus instantly gave a gracious answer to their petition—~~***

He did not indeed pronounce them whole, or even promise to make them so. He only ordered them to go to the priests, the appointed judges of leprosy, verse 14 with [Leviticus 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.2). This however amounted to a virtual promise of healing, unless he intended only to mock and deride their misery. And it answered many valuable and important purposes. It served as a test of their faith and obedience. Their instant departure would prevent any combination to discredit the miracle. It would make the priests themselves to attest its reality, and might lead them to receive him as the promised Messiah.

In obedience to his command, the lepers went, expecting a cure: nor were any of them disappointed of their hope. In going, they were restored by the almighty power of Jesus; and they saw in themselves infallible tokens of perfect health.

***~~The effects however produced upon them were not alike in all—~~***

Nine of them continued their journey, mindful only of their own comfort. Having obtained all that they wished, they forgot their Benefactor, nor ever thought of paying the debt which gratitude demanded.

One, however, was more sensible of the obligations conferred upon him, and burned with a desire to acknowledge the mercies he had received. Returning instantly, he prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus. With heartfelt gratitude he glorified God as the author of his mercy, and gave thanks to Jesus, as the instrument by whom it was sent. Nor was he less ardent in his thanksgivings, than he had before been importunate in his prayers, verse 13, 15.

To open these more minutely, we shall,

***~~II. Make some reflections on the text in particular—~~***

The first reflection which naturally arises from the text is,

***~~1. What ingratitude is there in the human heart!~~***

We are amazed at the conduct of the ungrateful lepers. We are ready to suppose that nothing could induce *us*to act like them. Yet we may see in them a true picture of the world at large.

How many temporal mercies have we experienced through our whole lives! What continuance of health, or deliverances from sickness! What freedom from want, or relief in the midst of it! What comfort in the society of our friends and relatives! *Yet how little have we thought of him who bestowed these blessings!*

How many spiritual mercies too have we received from God! What provision has been made for the healing of our souls! The Son of God himself has suffered, that he might "heal us by his stripes" and offers of pardon and salvation have been proclaimed to us in his name. Yes, we have been promised a deliverance from the leprosy of sin, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14), and have been entreated to become children and heirs of God. Are not these mercies which demand our gratitude? Yet what returns have we made to our adorable Benefactor?

May not God complain of us as he did of the ungrateful Jews, [Isaiah 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.2-3). Let us then abase ourselves before God under a sense of our vileness, [Job 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.6); nor let us justify our conduct from the example of the world.

Who does not commend the singularity of the grateful leper? Who does not admire the singularity of Noah among the antediluvians, and of Lot in Sodom? Let us then dare to be momentous in loving and adoring our Benefactor. Let a sense of gratitude far outweigh the fear of man. Then, though the world despises us, we shall have the testimony of a good conscience; and "our record shall be on high" in the day of the Lord Jesus, [Job 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 16.19).

***~~2. How often do they, who enjoy the greatest advantages, make the least improvement of them!~~***

The nine ungrateful lepers were, as Jews, the Lord's people. They had been instructed out of the law by God's appointed ministers. The wonderful works which had been wrought for their nation could not be unknown to them. The examples of David and other eminent saints had been set before them: they therefore could not but know much of God's will respecting them.

The poor "Samaritan," on the contrary, was a "stranger" to God's covenant. The prejudices of his nation forbade all fellowship with the Jews. By this means he was cut off from all opportunities of instruction: yet he returned to glorify his God, while all the Jews overlooked the mercy given unto them.

Just so, are there not many among ourselves, who are far from improving their spiritual advantages? Are we not surpassed in virtue by many who never enjoyed our privileges? Are there not many illiterate and obscure persons whose hearts overflow with gratitude, while ours are as insensible as a stone? Let us remember that God expects from us according to the means of improvement he has afforded us, [Luke 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.48); and let us labor to yield fruit suited to the culture bestowed upon us, [Isaiah 5:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.2-6).

***~~3. How plain is our duty both under a need, and after the reception of divine mercies!~~***

The lepers could not possibly have adopted a wiser measure than they did: they were persuaded of Christ's power to help: and they sought help at his hands.

And is not Jesus as mighty now, as in the days of his flesh? Will not the diseases of the soul, as well as of the body, yield to his commands? Has he not encouraged us by many express promises of mercy?

Let us then, like the lepers, cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Nor let us cease from our importunity until we have prevailed. And, if we have received answers of peace, let us be thankful for them, [Psalm 30:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.2-4).

Justly did Jesus express his wonder at not seeing the other nine; much more will he if we should forget to pay him our tribute of praise. Waiting for our grateful approaches, he says, "Where are they?" Let him then see us daily prostrating ourselves before him. Let us be earnest in our thanksgivings, as well as in our prayers. Let us often consider how we may best express our sense of his goodness, [Psalm 116:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.12). In his strength let us go and show ourselves to the world. Let us compel his very enemies to acknowledge his work, [Psalm 126:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.2), and constrain them by our lives to confess the efficacy of his grace. Thus shall we most acceptably honor him on earth, and before long be exalted to magnify his name in Heaven!

***~~#1554~~***

***~~Suddenness of Christ's Second Coming~~***

***~~[Luke 17:26-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.26-30)~~***

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from Heaven and destroyed them all. "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed!"

*We cannot be too often reminded that true religion is not a matter of speculation, but of practice.* The replies which our Lord constantly made to speculative or curious inquiries, leads us to this remark. He always endeavored to turn the mind inwards, and to*make every question that was put to him subservient to the spiritual welfare of his hearers*. The Pharisees, ever deceiving themselves with the expectation of a temporal Messiah, asked him, "When the kingdom of God should come?" He told them that the *Messiah's kingdom was not to be an outward and temporal one, such as they looked for, but an inward and spiritual kingdom*, such as he himself was now establishing in the hearts of men. But as the nation at large would reject him, he warned his hearers that the Son of Man would again come, even before that present generation should have passed away; that, when he did come, he would find them as supine and careless as they were at that moment; and that, unless they repented, his coming would outcome in their utter destruction.

This seems to be the obvious import of the words. But, as the same expressions are used in a subsequent discourse, where they are blended with others relating to the day of judgment, we shall not confine them to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, but take them as declaring in general,

***~~I. The state of mankind at large—~~***

***~~We are here told what was their state in the days of old—~~***

In the days of Noah and of Lot the great mass of mankind were in a state of carnal enjoyment, of sinful security, and of contemptuous unbelief.

Their business and their pleasures altogether engrossed their minds: they ate and drank, and formed connections, and got fortunes, and built houses, and planted grounds, and consulted their own happiness and comfort in the way they liked best. This was their entire employment, and the great object of their lives:*if they could but make themselves happy and comfortable in their respective stations, it was all they cared for.*

Had they pursued these things in subservience to higher and better things, there would have been no blame imputed to them: for, the eating, and drinking, and marrying, and buying, and selling, and planting, and building, were not wrong in themselves: but *the evil of this state consisted in its being their chief, if not their only, occupation*. Had we been told, that, in addition to these things, they wept, they fasted, they prayed, they turned to God, and served the Lord with their whole hearts, we would not have grudged them one atom of their enjoyments, or have thought the worse of them for their worldly occupations. *But God was not in all their thoughts; eternity was hid from their view; the things of time and sense engaged their whole attention*: they took for granted that they had nothing to fear from the hands of God, and therefore they were under no concern to obtain his favor. In a word, *they regarded their bodily welfare, but had no concern at all about their souls.*

But this security of theirs did not proceed from ignorance: the antediluvians were taught by *Noah*, for one hundred and twenty years together, that God would punish their supineness, that he would punish it too by a deluge that would overwhelm the whole earth. Moreover, the ark was gradually prepared in their sight; so that at least they must see that the preacher believed his own declarations.

In like manner, the inhabitants of *Sodom*were warned by Lot, who "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." But, as Noah was doubtless regarded as little better than a maniac, so, Lot's words, we are told, appeared, even to his own relatives, as idle tales; "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law."

This it was that chiefly aggravated the guilt of the persons referred to: they were called, but they would not answer; they were warned, but they would not hear: they cast God's words behind them, and ignored all his threatenings, and poured contempt upon all his messages of love and mercy. Such was their state in the days of old.

And similar to it will be the state of the world at the last day—

Should we attempt to describe the state of the world at this hour, where could we find words more proper to represent it than those in the text? We may appeal to all, whether the great mass of Christians, no less than of heathens, be not divided between the two pursuits of business and pleasure? Into how many companies may you go, before you will find a person that seriously inquires, "Where is God my Maker?" We might here speak of the open sins which are everywhere committed without shame and without remorse.

But we purposely omit the mention of any gross sin whatever, and confine ourselves to the things specified in our text as characterizing the most inoffensive part of the antediluvian world, and of the inhabitants of Sodom; because it is to the more inoffensive part of the community that we now more especially address ourselves: and we ask whether the text be not a faithful picture of them?

In particular, is not serious religion held up to scorn? and are not the promoters of it considered as "the troublers of Israel?" Blessed be God, the ark is rearing in the midst of you; and there are a few who boldly protest against the impiety that prevails: but how *few improve the warnings that they hear, or set themselves in earnest to flee from the wrath to come!*

Nor is this picture less descriptive of those who will be alive at the day of judgment. The same carnal enjoyments will be sought then as now; the same sinful security will obtain; and the same contemptuous unbelief will decry all need of vital godliness. The people of that generation will be warned, even as you have been; and they will *regard the messages of God as the dreams of gloomy superstition, or the reveries of enthusiastic folly*. This state of things will continue even to the very moment that Christ shall come to judgment, precisely as it did among the antediluvians, until the *flood*came; and, among the inhabitants of Sodom, until the *fire*came down from Heaven to consume them.

This melancholy prospect renders it necessary for me to point out,

***~~II. The danger of that state—~~***

We have before observed, that the text primarily refers to the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem, but has a further reference also to his coming to judge the world. Agreeably to this view of it, shall be our consideration of the danger that attends the state therein described.

Consider then its danger,

***~~1. To the nation—~~***

There is a time when Christ comes to punish nations, just as he did to punish Jerusalem. And how shall we judge of the time that he will come? I answer, then is he most likely to come, when a nation is in the state before described. That he is visiting the nations now, is a fact so clear, that no thoughtful man can entertain a doubt of it. Hitherto the showers of his wrath, which have deluged other lands, have but just sprinkled ours: but the clouds are black, and gathering thick around us: and the darkest symptom is, that, "though his hand is lifted up, we will not see it." Consult the Scriptures, and see whether this carnal security be not the surest forerunner of his judgments? See what was the state of Jerusalem previous to the Babylonish captivity, and say whether, while our state so precisely accords with it, we have not reason to tremble at the prospect of her judgments, [Isaiah 47:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 47.8-11), or let the predicted fall of the mystical Babylon be taken as a ground of your decision, [Revelation 18:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.7-8). The truth is, that, amidst all the advantages which we possess for superior piety, we take the lead in *an idolatrous attachment to wealth and pleasure*, and in a presumptuous confidence in an arm of flesh: we may well therefore expect, that the cup which others have drunk of, shall be put into our hands, [Jeremiah 25:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 25.15); [Jeremiah 25:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 25.28-29); and that our superior guilt will outcome in more aggravated calamities, [Amos 6:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 6.3-6) and [Isaiah 22:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.12-14).

***~~2. To individuals—~~***

The Lord Jesus may not in any signal manner visit men in this life; but he will infallibly call them to judgment in the world to come. For this end he will come to them as soon as they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities; and the same criterion which we have used in estimating the ripeness of *nations*for judgment, will serve us to judge of the state of *individuals*. God has told us, that "as fish are taken in an evil net, and as birds are caught in a snare—so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them! [Ecclesiastes 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.12)"

Moreover, to impress this the more strongly on our minds, he has represented a man, who, having succeeded in his temporal pursuits, congratulates himself on the prospect of many years of pleasurable enjoyment: and then he addresses that man in terms suited to the occasion; "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you! [Luke 12:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.45-46)." Here then we see a lively example of the state which is described in our text, and of the visit which the sinner receives from his offended Lord. May this awful representation never be realized in us! But let us tremble lest it should, for we are taught to expect, that "our Lord will come in a time that we look not for him, and at an hour that we are not aware, [Luke 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.19-20)." Nay more, we are assured, that, when we begin to say, "Those who hear the warnings of this curse should not congratulate themselves, thinking, 'I am safe, even though I am following the desires of my own stubborn heart.' This would lead to utter ruin! The LORD will never pardon such people. Instead his anger and jealousy will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will come down on them, and the LORD will erase their names from under Heaven! [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20)."

***~~3. To the world at large—~~***

The precise season of the general judgment is not known to men or angels; nor was Christ himself, as man, informed of it, at least not so informed as to have it within his commission to declare it. But we have already seen in what state the world will be at its arrival. They will be expecting the period as little as we at present are. They will have been warned respecting it by the faithful ministers of Christ; but they will not regard the admonitions that are given to them: they will rather scoff, as the antediluvians and the inhabitants of Sodom did, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, [2 Peter 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3-4). But in the midst of all their occupations, enjoyments, projects, the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge appear in his glory! This will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, [1 Corinthians 15:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.52)." "For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other, so it will be on the day when the Son of Man comes."

Alas! in what a dreadful condition will millions of the human race be found! some in the commission of the grossest crimes; some ridiculing the supposed weakness of their faithful pastors; and the more innocent among them occupied in nothing better than "eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage." How terrible to be called to judgment in a state so unprepared!

Will the *suddenness*of the event be any excuse for them in that day? or will it be any reason for averting or mitigating their punishment? No! it will be with them as with those mentioned in our text: "As soon as Noah entered into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all;" and, "as soon as Lot went out of Sodom, the fire and brimstone descended and consumed them all!" So will all, that are unprepared to meet their God, be utterly and eternally destroyed. Hence the day of judgment is called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men! [2 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.7)."

As long as we are in this world, it is "a day of acceptance, a day of salvation. [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2)." Yes, even to the eleventh hour we are warranted to invite men to return to God, and to assure them of a favorable reception: but when death or judgment arrives, there is an end of the day of grace, and then commences the day of everlasting perdition.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The congregation in general—~~***

We would entreat every one of you to inquire whether you are prepared to meet your God? This is no trifling question, no enthusiastic question, no party question; it is a question in which all are equally interested, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned. And we beg permission to remind you all, that a moral conduct is not sufficient to secure happiness for you in the last day. You will observe, that no gross sin is imputed to the antediluvian world, or to the inhabitants of Sodom; many of them doubtless were guilty of heinous transgressions: but *the universal sin, the sin that destroyed them all, was carelessness*.

Say then, brethren, whether this does not characterize your state? and whether you have not reason to tremble for the judgments that shall come upon you? You are apt to promise yourselves a more convenient season for turning to God, but how many are disappointed in that hope! Suppose that, at the deluge, there were some so far wrought upon by the ministry of Noah, that they determined to follow his advice as soon as they should have finished their present business, and got more time for spiritual employments. Suppose them surprised by the flood, witnessing the destruction of thousands around them, and, from an eminence to which they had fled, seeing the ark borne up by the waves in which they were shortly to be immersed—how would they wish that they had improved the day of their visitation, and fled to the ark for refuge! Thus biting, thus fruitless, will be the remorse of millions in the day of judgment.

But, blessed be God! the ark is not yet closed: it is open for all who will flee unto it: the Lord Jesus Christ never did, nor ever will, close the door against a repenting sinner: he came to seek and to save the lost; yes, he shed his blood upon the cross to save them. To every one of you then would we say, "Come my people, enter into your chambers, and shut the door about you, and hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation be over and past, [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20)."

But, if you will not hear, know of a certainty, that "your judgment lingers not, and your damnation slumbers not! [2 Peter 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.3);" for, "if God spared not the angels that sinned …nor the old world …nor Sodom; but saved Noah …and delivered Lot—he knows at this time how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished! [2 Peter 2:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-9)."

***~~2. Those among you who make a profession of vital godliness—~~***

This subject may appear to some of you to be calculated to awaken sinners, but not very well suited to the edification of saints. This conceit appears to have entered into the mind of Christ's disciples; and to have been justly reproved by him: for, who is he that needs not such an admonition? [Matthew 24:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.44-46). We grant that here are no new truths brought to our view: "you know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night;" and that when men shall say, 'Peace and safety,' then destruction shall come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. You, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-5."

But is this subject therefore uninstructive to you? Hear how the Apostle continues his address to the very persons whom he has thus described: "Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober! Let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and, for a helmet, the hope of salvation, [1 Thessalonians 5:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.6-8)." Hear also how another Apostle addresses the whole Christian Church: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night …Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God? …Why, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, 2 Peter 3:10-14."

As we said to others, that a *moral conduct*will not suffice; so we must say to you, that a *religious profession*will not suffice. You know full well in what a state men ought to die—how penitent, how believing, how devout in their minds, how subdued in their tempers, how superior to the world, how intent on heavenly things! This then is the state in which you ought to live: that, when Jesus shall say to you, "Surely I come quickly;" you may be ready at all times to answer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! [Revelation 22:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.20)."

***~~#1555~~***

***~~Lot's Wife~~***

***~~[Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32)~~***

"Remember Lot's wife!"

It is necessary for mariners frequently to consult charts or maps, which have been formed for the purpose of pointing out to them the different bearings of different countries, and of guarding them against latent obstacles which would endanger the safety of their ship. But notwithstanding the utmost care that has been taken to ascertain the situation of rocks and shoals, it often happens that ships are wrecked, where no caution has been given in the most approved charts, and where no danger was apprehended.

This however cannot happen to persons sailing for the port of Heaven. There is not a rock or shoal that is not plainly laid down in the inspired volume; nor is there any fear of shipwreck to those who will follow the course which is there prescribed.

That multitudes do perish, notwithstanding they have that volume before them, is certain. Many who have for a long time enjoyed, like Demas, a prosperous voyage, have yet, through their inattention to the cautions given them, struck upon the *rocks of worldliness*, and come short of the desired harbor. But the fault is in themselves alone; they have been guarded in a peculiar manner against the danger to which they were exposed: it had been said to them, and it is said to us also, "Remember Lot's wife!" But let us inquire,

***~~I. What we are to remember concerning her.~~***

We may comprehend the whole under two heads:

***~~1. Her sin—~~***

She, as the history informs us, looked back towards Sodom after she had been delivered from it by the angels, [Genesis 19:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 19.26).

Is it asked, What harm there was in this? We answer, it was in many points of view exceedingly sinful.

It was (to speak of it in the most favorable light) a ***curious***look. Curiosity may indeed be innocent in respect to some things; but in reference to others, it may be highly criminal. Who can doubt the criminality of those Bethshemites who looked into the ark; when above fifty thousand of them were struck dead upon the spot for their transgression? [1 Samuel 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 6.19). Or who that knows anything of his own heart can doubt, whether he has not often contracted guilt by indulging an unhallowed curiosity to see, or hear, or read, sinful things which he had no proper call to inquire into, and the knowledge of which tended only to inflame his imagination, and defile his soul? And surely the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not a fit subject for curiosity, at a time too that she was rescued from it by the ministry of angels: her mind ought to have been very differently occupied on so awful an occasion.

But it was also an ***unbelieving***look. She had been told that fire and brimstone would come down from Heaven to destroy those wicked cities; and she was desirous to know whether the threatening were indeed true, or whether she was fleeing from only imaginary dangers. And was this no sin? Was not Sarah reproved for doubting an almost incredible promise, [Genesis 18:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.12-13). Was not Zachariah struck deaf and mute for a similar fault? [Luke 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.18); [Luke 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.20). Yes, were not all the nation of Israel doomed to perish in the wilderness on account of their unbelief? [Hebrews 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.18-19). Who then will say, What harm was there in her conduct?

Moreover, it was a ***wishful***look. She had left a part of her family behind, together with (what she seemed more anxious about) the whole of her possessions; and, instead of being thankful for the preservation of her life, she was filled with regret about what she had lost. That this was a very essential part of her fault, is certain: because she is proposed as a warning to us in this particular view, verse 31. Her *treasure*was more in Sodom than in Heaven; and she showed by her look, that "where her treasure was, there was her heart also." Was there then no crime in "setting her affections on things below, instead of on things above?"

Lastly, it was a ***disobedient***look. However innocent it might be in every other view, it was palpably wrong in this. The command was plain and positive; "Look not behind you in all the plain." It was not for her to determine whether the command were more or less important; her duty was to obey it: and, in violating it, she rebelled against the Majesty of Heaven.

*Eve's*eating of the forbidden fruit might be thought a slight offence; but it ruined the whole world!

*Saul's*sparing of Agag and the spoil, might be called a merciful and commendable deviation from the commission given him; but it was declared to be rebellion against God, and as criminal in his estimation as witchcraft or idolatry! [1 Samuel 15:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 15.22-23).

In remembering therefore her sin, we should remember, that God looks not merely on our outward conduct, but at the inward principles and dispositions of the heart.

***~~2. Her punishment—~~***

This was truly ***awful***. She was instantly involved in the very same ruin that overwhelmed all the cities of the plain. Not a moment was allowed her for repentance; but she was cut off in the very act of sin, and summoned into the presence of her Judge to receive her doom at his hands!

It was moreover ***exemplary***. She was made a monument of God's holy indignation, and a warning to all future ages, that *men must not trifle with sin, or be inattentive to the Divine commands*. Wherever the Bible shall come, even to the very end of time, she will be held up as an example of that divine vengeance, which shall sooner or later overtake all whose hearts are at variance with their professions.

It will be proper to state,

***~~II. Why we are to bear her in remembrance—~~***

Much there is that we may learn from her; but particularly,

***~~1. Our duty—~~***

That we are not to be altogether "of the world," is a truth that scarcely need be mentioned to those who make any profession of religion. But very few are aware to what extent our renunciation of it should be carried. It is not sufficient, that we do not run to the same excess of riot with the ungodly; or that we differ from them in appearance and profession. We must indeed have some fellowship with them (or else we could not fill up our several stations in life); but we must "come out from among them and be separate, and have no more fellowship with them than light with darkness, or Christ with Belial, [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-17)."

Nor must we have our heart set upon our property, when God in his providence is calling us to forsake it. We need not put away riches from us, if God is pleased to cast them into our lap; nor ought we to be indifferent to the preservation of them, if we can keep them together with our integrity. But they are not to be our *idol*; nor ought we to regret the loss of them, if we are called to sacrifice them for the honor of our God. We should have our affections withdrawn from things below, and set primarily on things above. We should "love nothing that is in the world," so as to judge it at all necessary to our happiness. Instead of wishing to accumulate possessions in it, or to enjoy its vanities, it should be our principal care to shun its pollutions, and escape its plagues! [Revelation 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.4). If we look back upon it at all, it must only be for the purpose of kindling in our hearts a more lively gratitude to God, who in infinite mercy has delivered us from it, and plucked us out of it as brands out of the burning!

***~~2. Our danger—~~***

Let not anyone imagine himself safe, because he has come out of Sodom, and is associated with those who are fleeing from the wrath to come. We know that the Scripture does give many blessed assurances of the Divine protection to those who trust in God: but it is a very sinful perversion of the Scriptures to interpret them in such a manner, as to invalidate all the solemn cautions which are given against apostatizing from our profession, and falling short of the promised rest. We are in danger, [2 Peter 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.18); [2 Peter 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20); [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17); and our security principally consists in feeling our danger, and in acting conformably to those sensations.

For what end are we so frequently reminded of the destruction of the Israelites after they had been brought out of Egypt, and after they had been favored with God's visible presence in the wilderness, Jude verse 5, [1 Corinthians 10:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.1-6), [1 Corinthians 10:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11-12). Or why did our Lord so strongly recommend us to "Remember Lot's wife!" and tell us, that "no man, who having put his hand to the plough should look back, was fit for the kingdom of God?" Or where is the man, however confident he may be about the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, who will venture to say, that he himself is in no danger of "looking back," and that he is already so "escaped from the pollutions of the world, that he never can be entangled again with them and overcome?" I say again, we are in danger, all of us! And it befits us "not to be high-minded, but to fear." "Let him therefore who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

**In conclusion, we would suggest a few hints respecting the *manner*in which you should obey the admonition in the text.** Remember Lot's wife,

**1.** With **thanksgivings**to God, that you have not long since experienced a similar judgment.

**2.** With **prayer**to God, that he would "keep you by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation".

***~~#1556~~***

***~~The Duty of Persevering in Prayer~~***

***~~[Luke 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1)~~***

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

The efficacy of prayer is continually exhibited in the sacred writings, and every incitement to it is afforded to us: nevertheless we are prone to faint in the performance of it. To encourage our perseverance in it our Lord delivered a parable. Waving all notice of the parable itself, we shall consider,

***~~I. Our duty—~~***

To be always in the act of prayer would interfere with other duties: that which is here inculcated, implies that we pray:

***~~Statedly—~~***

Regular seasons for prayer should be fixed. Except in cases of absolute necessity, [Matthew 9:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.13). they should be adhered to. We should constantly acknowledge God in the public assembly, [Hebrews 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.25). We should maintain his worship also in our families. Abraham and Joshua were noted for their attention to family religion, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19), [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15). Our Lord's example is worthy of imitation; he not only expounded his parables to his disciples in private, but prayed with them. See [Luke 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.18), which means, "he was at a distance from the multitude, and praying with his disciples"; nor should we on any account omit it in our closets. How frequent the stated seasons shall be, must be left to our own discretion; David's example is good, [Psalm 55:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.17). But as the morning and evening sacrifices were called the continual burnt-offering, so they may be said to pray always, who pray at those returning seasons.

***~~Occasionally—~~***

There are many particular occasions which require us to pray: in *prosperity*, that God may counteract its evil tendency. See [Proverbs 30:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.9). In *adversity*, that we may be supported under it, [James 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.13). In times of *public distress*or danger, to avert the calamity, [2 Chronicles 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 7.14).

***~~Habitually—~~***

We should maintain a spiritual frame of mind. We may have a disposition for prayer in the midst of business; nor will spontaneous prayers prevail less than solemn devotions. Compare [2 Samuel 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.31) with [2 Samuel 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 17.14); [2 Samuel 17:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 17.23). See also [Nehemiah 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.4); [Nehemiah 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.6).

To pray thus is our duty; "We ought," etc.

***~~It is a duty we owe to God—~~***

He, our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, has commanded it; nor can anything absolve us from our obligation to obey.

***~~We owe it also to our neighbor—~~***

The edification of Christ's mystical body depends, not only on the union of every part with the head, but on the whole being fitly framed together, and on every joint supplying its proper nourishment, [Ephesians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.16), [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.19). But if we are remiss in prayer, we shall be incapable of administering that benefit, which other members have a right to expect from us. Samuel had a deep conviction of this truth, [1 Samuel 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23).

***~~We owe it to ourselves—~~***

A "spirit of supplication" is as necessary to the soul, as food to the body; nor can we feel any regard for our souls, if we do not cultivate it.

It is, however, by no means easy to fulfill this duty—

***~~II. The difficulties that attend it—~~***

When we set ourselves to the performance of it, we shall find difficulties—

***~~Before we begin to pray—~~***

Worldly business may occupy, or worldly amusements dissipate, our thoughts. Family cares may distract our minds, and family disagreements indispose us for this holy employment, [1 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.7). Lassitude of body may unfit us for the necessary exertions. We may be disabled by an invincible hardness of heart. A lack of utterance may also operate as a heavy discouragement. By these means many are tempted to defer their religious exercises: but to yield to the temptation is to increase the difficulty.

***~~While we are engaged in prayer—~~***

The *world*is never more troublesome than at such seasons. Something seen or heard, lost or gained, done or to be done, will generally obtrude itself upon us when we are at the throne of grace.

The *flesh*also, with its vilest imaginations, will solicit our attention.

Nor will *Satan*be backward to interrupt our devotions He has various devices whereby he strives to accomplish his purpose. He will suggest "it is needless to pray:" or, "it is presumption for so great a sinner to ask anything of God:" or, "it is hypocrisy to ask, when the heart is so little engaged." Sometimes he will inject into the Christian's mind the most blasphemous and horrid thoughts; and at other times tempt him to admire his own fluency and enlargement in prayer. Such are the "fiery darts" with which he often assails the soul, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16).

***~~After we have concluded prayer—~~***

When we have prayed, we should expect an answer. But worldliness may again induce a forgetfulness of God; and a habit of worldly conversation drive every serious thought from our minds. Impatience to receive the desired blessings may deject us. Ignorance of the method in which God answers prayer may cause us to disquiet ourselves with many ungrounded apprehensions. Unbelief may rob us of the benefits we might have received, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7). Whatever obstructs God's answers to prayer, disqualifies us for the future discharge of that duty.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

*Let us not expect victory without many conflicts.* Let us remember the effect of perseverance in the case of Moses, [Exodus 17:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.11-13). Above all, let us attend to the parable spoken for this end, [Luke 18:2-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.2-8). So shall we be kept from fainting under our discouragements, and God will fulfill to us his own promise, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9).

***~~#1557~~***

***~~The Importunate Widow~~***

***~~[Luke 18:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.6-8)~~***

Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

There is no duty more strongly enforced in Scripture than that of prayer; nor is there any which needs to be more impressed upon the conscience. To those, who have never engaged in this duty with real spirituality of mind, it may appear easy to be performed; but those who are most earnest in the discharge of it, find many difficulties to combat with. To encourage us to persevere in spite of all those difficulties, our Lord spoke the parable before us verse 1.

We shall consider,

***~~I. What the unjust judge said—~~***

***~~There was a widow laboring under some heavy oppression—~~***

Sin has universally armed men against their fellow-creatures. The world is full of robbery and oppression of every kind, [Psalm 74:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.20); and those who are most defenseless usually suffer the greatest injuries. Everyone is ready to take advantage of the fatherless and the widow. It is their comfort, however, that, if they have enemies on earth, they have a friend in Heaven, [Psalm 68:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.5).

***~~She went to a magistrate to redress her grievances—~~***

The appointment of magistrates is a rich blessing to the community, and they ought to be regarded with much respect and gratitude. We should not indeed be going to law about every trifle. We should rather settle our disputes, if possible, by arbitration; but under the widow's circumstances, it was right to solicit the magistrate's intervention.

***~~The judge, for a long season, would pay no attention to her request—~~***

The judge happened to be of a most abandoned character: he had no fear of the holy, omniscient, almighty God: he did not even regard the good opinion of mankind. Thus he had no rule of conduct but his own caprice or interest. Surely, next to a wicked minister, there can be no greater curse to a neighborhood than such an abandoned magistrate as this. We have reason to bless God, however, that though such characters are too common, they are rarely to be found among our magistracy. No wonder that such a one was deaf to the cries of equity and compassion.

***~~At last, however, he acknowledged himself overcome by her importunity—~~***

He gloried in his contempt of all laws human and divine, verse 4; but he could not bear the constant entreaties of the widow: he was afraid of being "wearied" with her cries. He therefore, purely to get rid of her interposed on her behalf, and did that for his own ease, which he should have done from a better motive. Thus, alas! he proclaimed his own shame; but declared, in a very striking manner, the efficacy of importunity.

His speech, impious as it was, may be rendered profitable to our souls:

***~~II. The improvement suggested by our Lord—~~***

Our Lord makes a twofold application of the subject—

***~~1. In a way of instruction—~~***

We all, in a spiritual view, resemble this helpless widow—

We are beset with enemies both within and without: our conflicts with indwelling corruption are great and manifold. We have moreover to contend with all the powers of darkness, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); nor have we in ourselves any strength to resist our adversaries, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

But God, the judge of all, will help us if we call upon him—

God has promised to hear the supplications of his people, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8): he has declared that he will "cast out none who come to him." He may indeed for wise reasons delay his answers to prayer: he may "bear so long with us" as to make us think he will not hear; but he will never fail to support us in the fittest season.

This may be strongly deduced from the preceding parable—

The widow was a stranger not at all related to the judge; but we are "God's elect," his favored and "peculiar people." The unjust judge was not interested in granting her petition; but God's honor is concerned in relieving the wants of his people, [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13). We may even address him in the language of holy, David [Psalm 74:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 74.22).

There was little hope of prevailing with such a merciless and unjust judge; but we have to go to a loving, and compassionate Father, [Joel 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.13). The widow moreover had none to intercede for her; but we have a righteous and all-prevailing advocate, [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1). She was in danger of irritating the judge by her entreaties; but the more importunate we are, the more God is pleased with us, [Proverbs 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.8), [Psalm 72:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.7). She, notwithstanding all her difficulties, obtained her request. How much more then shall we, who, in lieu of her difficulties, have such abundant encouragements! Surely this deduction is as consoling as it is plain and obvious, and our Lord, with peculiar earnestness, confirms it. He first appeals to us, and then adds, "I tell you," etc; nor can that be justly deemed tardy, which comes in the fittest season.

***~~2. In a way of reproof—~~***

There is but little of such importunity to be found; nor is this to be wondered at, since there is so little "faith on the earth"—

Faith is that principle from whence earnest prayer proceeds. If we believe the declarations of God, we must feel ourselves weak and helpless: if we credit his promises, we shall acknowledge his readiness to help us: and if we believe the reality and importance of eternal things, we shall most earnestly seek help from God; nor shall we be unwilling to wait until he sees fit to answer us. But how little is there of such faith in the world! How few are faithful to the convictions of their own conscience! How few maintain this holy constancy and fervor in prayer! How few can be truly called "a people near unto God!"

If Christ should now come to judgment, would he find this faith in us?

Some live without any acknowledgment of God in prayer: they seem to have forgotten that there will be a day of judgment. Others engage statedly in their accustomed round of duties, and satisfy themselves with an unmeaning recital of certain words. There are others also who under the pressure of affliction will cry to God, but are soon weary of a service in which they have no pleasure. Few, very few, it is to be feared, resemble the importunate widow. *Few pray, as if they thoroughly believed the efficacy of prayer.*If "Christ should now come, would he find faith" in us? He will surely inquire as well respecting our faith, as our works; and *if we have not the faith that stimulates us to prayer, he will appoint us our portion with the unbelievers*.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who live without prayer—~~***

Such persons are as devoid of reason as they are of piety. What madness is it to neglect Heaven when it may be obtained by such means! And how will such thoughtless sinners before long bewail their folly! We cannot but address them as the mariners did the sleeping prophet, [Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.6).

***~~2. Those who pray only in a formal manner—~~***

Formal services are far from being pleasing and acceptable to God: they tend, for the most part, only to deceive our own souls. God requires us to worship him in spirit and in truth, [John 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.23-24). Let us then remember the awful declaration of our Lord, [Mark 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.6-7).

***~~3. Those who, after praying for a season, become remiss again—~~***

See whether it be not the love of earthly things that has hindered you. If so, repent and do your first works, and turn unto your God, [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5); but perhaps you faint merely through the discouragements you meet with, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9). [Proverbs 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.12). Let the remembrance of the importunate widow revive your hopes. Justify God, as the Psalmist did in similar circumstances, [Psalm 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.2-3), and renew your application to him in dependence on his gracious promise, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3).

***~~4. Those that have received gracious answers to prayer—~~***

Let not the goodness of God to you become an occasion of pride. God was not first moved by any worthiness in your petitions; but *he stirred you up to ask, because he had before determined to give*. If this view of things be humiliating, it also affords much encouragement. Every believing prayer may be considered as a pledge of the blessings asked, [Psalm 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 6.9). Adopt therefore the pious resolution of the Psalmist, [Psalm 116:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 116.2); so shall your prayers terminate in everlasting praises.

***~~#1558~~***

***~~The Pharisee and the Publican~~***

***~~[Luke 18:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.13-14)~~***

"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Many express their regret that religion is so generally neglected; and doubtless, a considerate man cannot reflect upon it but with grief. But *it is common also to substitute a formal and mistaken religion in the place of that which is spiritual and saving*. Nor is there sufficient jealousy entertained on this subject. The Pharisees of old were extremely diligent in the observance of outward duties: but, while they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," they were as far from the kingdom of God as if they had been openly profane. For the conviction of such persons, our Lord contrasted, in a parable, the spirit of a self-righteous Pharisee with that of a repenting Publican. He represented them as engaged in prayer, which is a season when most of all they discover their true character. He then declared the very different acceptance they met with from God. In pursuance of our Lord's design, we will open more fully,

***~~I. The different dispositions they manifested in prayer—~~***

***~~The PHARISEE, with apparent devotion, gave thanks to God—~~***

The Pharisee might with propriety bless God for his preventing grace, and acknowledge with gratitude whatever God had wrought in him. Nor was it sinful to feel a pleasure in reviewing his past life. Paul, on proper occasions, spoke of his unselfishness and generosity, [Acts 20:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.33-34). He thanked God also that he had labored more than all the Apostles, [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10), and received much satisfaction in reflecting on his own integrity, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

But on a more attentive survey of his spirit we shall find him actuated by a most hateful disposition. Mark,

***~~1. His pride—~~***

He came professedly with an intention to pray to God; but he was so full of his virtues that he forgot all his needs. His acknowledgment of God was manifestly no more than a mere compliment. His thanksgiving was one continued eulogy upon himself: yet, after all, his freedom from gross sins was but a small matter to boast of; and *the duties he had practiced were only the means of gratifying his vanity*.

***~~2. His uncharitableness—~~***

Not satisfied with commending himself, he poured contempt on all others—the rest of the world. He arrogantly presumed to judge the Publican in particular: but what concern had he with the state of other men? Their greater degrees of sinfulness could not make him less sinful: nor should it have been a subject of boast, but of lamentation. He should have taken occasion from it, not to insult over them, but to intercede for them: but *the guilt and misery of his fellow-creatures were to him a source of gratification rather than of grief*: nor did he care how many might perish, provided he could have the satisfaction of contemplating his own superior goodness.

***~~3. His self-dependence—~~***

He confessed no sins, because he thought he had none to confess; or that they were far overbalanced by his virtues. He implored no help, because he felt no need of divine assistance. He entertained no doubt of his own ability to do the will of God. The whole of his deportment showed the thought of his heart to be, "In myself have I righteousness and strength."

***~~The PUBLICAN manifested a spirit altogether the reverse of this—~~***

He was of a profession that was generally and perhaps justly execrated. The Publicans were tax-gatherers; and, under pretense of gathering the legal imposts, generally extorted more than was due: hence their very employment was held odious, and all who engaged in it were detested; and it is probable he had yielded to the temptations that beset him; but now, "what had been sweet in his mouth, was become gall in his belly."

***~~He approached God with deep humility and contrition—~~***

He came into the temple with a holy fear and trembling. While the Pharisee boldly walked up to the highest part—he stood, as it were, at the very threshold. While the Pharisee ostentatiously spread forth his hands—he did not presume to "lift up so much as his eyes" to Heaven. Instead of boasting of his goodness—he humbled himself as "a sinner." He confessed himself to be deserving of God's wrath and indignation. With much anguish of spirit he "smote upon his bosom," and cried for mercy as one who felt himself the chief of sinners.

***~~He placed all his confidence in God alone—~~***

He did not attempt to extenuate his guilt, or promise amendment as a reparation for his offences. He renounced all self-righteous methods of recommending himself to God, and *cast himself entirely upon the Divine mercy.*

Services performed in so different a spirit could not find equal acceptance with God.

***~~II. The different success with which their prayers were attended—~~***

***~~The PHARISEE could not reasonably expect a blessing—~~***

Many humble persons indeed would envy his conscious rectitude, and wish that they could lay claim to such purity as his. But, what could he obtain who did not condescend to ask anything? His pride would set God at a greater distance from him, [Psalm 138:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.6). Had he been able to boast of far greater things than he possessed, his uncharitableness would have rendered them all of no value, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3); and his self-dependence cut him off from all hope in the Divine mercy, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4). Hence, though full of self-applause, he departed without a blessing from God. Though justified in his own conceit, he was under condemnation for sin. *He was odious in God's eyes in proportion as he was amiable in his own eyes.*

This is asserted, not in the text only, but in other passages of Scripture, [Proverbs 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.5). Jehovah himself declares this in very significant and awful terms [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.5). Here the Pharisee's character is described in perfect correspondence with the text: and God's indignation against him is very strongly painted.

***~~The PUBLICAN, on the contrary, was blessed beyond his expectation—~~***

Many would have reprobated his downcast look and solemn attitude, and have judged him to be a melancholy enthusiast or a designing hypocrite. But God regarded him with delight. Such humility and contrition could not fail of engaging his care, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15). [Psalm 51:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.17); and such trust in him obliged him, as it were, to display his mercy, [Psalm 125:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 125.1). [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4). Hence the Publican went home justified, while the Pharisee returned in a state of condemnation. This is the import of that which the text expresses in a way of comparison. Thus it is that God will deal with every humble suppliant, [Job 33:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 33.27-28). *He will assuredly exalt us in proportion as we abase ourselves*.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who trust in themselves that they are righteous—~~***

Almost all, when interrogated about their souls, reply as this Pharisee "I am not the worst of sinners," etc., etc. But we shall not stand or fall by a comparison with other men. If we have been free from some sins, we have committed many others; and if we have practiced some duties, we have neglected many others. As sinners we must all humble ourselves like the Publican: nor is there a possibility of obtaining mercy in any other way, [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13), [1 John 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8-9).

***~~2. Those who are of a contemptuous spirit while they profess to believe in Christ—~~***

Many pride themselves on the knowledge of the Gospel, as the Pharisee did on his virtues, and speak as contemptuously of the unenlightened world as he did of the Publican. Conceited, arrogant, contentious, they make the Gospel itself an occasion of sin. Well did Paul reprove such persons in the Corinthian Church, [1 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3); 1 Corinthians 4:7. Let them remember that humility and love are the very essence of religion; and beware, lest the higher they are exalted in privileges, the deeper they fall into destruction.

***~~3. Those who are low and vile in their own esteem—~~***

*Never are you higher in God's esteem, than when you are lowest in your own.* Fear not but that those who trust in God's mercy shall find mercy at his hands. Let that faithful saying of the Apostle's sink deep into your hearts, [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15). Look truly to the Savior, and you may "go down to your house justified. Christ emphatically says, "I say unto you," etc." To every believing penitent he speaks as he did to that repenting sinner, [Luke 7:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.48); [Luke 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.50).

***~~#1559~~***

***~~Christ Foretells His Own Sufferings~~***

***~~[Luke 18:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.31-34)~~***

"Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken."

We are informed respecting some of the heathen philosophers, that they had a doctrine for the vulgar, and a different doctrine for their own immediate disciples. Not so our blessed Lord; he had the same doctrine for all: but he communicated some things more plainly to his select followers, because they had, by reason of their constant attendance upon him, a clearer conception of his meaning, and because they were afterwards to become the instructors of the world.

Hence we find that he explained to them in private what he had spoken to the public in parables: and in these private, no less than in his public, instructions, he was indefatigable; embracing every opportunity, whether when sitting in the house, or when walking along the way. He was now walking with his disciples towards Jerusalem; and, as his death was speedily approaching, he judged it right to apprise them what they were to expect. He knew how great a stumbling-block his sufferings were likely to prove to those who did not understand the reason and necessity of them; and therefore he determined once more to inform them, that the *sufferings were not unexpected accidents, but events foreseen by him and fore-ordained by God*.

In this passage there are two things to be noticed:

***~~I. The minuteness of our Lord's prophecy—~~***

We can scarcely conceive a prophecy to be more circumstantial than that before us: and in this view it reflects peculiar light on,

***~~1. His character as a man—~~***

The particular sufferings here specified are most terrible to flesh and blood: yet behold, he speaks of them with as much composure as if they were light and insignificant. But in regarding them with such indifference, he showed how undaunted was his fortitude, how ardent his zeal, how unquenchable his love. Previous to his specifying these things, when he did but manifest a readiness to go up to Jerusalem, where the Jews of late had sought to stone him, his disciples were amazed at his courage, and trembled for themselves lest they also should be involved in difficulties through him. Compare [John 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.7-8); [John 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.16); [John 11:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.37) with [Mark 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.32). If the disciples were so agitated with a confused apprehension of probable evils, how great must his resolution have been, who saw every trouble distinct and certain, and yet went forward boldly to meet it all!

But he had undertaken to glorify his Father upon earth, and to open a way for the display of all his perfections in the salvation of fallen man; and he would not go back. Yes, foreseeing what a "bloody baptism he had to be baptized with, he was quite straitened until it should be accomplished." The only alternative was to bear the sins of men in his own body—or to leave them to perish under the wrath of God. Though he knew how dreadful that wrath was, and that, if not borne by him as their surety, they must bear it for ever, he went forward a willing sacrifice, and "gave himself up for us an offering to God of a sweet-smelling savor."

These heavenly virtues, I say, are all heightened by the consideration that he had a distinct view of the indignities that were to be done to him, and the miseries that he was to endure; and his prophetic enumeration of them discovers and illustrates the unrivaled excellencies of his character.

***~~2. His office as the Messiah—~~***

What clearer proof could be given of his Messiahship? Two questions I would put to any one that doubts the Messiahship of Jesus; and I will defy all the infidels upon earth to answer them:

Could any impostor foresee such events? or, Would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of them? We may conceive an impostor to foresee that he shall be treated with much indignity, and that he shall be put to death: I say, he may see so great a probability of these things, as that he shall venture to predict them. But the circumstances foretold by our Lord are beyond the sphere of probability. Compare the account of this prophecy as it is related in the text, and by Matthew, [Matthew 20:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.18-19). Jesus foretells that he was to be betrayed, and "delivered up into the hands of the Chief Priests and Scribes;" that he was to undergo the formality of a trial, and "be condemned" by a judicial sentence: that he should then not be put to death by them, but "be delivered unto the Gentiles," and by them be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit on: that by them also he should be scourged; and after that should "be crucified" as a slave.

Now the probability was that he would be tumultuously stoned to death by the Jews; because that was the punishment annexed to the crime of which they accused him, namely, blasphemy; and because they had repeatedly attempted to stone him before. As for the Jews delivering him up to the Romans, particularly after the Roman Governor had given them permission to "take and judge him according to their law," it was highly improbable, considering how jealous the Jews were of the Roman power, and how much they hated it. But supposing him delivered up to the Romans, what reason was there to think that he should be insulted by them, and in the precise manner which he described? But why should they "scourge" him? Or, if he must be scourged, why must he be put to death, and that too the death of a slave? No other persons were both scourged and crucified also: and the fact is, that Pilate ordered him to be scourged in order to prevent his crucifixion: he hoped, that the Jews, when they saw how severely he had been scourged, would have been satisfied to let him go: and it was nothing but a most singular concurrence of most implacable enmity on their part, and most shameful cowardice on his, that produced the accomplishment of the whole prophecy. I ask then again, Could any impostor foresee such events? or rather, must not he who did foresee them be endued with a divine prescience, that proved him incontestably to have been sent from God?

But supposing for argument sake that an impostor might guess at these things, and venture to predict them; would any impostor rest his pretensions on the accomplishment of such events as these? Though he might foretell many indignities to be done to him, would he predict his death, and so cruel a death as that of the cross, when he would thereby be precluded from reaping any benefit from his imposture, and be hurried into the eternal world to answer for his deceit at the tribunal of his God? Would any man in his senses act such a part as this? But if we could suppose it possible that a man should be so under the influence of vanity, as to sacrifice his present and eternal welfare for the purpose of leaving a name behind him, and being followed by survivors as a founder of a sect—would he be mad enough to give out, as our Lord did, that he "would rise again the third day?" Would he fix on a test which in so short a time would prove his imposture, and expose him to the scorn and derision of the whole world? They who can believe that any impostor would do this, have no cause to complain of anything incredible in the sacred oracles; for all the difficulties that can be found in the whole scheme of Christianity, are nothing in comparison with this, no, not worthy of a thought.

Besides, our blessed Lord speaks of "all these things as written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man;" so that they also, living at the distance of many hundred years from him, and from each other, must have been confederate with him, if he was an impostor: but, if this could not be, then does this circumstantial prediction of his sufferings and resurrection, accomplished as it was in every minute particular, prove beyond a doubt, that he was the true Messiah.

Let us now proceed to notice,

***~~II. The dullness of his disciples in comprehending it—~~***

Nothing could be plainer than his words: there are no figures, no metaphors, no parabolic expressions; all is clear, plain, literal, explicit. Whence then was it that the disciples could "not understand these things; that this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken?" The truth is, they were blinded,

***~~1. By their prejudice—~~***

They had, in common with their nation at large, formed a notion that the Messiah was to be a temporal Prince, and not only to liberate them from the Roman yoke, but to establish a universal empire upon earth: and as the things which Jesus predicted were altogether irreconcilable with those ideas, they could not at all receive his word, or comprehend his meaning. He had often repeated the same truths to them: but still they could not understand him.

Now it is owing to this cause that the Gospel is so little understood at this day. Men have formed pre-conceived notions of religion; and, because they do not find them confirmed by the sacred writers, they cannot receive even the plainest declarations of God himself.

The current idea of religion is "that we are imperfect creatures, needing some amendment; yet, provided we are not grossly immoral, we have nothing to fear: if we are sober and honest, and just and charitable, and approve ourselves good members of society, then God will readily pardon our little imperfections; and whatever is lacking to recommend us to his favor, Jesus Christ will supply."

These are the views almost universally adopted, and the sentiments that are maintained, wherever religion is made the subject of conversation. Now when persons possessed of these ideas, hear that we are altogether corrupt and abominable, and justly exposed to the curse and wrath of God for our innumerable violations of his law, they cannot tell what we mean: we appear to them to be misrepresenting and slandering human nature. When they hear that we must be created anew in Christ Jesus, and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds," that "old things must pass away, and all things must become new," and that "except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven," they have no idea what it is that we mean; but without much inquiry *they take for granted that these are some gloomy or extravagant notions of wild enthusiasts*.

When they hear that we must "flee to Christ for refuge," just as the man who had accidentally slain a person fled to the city of refuge from the pursuer of blood; and that, if we do not actually get our souls washed in his blood, we must eternally perish; we seem to them to be alarming men without necessity, and to be discouraging the practice of good works.

So also, when they hear that we are to devote ourselves altogether unto God, "living not to ourselves but unto him," and "walking in all things as Christ walked," we appear to them to be requiring a degree of sanctity that is not to be attained, and that is incompatible with the common offices of life. Their own notions are so deeply rooted in their minds, and they pay so little attention to anything spoken in the Scriptures, that they cannot conceive how sentiments so different from those which they have imbibed, can possibly be true.

To counteract this fatal evil, I would earnestly entreat all to lay aside their pre-conceived notions, and to come to the sacred volume, not as critics to sit in judgment upon God, but as little children to be instructed by him: on opening that blessed book, we should lift up our hearts to God, and pray with David, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!"

***~~2. By their worldliness—~~***

It is surprising to what an extent the love of this world yet predominated in the hearts of the Apostles. One would have supposed, that now at least for a few moments they should lose sight of their ambitious projects, and turn their minds to higher objects of pursuit: but not all that our Lord had said respecting his own sufferings, had in the least dampened their expectations of worldly good: for Matthew tells us that "Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." And the other ten Apostles, instead of pitying them for their folly, were filled with indignation against them, for endeavoring to secure posts of honor, which they were equally entitled to, and equally ambitious to attain, [Matthew 20:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.19-21); [Matthew 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.24)." Can we wonder that, in such a state of mind as this, they could not comprehend what our Lord spoke about his sufferings and death?

Here again we see whence it is that men are so slow of heart to receive the self-denying truths of the Gospel. We call men to renounce the world, to "come out from it," to "be crucified to it," to consider themselves altogether as "pilgrims and sojourners in it," and to "have their conduct in Heaven:" but how can they comply with such exhortations as these? We tell them that if they will be Christ's disciples, they must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow him. We tell them, that they must be conformed to him in sufferings, if ever they will be partakers with him in glory: but how can they endure such doctrines who are looking for wealth and honor and ease as the great sources of their happiness in life? "How can they believe who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which comes of God only?"

We have a remarkable illustration of this truth in the conduct of the Pharisees: our Lord had told them that they "could not serve God and Mammon:" and immediately it is recorded of them, that "being covetous, they derided him, [Luke 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.14)." What! was there anything absurd in our Lord's declarations? No! but the Pharisees were reduced to the necessity of condemning either themselves or him: themselves they would not condemn, because they were determined not to renounce their covetous desires; and therefore they condemned him as a weak, foolish enthusiast.

Thus it is with worldlings in every age and place. Not but that they see more than they are willing to confess; but that, "*being averse to receive the truth, God gives them over to their own delusions, until at last they believe their own lie*, [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12)."

How then shall this evil be counteracted? Let us be aware that there is a sinful bias within us, and that Satan makes use of our corruptions to blind our eyes and to harden our hearts. Let us beg of God to take the veil from our hearts, and so to irradiate our minds with divine knowledge, that we shall be constrained to "receive the truth in the love thereof."

***~~From hence arise two obvious and important questions:~~***

***~~1. What do I know of Christ?~~***

We have certainly in some respects the advantage of the Apostles during the time of Christ's continuance on earth; because we have clearer light given to us, and fewer prejudices to contend with. We therefore, as far as respects our speculative views of Christianity, are better instructed than they. But wherein do we differ from them in their practical views? Are we not as blind to the spiritual nature of the Gospel as they? We see indeed that Christ has suffered; but do we see the necessity of those sufferings for our salvation, and the sufficiency of them for salvation? Or, if we do see these truths nationally, do we view them as the life, the soul, the essence of all religion? Do we live upon them, and glory in them, from day to day? Before we can know them thus, we must be "taught of God:" the Lord Jesus himself must "open our understandings," as he did those of his disciples: and the Holy Spirit must "shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We must "receive the Spirit of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us of God, [1 Corinthians 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.10-11); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14) and [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)."

***~~2. What am I doing for Christ?~~***

Surely, if he so willingly gave himself up to sufferings for me, I am not afraid of sufferings for him; I am ready to "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach." He has told me that, if I will be faithful to him, the world will hate me as it hated him, and persecute me as it persecuted him. Do these predictions alarm me? and, when I see them fulfilled in others, do I study how I may avoid the accomplishment of them in my own case? Surely, if my heart were right with him, I should be willing to receive him on his own terms, and to follow him in his own way; and, if called to suffer for him, I should "rejoice that I am counted worthy to do so."

Is this then my spirit? and is it my one wish, desire, and labor, that "Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or death?" O! that we all might be able to appeal to God, that this is indeed our daily experience! Let us remember that Christ not only died, but rose again, according to his predictions; and then the shame of his cross was for ever rolled away. So shall it be with us; we may be persecuted for his sake even unto death; but in the resurrection, our crown of glory shall be proportionably bright: let us be contented therefore to "*suffer*with him, that we may *reign*with him;" and, in spite of men and devils, let us endeavor to glorify him here, that we may hereafter be glorified with him in the eternal world!

***~~#1560~~***

***~~The Conversion of Zaccheus~~***

***~~[Luke 19:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.9)~~***

"And Jesus said unto him: This day salvation has come to this house."

It is said of our blessed Lord, that "he went about doing good." But the good which he did was principally to the bodies of men; the work of converting and saving their souls was to be carried on principally after his death by the instrumentality of his Apostles. There were, however, some instances, wherein he wrought effectually to the conversion of men's souls. At the time of his death, the number of his disciples amounted to about five hundred. Among that happy number was Zaccheus, of whose conversion we are informed in the passage before us.

Zaccheus was a rich Publican, or tax-gatherer: having heard much of the fame of Jesus, he was desirous to see him; but, being small of stature, he could not easily accomplish his wish: he therefore ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree, near which Jesus was about to pass; and thus secured the desired gratification. But, to his utter surprise, Jesus called him down from the tree, invited himself as a guest to his house, and, as the event proved, converted and saved his soul.

Now in this history we see,

***~~I. In what way salvation is imparted—~~***

Doubtless there is a great diversity in the experience of different people: some are called to the knowledge of Christ more suddenly, others more gradually; some with deeper convictions of their guilt and danger, and others in a more easy and placid way: but in some things all are agreed: to whoever salvation comes, it is in the first instance,

***~~1. Unmerited—~~***

It is evident that Zaccheus did not merit salvation: he was an unjust and oppressive man; and though he might not deserve such opprobrium as the Jews cast upon him, as though he were the vilest of characters—yet it is plain, from his own acknowledgment, that he had availed himself of the power vested in him by the Romans, to extort more than by the laws he was entitled to; and he had thereby considerably augmented his own wealth.

But if no such conduct could have been imputed to him—yet must salvation have been to him an unmerited gift: for, as sinners, we all deserve the wrath of God: and those who deserve his wrath, certainly cannot deserve his favor. "If we had done all that is commanded us, we would still be unprofitable servants;" and therefore we must for ever renounce all idea of merit, and look for salvation as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus.

***~~2. Unsolicited—~~***

We read not of any application that Zaccheus made to Jesus: on the contrary, Jesus prevented him with the blessings of his goodness. It is thus with all of us in the first communication of grace to the soul: as the prophet says, "I am sought by them that asked not for me; I am found by them that sought me not." I do not say, that, when grace is imparted to the soul, we shall not pray: for we certainly shall wait upon God in fervent supplication; and on this is suspended all our hope of divine blessings: "we must ask, and seek, and knock, if we would have the*door of mercy*opened to us." But this, I say, that, in the first instance, previously to the communication of divine grace to the soul, we do not pray for it: but God imparts it of his own mind and will. We are like Lazarus in the grave, until God speaks the word, and says, Come forth! nor do we ever begin to pray, until God of his own grace and mercy has given us "a spirit of grace and of supplication."

***~~3. Unthought of—~~***

Zaccheus' mind was as much as ever set upon his wealth; and his only view in wishing to see Jesus, was to gratify his curiosity. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea of becoming a stated follower of Christ, and an heir of his salvation. Thus does God still "bring the blind by away that they know not, and lead them in paths that they have not known."

By his Providence he leads persons into such situations and circumstances as shall be favorable for the communication of his grace. Little did Zaccheus imagine what would be the result of his climbing up into the tree, or what God intended, when he inclined his mind to adopt such a measure for the gratifying of his curiosity: and little do many think, when God leads them to this or that place, or visits them with this or that affliction, what the outcome of it will be: but God, who sees the end from the beginning, so orders all events, that the purposes of his grace towards his chosen people may be accomplished.

That this is a just view of the subject we cannot doubt, when we are told, that "God is the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift;" and "that he gives us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If holy desires and purposes originated first with ourselves, we would have whereof to glory: but*since the first desire after salvation is no less the gift of God than salvation itself, the whole praise of it, from first to last, must be given to God alone.*

In this part of our subject we wish not to be misunderstood: we do not say, that the parallel between Zaccheus and others holds good in the suddenness of his conversion: for though God may convert persons as suddenly now, as he did in the days of old we apprehend that conversion in these days is, for the most part, gradual and progressive. But, with respect to the first imparting of the divine life to the soul, we conceive that there is no difference between him and us: *it is alike in all cases, unmerited, unsolicited, unthought of.*

The resemblance between his salvation and ours may be yet further seen,

***~~II. In the manner in which it operates—~~***

Exceeding different were the effects produced,

***~~1. On the receiver—~~***

No sooner had the grace of Christ wrought effectually on the heart of Zaccheus, than he approved himself indeed to be a child of Abraham.

Behold the change wrought in him in reference to Christ:

Before, he had no regard for *Christ*: but now he came down gladly, and received him joyfully to his house, and accounted fellowship with him as the most desirable of all blessings.

See the change also in reference to his *fellow-creatures*. Before, he had disregarded all the duties both of justice and mercy; and now he set himself to the diligent performance of them. Had he wronged any person, either by false accusation, or in any other way? He would now make restitution even four-fold, or to the utmost demands of the law, [Exodus 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 22.1). Had he overlooked the necessities of the poor? he would, from this moment, consecrate to their service one half of his possessions.

*Here we see the invariable effects of grace upon the soul*—it will change all our dispositions and conduct: it will make us to delight ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to desire above all things the advancement of his glory. It will make us also to fill up in a very different way our duties in society. Instead of leaving us under the influence of covetous practices and selfish passions, it will cause us to seek our happiness in diffusing happiness around us: it will never allow us to rest until we have made restitution to all whom we may have injured, and to undo (as far as possible) all the evil we have done; and it will lead us to do in all things as we would in a change of circumstances, have others do to us.

***~~2. On the beholders—~~***

One would have supposed, that, on seeing such a change wrought on a notorious sinner, all who beheld it would magnify the grace of Christ, and admire his condescension to one who was so generally detested. But the spectators were filled rather with spleen and envy; and took occasion to pour contempt on Zaccheus, on account of his past character, and to murmur against Jesus for going to be a guest with him. It was thus that the elder brother in the parable was indignant at his father's reception of the Prodigal Son: he would not so much as own him for a brother: but said to his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him."

And thus it is whenever any conversion takes place, especially among the profligate, and still more if they are rich; it is always made by the proud Pharisee an occasion of pouring contempt on the converts themselves, and of venting his indignation against the Gospel of Christ. Thus is the very grace of Christ, no less than the exhibition of it in the Gospel, "a savor of life unto life to some, and to others a savor of death unto death."

***~~Observations—~~***

***~~1. How desirable it is to be found attending on the means of grace—~~***

It is there, if we may so speak, that Jesus passes by; and there that we may expect to get a sight of him. But *when*he will be pleased to reveal himself to us, we know not. This however we know, that, whenever that blessed event shall take place, it will richly repay us for all the efforts we have made. That *difficulties*may sometimes lie in our way, is probable enough; but we should not too easily yield to them. The difficulty that presented itself to Zaccheus, was real: he was small of stature, and could not get a sight of Jesus for "the crowd" that surrounded him. But this put him on the use of an expedient, by which he succeeded. So we, if we were intent upon it, might often overcome the obstacles that oppose our attendance on divine ordinances. There is "a crowd" of company or of business that obstructs our way: but we may run away from it, or go before it, or by various means avoid it: and, if we are in earnest to get a sight of him, we may reasonably hope that he will not allow us to be disappointed. Many who have come hither from no better motive than, curiosity, have found salvation unexpectedly brought home to their souls: how much more may this blessed effect be hoped for, if we come to seek salvation itself!

Let us hope then, that this is the day appointed in the Divine counsels for the communication of life to our souls: and that the grace which triumphed so gloriously in the conversion of Zaccheus, shall now be magnified towards *us.*If only our souls are willing to receive Christ, we are authorized to say, "This is the day" Nay, more; the very thing which was imputed to him as a fault, he will do again, as often as he is invited; "he will come and be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

***~~2. How happy are they to whose conversion the means of grace are made effectual—~~***

That very day and hour that the soul is converted unto God "salvation" comes to it: and who can ever justly appreciate the import of that word? To speak of salvation in its full extent, would lead us too far. View salvation only in its present effects.

How happy was Zaccheus rendered in his own soul! From that moment his heart was filled with joys to which he had been before an utter stranger. Now he felt that "peace of God which passes all understanding," that "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." Many would have envied him as a rich sinner: but his state was far more enviable when he was a saint, and stripped of half his wealth, or even if he had lost the whole that he possessed.

What a source of happiness also did he now become to all around him!

To "his house," as well as to himself, did "salvation come:" for who would receive it in his own soul, and not endeavor to communicate it to all connected with him?

To them also who transacted business with him did the benefit extend. He would no longer oppress them, as he had formerly done, but act agreeably to the dictates of strict justice. He would sooner lose all his gains, and be reduced to poverty, than enrich himself by extortion.

And what a comfort arose to the poor! These had derived but little good hitherto from his opulence: but henceforth they were sure to find him the kindest friend. At one single gift, the half of his property was consecrated to their relief; and doubtless they would, together with financial aid, receive from him also the benefit of his advice.

Behold, then, what happiness resulted from this one instance of conversion! Doubtless, the angels in Heaven rejoiced at it: and well may every such change be a ground of praise and thanksgiving to all who behold it. Let proud Pharisees "murmur," if they will: but let us bless God for every such communication of his grace, and pray that such converts may be multiplied throughout the world.

***~~#1561~~***

***~~The End for Which the Son of Man Came~~***

***~~[Luke 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.10)~~***

"For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

One would imagine that all should be pleased with the conversion of notorious sinners: but it too often excites indignation rather than pleasure in the bosoms of proud Pharisees. Zaccheus was a tax-gatherer, and most probably, like the rest in that line, was addicted to avarice and extortion, though, perhaps, not in so great a degree as some others. He having a curiosity to see Jesus, and not being able on account of the smallness of his stature, ran ahead, and climbed up into a tree near which Jesus was about to pass. Our blessed Lord in an instant converted his soul; and, calling him down from the tree, went home to dine with him. This, it seems, gave great offence to the Pharisees, who could not endure to see such a distinguishing favor conferred on so worthless a character. But our Lord vindicated his own conduct, by alleging that, however sinful Zaccheus might be, he was a descendant of Abraham; and that the very intent of his own advent in the flesh, was to seek and to save that which was lost.

To elucidate these comfortable words, we shall show,

***~~I. Who this Son of man is—~~***

This, to those who beheld him in the flesh, was no easy matter to determine. When he spoke of his approaching crucifixion, and yet of drawing all men to himself, his hearers could not conceive how such opposite things could be affirmed of the same person, the one indicating him to be a man, the other to be a God. Hence they ask him, "Who is this Son of man?" [John 12:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32-34); but to us it is clear as the light. Let us consult,

***~~1. What Jesus has said of himself—~~***

He tells us that "the Son does whatever the Father does;" "quickens whom he will, even as the Father does;" "has all judgment committed to him;" is to be "honored even as the Father is; yes, that the Father is not honored unless he also is honored:" that he will "raise the dead by his voice:" that he "has life in himself even as the Father has;" and "has authority to execute judgment also, because he is the son of man, [John 5:19-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.19-27)." Here he calls himself "the Son," "the Son of God," "the Son of man," evidently showing, that these different names were of the same import, and that, notwithstanding he was a man, he possessed, and exercised, a divine power.

He speaks of the Son of man as existing in Heaven before his incarnation, [John 6:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.62), before the world was made, [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.5), and even while, in his human nature, he was on earth, [John 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.13). He declared that the Son of man had a power to dispense with the Sabbath, [Mark 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.28), and even to forgive sins, [Luke 5:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 5.20-24); and when accused of being guilty of blasphemy for arrogating such power to himself, he reasserted his claim to that divine prerogative, and wrought a miracle in confirmation of it.

Finally, he foretold that "the Son of man would come again in his own glory, with his holy angels, [Matthew 25:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31);" and he bade his disciples "watch and pray, that they might be worthy to stand before the Son of man, [Luke 21:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.36)."

Put these words into the mouth of Peter, or Paul, or any creature, however exalted, and they will appear arrogant, and blasphemous, in the extreme.

***~~2. What his disciples have said of him—~~***

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "When God brings in the first-begotten into the world, he says, Let all the angels of God worship him:" and again, "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" and again, "What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the Son of man, that you visit him? You made him for a little time lower than the angels, [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6); [Hebrews 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8); [Hebrews 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.6-7)." What can all this mean, but that he was infinitely superior to angels in his pre-existent state, but was made lower than them for a little while, for the great purposes of our redemption?

But Peter speaks in terms that cannot well be misunderstood. Our Lord put this question to his disciples; "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, Some say you are John the Baptist, some Elijah, some Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He says unto them, But whom do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord immediately replied, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 16:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.13-17)." Now, if Peter meant only to say that he was a good man, or a prophet, what was there in that which he might not see and know without any particular revelation of it to his soul?

Stephen is yet more strong and decisive: for when he was "full of the Holy Spirit," he said, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God:" upon which his hearers, filled with indignation, stoned him, calling upon God, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, [Acts 7:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.56); [Acts 7:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59)." Now it is utterly unaccountable that a man full of the Holy Spirit, when favored with a vision of God, and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, should, in the very hour of death, address himself to Jesus, and not unto the Father, and that too almost in the very words that Jesus himself had used when addressing his heavenly Father—if Jesus were not higher than any created being? If he did not see that the Son of man was also the Son of God, yes, God over all, equal with the Father—he was deservedly stoned to death, as the vilest blasphemer that ever lived upon the earth.

Who can see the disciples of our Lord paying him such honor, and doubt what ideas they annexed to that lowly title, "the Son of man?"

***~~3. What his enemies said of him—~~***

There can be no doubt but that they understood the terms, "Son of man," and, "Son of God," to be equivalent, and that, when used in their highest sense, they denoted equality with God himself. When our Lord stood before the supreme council of the Jews, he said to them, "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God." Upon which they all exclaimed, Are you then the Son of God? to which he answered, "You say truly that I am. [Luke 22:69-70](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.69-70)."

On another occasion we are told, that the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also, "that God was his Father, making himself equal with God, [John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.18)."

But the strongest testimony of all is, that *his enemies actually put him to death for calling himself the Son of man*. When the witnesses that appeared against him agreed not in their testimony, the high-priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One? And Jesus said, I am: and you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." In these words he evidently referred to that glorious prophecy of Daniel, where the Son of man is represented as receiving from the Father a universal and everlasting dominion, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14). Instantly the high-priest rent his clothes, and said, "What need do we have any further witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy: what do you think? And they all condemned him to be worthy of death! [Mark 14:61-64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.61-64)."

Now, if the name "Son of man" did not import that he was God also, why did not our Lord rectify their mistake, and inform them that he did not intend to arrogate divine honor to himself, or to insinuate that he was any more than a common prophet? By this he would have invalidated in an instant the charge of blasphemy, and have obliged them either to release him, or to find some other pretext for putting him to death. But our Lord knew that they were right in their interpretation of his words; and therefore he submitted in silence to the sentence that was dictated by their blind infuriated zeal.

Thus it fully appears that "the Son of man" is none other than "God manifest in the flesh." And though there are many passages that more directly prove this point—yet these are peculiarly strong, inasmuch as they prove the divinity of Christ from things which are spoken of him under that title, which most of all denotes his humanity.

It will be found an easier task to show,

***~~II. For what purpose he came into the world—~~***

In our Lord's assertion respecting this, we cannot fail to notice,

***~~1. The humiliating description which he gives of the human race—~~***

Every living man is characterized by this description, "Those who are *lost*." All are "by nature children of wrath! [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3);" and by practice they have aggravated their guilt and condemnation a thousand-fold. To understand the full import of this word, "lost," let us reflect on the state of those who are already in Hell:  
their guilt,  
their condemnation by the law,  
their banishment from the Divine presence,  
their inconceivable and irremediable misery  
—then we shall see our own state, with this only difference; that we are yet on mercy's ground, and may have our sentence reversed, and our misery prevented. Whereas they are gone beyond redemption: they are criminals already executed; and we are under the same sentence, uncertain whether we shall not the very next hour be called forth for execution, but with a pardon offered us on certain terms. O that we could realize this solemn thought!

***~~2. The explicit declaration which he makes of the intent of his coming—~~***

We would never have sought him: we are like a lost sheep that never traces back its steps to the fold it has deserted. He therefore came to "seek" us. However solicitous we had been to avert the wrath of God, we never could have done it by any means within our own power. He therefore came to "save" us; to save us by his blood from the guilt of our sins; to save us by his Spirit from the power and pollution of them.

To form a just idea of our state by means of his advent, let us once more consider the state of those in Hell. Let us suppose that Jesus went down to Hell itself, and there proclaimed liberty and salvation to those who would believe in him. The state of his auditors there would exactly represent our state: and if we do not take the same interest in the glad tidings that they would, it is because we do not feel ourselves so utterly lost as we really are.

But whether we will believe it or not, this is our state, and to deliver us from it was the great end of his advent. It was for this, that the Son of God humbled himself to become a son of man; and, if we will believe in him, he will exalt us to be "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12)."

**Application—**

The latter part of the subject is so plain and easy, that the youngest minister can be at no loss to illustrate it.

***~~1. To those who deny that they are utterly lost and undone—~~***

Produce one person that is not wholly lost, and we will show you one that has nothing to do with Christ, any more than Satan himself has. It was only those who are lost that Christ came to seek and save. Let proud self-justifying sinners consider this.

***~~2. To those who desire to obtain salvation—~~***

The person that came to seek and save you was fully equal to the task. He was God as well as man; and therefore there can be no lack of efficacy in his blood to pardon, or in his grace to sanctify, you. Trust in him, and he will prove himself able to save you to the very uttermost!

***~~#1562~~***

***~~The Parable of the Pounds~~***

***~~[Luke 19:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.12-13)~~***

"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds (a pound was about three month's wages), and said to them, 'Do business until I come.'"

*Mankind are prone to amuse themselves with prospects of earthly grandeur, and to neglect the most important ends and purposes of life.*The Jews were expecting their Messiah to erect a temporal kingdom; the disciples themselves also were led away by this fond conceit. At our Lord's last ascent to Jerusalem, this expectation prevailed among all orders and ranks of men, verse 11. To rectify their notions and turn their attention to their proper concerns, he delivered to them this parable.

The parable states that a nobleman, having been invested with royal dignity, reckoned with his servants to whom he had committed money, and punished the citizens who had refused submission to his authority. These being perfectly distinct, we shall treat them separately, and confine our attention at present to the former.

Christ is the person here intended by the nobleman; he has committed to every man something which is to be improved for him; and he is shortly coming at the day of judgment to reckon with us. These points are so clear that we need insist on them only in a way of APPLICATION—

***~~I. Has not Christ given us something to improve for him?~~***

We are ready enough to fix a high value on what we possess, when we think it will reflect honor on ourselves: but we are apt to think lightly of it, when we are reminded of the responsibility connected with it. Few indeed have great talents or extensive influence; but every person has at least a pound committed to him.

Have we not, in the first place, been endued with reason?This surely is capable of great improvement. Have we not also enjoyed many sabbaths and ordinances? These might have been turned to a good account for God. Have we not also had access to the Holy Scriptures? From these we might have learned all the mysteries of godliness. We should therefore have studied them with all humility and diligence. Have we not experienced many convictions of conscience and gracious operations of God's Spirit? These are inestimable, and may be made subservient to our eternal welfare. Have we not received many calls and warnings from God in his Providence? These, if duly attended to, might have been occasions of much good to our souls: and all these things are mercies, of which we must hereafter give an account.

***~~II. What improvement have we made of his favors?~~***

The injunction given to all, is, "Occupy, that is, *Trade*, until I come;" and all these things are given to us to be improved for God, [1 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.7). *What use then have we made of the pound committed to us?*Have we employed our reason in search of Divine truth? Have we spent our Sabbaths in meditation and prayer? Have we profited by the ordinances as we might have done? Have we taken the Scriptures as a guide to our feet and lantern to our path? Have we obeyed the dictates of conscience, and the motions of God's Spirit? Have we laid to heart the various dispensations of Providence which we observed in our own concerns, and in the world around us? Have we, in short, labored to improve our *time*, our *money*, and our *influence*for him who has entrusted them to our care? Have we labored earnestly to fulfill that apostolic injunction, [1 Peter 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.10).

***~~III. What excuse have we for neglecting to improve them?~~***

The slothful servant cast the blame upon his lord: nor are there lacking among ourselves those who resemble him. We say, God requires more than he will enable us to perform: but can this be affirmed with even a shadow of truth? Do not his promises extend to all our needs? May not every one adopt the words of the Apostle Paul in [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13), "I can do everything through him who gives me strength!"

Even if this excuse were true, it would not justify our supineness. The more "austere" our Lord was, the more we should fear to provoke him: we should endeavor at least to approve ourselves to him as we could. *If we could not do all, it is no reason that we should do nothing.*If we could not improve his money by trading, we could "put it into the bank." Our excuses then will only turn to our confusion. God will justly say to us, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you!"

***~~IV. What recompense have we reason to expect?~~***

Our Lord will reward every man according to his works. Are we ready then to give up our account to him? Can we say, "Lord, your pound has gained ten pounds, or five pounds?" Can we say upon good grounds that it has gained even two pounds? Happy for us, if we have the testimony of our conscience respecting this. We shall gladly, like the good servants, ascribe the honor to our Lord. They do not say I have gained, but, "Your pound" has gained: they knew and acknowledged that they had nothing of their own to trade with; we shall adopt the language of the Apostle in [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10), and of David 1 Chronicles 29:14.

Nor will our Lord be backward to reward our faithful exertions. He will recompense every one in proportion to his labor, 1 Corinthians 3:8; and he will give to every one what infinitely exceeds the value of his services!

But, alas! are there not many who have hid their money in a napkin? What recompense then must such slothful servants receive? Christ will shortly deprive them of the means of grace they possess, and make them *monuments of his everlasting displeasure!* Nor will this be the reward of those only who *dissipate*his money: it will be the certain recompense of unprofitableness. Let not any one therefore hope to be approved while he continues *idle*. Let not any one be satisfied with mere morality. Let our exertions in our Master's service be unwearied. Let us, like the saints of old, look to the recompense of reward, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26). Let us stand ready to give up our account with joy. So shall we have confidence before him, and not be ashamed at his coming! [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28).

***~~#1563~~***

***~~The Rebellious Citizens~~***

***~~[Luke 19:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.12-14)~~***

"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds (a pound was about three month's wages), and said to them, 'Do business until I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' "

***~~There is scarcely anyone to be found who does not imagine he loves God. Men form erroneous notions of God, and then approve of him as corresponding with their views of his character. But, if all his attributes were faithfully set before them, they would rather turn from him with hatred and disgust!~~***

Just so, the Jews conceived that when their Messiah should come, they should all be ready to welcome his arrival. But, when he really did come, and declared that his kingdom was not of this world, they poured contempt upon him, and persecuted him unto death. To show them this conduct of theirs was foreseen, our blessed Lord told them of it before it came to pass. And, to rectify their views, spoke to them the parable before us.

***~~"The nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom," represented our Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

We are not to look for any hidden meaning in the title here given him: but it was well suited to the Lord Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God.

His journey "to a far country to receive a kingdom," to us appears dark; but to a Jew, it would be exceeding clear and pertinent. The ecclesiastical and civil governors were at that time appointed by the Roman emperor; and were frequently sent for, either to be confirmed in their authority, or to answer for their abuse of it. This was well known to the Jewish nation; so that, as applied to the Messiah, the allusion would appear both obvious and interesting.

The Lord Jesus, though he was a king from the very hour of his birth (for he was "born King of the Jews"), never assumed anything of royal dignity, but lived in so base a condition, that sometimes "he had not even where to lay his head." But on his ascension to Heaven, he was "exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31)," and was invested with authority over all the powers of Heaven, earth and Hell, [Ephesians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-22)."

***~~The conduct of the citizens towards this nobleman marks the conduct which would be observed towards the Lord Jesus both by Jews and Gentiles—~~***

They "hated him," we are told, "and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." Thus the Jews treated our blessed Lord while he was yet in the midst of them; for they even put him to death for making himself a king, and declared, that they "had no king but Caesar." And after his ascension they strove to the uttermost to prevent the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, persecuting to imprisonment and death all who called themselves his subjects.

And what is the treatment which he receives from us at this day? The conduct of those citizens, as expressed in their message, marked deliberation, union, virulence: and with these is our conduct very clearly stamped. The rejection of Christ today is not sudden or occasional, but constant and uniform. Nor is it peculiar to any one description of persons, but is found in all of every rank and every age. Nor is there any other thing under Heaven which so kindles the wrath of men, or instigates them to such implacable animosity, as his. "You shall be hated by all men for my name's sake," and "whoever kills you, shall think he does God service."

***~~The recompense awarded to them by him, shows what all the enemies of Christ must expect at his hands—~~***

He said to his attendants, "But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slay them in front of me!" verse 27." When our blessed Lord shall come to judge the world, so will he say to his attendant angels. He bore long with the Jews before he destroyed them: and so he may do with us. But he inflicted on them at last a judgment heavier far than ever befell any nation under Heaven.

And on us also at last, when the day of grace has terminated, shall wrath come to the very uttermost! *Now*every repenting sinner shall be spared and made partaker of his mercy: but *then*no pity shall be shown to any impenitent transgressor; but all without exception shall have the cup of God's wrath put into their hands, and shall drink of it to all eternity! If the sword that smites his rebellious subjects were to put an end to their existence, then it would be tolerable: but the death which it inflicts will be attended with an agony of which no conception can be formed, and of which there shall be no mitigation or end so long as God himself shall endure!

***~~And now let me make my appeal to you:~~***

***~~1. Has not this been your conduct?~~***

The kingdom of Christ has been set up among you, and you have all been repeatedly called upon to submit to his scepter. But who among you have thrown away the weapons of your rebellion? Who have renounced "the *lords*which have hitherto had dominion over them, and determined henceforth to make no mention of any other name than that of Christ, [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.13)." Who account "his yoke light and easy," and desire to have every thought of their hearts subjected to the obedience of Christ? You cannot but know that from your very earliest days, your own will, rather than his—has been the rule of your action; and that, instead of humbling yourselves before him, and seeking mercy through his atoning blood—you have maintained a stoutness of heart, most of you, at least, even to the present hour. I am well aware, that all have not equally avowed their independence from him, or proceeded to the same extremities in their rebellion against him: but whether you have rejected him with Pharisaic pride or with Sadducean indifference, the effect has been the same; you have equally in your hearts said, "Who is Lord over us?" "I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice."

I warn you then, that though he has with astonishing patience and long-suffering borne with you hitherto, the time is shortly coming when he will call you to account; and when, if you persist in your rebellion, he will say, "But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slay them in front of me!"

***~~2. Is not this your desert?~~***

We are apt to wonder at the Jews, that they could treat with such envenomed hostility a man like our blessed Savior—so mild, so benevolent, so blameless. But their guilt is not to be compared with ours, whose views of his character are incomparably more enlarged.

They saw him but as a man. We know him to be God as well as man, even "Emmanuel, God with us."

They knew not the true end of his coming into the world: we know that he came "to give his life a ransom for us," and by his own obedience unto death to make reconciliation for us with our offended God. We even profess to believe in him, and to be his obedient followers: and yet, in our conduct, we show ourselves "enemies to him in our minds by wicked works," even as they.

What then can we expect but that the sword of divine vengeance shall be drawn forth against us, and that, when we shall stand before him in the last day, he will bid us to "depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

Dear brethren, I pray that you may not, by persisting in your rebellion, reduce yourselves to this awful condition.

Now, if you will submit yourselves to him, he will be gracious and merciful unto you, and will "blot out your iniquities as a morning cloud;" but if you allow this day of grace and salvation to pass unimproved, you will deplore it to all eternity! For "how can you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?"

***~~#1564~~***

***~~Talents Lost, If Not Improved~~***

**[Luke 19:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.26)**

"I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away."

The *force of habit*, irrespective of any particular influence from above, is well known. But, in addition to that, God has annexed a blessing to the use of means, and has promised that they shall not he employed in vain. The words before us were uttered by our blessed Lord on different occasions. They seem to have been used by him as a kind of proverb. At all events, as being so repeated by him, they deserve particular attention. We may well consider them in a threefold view:

***~~I. As a principle established—~~***

God has ordained, not only that means shall be used in order to the end, but that *the very mercies he has given to us shall be either augmented or diminished, according as we exert ourselves for the improvement of them*, or allow them to lie by us unimproved. This he has established as a principle,

***~~1. In nature—~~***

Everything, in the first instance, is the gift of God. The fertility of the earth, the vegetative power of the seed, the concongenial influence of the sun and rain, are all of God. But still they would all be in vain without the labor of man. Adam was required to labor, even in Paradise: and so, now, man must til the ground, and use all the means which the different kinds of agriculture require, in order to ensure a crop; and, if he neglects his duty in these respects, not only will he lose the fruits which he might otherwise have obtained, but his land will sustain an injury which the labor of years will be scarcely able to repair.

This is the account given to us by Solomon, after beholding with his eyes the very event itself: "I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man. [Proverbs 24:30-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 24.30-34)." Through his neglect of the proper means, not only does he fail to be enriched; but he loses what he possessed; and poverty, with gradual and irresistible force, seizes hold upon him!

***~~2. In grace—~~***

All the faculties which we possess are given to us from above. But the *understanding*must be cultivated, the *affections*must receive a proper direction, and the *conscience*must be exercised as in the presence of the heart-searching God. If we will not exercise the faculties in the way which God has appointed, not only shall we suffer loss of all that we might have attained, but the *understanding*will become blind, the *affections*sensual, and the *conscience*seared.

These were the very effects produced by the ministry of the Prophet Isaiah, among his hearers, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10); as also by our blessed Lord, [Matthew 13:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.13-15). and his Apostles, in their ministrations, [Acts 28:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.25-27); so that in every age those words of Solomon have been verified, "He becomes poor who deals with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent makes rich, [Proverbs 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.4)."

If it be said, that our entire dependence upon God for everything may well supersede all labor on our part; I answer, that, instead of superseding our exertions, it is urged as an encouragement to us to labor with all our might: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)." Nothing will be added to us but in the use of means; and "whether we ree righteous or wicked, the fruit of our doings, and the reward of our hands, shall be given to us, [Isaiah 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 3.10-11)."

The words of our text may be further considered,

***~~II. As a fact realized—~~***

They are realized in the experience of all, and especially among the people of the Lord;

***~~1. In their gifts—~~***

God has given to his servants somewhat of a spiritual discernment; perhaps, too, a faculty to impart the knowledge they possess, and an ability to spread their needs before the Lord in prayer.

Now these, and such like gifts, are increased by use, and lessened by neglect. Let any one look back to the time when any of these gifts were bestowed upon him, and mark what measure of improvement he has made of them; and then let him compare his present state in relation to them: and I doubt not but that he will acknowledge the truth of our Lord's assertion, that, while a good and diligent use was made of the gifts, they were augmented to him; and that, when he became remiss in the use of them, they were proportionably diminished.

Indeed, this is nothing but what we are taught expressly to expect at the hands of God: for we are told, "It is impossible for those that were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away—to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6)." Here it is evident, that not only does a neglect of talents prevent the increase of them; but it causes them to be withdrawn, and brings an obduracy over the heart, and indisposes it for the reception of any further blessings.

***~~2. In their graces—~~***

On some, God has bestowed a measure of contrition, and faith, and love, and peace, and holiness: and we see, by the stony-ground hearers, what declension takes place in these graces, when the possessor of them becomes remiss in secret duties. He "leaves his first love, [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4);" and "the things which remain in him are ready to die; insomuch, that he may appear rather as one dead, than alive, [Revelation 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1-2)." Let anyone call to mind those favored seasons, when his heart was dissolved in tears of penitential sorrow, or elevated with joy under a sense of God's pardoning love: let him now say: Whether, after having lost them by neglect, he finds it an easy thing to regain them? Rather let him say: Whether he be not in danger of having that realized, in his experience, which Peter has so awfully declared: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

A work of grace is not like the work of a statuary, which, if left for a season, will be found unchanged; but like a stone rolled up a hill, which, when the labor ceases, will descend to the bottom, and require all the work to be performed again.

Well then, may we regard the words of our text,

***~~III. As a lesson inculcated—~~***

Surely there is much in these words,

***~~1. For our warning—~~***

There is not any one of us who has not some talent committed to him: and for that, whether it be more or less, we are responsible. The man who had but one talent, did wrong to hide it in a napkin: and justly was it taken from him, and he was consigned to punishment, as an unprofitable servant. We must "look to ourselves, and diligently too, that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward, 2 John, verse 8." The Israelites who came out of Egypt, and yet perished in the wilderness, are held forth to us as a warning to make a due improvement of the mercies we have received, Jude verse 5. Our Lord also bids us to "remember Lot's wife." To every one of you, then, I would say: *Employ your time, and put forth all your powers, in the service of the Lord*. This is to every one of you a day of grace, a day of salvation. The Gospel now sounds in your ears. The Savior is proclaimed to you in all the wonders of his love and mercy; and not one of you that will call upon him, shall be rejected. On the other hand, if, like Capernaum, you are exalted in your privileges, like Capernaum, shall you also be distinguished by a heavier condemnation, if you abuse them.

***~~2. For our encouragement—~~***

If only we will engage diligently in the work assigned us, truly "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:58." Hear what blessed encouragement is afforded to us by an inspired Apostle: "Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. [2 Peter 1:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5-11)."

What can any of us desire more than this? We would not wish to have our own labors dispensed with: all that any of us can wish, is, to be assured that they shall be effectual to the desired end. In the name of Almighty God, then, I declare to all of you, that to him who will employ his talents "more shall be given, and he shall have abundance [Matthew 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.12);" abundance here, for more special improvement; and abundance hereafter, as his recompense of reward! verse 17-19.

***~~#1565~~***

***~~Christ's Enemies Warned~~***

***~~[Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27)~~***

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of Me!"

In any assembly of Christians, there appears, externally, but little difference between one and another: for, as all profess the same faith, it may be supposed they stand nearly on the same footing as it respects the eternal world. But among them, if there be found many "friends" of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be acknowledged and rewarded by him in the future judgment, there will also be found many who, as enemies, shall be made objects of his everlasting displeasure. To assist you, my brethren, in ascertaining to which party you belong, and what sentence from him you are to expect, I will endeavor to show you,

***~~I. Who they are whom Christ will account his enemies—~~***

We, in general, number none among his enemies except those who have been guilty of some very flagrant transgression; and even for them we find so many excuses, that we are ready to acquit them of any intentional disrespect to him. But God will judge by a very different standard from that which we adopt. He will inquire, What has been our regard for him, and what our conduct is in reference to his revealed will?

***~~He requires all to take upon them his light and easy yoke—~~***

He has a right to demand this at our hands:

As our *Creator*, he may well expect that every faculty we possess should be employed for him.

As our *preserver*, in whom we live and move and have our being, he is yet further entitled to every service which we can render to him.

Above all, as our *Redeemer*, who "has bought us with the inestimable price" of his own blood, he may well expect that we live only for him, and that our whole body, soul, and spirit be sanctified to his service.

In what light, then, must he view us, if in this we counteract his will?

Can he call us his friends? Or can we flatter ourselves that we have any title to be regarded by him under that character? If "we will not have him reign over us," that very disposition is itself an irrefutable proof that we are "enemies to him" in our hearts: we are enemies to his will, his kingdom, his glory. We cannot serve God and mammon too: whichever we affect, we must of necessity hate and despise the other, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24). We may think this "a hard saying:" but there is no such thing as neutrality in reference to God: "Whoever will be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the enemy of God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)."

Supposing such persons to be justly designated the enemies of Christ, let us consider,

***~~II. What is the judgment that awaits them—~~***

***~~They will certainly be distinguished by the Judge of living and dead—~~***

Men in this world, who can judge only by the outward appearance, may easily be mistaken in their estimate of human character: but to Him who will decide the destinies of men, the most secret recesses of their hearts are open. He will discern with infallible certainty what their true character was: to his all-seeing eye it will be as obvious as to us is the difference between sheep and goats. And when he shall say to his angels, "Bring them hither," there will be no possibility of escape. None can hide themselves so as to escape their search; nor can any resist the power that summons them to his presence.

***~~Then will be inflicted on them the threatened judgments—~~***

Capital punishment among men is merely a privation of life: but the punishment that will be inflicted on the enemies of Christ will be of perpetual duration. There is "a lake of fire and brimstone, into which they will be cast;" and "the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever!"

This the Prophet Nahum distinctly affirms: "God is jealous, and the Lord revenges: the Lord revenges, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies, [Nahum 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Nah 1.2)."

The Psalmist also, if possible—yet more pertinently declares, "Your hand shall find out all your enemies; your right hand shall find out those that hate you. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them! [Psalm 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 21.8-9)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who think this a hard sentence—~~***

Let me ask: What can you reasonably expect? Can you suppose that God will "put no difference between his friends and his enemies; between those who serve him, and those who serve him not? [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)." But you think that God will proclaim a general amnesty; since he is too *great*to be affected by anything that we have done, and too *good*to notice it with such severity. Among earthly governments, a general amnesty may well be proclaimed, and punishment be limited to those who have been the ringleaders in rebellion. Indeed, a monarch who should proceed to extremity with all who have risen up against him, might almost depopulate his empire; and, if he exercises mercy, the pardoned rebels may richly repay him by their fidelity in the future. But God needs not us, nor can ever be repaid by us, for any lenity which he may exercise. *He must and will fulfill his own word*, and will execute judgment on all impenitent transgressors. And the only hope that remains for us, is, to humble ourselves before him, and to seek for mercy through that very Savior, against whom we have rebelled!

***~~2. Those who acquiesce in it—~~***

Many acquiesce in the declarations of God as *true*, who by no means approve of them as *good*. I beg you, brethren, not to confound these ideas, or to give yourselves credit for the better feeling, because you cannot divest yourselves of that which forces itself irresistibly upon you. Never imagine that you are right in the sight of God, until you delight in the Redeemer's yoke as light and easy, and are ready, as faithful subjects, to lay down your lives in his service.

***~~#1566~~***

***~~Our Lord's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem~~***

**[Luke 19:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.37-38)**

"Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: "'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

During the greater part of our Lord's ministry upon earth, he abstained, for the most part, from an avowal of his Messiahship, especially when conversing with the Scribes and Pharisees: he rather left it to be inferred from his words and actions, than asserted it in plain terms. Two reasons he had for this reserve: one was to prevent his zealous followers from proclaiming him a king; and the other was to keep the wrath of his enemies from breaking forth to the uttermost, before he should have finished the work which God had given him to do.

Now, however, the time being come for him to return to his Father, he openly acknowledged himself to be that King, of whom the Prophet Zechariah had spoken, saying, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes unto you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon a donkey, upon a colt, the foal of a donkey, [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9)." In general, the fulfillment of prophecy was left to the course of events: but here our Lord himself directed the events which were to accomplish the prediction, [Matthew 21:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.4-5). The acclamations of the multitude, at the time of his fulfilling this prophecy, will afford us a profitable subject for our present meditation. Let us consider,

***~~I. The acclamations themselves—~~***

***~~Doubtless the people at that time had abundant reason to rejoice—~~***

They had long seen the wonderful works which the Lord Jesus had done; and more especially a most stupendous miracle just wrought—the restoring of Lazarus to life, after he had been dead four days. This carried to the minds of multitudes a more than ordinary conviction of Christ's Messiahship; because Lazarus went in and out before them, a living witness of his power: and so universal was this impression, that "the chief priests consulted to put Lazarus to death, [John 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.9-10)," in order to remove from before their eyes an evidence which they could not withstand.

Persuaded that he was indeed the Messiah, they welcomed him with suitable expressions of admiration and love. They felt that it was an inestimable privilege to behold Him of whom Moses and the prophets had for so many ages spoken, and whom many prophets and kings had in vain desired to see.

***~~The particular expressions of their joy must be distinctly noticed—~~***

They were the very terms which David, a thousand years before, had suggested as suited to the occasion, [Psalm 118:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.25-26). How far the people used them in their highest sense, we cannot exactly declare. We fear their views of him were too carnal to admit of their entering into the full import of the Psalmist's words. Yet, even in their view of them, the sending of the Messiah was justly deemed an evidence of God's good-will towards them; and they did well in rendering unto God the utmost possible tribute of adoration and thanksgiving.

But, not to occupy our time with that which merely concerned *them*, let us consider,

***~~II. What reason we also have for similar expressions of joy—~~***

That Jesus is come to us, we can have no doubt. We, therefore, have reason for more exalted joy; because,

***~~1. The evidences of his Messiahship are to us more clear—~~***

We have all the same evidences that they had; except that they saw the miracles with their eyes, while we only hear of them by the report of others. Yet, when that report is duly considered, it will be found not a whit less satisfactory than ocular demonstration. Besides, we have an evidence which they could not have; an evidence far surpassing all other; namely, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead. On this, Jesus had, from the very beginning, rested the whole weight and evidence of his pretensions: "Destroy this temple; and in three days I will raise it up again." This, we are told, "he spoke respecting his body," which he would raise from the grave on the third day, [John 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19-22). Knowing, therefore, that he has accomplished this, we can have no doubt who He is, or that he is "declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4)."

***~~2. The nature of his kingdom is, by us, more fully understood—~~***

They, not excepting even his own Apostles, had an idea of a *temporal*Messiah, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and exalt their nation to greater power and splendor than ever they enjoyed even in the days of Solomon, [Acts 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.6).

But we know, that his kingdom is *spiritual*; and that he has come to deliver us from sin and Satan, death and Hell. We have indeed in ourselves an evidence of his power. We know what it is to have "his kingdom set up within us;" to have both his enemies and ours bruised under our feet; and to be "brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." We, therefore, have proportionably greater reason to rejoice; because the benefits which we are taught to look for are so far beyond all that they had any conception of.

***~~3. The interest we have in him is also more deep and lasting—~~***

Many of them had been healed in their *bodies*; but we, even every one of us that welcomes him aright, have been healed in our *souls*, and have his healing work continually carrying on within us. They, whatever benefits they might receive, looked only to *this life*as the season for enjoying them. But we look to the *eternal world*, as the true and proper season for enjoying the fullness of his blessings. The commencement of them, indeed, we here possess, in pardon of sin, deliverance from its power, and in the manifestations of God's love to our souls. But these are only pledges of our full inheritance, which we shall possess forever in the eternal world.

I think, that when these considerations are duly weighed, we shall have no hesitation in adopting, in the highest possible sense, the acclamations that were used by them.

***~~Let me, however, add,~~***

***~~1. A word of caution—~~***

It is evident that the joy of that people was of an emotional kind: and I confess I am no friend to such expressions of piety among us. It was suited for them; but it is not so for us. *Our joy in the Lord should be more intelligent, more humble, more quiet, more enduring.*

We should have just views of Christ altogether, and of the whole work which he came to accomplish. We should have a deeper sense of our need of him, and of our utter undone state without him. We should have less of carnal fervor, and more of that which is spiritual. And, with us, it should be not merely occasional, as called forth by some particular circumstance, but the daily and continued habit of our minds.

In a word, ours should resemble rather the joy of the glorified saints above, who prostrate themselves on their faces before the throne, and rest not, day nor night, in ascribing glory to Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

***~~2. A word of encouragement—~~***

If you truly glory in the Savior as you ought to do, you will find Pharisees in abundance ready to condemn you for your zeal and love. One would have thought, that the reasons which that people had to exalt the Savior were abundantly sufficient to justify them, even in the eyes of those who could not participate in their joy. But *envy*is of a peculiarly malignant character: and *those who have no piety themselves, hate to behold the exercise of it in others*. Know, however, that if man condemns, God approves, the exercises of love; and that those who "confess Christ before men shall be confessed by him before God and all his holy angels."

***~~#1567~~***

***~~Our Duty Towards the Lord Jesus Christ~~***

***~~[Luke 19:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.40)~~***

"But He answered and said to them: I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

The exercise of the affections is not only approved, but applauded, when earthly things are the objects of our pursuit. But when the soul is attracted by heavenly objects, the livelier emotions of the mind are deemed enthusiasm; and even gratitude itself must restrain its voice, lest it incur the censure of the world. But, whatever construction may be put upon our conduct, or whatever difficulties we may be called to encounter in the discharge of our duty, we should study to approve ourselves to God, and to render unto him the honor due unto his name.

At the time of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem "the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God for all the mighty works that they had seen, verse 37." But, acceptable as this tribute of praise was to God, it excited only envy and indignation in the bosoms of the malignant Pharisees. They considered this display of their gratitude as a just ground for displeasure; and therefore desired our Lord to silence them; "Master," said they, "rebuke your disciples." Our blessed Lord, however, instead of rebuking, vindicated his disciples; and declared, that if from any motive whatever, they should be induced to withhold their grateful acknowledgments, they would do so to their eternal shame: " I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out!"

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

***~~I. Show what obligations we lie under to magnify and adore the Lord—~~***

***~~The disciples at that time had abundant reason to praise his name—~~***

They had seen the miracles he had wrought, and especially that of raising Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days, [John 12:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.17-18); perhaps many of them had themselves experienced his power to heal. From what they had seen and heard, they were assured that he was the Messiah so long promised to the world, verse 38; and they regarded his advent as the most wonderful expression of God's favor toward their whole nation.

Could they then keep silence? Were they to be blamed for testifying their love to this august Personage, now that they saw him in the very act of fulfilling one of the most remarkable of all the prophecies. Compare [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9) with [John 12:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.13-15). When they were thus highly privileged to witness what "many prophets and kings had in vain wished to see and hear," would they not have been guilty of the basest ingratitude, if they had remained silent? If Abraham leaped for joy at a distant prospect of that period, should not they much rather, [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56).

***~~But our obligations to praise him are far greater than theirs—~~***

We have a far clearer knowledge of the *dignity of his person*. They viewed him indeed as "a great prophet;" and on some occasions they seemed to have thought him to be more than human: but on the whole, they considered him as a mere man, though indeed the greatest of men. But we know him to be "God manifest in the flesh," even "God over all, blessed for ever! [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16). [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5). [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3). [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)." And shall we behold in him such adorable majesty and condescension, and yet withhold from him our tribute of praise?

We also are far better acquainted with the *ends of his mission*. The disciples supposed that he was sent to instruct them more fully in the knowledge of God's will, to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and to make them a prosperous and happy people. But we know that he came:  
to deliver us from the yoke of sin and Satan,  
to reconcile us to God by the death of his cross,  
to teach us, not by his word only, but by his Spirit,  
and finally, to save us with an everlasting salvation.

Are not we then bound to bless and adore his name?

Moreover, we have a far deeper insight into the extent of his benefits. If the disciples had seen their nation raised to universal empire, and enjoying uninterrupted peace and prosperity, they would have been well satisfied, and would have looked for nothing beyond it, especially if they themselves were exalted to the highest offices of dignity and power. But we look for infinitely richer benefits at his hands. We expect the pardon of sin, and peace with God, and victory over our spiritual enemies, and "a kingdom that cannot be moved." Shall we then refuse to praise him? "If we should remain silent, will not the very stones cry out against us?"

This being clear, we shall proceed to,

***~~II. Enforce our duty from some additional considerations—~~***

That we may be excited to rend the air with our acclamations and hosannas, let us consider,

***~~1. How delightful a duty this is!~~***

It is justly observed by the Psalmist, that it is not only "a *good*," but also "a *pleasant*thing to be thankful." Who can doubt which were the happier, the disciples who shouted forth the praises of their Lord—or the Pharisees, who, with malignant jealousy, strove to silence them? Indeed,*a devout and grateful spirit is a foretaste of Heaven itself*; and, as far as relates to the outward exercise of their affection, the disciples on that occasion strongly resembled the heavenly hosts: they all were penetrated with fervent love to the same divine object, and exerted all their powers to magnify his name. Let us then, each in his place and station, be followers of them; and our happiness shall surely rise with our employment.

***~~2. How reasonable a duty it is!~~***

The Pharisees, if they had been asked the reason of their conduct, would doubtless have offered many specious arguments in vindication of themselves. They might have imputed the conduct of the disciples to enthusiasm, ostentation, hypocrisy. They might have blamed Jesus for allowing them to raise such a tumult, and to endanger thereby the peace of the whole city. They might have ascribed his acquiescence to vain-glory, and a love of popularity, which did but ill accord with his pretensions to superior wisdom and humility. This would have appeared very satisfactory in their eyes; and they, like our modern Pharisees, would have arrogated to themselves the exclusive name of *reasonable*Christians. But we know on whose side reason was in the instance before us: and *as long as infinite greatness, and unbounded goodness, deserve our admiration—so long will it be reasonable to bless and magnify our adorable Jesus with all our might*.

***~~3. How necessary a duty it is!~~***

The Pharisees thought that, if Jesus merited any respect at all, his disciples should have regarded him only with silent reverence, instead of attracting so much attention by their clamorous proceedings. But our Lord told them, that silent reverence, however great, was not sufficient; that they were bound to give a public testimony of their affection; and that, if they withheld it, they would be traitors to his cause. Though therefore we are not called to bear our testimony precisely in the same way—yet are we all bound to confess Christ before men, [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33), and to let it be seen, "Whose we are, and whom we serve."

Shall it be said, That there is no such occasion now for our public acknowledgments as there was then; we answer: That the world needs as much as ever to have their attention drawn to the Lord Jesus, and to be stimulated to love and serve him. And, if this were not the case, still it would be our duty to confess him openly, since*in Heaven, where he is universally known, he is universally and incessantly adored*.

***~~ADDRESS~~***

***~~1. Those who, like the Pharisees, have no heart to adore the Lord—~~***

It is not difficult to determine who would have taken part with the disciples, and who with the Pharisees. We need only ask: What is our conduct now?

Are we frequently and fervently engaged in the secret exercises of the closet, and are we bold in confessing Christ before an ungodly world? Or are we formal in secret duties, and ready to blame the superior zeal of others? If we be of this latter class, we should surely have joined the Pharisees in their opposition to the disciples. To such then we say: Deceive not yourselves with vain excuses; nor think to justify yourselves by condemning others.

Suppose for a moment that the disciples, in their zeal, had exceeded the strict bounds of prudence and propriety: was that any reason why the Pharisees should render him no praise at all? Was less due from them, because others paid too much? Yes rather, was not their *pretended zeal for propriety*, a mere cloak for their own envy or indifference?

Away then with such base dispositions as they manifested; and, instead of blaming the zeal of others, endeavor to "glorify Christ with your body and your spirit which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:20." Far be it from us to countenance *excess*, but in this lukewarm age we are far more in danger of erring from *defect*. This, at least, is your danger, while, with all your jealousy about being "righteous over-much," you have no fears lest you should not be found "righteous enough." To you therefore, in the name, and by the command, of Christ himself, we say, "Be zealous and repent! [Revelation 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.19)."

***~~2. Those who, like the disciples, feel their hearts warmed with love to Christ—~~***

You must expect to meet with opposition from the world, and especially from proud, envious, malignant Pharisees. But let not the fear of their censures deter you from the path of duty, [Hebrews 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.13). If Jesus has given up his *life*for you, it is a small matter for you to give up your *names*for him: and if you will not bear so light a cross as that of being called by some opprobrious name for him, you have little reason to number yourselves among his true disciples, [Matthew 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.38).

It will be proper indeed for you to consider times and places, and sometimes to lay a restraint on your feelings, lest by an unseasonable disclosure of them, you "cast your pearls before swine, that will only turn and rend you, [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)." But let not the fear of man be the restraining principle: rather, let the love of Christ be the one motive for moderating, as well as for exhibiting, the proofs of your love. Then shall you in due season have a public testimony of his approbation, when those who now condemn you shall be themselves condemned!

***~~#1568~~***

***~~Christ's Compassion to Lost Sinners~~***

***~~[Luke 19:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41-42)~~***

"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

In profane history we are often called upon to admire the actions of conquerors, and of heroes. But most of the feats proposed for our admiration serve rather to evince the depravity of our nature; and are calculated only to excite horror and disgust in a well-instructed mind. Perhaps, of real magnanimity, the world never yet witnessed a more glorious instance than that before us; wherein we behold *the Savior of mankind weeping over his blood-thirsty enemies, and most pathetically lamenting their invincible ignorance and unbelief*. To enter fully into the scope of his words, it will be necessary to consider them,

***~~I. In reference to Jerusalem—~~***

***~~The Jews had long been the most favored nation under Heaven—~~***

They had had the oracles of God committed to them, when the rest of the world were left to the suggestions of unenlightened reason. The way of life and salvation was exhibited to them in their daily *sacrifices*, and more especially in those offered annually on the great day of atonement. They had been taught by a long succession of *prophets*who were divinely qualified and commissioned to make known to them the will of God. Above all, they had now been privileged to hear the *Messiah*himself, and to see all his doctrines confirmed with the most numerous, most stupendous, and most unquestionable miracles. These were such advantages for the obtaining of eternal life as none others ever enjoyed, and such as must have proved effectual, if Satan had not blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts.

***~~But they were now speedily to be given over to the judgments they had merited—~~***

They had in no respect rendered unto God according to the benefits received from him. On the contrary, they had made void the law, and established their own traditions as of superior obligation. Instead of hearkening to the prophets, they persecuted them unto death. Instead of yielding to the wisdom and authority of the Messiah, they imputed his miracles to a confederacy with the devil, and incessantly plotted to take away his life. Within the space of four days they were to fill up the measure of their iniquities by effecting their murderous purposes: and wrath was in due time to come upon them to the uttermost for all the righteous blood that they had spilled, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Christ and his Apostles. They were to be given up to judicial blindness and obduracy; and the whole nation were to suffer such calamities from the hands of the Romans, as never had been endured by any nation since the foundation of the world: and all this was but *a pledge of infinitely heavier judgments, which were to abide upon them for ever and ever.*

***~~Our Lord, foreseeing their impending miseries, was filled with compassion towards them—~~***

He might well have spoken to them in those terms of indignant triumph, "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how shall you escape the damnation of Hell?" But he had far other thoughts on this occasion: knowing the full extent of the miseries that were coming on them, his affections yearned over them. Nor did he only pity them as one possessed of human passions, but as their Mediator, who had come from Heaven to seek and save them. Perhaps too the thought that he should one day be their Judge, and be necessitated to pass the awful sentence of condemnation on their souls, oppressed, and, for a moment, overwhelmed his spirit. Often had he already travailed, as it were, in birth with them; and now he was about to lay down his life for them. But, except to a little remnant, his efforts would be in vain. With respect to a far the greater part of them, the things belonging to their peace were about to be hid from their eyes: yet if even at that hour they would have repented, he would gladly "have gathered them, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." But, alas! they would not; and he foresaw moreover that they never would: and therefore, despairing of ever bringing them to happiness, he looked on them with the tenderest emotions of pity, and with a flood of tears poured forth this pathetic lamentation.

***~~Nor could the circumstances he was in at all divert his attention from them—~~***

He was surrounded by vast multitudes of people; yet he was not ashamed to stop the procession, and to weep before them all. They were all crying "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" Yet was he deaf to their acclamations and hosannas. He foresaw all the conflicts which he was about to sustain, and the agonies he was speedily to suffer for the satisfying of divine justice; yet was he altogether insensible to his own concerns, and occupied about the welfare of his most inveterate enemies. Who but God could have exercised such magnanimity as this, or manifested such unbounded compassion?

But, not to confine these things to the Jews, let us consider them further,

***~~II. In reference to ourselves—~~***

Peculiar as these circumstances were, they were both written for our admonition, and intended to represent the compassion which Jesus yet bears towards us.

***~~We, like the Jews, have had a day of grace afforded us—~~***

The things belonging to our peace have been plainly revealed to us, and, we trust, faithfully declared among us. The way of acceptance through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, has incessantly been pointed out in the written word, in the offices of our Liturgy, in the administration of the sacraments, and in the preached Gospel. Moreover, the Holy Spirit has often striven with us to bring us to repentance; but, with respect to very many among us, the means have hitherto been used in vain. There are yet too many unacquainted with their depravity, and unsolicitous about a saving interest in the Savior. Deeply as their eternal peace is involved in these things, *they are ignorant of them, if not in theory, at least in their practical and sanctifying efficacy*.

***~~With respect to many, this day of grace is quickly drawing to a close—~~***

Certain it is that, even while we are yet possessing the outward means of grace, the inward power that alone can render them effectual, may be withdrawn. God plainly warns us that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man:" and that by continuing to resist the Holy Spirit, we may not only "grieve" and "vex" him, but may ultimately "quench" his sacred motions. And how inexpressibly dreadful is the state of one, concerning whom God has said, "He is joined to idols, let him alone!" If once this sentence be pronounced, the things belonging to our peace will be as effectually hidden from our eyes, as if we were cut off out of the land of the living: and *we shall live henceforth only to add sin to sin, and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath*." But at all events as soon as death comes, our day of grace must terminate; and, if we have lived all our days ignorant of Christ and his salvation, we have then no more hope of mercy than the fallen angels. And how many are there, not only of the aged and infirm, but also of the young and healthy, against whom death has already pointed his dart, and whose speedy dissolution is foreknown to God!

And may we not suppose that Jesus is now looking, as it were, upon them with tender compassion?

He has not now indeed the same susceptibility of grief and sorrow which once he had: but does he not long for the salvation of sinners as much as ever? Does he not look on some, whose day of grace is nearly passed, and say, "O that you might know, at least in this your day, the things that belong unto your peace?" Does he not behold even the proudest Pharisee, and the most abandoned profligate, and without excluding either of them from his mercy, say, O that you, even you, would turn unto me, that I might save you! Yes surely, his address to every sinner is, "Turn, turn from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Let us suppose for a moment that he were to come into this assembly, and to look round about upon us all; what would be the feelings of his benevolent heart? Methinks, when he beheld so many ignorant of his salvation, and perishing in the midst of mercy, he would burst into a flood of tears. A sight of so many who by disease or accident will soon be hurried into the eternal world, while yet they are unprepared to meet their God; a sight of so many continuing mirthful and thoughtless, or careful only about this present world, would pierce him with the deepest sorrow, and extort from him a lamentation similar to that before us. Yes, at this moment is he inspecting all our hearts, and, as far as his situation admits of it, is grieved on our account: nor can all the anthems of saints around the throne so occupy his attention, as to make him regardless of our deplorable condition.

***~~Let us then see the folly of an inconsiderate and careless state—~~***

Perhaps many in that day might wonder at this exercise of Christ's compassion, and consider his weeping over the people as a mark of folly and weakness: and many at this time, if they should behold a servant of Christ expressing a concern for immortal souls in the same way, would laugh at him as a weak enthusiast. But who that knows the value of a soul, and sees in what a delusive security the generality are living, must not confess, that there is just occasion for all the compassion we can exercise, and all the zeal we can put forth. Can we imagine that Jesus would have felt so much, or given such vent to his feelings on this occasion, if there had not been sufficient reason for it. Suppose we knew for certain, that one among us had lost his day of grace; would it not befit us all to weep over him? Let us then learn to weep for ourselves; and seek the things belonging to our peace, lest they be speedily, and for ever, hidden from our eyes.

***~~Let us also acknowledge the blessedness of a converted state—~~***

If our Lord wept over the ignorant and ungodly, we may well conceive that he would rejoice over those who are divinely instructed, and walking in the way of godliness. Indeed he has represented himself as the shepherd rejoicing over his recovered sheep, and the father over the returning Prodigal. He has even said, "He will rejoice over us with joy, he will rest in his love, he will rejoice over us with singing." Surely then neither is this without a cause: there must be real reason for joy, if Jesus himself rejoice over us.

A soul enlightened, sanctified, and saved! O what cause for joy! Who that knows the temporal, and much more the eternal, judgments that fell upon the great body of the Jewish nation, would not incomparably prefer the state of those, who are persecuted unto death, before that of their proud oppressors? Let us then improve "this our accepted time, our day of salvation." Let us be earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life: so shall we have reason for triumph, though in the most afflictive circumstances; and shall rejoice for ever in the presence of our God, when all others shall be "cast into that lake of fire, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

***~~#1569~~***

***~~The Wicked Gardeners~~***

***~~[Luke 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.15)~~***

"So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?"

When the mind is unbiased, it can easily discern between truth and error, especially where the grounds of judgment are clear and strong. But *where persons are under the influence of prejudice or worldly interest, they are blind to the most obvious conclusions, and obstinately tenacious of the most absurd opinions*. Hence our Lord spoke so much in parables; because his adversaries, not aware of their drift at first, were easily brought to acknowledge things, which, if more plainly delivered, would have excited the most inveterate opposition. In this manner he gained their assent to *the equity of God in executing the heaviest judgments on themselves and their whole nation*.

This was the scope of the parable before us, in opening which, we shall show,

***~~I. In whom this heinous wickedness is found—~~***

***~~It was manifestly accomplished in those to whom the parable was spoken—~~***

God had planted his Church among the Jews, and had cultivated it with peculiar care, [Isaiah 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.1-4). From it he expected a revenue of honor and glory: and when the people were forgetful to pay it, he sent his prophets to remind them of their duty, and to stir them up to the performance of it. But they abused his messengers in every successive age, and beat them, and sent them away empty. He, however, averse to punish them as they deserved, sent, last of all, his Son, in hopes that, when they should see his exalted dignity, his clear credentials, and his unbounded benevolence, they would reverence and obey him. But they, wishing to retain undisturbed possession of their lusts, determined to cast him out and kill him. And though, when warned that they would do so, they exclaimed, 'God forbid that we should treat the Messiah thus, verse 16.' *they actually fulfilled the parable within the space of three days, and put to death God's only begotten Son.*

***~~And is it not accomplished in us also?~~***

It is true that we cannot crucify him as the Jews did, because he is not within our reach; but nevertheless we cast him out with as much indignity as ever they did. As he was among them, "the man whom the nation abhorred," so is he still "despised and rejected of men," "a butt of contradiction" to an ungodly world, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35).

How is he treated by the ungodly and profane! When he comes to them in the ministry of the word, and demands their hearts for God, do they not thrust him away, saying, "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us! [Acts 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.27)." "We will not have this man to reign over us! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)."

And how do the self-righteous moralists regard him? When he calls them to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes, do they not make him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33). Do they not persist in going about to establish their own righteousness, instead of thankfully submitting to his, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3).

Among his very followers too, are there not many self-deceiving professors who acknowledge him in words, but in works deny him, [Titus 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.16). *If others crucify him more openly, these, like Judas, betray him with a kiss.*

Lastly, what shall be said of vile apostates, who having once embraced his cause, decline from his ways, and go back unto the world? Are we not expressly told, that they crucify him afresh, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6), and "tread him under foot?" By all of these then is Jesus cast out of the vineyard, as much as ever he was by the Jews of old.

Let us then consider attentively,

***~~II. What portion such persons must expect—~~***

***~~The Jews, as our Lord foretold, were visited with the heaviest calamities—~~***

They, when interrogated by our Lord, confessed what such laborers must expect at the hands of their lord, [Matthew 21:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.41). And behold, it happened to them according to their word. That generation was not passed away, before their city was burnt up, their people were massacred without distinction, and their whole polity, civil and religious, was dissolved. Nor can any one reflect on their treatment of their Messiah, without acknowledging the equity of those unparalleled judgments that were inflicted on them.

***~~And shall not the wrath of God fall on those also who despise him now?~~***

Let our Lord's appeal be considered, "What shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" Would any rational person imagine that he should show kindness to such obstinate transgressors? Do we not see immediately that God must be incensed against them? must he not be displeased with those who withhold from him the tribute of their love? Must he not be indignant also that his messages of mercy are so continually slighted? And above all, must not the contempt poured upon his only dear Son, provoke him to anger? What can we expect, but that his wrath should wax hot against us, and "burn even to the lowest Hell, [Deuteronomy 32:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.22)." Let any one impartially consider the ingratitude and impiety of such conduct, and he will confess that the everlasting punishment of such offenders is no more than adequate to their just desert, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3); [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29).

***~~Let us then learn from this parable,~~***

***~~1. That we are accountable to God for all the advantages we enjoy—~~***

If God has made us his vineyard, and bestowed labor upon us, doubtless such a favor entails upon us an obligation to love and serve him. And if he has sent a succession of faithful servants to remind us of our duty, and direct us in the performance of it, this also calls for correspondent acknowledgments from us. Above all, if he has sent us his only dear Son, not only to *instruct*us, but to *die*for us, we should be incessantly filled with admiration of his love, and with zeal for his glory.

But these very mercies, if overlooked and despised, will bring upon us the heavier indignation and wrath. Think then for how many things, both temporal and spiritual, you are indebted to God; and begin immediately to render to him his dues. That which, above all, he requires is, the tribute of a grateful heart. O that he may receive it daily from us; and that we may devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit!

***~~2. That we are peculiarly responsible for our treatment of Jesus Christ—~~***

Christ is the Father's greatest gift. Our past abuse of all his other mercies may be forgiven, provided we be duly sensible of this mercy. However long we have alienated God's property, yes, however shamefully we have abused his other messengers, if now we repent of our sins, and turn to him in the name of Jesus, he will pardon our past transgressions, and remember our iniquities no more. But, if we continue to slight the Savior, all other changes will be to no purpose. We may turn from profaneness to morality, or may even profess a regard for Jesus himself; yet if we do not cordially receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent into the world, we shall only deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. Let us then "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn." Then shall God's indignation be turned to love; and we shall be made partakers of his eternal inheritance!

***~~#1570~~***

***~~The Rejected Corner Stone~~***

**[Luke 20:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.17-18)**

"Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

*Many truths delivered by our Lord militated strongly against the carnal notions of his hearers*: they were ready on many occasions to reply, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" But he invariably appealed to their own Scriptures in confirmation of his word. Nor could any better method of silencing their objections be possibly devised. He had just warned the priests and elders that they would kill their Messiah; and that God would on that account transfer his Church to the Gentiles, verse 13-16. They, not conceiving that either of those events could ever take place, cried, "God forbid!" Our Lord, in reply, referred them to their own Scriptures, and added a most awful declaration of his own, in order that he might impress the passage more deeply on their minds. We shall consider,

***~~I. The passage appealed to—~~***

***~~The words in their primary sense refer to David—~~***

David's establishment on the throne of Israel had been opposed to the uttermost: Saul had labored incessantly to kill him: after the death of Saul, only two tribes acknowledged him as their king: it was seven years before the other tribes became subject to him: and then all the surrounding nations sought his destruction. But God made him triumphant over all: in remembrance of which mercy he penned the words before us. See [Psalm 118:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.10); [Psalm 118:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22).

***~~But they most undoubtedly have a reference to Christ also—~~***

Christ is represented in Scripture as the stone that would both support and connect the Church of God [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16); and the passage referred to in the text particularly declared that he should be rejected by the very persons whose duty it was to edify and build up the Church. It announced however the determination of God to frustrate their designs, and to establish him as the capstone in spite of all their endeavors to destroy him. In this view the passage is quoted no less than six times in the New Testament: and its full accomplishment was triumphantly proclaimed before the very builders who had rejected him, [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36); [Acts 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.11-12).

***~~The particular manner in which our Lord appealed to them is worthy of notice—~~***

He beheld the objectors with a mixture of indignation and pity. He referred them to the words as to a passage well known among them, and generally considered even among themselves as applicable to the Messiah. His very look, together with the pointed manner of his address, intimated to them, that they were at that moment ignorantly fulfilling that prophecy, and that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice could induce them to persist one moment longer in such glaring impiety.

The importance of this appeal will more strongly appear, if we consider,

***~~II. The declaration founded upon it—~~***

The latter part of the text is understood by most as intimating the more aggravated punishment that persecutors would incur beyond that of other unbelievers. They suppose also that there is an allusion to the manner in which persons were stoned to death, namely, by casting them down first upon a large stone, and then throwing large stones upon them. Perhaps we may rather understand it as importing,

***~~1. That all who stumble at Christ, greatly endanger their own souls—~~***

Many are the grounds of offence which Christ affords to proud and ungodly men. To some the sublimity, to others the simplicity, to some the strictness, and to others the grace of his Gospel, becomes a stumbling-block. Hence some professedly "deny the Lord who bought them," while others, "call him Lord, but will not do what he commands." These equally stumble at Christ himself, [1 Peter 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.8). And as he who falls upon a great stone, will bruise and maim his body, so does he who thus stumbles at Christ wound his own soul. What pangs of conscience, and dread of death and judgment, do such persons experience! Solomon, expressly speaking of Christ, attests this awful truth, [Proverbs 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.30); [Proverbs 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.36).

***~~2. That those who provoke him to cut them off in their impenitence, will perish certainly and without a remedy—~~***

Many have rejected him for a season, and found acceptance with him at last; but those who abide in unbelief must inevitably perish. The despised Jesus will fall upon them at the last day, and grind them to powder: the weight of rocks and mountains would not more effectually crush a potter's vessel, than he will his obstinate and unbelieving enemies! [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9).

***~~Surely this is a declaration which deserves the deepest attention—~~***

They who oppose the truth of Christ, think that they shall retard his work; at least, they do not apprehend that they shall endanger themselves. But they "kick against the goads, [Acts 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.5)." As well may persons hope to wound a rock by casting themselves down upon it, as that they shall ever prevail against the Church of Christ: the injury will ultimately be sustained by themselves alone. The voice of God therefore in the text is like that of David, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way! [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12).

***~~Advices—~~***

***~~1. Attend diligently to every word of God which you read or hear—~~***

The knowledge which the Jews had by means of the Scriptures, rendered their guilt in rejecting Christ incomparably more heinous than that of the Roman soldiers. Just so, we who enjoy the still clearer light of the New Testament, must contract ten-fold guilt if we reject him. How shall we be able to endure that appeal which will be made to us in the day of judgment, 'Were not such and such things written respecting me? Were not my invitations, promises, and expostulations set before you? Were you not forewarned of the evils which a rejection of me would bring upon you?' Give earnest heed then to the word you hear, lest, instead of proving a savor of life unto life, it becomes a savor of death unto death, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16).

***~~2. Examine carefully what regard you are paying to Christ—~~***

All do not make him the capstone: many reject him still. If we be not with him, we are against him Matthew, 12:30. All that disobey him, as truly stumble at him, as if they were his avowed enemies, [1 Peter 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.8). Inquire then whether you make him the foundation whereon you build, and the corner-stone that unites you in love to every part of God's spiritual temple. By this must you know that you are his true disciples.

***~~3. Be thankful if you have attained even the smallest true knowledge of Christ—~~***

There is no hope whatever for those who, in a Christian land, die ignorant of Christ, [2 Thessalonians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8). But those who know him, have nothing to fear. To them is promised eternal life, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3). When the whole assembly of the ungodly shall be banished from his presence, they shall stand with great boldness, [2 Thessalonians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.9-10). When the wicked will be crying to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, the followers of the Lamb will be triumphing in their God. This promise is sure to all the seed, [Romans 9:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.33). Let Jesus then be more precious to all our souls; let us willingly consent to his being the capstone; let us, as living stones, ever seek to be built up upon him, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5); and, though we should be despised and rejected like him, let us never be ashamed of owning him as all our salvation and all our desire.

***~~#1571~~***

***~~Encouragement to Bear Persecution~~***

***~~[Luke 21:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.17-19)~~***

"You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

In applying to ourselves the addresses of our Lord to his disciples, we are liable to err, if we do not distinguish between their situation and our own. As far as we are in their circumstances, the application will be just, but no further. They were taught to expect on trying occasions such aid from God, as would entirely supersede the necessity of study on their part, verse 14, 15; but if we should form such expectations, we would only tempt God, and expose his cause to the derision of his enemies. Nevertheless, *inasmuch as we are subject to many of the same difficulties with them, we may reasonably hope for the same supports and consolations*. Though therefore we willingly concede, that it would be enthusiastic and absurd in us to expect the miraculous influences which were given to them, we may regard the words before us as addressed to ourselves. In them we have,

***~~I. An alarming declaration—~~***

Piety has been an object of aversion to fallen man in all ages, [John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.12), [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29). Where it has appeared in its most perfect forms, it has been most reviled and persecuted, [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52) and 1 Corinthians 4:9. It might have been hoped indeed that the glorious effects of Christianity would disarm its enemies: but the enmity of the human heart against God has never appeared so strong, as it has since the establishment of Christianity in the world. And to this hour does a conformity to its precepts call forth the same wrath and bitterness as it did in the Apostle's days. The laws enacted for its support do indeed restrain men from executing all that is in their hearts: but the words of our Lord are still verified in every place; nor can any wisdom or prudence in the professors of religion exempt them from the reproach connected with it.

Among other reasons for the aversion of men to Christianity in the first ages, a very prominent one was that it was an unaccommodating religion, and claimed, not only a pre-eminence above every other, but an exclusive way of salvation through faith in Jesus. Had the followers of Jesus been content that his name should have been enrolled among the list of heathen deities, they would have been no more hated than the professors of any other religion: and if at this time the followers of Christ would connive at the existence of other tenets and other practices than those which Christianity enjoins, they would be admired, rather than hated, by an ungodly world. But their *exclusive*claims in its behalf subject them to the fiercest resentment of those who are hostile to its requisitions.

Not content with serving the Lord Jesus Christ themselves, they call upon all others to serve him too, and that at the peril of their souls: hence all who are determined to follow their own ways must, in their own vindication as it were, condemn those who so greatly differ from them: and hence, as long as that difference exists in the world, the enmity excited by it will operate.

To fortify us against these trials, our Lord graciously gives us,

***~~II. A consoling promise—~~***

The expression used by our Lord was proverbial. It occurs in many other parts of Scripture; and signifies, that no *real evil*shall arise to the person of whom it is spoken. It cannot mean that he shall experience no trouble; for in the preceding context it is said, that "many shall be put to death:" but it is equivalent to that expression of Peter, "Who is he who shall harm you, if you are followers of that which is good [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13)." and it accords with that promise of God by the Prophet Jeremiah, "Turn you every one from your evil ways, and I will do you no hurt, [Jeremiah 25:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 25.5-6)."

Two things are implied in it; namely, that no evil whatever shall accrue to the person but by the express permission of God; and that none shall be inflicted, which shall not be over-ruled for his eternal good.

Little does the world think how much their powers are limited by the special providence of God. They boast of their purposes; but find that "wherein they deal proudly, there is One that is above them," "who disappoints the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprise [Job 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.12)." Laban and Esau menaced great things against the defenseless Jacob; but they could effect nothing: and every believer may address his enemies in the words of Christ to Pilate, "You can have no power at all against me, except it be given to you from above."

The Christian's enemies do indeed often appear to triumph: but it is in appearance only, and not in reality; for *they can do nothing which God will not "make to work together for good to them that love him."*If they injure his body, and benefit his soul, what harm do they inflict? If they deprive him of earthly comforts, but occasion him to receive a richer reward in Heaven, what loss does he sustain? Truly *the efforts of the most malignant among them shall only operate as a furnace to purge him from his dross*, or as a cross-wind to fill all his sails, and waft him with more rapidity to his desired haven.

But as flesh and blood must feel, and are too apt to faint, our Lord adds,

***~~III. An encouraging direction—~~***

Self-possession is the privilege of all who trust in God; "They that believe shall not make haste." The unreasonableness of wicked men is apt to discompose us; and their virulence, to grieve us: but by perseverance we are enabled to bear up against every species of oppression, and to retain the same tranquility of mind as if we were in a state of perfect ease: "I will keep him in perfect peace," says God, "whose mind is stayed on me." This then is the direction given to us by our Lord, "In your patience possess you your souls;" "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing [James 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.4)."

Yield not to *irritation*. The instant that anger arises in your bosoms, you are "overcome of evil:" whereas your duty is, "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Yield not to *dejection*. *Your trials may be long and heavy—but they are all appointed in number, weight, and duration*. See the experience of the Apostle Paul [2 Corinthians 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.8-10); that experience shall be yours; and "your strength shall be according to your day."

Yield not to *fear*. "Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man that shall be as grass?" However formidable your enemies may appear, the advice of Peter to you is, "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, [1 Peter 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.14-15)." "Be anxious for nothing;" but "cast all your care on him who cares for you."

***~~For the conclusion of this subject, we shall,~~***

***~~1. Correct some mistakes in relation to it—~~***

Religious people are apt to imagine that *every cross*which they are called to bear, is the cross of Christ; and that they should use no means to avoid it: but it is a common thing for them to bring trials upon themselves by their own imprudence, or perhaps even by very reprehensible misconduct. Of such Peter speaks; contrasting their sufferings with those which are endured for the name of Christ; and affirming, that their troubles are a ground of shame rather than of glorying, [1 Peter 4:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14-16). It would be well if those who make religion a pretext for neglecting their relative duties, would consider this; for, whatever they may imagine, their cross is not the cross of Christ, but their own; nor will it ever bring either honor to God, or benefit to themselves. Moreover, if a cross be really coming upon us for the name of Christ, we may without any impropriety endeavor to avoid it. We must not indeed sacrifice a good conscience, even for the avoiding of death itself. Daniel would not so much as shut his window when he prayed, because it would have been a denial of his God, [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10); but our Lord told his disciples, that "if men persecuted them in one city, they should flee to another:" and Paul on many occasions fled from his enemies, and made considerable sacrifices to abate their prejudice, [Acts 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.25); [Acts 21:21-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.21-26); [Acts 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.6). Thus also should we act: we should be careful never unnecessarily to bring a cross upon ourselves; we should even use any prudent means to avoid the cross of Christ: but when we have no alternative but to bear it, or to make shipwreck of a good conscience, then we must "take it up," and "glory in it."

***~~2. Suggest some considerations for a suitable improvement of it—~~***

First: If all men conspire to hate and persecute the disciples of Christ, let the disciples at least take care to love one another, and to strengthen each other's hands by a firm and indissoluble union among themselves. The ungodly will triumph, if they can see Christians quarreling among themselves, and hating and reviling each other.

Next, let us duly reflect whose cross it is that we are called to bear. Did we but consider what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us, we should account no cross heavy, nor any affliction long.

Lastly, let us look forward to the eternal world: there, all our trials will be compensated; and "our light and momentary afflictions will be recompensed with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"!

***~~#1572~~***

***~~The Budding Fig-tree~~***

***~~[Luke 21:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.29-31)~~***

"Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."

It was a great advantage to our Lord's stated followers, that they could ask him more particularly respecting anything which they did not perfectly understand. Of this privilege they often availed themselves, and obtained satisfactory information on many important points.

Our Lord told them that the time was coming when that temple, which they so much admired, would be utterly destroyed. This was so contrary to their expectations, that they begged to know both the period to which he referred, and the particular signs whereby its approach might be ascertained. To this our Lord gave a very full reply; and illustrated his discourse by a parable taken from the season of the year, and, most probably, from the prospect then before their eyes. This parable, with the application of it, shows us,

***~~I. That we ought to notice the signs which God has given to us—~~***

There is scarcely anything needful for us to know, which is not discoverable by certain signs even before it actually exists, or is fully accomplished. We may notice this,

***~~1. In the works of nature—~~***

Our Lord justly observes that the seasons which succeed each other do not come upon us unawares, but manifest their approach by certain signs. The prophet describes the very birds of the air as instinctively observing their appointed times, [Jeremiah 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.7). And it is of the greatest importance to us in all our agricultural and commercial concerns to do the same. Indeed, if we should neglect such precautions, we should deprive ourselves in many instances of the comforts, if not the necessities, of life.

***~~2. In the works of Providence—~~***

Those great dispensations referred to in the text were, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom. The time when they were to take place was to be known, by impostors arrogating to themselves the Messiah's office; by bitter persecutions raised against the Church, and lamentable apostasies occasioned by them; by destructive wars on earth, and tremendous signs in Heaven; and particularly by the Roman standard being planted upon holy ground, when their armies would enclose and besiege Jerusalem. It was of infinite importance to the Church to notice these signs; for, on their observation of them, under God, depended all their safety: and their attention to them enabled them to embrace the interval, when the siege was raised, to effect their escape; whereby they were preserved, while the whole nation besides were left to suffer the greatest extremities.

The signs of other times are not so clearly marked; and therefore cannot be so confidently interpreted: but it is wise to notice them with care; and our Lord warns us that our observations on the weather will turn to our condemnation, if we do not endeavor to improve with equal diligence our observations on the works of Providence, [Matthew 16:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.2-3).

***~~3. In the works of grace—~~***

The conversion of the soul is preceded by many symptoms from which we may form a reasonable judgment. When we behold a humiliation for sin, a teachableness of mind, a love to ordinances, a diligence in duties, a renunciation of the world, and other similar marks—we may hope well respecting the outcome: and it is desirable to attend to these symptoms, because we may often derive from them a comfortable hope, when other circumstances might be ready to overwhelm us with despair. Our Lord himself formed his judgment upon these grounds; and we shall turn our observations to good account, if we follow his example, [Mark 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.34).

Though we are liable to mistake when we have not God for our guide—yet we are sure,

***~~II. That whatever God has signified to us in his Word shall in due time be accomplished—~~***

The destruction of the unbelieving Jews, and the redemption of the Church from the midst of them, were emblematic of the *judgments*that would be executed, and the *salvation*that would be given, in the last day. Indeed, the two periods are so interwoven in our Lord's discourse, that it is not easy to separate them. We may well therefore fix our attention on those events wherein we are all concerned:

***~~1. The final destruction of God's enemies—~~***

This is foretold in many passages of Scripture; and the judgments, which are now executed in the world, are so many presages of a future retribution. Whatever people may imagine, this awful event shall come to pass. The Jews supposed that, because they professed the true religion, they would never experience the threatened calamities: but, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, "wrath came upon them to the uttermost."

Thus it shall be with all the ungodly. In vain are all their hopes founded on their external relation to Christ: the word of God will be fulfilled in its season; and sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it shall fail, verse 32, 33.

***~~2. The eternal salvation of God's elect—~~***

This is asserted with the same frequency and clearness as the opposite truth: and too often is it questioned by persons through the prevalence of unbelief. There may be indeed great, and, humanly speaking, insurmountable obstacles in the way. As the Christians were enclosed by the besieging army—yet escaped at last through the most unaccountable and impolitic conduct of the Roman general in intermitting the siege, so shall some way be found for the salvation of God's people: they may be hemmed in on every side; yet God's purposes of love shall not be defeated, or the smallest grain of pure wheat ever fall to the ground, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9)."

***~~This subject may be further improved,~~***

***~~1. In a way of conviction—~~***

It befits us all to inquire what is to be expected from the signs that manifest themselves in us?

Is the fig-tree budding, and are the trees putting forth their leaves? Or, are they stripped of their foliage, and assuming daily a more dead and barren appearance?

Just so, are our *graces*, though small, growing in beauty and fruitfulness; or are we mere cumberers of the ground that bring forth no fruit to God? From these things we may know the present, and forecast the future, state of our souls. O let our minds be open to conviction; and let conscience do its office.

***~~2. In a way of consolation—~~***

We are "not to despise the day of small things." Let us be thankful if there be "some good thing found in our hearts." Summer comes not all at once; but, if the symptoms of it appear, we may wait with joyful expectation: and if the good work is begun in our hearts, we may be confident that God will carry it on, and perfect it to the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6).

***~~#1573~~***

***~~Our Lord's Eating the Last Passover with His Disciples~~***

**[Luke 22:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.14-16)**

"When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Supposing the Holy Scriptures to have been written by divine inspiration, and Jesus Christ to have been the Son of the Most High God, we should expect that everything related to him would have the stamp and character of his perfections. There would be a consistency in all that belonged to him: in what belonged to him as *God*, he would appear as God; and in what belonged to him as *man*, he would be found altogether pure and spotless. This consistency we do find; nor does he ever for a moment say or do anything which is not worthy of himself.

The time has come for his celebration of the Passover, on the very night previous to his death. He orders his disciples to go into the city, and make things ready for him. But where shall they go? He bids them enter into the city, and inform a person whom they shall meet bearing a pitcher of water, that their Master would eat the Passover at his house; and he assures them that the person will, without hesitation, show them a large upper room furnished, and affording every accommodation that they can wish.

Here we see him, as the omniscient God, declaring with infallible certainty the most contingent events: and when he comes to his disciples, behold, he forgets all his own approaching sufferings, and is intent only on promoting their eternal welfare.

The last evening was arrived, when he was to conflict with all the powers of darkness, and to be delivered into the hands of sinners. This he well knew; and therefore, one would suppose, should have greatly dreaded the approaching hour: but, instead of dreading it for himself, he earnestly desired it for their good: "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Here two inquiries arise; and they will afford a profitable subject for our present contemplation?

***~~I. Why did he so desire to eat the Passover with them at that time?~~***

Many reasons doubtless conspired to make him so desirous of it. It would afford him a valuable opportunity

***~~1. Of manifesting his love to them—~~***

Parting friends are usually anxious to give to each other some lasting token of their mutual regard. Our blessed Lord, in particular, was glad to avail himself of the opportunity which the Paschal feast would afford him for this purpose. That feast was attended with repeated washings of the hands of him who presided at it: but our Lord, having his disciples alone with him, instead of washing his own hands, took a towel, and girded himself, and washed their feet: nor would he allow any one of them to decline accepting this token of his love: so anxious was he to convince them all, that "having loved them, he loved them to the end, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)."

Nor did he by this action merely express to them his own love, but showed them what sentiments they should entertain towards each other, and towards all his people to the end of time: they should account no service too humiliating to perform for the lowest member of his mystical body; but every one should make it the summit of his ambition to become the servant of all.

***~~2. Of conveying instruction to their minds—~~***

They had been frequently informed of his approaching sufferings and death; insomuch, that though they did not fully comprehend these predictions, they were much troubled and perplexed in relation to them. They were now, like ground that has been ploughed up, and watered with plenteous rains, prepared to receive into their bosoms the good seed, the word of life. Our Lord therefore now opened to them, more fully than on any other occasion, all the deepest mysteries of his religion. He told them plainly who he was, even one with the Father, insomuch that "whoever had seen him, had seen the Father." He told them also, where, and for what end, he was going; even to his Father's house, "to prepare places for them." He told them, that his departure was altogether "expedient for them;" so that if they considered it aright, instead of mourning on account of it, they would rejoice: for that he would send to them the Holy Spirit to be their abiding Comforter and Guide: yes, he himself would hear and answer every petition that they should present to the Father in his name; nay more, though removed from them as to his body, he would come and manifest himself to them, and even dwell in them, by his Spirit. He opened to them also the nature and intent of his death, which was to procure "for them the remission of their sins;" and showed them, that, notwithstanding his removal from them, they should be united to him as branches to the vine, and, by constant communications of grace and strength from him, be enabled to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.

In a word, in his discourses at this feast, he brought forth every subject which their necessities required, and presented it in such a view as should most conduce to their lasting edification and comfort. See John chapters 13 through 16.

***~~3. Of commending them to God in prayer—~~***

Doubtless he had oftentimes prayed with them: but this last prayer was peculiarly tender and impressive. It is the delight of pious friends, when parting to meet no more, to commend each other into the hands of their common Father, in the hope and prospect of seeing each other again in the eternal world.

Thus did our blessed Lord on this occasion. He had taken the charge of his disciples in this world, and had kept them all in safety, the traitor alone excepted, according to the predictions concerning him: and now he entreats his Father to keep them; that, through their ministrations, his name may be made known to the ends of the earth; and, through their exalted love and piety, the whole world may have an evidence, both of the truth of his mission, and of the sanctifying efficacy of his religion.

And, that they might have the fuller assurance of meeting him again in the eternal world, he prays, or rather, I should say, he declares it to be his unalterable will, that they all should be with him in that kingdom to which he was going, and should behold his glory there for ever and ever. See the 17th chapter of John. Surely they never could forget that prayer so solemnly offered, so tenderly expressed, so richly fraught with instruction and heavenly consolation.

***~~4. Of preparing them fully for his departure—~~***

His approaching sufferings must of necessity prove a great stumbling-block in their way. But when they would recollect what he had told them previously to his death, their hopes would revive, and they would be encouraged to expect the full accomplishment of all his promises. To produce this effect was a very principal object of this last discourse, (see [John 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.19); [John 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.25); [John 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.4); [John 16:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.33); [John 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.13)) and how completely it was attained, the Apostles themselves inform us: they thought his former discourses had been obscure parables in comparison with this: but this appeared to them simple and intelligible; insomuch that it removed all remaining doubt from their minds respecting his Divine mission, [John 16:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.28-30).

It is true, we find, that, on the apprehension of their Lord, they all forsook him and fled; and for some time they scarcely knew how to believe the joyful tidings respecting his resurrection from the dead: but, from the moment that they were convinced of that fact, we see a steadfastness in them which was evidently the result of these previous instructions; and their whole future lives demonstrated what unspeakable benefit they had received from them.

Such were the grounds, we conceive, on which our Lord so earnestly desired to eat the Passover with them at that time. We are next to inquire,

***~~II. Why he determined to eat it with them no more—~~***

If he had pleased, he might have continued upon earth after his resurrection, or come down again from Heaven at that season of the year to eat it with them again. But, independent of many other considerations, there were two reasons in particular, why he would not celebrate with them that ordinance any more:

***~~1. Because it was now about to be fulfilled and abrogated—~~***

The Passover was instituted only for a time, until the more perfect dispensation of the Messiah should be introduced. For both the occasion of that ordinance, and the ordinance itself, were altogether typical.

The occasion of that ordinance was the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, which was typical of the redemption of the world from sin and Satan, death and Hell. The Paschal Lamb also, which was to be roasted, and eaten with bitter herbs, and not a bone of which was to be broken, was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to endure the extreme agonies both of soul and body as a sacrifice for sin—yet was not to have one bone of his body broken.

To the completion of this type in the Lord Jesus Christ the Apostle Paul bears witness, saying, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast." This therefore was the deliverance which was henceforth to be celebrated in the Church; and in comparison with it the deliverance from Egypt was no more to be remembered, [Jeremiah 23:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.5-8). From this time the shadows were to flee away, seeing that the good things which they prefigured were now arrived. The *new covenant*, with everything relating to it, was now established; and therefore the old covenant, with all its carnal ordinances, having waxed old, was to vanish away, [Hebrews 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.13).

Now it was of great importance to the whole Church that this matter should be fully understood: and therefore our blessed Lord informed his disciples, that, since "the Passover would now be fulfilled in the kingdom of God," or in the dispensation which he was about to introduce, there would be no more occasion for the Jewish rites and ceremonies, not even for that which was the most solemn and sacred of them all. The word "until" does not import, that our Lord would keep the feast after it had been accomplished in him, but that he never would keep it again. It is a *Hebraism*, frequent in the Scriptures.

***~~2. Because other memorials of his love were now to be established—~~***

The *Lord's Supper*was now instituted for the purpose of exhibiting to the world the wonders of his love, and of perpetuating in the Church the remembrance of it to the end of time. In the breaking of the *bread*, was represented the rending of his body on the cross; and in the pouring out of the *wine*, the effusion of his blood: and the partaking of those sacred elements which nourish the body, represented the nourishing of our souls by a believing application to Christ as our sin-atoning sacrifice.

This is the feast which his people are now to keep: of this all are to partake, provided they desire to have redemption through his blood, and can partake of it with the bitter herbs of genuine repentance. This feast he will keep with us; not indeed by his bodily presence, but by that which is infinitely more important, his spiritual presence with our souls: "I will come unto you," says he, "and sup with you, and you with me."

Nor was this the privilege only of his own immediate disciples, but of all who shall believe in him through their word: "Lo," says he, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

***~~Reflections—~~***

***~~1. How earnestly should we desire communion with Christ!~~***

Did he forget all his approaching sufferings, that he might instruct and comfort his disciples? O how should we rise above all considerations, whether of pain or pleasure, to enjoy fellowship with him! How should we seek instruction from him as the first and greatest of all blessings! I am far from saying that we should neglect any earthly duty whatever; but we should consider everything in this world as altogether worthless in comparison with him: *joys*should be no joys, any further than they will consist with a sense of his love; nor should *sorrows*be regarded for a moment, if they be endured for his sake, or can be rendered subservient to his glory. To hear his voice, and learn his will, and taste his love, and follow his steps, and secure a participation of his glory, this should be our one desire, our continued labor, our supreme delight.

***~~2. How delighted should we be with the thoughts of death!~~***

At death, this whole work of redemption will be fully completed. In Christ it is completed now; in us it will not be fully completed, until all the remains of sin are done away. That will take place at the moment of our release from this mortal body: and then we shall keep the feast in a better manner. Our Lord has taught us to expect a renewal of this feast in the realms above: he has told us, that "he will drink of new wine with us in his Father's kingdom, [Matthew 26:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.29)."

O what a feast will that be! We need not then envy the beloved Apostle, who at the Last Supper lay in his Savior's bosom: for we ourselves shall, like Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, recline upon the bosom of our blessed Lord. Should we not then look forward to that time with holy desire, "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of our Lord?" Should not the language of us all be, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!" Let not *death, which is to introduce us to such bliss*, be formidable in our eyes: but let us be anxious only to be counted worthy of that honor which he has prepared for us, and be "longing to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ."

***~~#1574~~***

***~~The Circumstances of Our Lord's Death Fore-ordained~~***

***~~[Luke 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.22)~~***

"Truly the Son of Man will go just as it has been determined."

Another exordium might be to this effect: Persons educated in the Christian religion, take for granted that it is true; while yet they know but little how to defend it against the assaults of infidels. But it is desirable that we should all be conversant, in some degree at least, with the evidences of its truth. I will therefore set before you somewhat of the evidence that arises from the accomplishment of prophecy, and especially in reference to *the death of Christ as being altogether decreed and determined by God*.

The doctrine of *predestination*is very mysterious. If it is so held as to destroy the free agency of man, it must be pernicious and false: but it cannot be denied without denying also the omniscience and immutability of God; nor, if properly understood, is it at all inconsistent with the responsibility of man. If we know not how to reconcile all the difficulties that arise from this doctrine, it is not therefore false.

Certain it is that Judas was punished, and that eternally, [Mark 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.21); nor can we doubt but that the Judge of all the earth will do right, [Psalm 145:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.17); yet *his sin was among the things which had been fore-ordained*. To this effect Peter speaks respecting the Jewish nation at large, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23).

***~~I. Our Lord's death in general was fore-ordained—~~***

No unprejudiced person can entertain a doubt of this truth: there are innumerable proofs of it in the Holy Scriptures.

***~~Our Lord's death was fixed before the foundation of the world—~~***

God foresaw the fall of man from eternity: he from eternity also determined to restore man again to his favor. The means by which he resolved to effect it, was the death of his own Son. Hence the Apostle speaks of Christ as "fore-ordained," etc. [1 Peter 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.20).

***~~Our Lord's death was predicted soon after man had fallen—~~***

God denounced a curse against the serpent. In that denunciation he foretold the destruction of Satan himself: he foretold it as to be effected by the death of Christ, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15).

***~~Our Lord's death was shadowed forth in a variety of types—~~***

The paschal lamb represented it, [1 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7).

It was prefigured by the daily sacrifices, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29).

It was typified by the offerings on the great day of atonement Hebrews, 9:13-14.

The serpent in the wilderness was a striking representation of it, [John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14).

***~~Our Lord's death was foretold by all the prophets—~~***

The prophetic writings are full of declarations respecting it. Isaiah seems rather to have composed a history than a prophecy. To quote particular passages is needless. Peter mentions it as foretold by all the prophets, [Acts 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.17-18). Our Lord himself speaks to the same effect, [Luke 24:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.25-27).

***~~A body was prepared for him on purpose that he might die—~~***

He freely undertook to suffer in our stead, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8). This was the ground on which a body was provided for him, [Hebrews 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-7). The Apostle explains the expression in, [Psalm 40:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6). "My ears you have opened," by other words to the same effect, "A body you have prepared me." The boring the ear of a servant bound him to his servitude for ever, [Exodus 21:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.6). And the preparing of a body for Christ fixed him to his engagements. This reason for his incarnation is often noticed in the Scriptures, [Hebrews 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.9); [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14).

***~~It was foreknown and consented to by our Lord himself—~~***

Our Lord often spoke of it to his disciples, [Luke 18:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.31-33). It was the subject of his conversation with Moses and Elijah, [Luke 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.31). He could have delivered himself from his enemies if he had chosen it. He had frequently done so, [Luke 4:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.29-30), [John 8:59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.59), and he could easily have done it then, [John 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.6), [Matthew 26:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53); but it was an event he greatly longed for, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50).

Hence we may conclude, that *though the agents were guilty, as having acted freely, the actions themselves were fore-ordained,*[Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28). But there was not merely a decree respecting our Lord's death *in general*,

***~~II. Every particular respecting Jesus' death was determined—~~***

It would be endless to enumerate all the *prophecies*respecting Christ, and to compare them with his history. Matthew alone quotes above thirty passages that refer to Christ; but we will point out a few that relate more immediately to his death:

***~~1. Those events that were immediately to precede his death—~~***

It was foretold by whom he was to be betrayed, [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9). Our Lord himself applies this prediction to Judas, [John 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18).

The price that should be paid for his blood, together with the disposition of the purchase-money, was accurately foretold, [Zechariah 11:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.12-13). This very sum (the price of a slave) was paid, and afterwards so applied, [Matthew 27:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.6-10).

It was moreover foretold that he should be scourged, [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3) and [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5). This was complied with to prevent his death, [Luke 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.22).

He was also destined to be mocked, spit upon, and smitten, [Isaiah 50:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.6). His enemies vented their indignation in this very way, [Matthew 27:26-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.26-30).

***~~2. Those events that were to accompany his death—~~***

It was foretold that he should be nailed to a cross, [Psalm 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.16). The accomplishment of this was very singularly effected, [John 18:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.31-32). Crucifixion was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment: yet he was put to death for a crime of which the Roman law would not have taken cognizance.

He was to be crucified with others, malefactors, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12). The fulfillment of this also is particularly noticed, [Mark 15:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.27-28).

He was to experience fresh insults here, [Psalm 22:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.6-8). This was fulfilled in the most literal manner, [Matthew 27:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.41-43).

He was also to suffer the hidings of his Father's face, [Psalm 22:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.1). David's words were those used by Christ under his dereliction, [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46).

He was to have vinegar offered him to drink, [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21); he would not resign his breath until this was accomplished, [John 19:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.28-30).

***~~3. Those events that were immediately to follow his death—~~***

He was to be *pierced*, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). This was fulfilled in a very remarkable manner, [John 19:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.34); [John 19:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.36).

Yet he was not to have a bone broken, [Exodus 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.46). This was very unlikely to be fulfilled, seeing that many of his bones were out of joint, [Psalm 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14) and the bones of those who were crucified with him were broken. This, too, received its accomplishment, [John 19:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.32-33); [John 19:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.36).

The manner in which his clothes were to be disposed of was also foretold, [Psalm 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.18). The fulfilling of this strongly marked the overruling hand of God, [John 19:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.23-24).

We may say of every minute circumstance, as Matthew does,*"But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."* [Matthew 26:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.56)

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How certainly is Jesus the true Messiah!~~***

Such a variety of circumstances could not have concurred but from the express determination of Providence. Let us then receive Jesus as the promised Messiah. Let us welcome him with acclamations and hosannas. Let us depend upon his death as a sure ground of hope.

***~~2. How cheerfully may we leave ourselves to God's disposal!~~***

How were the malice of Satan,  
the envy of the priests,  
the treachery of Judas,  
the cowardice of Pilate, etc.

overruled for the effecting of the Divine purposes! Thus may God overrule the most adverse circumstances for our good. Let us then in all states rely on that gracious declaration, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)

***~~#1575~~***

***~~Reward of Faithfulness~~***

***~~[Luke 22:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.28-29)~~***

"But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me."

At the close of his life, our blessed Lord was peculiarly engaged in comforting and encouraging his disciples. This appears particularly in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John's Gospel. But in the passage before us it appears still more remarkably; because he had, at this time, great reason to be displeased with them: and yet he overlooks their offence with the most slight and transient notice; and administers consolation to them, as if they had deserved nothing but commendation. Yet we are not to suppose that the words of my text are to be confined to them: they are applicable to all Christ's faithful servants. And, to place them in their true point of view, I must consider them,

***~~I. As addressed to the disciples then before him—~~***

There are difficulties in the words: but those difficulties will vanish, if we bear in mind the precise circumstances under which the disciples were, at the time when these words were delivered.

Our Lord had now kept the Passover with his disciples; and had instituted his Last Supper, which, under the Christian dispensation, was to supersede the Passover. In explaining to them the nature and intent of this new ordinance, he had compared the *bread*which he broke, to his body, which was to be broken on the cross; and the *wine* which he poured forth, to the blood which was about to be shed upon the cross for the sins of the world.

In speaking of these things, he twice mentioned "the kingdom of God, which was about to come," and which was to be the completion and consummation of all that he had undertaken to effect verse 16, 18. The Apostles, passing by all that their divine Master spoke concerning his own sufferings, caught hold of the idea of "the kingdom of God," in which they hoped for advancement upon earth; and immediately began to contend with each other for pre-eminence in that kingdom; each specifying the grounds on which he himself claimed a priority above the rest. Our Lord reproved this ambition in the same kind of way as he had before done, [Matthew 20:20-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.20-28) with verse 25-27; but still forbore to dwell upon it, that he might comfort and support them under the accumulated weight of trouble which they were now immediately to sustain.

He told them, that, while many had forsaken him, they had continued with him through all his temptations; and that therefore he would act towards them as the Father himself had acted towards him; and would fulfill all their desires to an extent of which they could now form no conception.

Did they desire pre-eminence in his kingdom? They should all be admitted, not to the table of earthly princes merely, 2 Samuel 9:9-10; [2 Samuel 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 19.28), but to the table of the King of kings, to eat and drink in his presence! Yes, they all should possess kingdoms, and sit on thrones! And, though they should themselves stand for a time at the tribunal of wicked men, and receive a sentence of condemnation from them, they should have all the tribes of Israel, standing as it were, at their tribunal, and receiving, to a certain degree, their sentence from them, who, as assessors with Christ, would approve the sentence passed upon them. This I conceive to be the true sense of the last clause of my text; which was intended to fortify them against all which was about to be realized in their Lord, and which they themselves also were, in due time, destined to experience.

But we must further consider these words,

***~~II. As addressed to his faithful followers in every age—~~***

There is, between them and the Apostles, a great resemblance:

***~~1. They answer to the same character—~~***

Though Christ himself is out of the reach of men, his word, his cause, his people, are treated precisely as he was in the days of his flesh. "Was he despised and rejected of men?" So is his Gospel, wherever it is proclaimed. It is "to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness," as much as ever. Nor is there, in the whole universe, a faithful servant of his who has not a cross to bear for his sake. But they are all firm in their Master's cause: they allow nothing to turn them aside from following him: yes rather, instead of being intimidated by sufferings, they rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame, or even death itself, for his sake.

***~~2. For them, also, are reserved the same honors—~~***

At the table of the Lord above is Abraham sitting, and Lazarus next to him, with his head, as it were, reposed on Abraham's bosom. And there shall every true disciple feast with his divine Master for evermore, [Revelation 19:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.9).

To them, also, shall be assigned "thrones and kingdoms," even as God the Father has assigned them to his well-beloved Son. It is by an express covenant that these were given to Christ; and by covenant does Christ also confer them on his people: they "inherit a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world." And they, too, shall be assessors with Christ in judgment. Of this there can be no doubt. Paul says to the Church at Corinth, "Know you not that the saints shall judge the world? yes, know you not that we shall judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:2-3."

What then shall influence us, or what shall we regard in comparison with these things? Let us be content to hunger now, if we may but feast then: and if called to lay down our lives as martyrs, let us willingly make the sacrifice, knowing how abundantly we shall be recompensed through eternal ages.

***~~Now, brethren, a word of exhortation—~~***

***~~1. Adhere with firmness to the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

Many forsook him in the days of his flesh: and many, at this day, like the stony-ground hearers, fall away in a season of temptation and persecution. But "be steadfast and immoveable," even to the end; "following the Lord fully," and "cleaving to him with full purpose of heart".

***~~2. Expect with confidence his promised blessings—~~***

Think of the state to which many whom you once knew on earth are now exalted in Heaven: and think in how little a time you also will be partakers of the same blessings. Know, that, if you be Christ's, all these things are yours, secured by a covenant that cannot be broken. What glory can this world give you, in comparison with this? Contemplate this; follow this; anticipate this; and you need not fear what either men or devils can do unto you.

***~~#1576~~***

***~~The Means of Security from Satan's Malice~~***

***~~[Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32)~~***

"Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

The agency, or even the existence, of evil spirits is scarcely credited among us; but there is nothing more certain than that they exist, and act in the world. To conflict with them, constitutes a principal part of the Christian's warfare, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); and to be aware of their wicked devices is no inconsiderable attainment in Christian knowledge, [2 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.11). There is however a Being who is able to counteract their agency: and of this we have a proof in the history before us. Satan, the prince of the devils, attempted the destruction of Peter. Our Lord with affection and earnestness warned Peter of his evil designs; and, by his own intercession, secured him against his assaults.

***~~I. The malice of Satan—~~***

***~~Satan is the great adversary of mankind—~~***

He was once as bright a morning star as any in Heaven. But he rebelled against the Most High, and incurred his displeasure, [2 Peter 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4). Full of hatred against God, he sought to efface his image from our first parents. Through subtlety he prevailed to the destruction of them and us, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3). Nor does he cease to assault those who through grace are restored.

***~~He desires to agitate and distress them—~~***

This is evidently implied in the expression in the text. He has various ways of effecting his purpose. He may harass us with temptations and persecutions: he may perplex us by artful insinuations and suggestions. His efforts were exerted against all the Apostles: but the more eminent any are, the more they are hated by him. Peter was distinguished for his knowledge and intrepidity, [Matthew 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16); yes, he had had a peculiar honor conferred on him, [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18). On this account Satan's malice raged against him more especially.

***~~But his ultimate end is to prove them hypocrites, or to make them apostates—~~***

This was evidently his design in assaulting Job, [Job 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.9); [Job 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.11); [Job 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.5), and in asking permission to try the disciples seems to imply a kind of challenge, as in the case of Job, wherein he undertook to prove them to be but chaff, if God would allow him to make the trial. Nor would he leave one faithful person upon earth. "As a roaring lion he seeks to devour all".

He can do nothing indeed but by Divine permission. He could not afflict Job more than God saw fit to suffer him: nor could he enter into the swine without our Savior's permission, [Matthew 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.31); but if allowed to fulfill all his will, he would destroy every soul. His influence on the herd of swine shows what he would do to men, [Matthew 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.32); not one vassal of his would escape the fate of Judas. Compare [Luke 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.5) with [Matthew 27:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.5).

But God has not left his people without means of resistance.

***~~II. Our security from his assaults—~~***

***~~God has both armed his people for the combat, and given them a great Deliverer—~~***

Faith is the grace whereby he enables us to maintain our stand.

It was by faith that we were translated from Satan's kingdom into Christ's, [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26). It is by that also that our daily warfare is to be carried on, [2 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.24). Yes, through that are we to attain our full and final salvation, [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5). Faith is the shield whereby alone we can ward off the darts of Satan, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16). If that fails, we are exposed to the fiercest assaults of our enemy. If we lose our hold of the promises, we shall be driven away as chaff: we shall have no point around which to rally our scattered forces. Whereas, if faith be strong, we shall hope even against hope, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18); [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20); and, though wounded, we shall return with fresh vigor to the combat. Nor shall our great adversary be able to prevail against us, [Romans 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11). Hence that earnest caution against unbelief, [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12); and that express direction respecting the mode of opposing Satan, 1 Peter 5:8-9.

***~~But the intercession of Christ is as necessary to uphold our faith—~~***

Peter's faith would have failed utterly, if he had been left to himself; but through the intercession of Christ he was preserved. Thus we also would "make shipwreck of our faith." But our prevailing Advocate pleads for us also, [John 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.20); as our High-Priest he bears us on his breast-plate before the throne, [Exodus 28:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29); he obtains for us fresh supplies of the Spirit. In this way he, who has been the author of our faith, will also be the finisher, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2).

Hence the encouragement given us to rely on the intercession of Christ, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34). Hence the encouragement given us to regard it under every backsliding, [1 John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1). Hence the encouragement given us to rest assured of Christ's power to save, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What need have we to be ever on our guard!~~***

Perhaps at this moment Satan may be desiring to sift us. And what if God should give us up into his hands? If allowed to exert his strength, he could soon dissipate whatever is good in us; nor should our past zeal in God's service remove our apprehensions; that would rather provoke Satan to more activity against us. Let us then "not be high-minded, but fear." Let us follow the beneficial advice which our Lord has given us, [Matthew 26:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.41). Let us plead with fervor those important petitions, [Matthew 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.13). At the same time let us "put on the whole armor of God," and prepare, as God has taught us, for the assaults of our enemy, [Ephesians 6:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13-18).

***~~2. What a mercy is it to have a saving interest in Christ!~~***

They who know not Christ, are wholly under the power of Satan, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26); but those who are Christ's, have a watchful and almighty guardian. Our Lord provided for Peter's safety, before Peter even knew his danger. Thus "will he keep the feet of all his saints." He will allow none of them to be plucked out of his hand, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28). If he permits Satan to sift them, it shall be only for the removing of their chaff. Compare [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7) with [Hebrews 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10-11). He has pledged his word for the security of the weakest of his people, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9). Let us therefore commit ourselves entirely into his hands. Let us beg him to remember our unworthy names in his intercessions, and to deal with us as with Joshua of old, [Zechariah 3:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.2-4).

***~~#1577~~***

***~~Christ's Sufferings in the Garden~~***

**[Luke 22:39-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.39-46)**

"Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. Then He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

It was foretold of the Messiah, that he should be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and we are informed that he had scarcely come into the world before his life was sought for, and he was carried by his parents as a fugitive to a foreign land, in order to escape the cruel effects of Herod's jealousy. During the four years of his ministry, much is told us of his trials: but the principal scene of them was reserved for the close of his life. We propose to contemplate them, from their commencement in the garden of Gethsemane until the time that he expired upon the cross. At present we shall confine our attention to the words before us; in which we may see,

***~~I. The tremendous sufferings of our Lord—~~***

Now, beyond any former period of his life, were the troubles of his heart enlarged. That I may bring them before you the more distinctly, I will call your attention to three things:

***~~1. The terms by which his sufferings are described in the inspired volume—~~***

If we look into the Prophets who foretold those sufferings, we shall see that they almost exhaust the powers of language in order to convey some idea of their inconceivable greatness. The Psalmist, impersonating the Savior, says, "The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. [Psalm 18:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.4-5)." "My heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me; and horror has overwhelmed me [Psalm 55:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 55.4-5)." "The waters are come in unto my soul: I sink in deep mire where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: my eyes fail while I wait for my God. [Psalm 69:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.1-3)."

To mention only one passage more, the Savior complains, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my affections. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and you have brought me into the dust of death! [Psalm 22:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14-15)."

Who that reads such passages as these, is not prepared for that distressing appeal, "Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow, with which the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger! [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12)."

The Evangelists also, in their report of these sufferings, vie with each other in the extraordinary force of the words by which they endeavor to express them. *Matthew*speaks of him as so surrounded with grief, as to be brought by it into the utmost dejection and consternation, [Matthew 26:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.38) with [Psalm 42:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.5). *Mark*uses one term which implies a high degree of fear, and terror, and amazement; and another denoting the utmost excess of grief and anguish, [Mark 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.33). *John*also expresses his sufferings by a word of exceeding strength to denote the extremity of his troubles. *Luke*, in my text, tells us he was in an agony, in the greatest possible straits in his conflict. In fact, "his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death." And the depth of his sufferings will further appear from,

***~~2. The effects produced by them—~~***

It must be remembered that as yet no man had inflicted on him any pain at all. Yet we behold him deprecating his present sufferings in the most earnest way imaginable, even "with strong crying and tears, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7)," renewing his entreaties again and again, not only on his knees, but in a posture of the most abject prostration, [Matthew 26:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.39). Yes, and we see him "sweating great drops of blood" from every pore of his body through the excess of his agony. What an idea does this give us of the intensity of his sufferings!

It will be asked perhaps, Why should he, whom we believe to be God, as well as man, betray such a fear and dread of sufferings, which thousands of martyrs have sustained with cheerfulness; and why, when he had voluntarily undertaken to endure them, should he afterwards deprecate them with such extreme fervor? I answer, Martyrs in their sufferings have had to bear only what could be inflicted by *men*; whereas the Savior had to endure the wrath of *God*, even the penalty which was due to the sins of the world: and, in deprecating that misery, he acted precisely as it befit him to act both as a man, and as a good and holy man.

As man, it was quite allowable to him to deprecate sufferings which he had not deserved; and as a good man, it became him to deprecate the wrath of God. These two things therefore he did: but he did them with most unreserved submission to the will of God; and thereby gave to us *the most perfect pattern of resignation under sufferings*of whatever kind.

But we may further learn the greatness of his sufferings from,

***~~3. The means used for his support—~~***

At the commencement of his ministry, when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, "angels were sent from Heaven to strengthen him, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11)." And thus it was in this his last hour, which was more especially "the season when all the powers of darkness assaulted him, verse 53;" an angel was sent from Heaven to administer to him that strength and consolation which he needed after so severe a conflict, verse 43. What an idea does this give us of his sufferings, when he who was God as well as man, needed such assistance to sustain and support him in that dread hour!

But how were his three favored disciples occupied in the mean time? He had bidden them to watch and pray with him: and "had gone only about a stone's throw from them," that he might with the more liberty pour out his soul before God. But alas! the Savior's sorrows were yet further increased by,

***~~II. The lethargic indolence of his disciples—~~***

***~~It might have been supposed that they, at such a season as this, would have been particularly wakeful and earnest in prayer—~~***

Their Lord had counseled them to employ this time in prayer, not only in interceding for him, but in imploring strength for themselves, that they might be able to sustain the trials which were now coming fast upon them. But they were so overpowered with sleep, that notwithstanding they were again and again wakened by their Lord; they were no sooner left to themselves than they fell asleep again. Not a single hour could they watch with their Lord, notwithstanding all their recent protestations and professions.

The fact was that they were "overcome with sorrow," which, in some cases, when it is exceeding deep, operates as a blow, that, for a season, only stuns and stupefies. The whole of our Lord's late conversations with them respecting his approaching sufferings and death had altogether oppressed their minds, so that they were no longer able to exercise their faculties as the occasion required. "Their spirits were willing; but their flesh was weak."

***~~This ill-timed somnolence added yet further to the sufferings of their Lord—~~***

He did indeed administer reproof to them with the utmost tenderness, and even apologize for them, as he afterwards did for his very murderers. But to be so neglected by them in this his last extremity, and to behold them so indifferent about him, and so careless, after all the exhortations he had given them, must have occasioned him the most poignant grief; and still the more, when he saw that the time for prayer was now lost, and that the traitor, with his armed bands, was at hand, to deliver him up into the power of his blood-thirsty enemies.

We are told indeed, that "they knew not what to answer him, [Mark 14:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.40)." And well might they be confounded, when they saw how shamefully they had violated their obligations to their divine Master, and how regardless they had been of their own eternal interests.

And what shall we ourselves answer in the last day, when called to account for our present carelessness in the midst of all the warnings that are given to us, and the dangers to which we are exposed? Truly, whatever excuses we may now make, our mouths will then be shut: and to all eternity shall we reproach ourselves, that when we could watch whole nights about our temporal concerns, as the Apostles had done with their nets, we have not been able to "watch with Christ one single hour" in fervent and persevering prayer; so "stupid have we been and brutish, even as beasts before him."

***~~May we not see from hence, my brethren,~~***

***~~1. How terrible we shall find it to bear the penalty due to sin!~~***

If it so oppressed and overwhelmed our incarnate God, what will it effect in us? "If it so consumed the green tree, how will it burn up the dry, [Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31)." I tremble to think how careless all around us are, when in a few more days or hours they may have to sustain without any alleviation, and to all eternity, the wrath of God. Dear brethren, though your Lord bore in his own sacred person all your sins to make atonement for them, his atonement will be of no avail to you, unless you repent of your sins, and plead the merit of his blood for the expiation of them. No indeed, all that the Savior has done and suffered for you will but aggravate your guilt, if you lose your present opportunity of calling upon him for the pardon of it. Do not, I pray you, give way to a sleepy careless state of mind. You have been again and again called, in order to awaken you; and if you continue with folded arms to waste, as it were, your day of grace, *death*will before long come, with irresistible energy, like Judas with his armed bands, and transport you to the bar of judgment, where nothing but condemnation will await you, and the wrath of an offended God. O that today, while it is called today, you may arise and call upon your God, so that iniquity may not be your ruin! But, if you will "sleep on now and take your rest," wonder not if you be left, like Peter, to deny and forsake your Lord, and to perish with Judas, under an accumulated load of guilt and misery.

***~~2. How different a cup God is willing to put into our hands!~~***

Our blessed Lord prayed, that, "if it were possible, the cup of bitterness might pass from him." But God had decreed, that, "without shedding of blood there would be no remission of sins;" and therefore if the Lord Jesus would be a surety for us, he must discharge our debt; and consequently, if he would take the cup out of our hands, he must drink it for us. And drink it he did, even to the very dregs.

And now, brethren, he puts into our hands the cup of salvation, with all its inconceivable and eternal blessings. O drink of this, and let your souls live for ever! I will not promise that you shall never in this life taste of the Savior's cup of sorrows. You may taste of it; you may even drink deeply of it, in order that you may be the more conformed to him. But of this I assure you, that, *however bitter a cup God may at any time put into your hands, there shall be no wrath in it, no, not a drop of wrath: it shall all be sweetened with love: it shall be altogether medicinal, and not penal*.

And, to counteract its bitterness, there shall be put into your hands "a cup of which the Lord himself shall be the portion, [Psalm 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.5)." Yes, the Lord Jesus drank the one, that you might drink the other. Only believe in him; and trust in him; and cleave to him; and watch and pray with him—and all the blessedness of Heaven shall be yours! And when the cup of God's wrath shall be put into the hands of the impenitent and unbelieving to drink to all eternity, [Revelation 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10), the cup of salvation shall be yours, and "the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore."

***~~#1578~~***

***~~The Treason of Judas~~***

***~~[Luke 22:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.48)~~***

"Jesus said unto him" Judas, are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?"

*Virtue is best discerned when it is subjected to the heaviest trials*. The stroke of the hammer displays the excellence of the diamond; and the furnace ascertains the purity of the gold. *Meekness and patience are mere dormant qualities, until injuries or misfortunes call them into exercise*. Let our character be blasted, our interests ruined, our person injured; and then it will appear how far these qualities exist within us, and to what extent they will enable us to support our burdens.

Had our blessed Lord himself been viewed in a season of perfect tranquility, his unrivaled glories would have shone only as the sun behind a cloud: but when he labored under severe and complicated afflictions, then his brightness beamed forth in its meridian splendor. His circumstances were peculiarly painful at the time when he uttered the words before us.

He had been sustaining a conflict with all the powers of darkness, and sipping that cup of wrath which his Father had put into his hands. He had seen with grief the supineness of his three disciples, who, notwithstanding his repeated warnings, had consumed in sleep the time which should have been spent in watchfulness and prayer. To add to his sorrows, Judas now approached him at the head of an armed band, and by a treacherous kiss betrayed him into their hands.

Behold then our Divine Master under these accumulated troubles! What might we expect to hear from him on this occasion? Methinks his address to Judas, whose treachery he was aware of, could be no other than that of Paul to Elymas the sorcerer, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness," are you come to betray me? But however this address befit an Apostle, when zealous for the honor of his Lord, the Savior himself, when personally interested, saw fit to speak in milder accents, that he might set an example to his followers to "show all meekness to all men:" "*Friend*," says he, "why have you come?" "Judas, are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?"

We shall consider these remarkable words,

***~~I. In reference to the traitor Judas—~~***

That we may have a just view of the wickedness of Judas, let us notice,

***~~1. The light he resisted—~~***

He had attended our blessed Lord during the whole course of his ministry: he had heard all his discourses; and had received from him in private a further exposition of the truths which had been more obscurely delivered to the proud, captious, and malignant auditors that flocked around him. He had seen innumerable and most beneficent miracles wrought in confirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus: so that there could be no doubt upon his mind but that Jesus was "the Son of Man," "the Christ, the Savior of the world." Had he entertained any secret suspicions that Jesus was an impostor, he would have had some excuse for his treachery: or if he had enjoyed but few opportunities of instruction, his guilt would have been less heinous. Pilate, who was an ignorant Heathen, sinned grievously in not executing strict justice: but the sin of the who had delivered Jesus unto him was incomparably greater, [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11), because of the superior light which they enjoyed. In this view therefore the sin of Judas was exceedingly great.

***~~2. The obligations he violated—~~***

Judas was "one of the twelve," who were called to a more intimate acquaintance with our Lord; and was selected from among them to be his purse-bearer and almoner. He had been sent out, like all the other Apostles, to preach the Gospel, and to work miracles in the name of Jesus. He had seen diseases and devils yielding to his word; and had probably been instrumental in converting others to faith in Christ. How was he bound then to "show all good fidelity," and to maintain to the uttermost his Master's cause!

But besides all this, Jesus, within the space of a few hours, had acted towards him the part of a menial servant, and had condescended to wash his feet: should not such love have called forth his tenderest and most faithful regards?

Moreover, Judas had, on that very occasion, pledged himself to die with Jesus rather than deny him: yet behold, this man, almost immediately after uttering these words, leaves the room, in order to betray his Lord!

What impiety was here! If woe was denounced against Chorazin and Bethsaida for not improving the mercies given to them, what woes must belong to this unhappy man for violating the strongest obligations which could lie upon him!

***~~3. The manner in which he violated them—~~***

Jesus, it would seem, had permitted his disciples to express their regards to him by the affectionate and endearing token of a kiss: and this was the sign by which Judas undertook to betray him into the hands of his enemies! What horrid treachery! to make an expression of love and friendship, a signal for Jesus' apprehension! But mark the peculiar aggravations with which this betrayal was attended!

It was altogether a *voluntary*act. The Chief Priests and Elders could never have entertained a thought of prevailing on one of Christ's own disciples to betray him: they could expect nothing from them but the most vigorous and determined opposition. Methinks they could scarcely believe their own senses when they heard the traitor Judas making the proposal. If indeed they had seized on Judas, and threatened to put him to extreme torture if he would not further their designs, we might offer some little excuse for him: but who could conceive that the proposal should originate with him, and that Judas should be a volunteer in such a service?

It was immediately after he had received an express *warning*respecting it. Our blessed Lord had, but a few hours before, told his disciples that one of them would betray him: and upon being interrogated by each of them, "Lord, is it I?" he told them all, that it was the person to whom he would give the sop, [John 13:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.26); and told Judas in particular that it was he; and that since he was thus bent on the commission of this sin, it would have been better for him that he had never been born! [Matthew 26:21-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.21-25). Would one not have supposed that such a *warning*should have diverted him from his purpose? Yet, instead of being checked by it, he went out "immediately" under the cover of the night, that he might execute his plot without delay.

We cannot but be astonished for *how small a price*he was induced to do this. Had he been promised great riches, sufficient to keep him in opulence and splendor all his days, we would have wondered less at the power of the temptation: but it was only "thirty pieces of silver, compare [Zechariah 11:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 11.12-13) with [Matthew 26:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.15)," (the price of a slave,) that he was to receive for his recompense: so little a value did he set upon his master's life.

The diabolical malignity which he expressed on the occasion, is a yet further aggravation of his guilt. When agreeing with the Chief Priests, he gave them a strict charge, "Take him, hold him fast, lead him away safely, [Matthew 26:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.48). [Mark 14:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.44)." As Ahithophel, the treacherous friend of David, counseled the rebellious Absalom: "Give me twelve thousand men, and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and I will smite the king only, [2 Samuel 17:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 17.1-2);" so did Judas respecting the true King of Israel: he reminded the Chief Priests how often he had escaped out of their hands; and, that they might secure him now, he charged them to use the utmost vigilance and circumspection.

Such was the sin of Judas; a *sin unparalleled*in the annals of the world.

Let us now extend our views, and consider the text,

***~~II. In reference to traitors of every description—~~***

Though the precise sin which was committed by Judas never was, nor will be, committed by any other—yet are there too many who follow his steps, and betray the cause and interests of their Divine Master. There are different kinds of traitors:

***~~1. Heretics—~~***

Many pretend to be followers of Christ, and yet deny every fundamental truth of his religion. The fall of man, and the guilt and corruption consequent upon it; the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ in the place of sinners, and our reconciliation to God by the blood of his cross; the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, together with all the inward life and power of godliness; all these, I say, are denied and held up to ridicule and scorn: and yet the people who thus expunge from their system almost every doctrine that distinguishes our holy religion, will call themselves Christians.

But are they really friends of Christ? Are they not rather enemies and traitors? Even the followers of Mahomet express as much regard for Christ as they: the Mohammedan allows that Christ was a prophet; and what do these infidels allow him more? Truly their kisses are treacherous; their professions are a lie.

***~~2. Antinomians—~~***

There are two kinds of Antinomians: theoretical and practical.

The *theoretical Antinomians*are very zealous for the peculiar doctrines of Christianity; but they carry them to an undue extent; and erase from their system all the obligations of the moral laws of Scripture. We hope and believe, that all who embrace this system are not so regardless of the law in practice, as they are in theory: nevertheless their sentiments are most pernicious; and their professed attachment to Christ is constructive treason.

It is certain that, however exemplary some of these persons may be, others (and we fear by far the greater part of them,) take encouragement from these licentious tenets to live in sin. If they do not give way to those grosser propensities which would expose their profession to universal contempt, they are at least distinguished by a proud, contentious, worldly spirit, and by irreverence and undue confidence in their transactions with God.

As for *practical Antinomians*, the great majority of nominal Christians are of this class. They object not to the leading truths of the Gospel: having been educated in the belief of them, they acknowledge them as points which they are not disposed to controvert. But to yield to their influence, and to bring their souls to a state suited to them, they have no mind. They wish for nothing beyond this world; they think of nothing but what relates to the body. Whether their outward conduct be more or less correct, they consider it as of very little importance. Some can run to the greatest excess of riot, being wholly addicted to worldliness or dissipation, and yet account themselves very good Christians. Others, who are restrained from such excesses, can content themselves with "a form of godliness, while they utterly deny its power;" and though they never smite upon their bosoms with contrition, never flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, never devote themselves in earnest to the service of their God—they imagine that all is well, and that they are to be reckoned among the friends and followers of Christ. But their profession serves only to lower Christ in the estimation of the world, and in many instances to fill heathens themselves with an utter abhorrence of his name.

We must acknowledge, indeed, that neither the one nor the other of these characters have the malignant designs of Judas: but the ultimate effect of their conduct is to betray him with a kiss!

***~~3. Hypocrites—~~***

These come the nearest of all to the character of Judas: and many there are to whom this designation properly belongs. In every age there have been some who have joined themselves to the Church, while yet they felt only transient impressions, and had no root of grace in their hearts. Of them, some cast off all profession of religion, and go back again to the world: others continue their profession, but indulge habits altogether inconsistent with it, [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31).

Hence they are found deceitful in their words, dishonest in their dealings; and less worthy of confidence than the generality even of avowed worldlings. For a time they wear *the mask*with success: but at length their true character appears; and they make religion "to be a stench in the nostrils" of all who know them. It is almost superfluous to say that these are traitors: for they not only deliver up Jesus to the scorn and contempt of his professed enemies, but lay a stumbling-block in the way of his friends, and cause many to wax cold in their attachment to Christ, if not also utterly to renounce him. "Woe unto the world because of them! but woe be more especially to those by whom the offence comes!" In a little time, if they repent not, they will "go to their own place," and participate with Judas the just recompense of their deeds.

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. Let us not be offended with religion on account of the faults of those who profess it—~~***

It would manifestly be absurd to make the treachery of Judas a reason for rejecting Christ: for the Scriptures, yes and Christ himself, foretold, that "one who would eat bread with him would lift up his heel against him." And do not the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament declare, that "false brethren would come in," and that "by means of them the way of truth should be evil spoken of?" The very existence therefore of traitors and hypocrites in the Church, is a proof of the truth of our religion; and should confirm, rather than weaken, our attachment to it.

If indeed the Gospel gave licence to such characters, that very circumstance would be a just ground for doubting its Divine authority, and withholding from it our approbation: but if it invariably inculcates holiness both in heart and life, then let the blame of hypocrisy rest on those only who are guilty of it; and let the offence that is occasioned by some, be a stimulus to others to adorn the Gospel.

***~~2. Let us watch against our besetting sin—~~***

Judas from the very beginning was addicted to **covetousness**. To gratify this propensity, he took advantage of his office as the purse-bearer to steal from time to time a part of the money entrusted to his care. Had he been told on the first occasion to what this covetous disposition would ultimately lead, how little would he have been able to credit the assertion!

But thus it is with sin; it is like a breach in a bank, which, if not stopped at first, will soon be widened by the current, until the whole country is overflowed. *When once a man harbors any secret lust, it will gather strength, and gradually obtain an entire ascendance over him.*Whatever, then, is our besetting sin, whether lewdness, or covetousness, or any other, let us watch and pray against it; lest we prove at last a scandal to our profession, and, after having instructed others, ourselves be cast away!

***~~3. Let us get a real and firm attachment to Jesus Christ—~~***

There is a sense in which we may say to all of you, "Kiss him, apprehend him, hold him fast!" The Psalmist bids us to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry." Paul speaks of "apprehending that for which he had been apprehended of God in Christ Jesus;" and exhorts us to "lay hold on the hope set before us." We are commanded also to "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart."

Should not we be as earnest in this good work as Judas and his band were in their evil work? If they plotted by day, and watched by night, to destroy the Lord Jesus—then should we be averse to labor and watchfulness, to obtain a saving interest in his salvation? Let us get a love to him in our hearts as deeply rooted as their enmity against him was, and we shall account nothing too much to do or suffer for him; nor will the whole world be sufficient to suspend or lessen our fidelity in his service.

***~~#1579~~***

***~~The Healing of Malchus' Ear~~***

***~~[Luke 22:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.50-51)~~***

"And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him."

It is but too common for even good persons, who are of a hopeful temper, to ask instruction or advice, while by their conduct they evince that they have very little disposition to receive and follow it. We do not wonder that Pilate should ask, "What is truth?" and go away before an answer could be given him: but it is grievous to see one of Peter's eminence, who had been favored with so many opportunities of divine instruction, affecting to seek direction from his Lord, and instantly prosecuting his own unhallowed will. In considering the instance recorded, it will be proper to notice,

***~~I. The indiscretion of Peter—~~***

Peter, in striking Malchus with the sword, was evidently actuated by a love to his Master, and a zeal for his service; yet his mode of revealing his affection was certainly deserving of blame. It argued,

***~~1. A lack of Christian temper—~~***

Christianity does not preclude men from taking the sword in defense of their country, when called to it by imperious necessity, and authorized by the civil magistrates. But it enjoins individuals rather to suffer patiently the persecutions with which they are assaulted, and gladly to endure the loss of all things, even of life itself, for the Gospel's sake.

As for taking up arms against the civil power, it is an extremity which perhaps not anything can justify. Yet this is the very thing that Peter did; and as he did it without any express command, he was rebuked by our Lord, and told that "all who would take the sword in that manner, however they might think they were fighting the Lord's battles, should perish with the sword. Our Lord in his answer to Peter pointed out the various sources of his misconduct. See [Matthew 26:52-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.52-54)."

***~~2. An ignorance of the prophetic writings—~~***

It had been foretold that "one, who had eaten bread with our Lord, would lift up his heel against him;" and that, in consequence of his treachery, he would be "led like a lamb to the slaughter," and "be numbered with transgressors." Had Peter fully understood those prophecies he would not so rudely have contradicted our Lord on a former occasion, [Matthew 16:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22-23), or so impetuously defended him on this; but would have submitted to the will of God, saying, "The cup which his Father has given him shall he not drink it?"

***~~3. A forgetfulness of our Lord's character—~~***

Often, yes, but a few minutes before, had Peter seen his Lord performing the most stupendous miracles, [John 18:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.5-11). If these had been wrought by the Father's power, could not Christ call upon him now, and have more than seventy thousand angels sent for his defense? If Christ wrought them by his own power, could he not deliver himself out of their hands without Peter's interposition? But if Christ were abandoned by his Father, and reduced to a state of impotence himself, could Peter protect him against a band of armed men? Was not his furious assault rather calculated to increase their rage, and to make them destroy Jesus and all his disciples upon the spot? In every view his conduct was wrong; for if aid was needed, his was insufficient; and if it was not needed, it was imprudently obtruded.

The contrast between Christ's conduct and Peter's will appear by considering,

***~~II. The remedy which our Lord applied—~~***

Jesus would give no just occasion of offence to the civil magistrate, and therefore set himself instantly to remedy the evil that had been committed.

Peter had cut off the ear of the high-priest's servant, probably because he was most active and forward in apprehending our Lord. But Jesus would not suffer even that small injury to be sustained on his account: he therefore "touched" the wound, and restored the ear to its perfect state. What a marvelous return was this for all the indignities which this miscreant had offered him! If Jesus had chosen to work a miracle on this occasion, one would rather have expected that it would be such an one, as would make the "ears of all that heard of it to tingle." But mercy was his delight; and *the more unworthy the objects of his mercy were, the more did he glory in displaying "the unsearchable riches of his grace.*" Would one not at least hope that this miracle would disarm his enemies, and make them desist from their purpose? But, alas! nothing can prevail with those who are given up to judicial blindness; for example, Pharaoh was alike uninfluenced by judgments or mercies. The manner of working the miracle was scarcely less remarkable than the miracle itself: for he performed it unsolicited. What astonishing meekness and condescension!

Thus, while he more than recompensed the injury that Peter's indiscretion had occasioned, he showed to his enemies, that his surrender of himself was voluntary; and left to his people a most perfect pattern for their conduct when persecuted by an ungodly world.

***~~From this history we may learn,~~***

***~~1. To guard against an indiscreet unhallowed zeal—~~***

Zeal properly directed, is amiable and praiseworthy, [Galatians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.18); but a "zeal without knowledge" is most injurious to the Christian cause. Paul's conduct in his unconverted state, and the request of two of our Lord's disciples, may serve to put us on our guard against the fatal mistakes into which even good men may fall, [Galatians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.13) [Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54). Let our zeal be ever tempered with love, and regulated by the Holy Scriptures; else, while it carries us too far on some occasions, it will prove, like Peter's, miserably defective upon other occasions, [Mark 14:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.71). Such persons are compared to "a cake not turned," which, instead of being equally penetrated with heat, is burnt up on one side, and scarcely warmed on the other. See [Hosea 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.8).

***~~2. To exercise love towards our most inveterate enemies—~~***

The Christian's "weapons are not to be carnal," nor must he "war after the flesh." He is to turn the right cheek to him that smites him on the left," and, by rendering good for evil, to "heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies." "Instead of being overcome of evil, he is to overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19-21)." Christians, examine if this be your conduct: And remember that "Christ set you an example that you would follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.20-23)."

***~~3. To trust in Christ for the healing of the wounds which sin has made—~~***

No sword can inflict so deep a wound as sin has made. It were a light matter if it had merely killed the body: it has inflicted a mortal wound on our souls. But Jesus can heal us; nor should any sense of unworthiness prevent our application to him. Let us go to him, and he will add us to the number of those whom he has made monuments of his almighty power and his unbounded mercy.

***~~#1580~~***

***~~Peter's Fall and Repentance~~***

***~~[Luke 22:61-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.61-62)~~***

"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So Peter went out and wept bitterly."

The fidelity of the sacred historians is a strong argument for the truth of what they wrote, and for the divine commission which they bore. *Had they been impostors, they would never have recorded all their own failings in such an artless and faithful manner*. A greater blemish could scarcely exist in the character of an Apostle, than that which is here exposed: and yet it is not only mentioned by all the four Evangelists, but Mark, who wrote his Gospel under the immediate inspection of Peter himself, is most diffuse in aggravating the crime, and most reserved in noticing the repentance: he tells us of Peter's oaths and curses; but observes only, that he wept: whereas Luke, who omits the former, tells us, that he wept "bitterly."

The immediate occasion of Peter's repentance is mentioned only by Luke. It would seem, that his heart was affected by the expressive look which our Lord gave him.

It will be useful therefore to inquire,

***~~I. What that look expressed—~~***

***~~We may be certain that there was nothing vindictive in it—~~***

Never on any occasion did our Lord assume a menacing tone towards those who injured him: "when he suffered, he threatened not." When Judas came to betray him, he

greeted the traitor by the tender appellation of Friend, "Friend, why have you come, [Matthew 26:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.50)." When the people came to apprehend him, he only asked whom they sought? and then told them that he was the person. Yes, in the midst of all the torment and ignominy of crucifixion, he extenuated the guilt of his very murderers, and prayed to his heavenly Father to forgive them.

Justly indeed might he have looked on Peter with anger, and have intimated, by *an indignant look*, that he, who now thus basely denied his Master, would speedily he denied by him at the bar of judgment. But, as no such words ever escaped his lips, so no such disposition ever manifested itself in his looks. He was altogether meek and silent, like a sheep before her shearers, or a lamb led to the slaughter, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7).

***~~Nevertheless it, doubtless, conveyed a reproof to Peter—~~***

We may conceive, that our Lord intended to remind him of his folly in boasting, and of the presumption he had manifested, in declaring that, though all the disciples would deny their Master, he never would; and, that he would rather die with him than deny him.

Such a reproof was necessary: but still it was expressed only in a look: and how different was it from the rebuke given him on another occasion! When Peter, though in real kindness, desired to divert his Lord from the thoughts of suffering, Jesus, in righteous displeasure, said, "Get behind me, Satan, you are an offence unto me, [Matthew 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23)." But, when Peter wished to shrink from sufferings himself, even though, in order to avoid them, he denied his Lord with oaths and curses, the severest reproof that Jesus gave him was a look—a gentle intimation, that he had fallen by his own vain confidence and self-dependence.

***~~But the principal thing expressed in that look, we apprehend to have been pity and compassion—~~***

Having nothing revealed respecting this, we can only speak from conjecture. But, if we may be permitted thus to interpret a look, which perhaps no words could fully express, we may suppose it to have intimated somewhat to this effect: "Ah! Peter, see the sad consequence of trusting in yourself. See how you have not only dishonored me, but wounded your own soul. But still, though your sin is so great, do not give way to despair. You will soon hear, into what a dreadful measure *Judas*has been precipitated, through a sense of guilt, and a despair of mercy: but be sure you do not imitate him. I told you before, that I had prayed for you, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32); now then go, and pray for yourself. Only repent, and you shall even yet find mercy, yes, and be restored to the office which you have so disgraced: return, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely, [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4); go instantly, and cry unto God for pardon; and all shall yet be well with you, both in time, and in eternity."

That something inexpressibly moving was intimated in that look, cannot be doubted, if we consider,

***~~II. What effect it produced—~~***

A voice from Heaven could not have been attended with a more instantaneous or powerful effect on the mind of Peter:

***~~1. It brought his sin to remembrance—~~***

*It is astonishing to see how awfully the conscience even of a child of God may, on some occasions, be lulled asleep.*David, after his fall, seemed wholly insensible of his wickedness, for no less than nine months. While he was disposed to punish, with most excessive severity, a crime of infinitely less enormity than that which he had committed, he appeared unconscious of having himself contracted any guilt at all, [2 Samuel 12:1-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.1-7).

Thus it was with Peter on this occasion. He had denied his Master; he had repeated that denial with yet greater vehemence; and no less than an hour had elapsed without his discovering any signs of penitence and contrition, verse 59. His heart even seemed to be more and more hardened: for, not contented with continuing to deny his Lord, he added oaths to his protestations, and perjury to lies.

***~~Is it not thus with too many professors of religion, who allow themselves in pride, envy, malice, anger, covetousness, impurity, or some other secret evil; and go on from year to year without being sensible that they have done anything amiss? Perhaps there may be instances, wherein even a follower of Christ has acquired unjust gains, defrauding his customers by false weights and measures, or by bad commodities: defrauding the government too by withholding customs, and taxes, that were clearly due. O that the consciences of all such persons might be awakened from their lethargy, and be excited to remonstrate against such unchristian practices!~~***

But this look of Jesus brought to Peter's mind the warnings he had slighted, the vows he had broken, and the complicated evil he had just committed. All his conduct now appeared in its true colors; and he saw himself, as in a mirror—a base, cowardly, perjured sinner.

And such is the effect, which the testimonies of Christ's compassion will produce on all who duly receive them, [Ezekiel 16:60-63](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.60-63).

***~~2. It filled him with compunction and contrition—~~***

Instantly his heart bled with a sense of sin, and was tortured with the bitterest anguish. Had Jesus reproached him with severity, it is probable he would have yielded to despondency, and sought refuge in suicide, from the horrors of a guilty conscience. But the look that pierced his soul poured also a healing balm into the wound. He could now no longer continue in the company of the ungodly, or indulge a vain curiosity respecting the outcome of his Master's trial: his heart was now full; and he sought retirement, that he might give vent to his feelings, and implore that mercy which he so greatly needed.

Thus will a view of God's mercy operate on us. Even a wicked Saul, when he saw the lenity and forbearance of David, was overcome with a sense of the kindness shown to him, and lifted up his voice and wept, [1 Samuel 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.16).

How much more would the tender mercy of our God abase us in the dust, and cause the tears of penitence to flow apace! Yes, doubtless, it will instantly lead us from the scenes of folly and dissipation to the more suitable employments of meditation and prayer. [Ezekiel 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 7.16) may, in an accommodated sense, be applied to this.

***~~To improve this subject, let us consider,~~***

***~~1. To what a shameful state the most exalted Christian may be reduced, if he be left to himself one single moment!~~***

Who, that had been witness to Peter's confession of Christ, [Matthew 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16), or had seen him jump into the sea to embrace his Master, [John 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.7), or had beheld him wielding a sword in his defense, [John 18:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.10), and above all, had heard his promises of being faithful unto death, [Mark 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.31)—would have supposed that, in so short a time, this most favored Apostle would so grievously transgress?

Let this then be a lesson to us all. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)." Let every one of us remember that there is not any sin whatever which we would not commit, if God only left to ourselves; and let our daily prayer be, "Hold up my goings in your paths, that my footsteps slip not! Hold me up, and I shall be safe! [Psalm 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.5); [Psalm 119:117](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.117)."

***~~2. How connected and precipitous are the ways of sin!~~***

Peter began by indulging a confidence in his own strength:  
then he followed Jesus "afar off;"  
then he mixed himself needlessly with ungodly company;  
then he yielded to the fear of man:  
and then he denied his Lord with oaths and curses.

And have not we also found that we have proceeded from one sin to another; and that, when once we have given advantage to the enemy, he has prevailed against us in a far greater degree than we ever could have imagined!

Let us then inquire whether there have not been some warnings given us of which we are unmindful; some resolutions, which, having been made in our own strength, we have violated in the hour of temptation? Let us inquire:  
whether we are not at this moment walking at too great a distance from our Lord?  
whether we are not influenced by the fear of man?  
whether we are not associating too much with the enemies of our Lord?  
or whether there is not some other secret sin, which we allowedly indulge?

Let us remember, that to descend is easy; and that, when we enter on the downward slope, none but God can tell where we shall stop! Compare [Ecclesiastes 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.1) with [Proverbs 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.18).

***~~3. How unbounded is the compassion of our blessed Lord!~~***

Well might our Lord have exposed Peter to those whom he feared. Or rather, well might the insulted Jesus have looked him dead upon the spot, even as Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead with a lie in their mouths, [Acts 5:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.1-10). But that compassionate Savior cast only on his fallen servant a look of love and pity; yes, and that too, in the very midst of his sin.

And may we not suppose, that he is at this very moment looking in the same manner on some of *us*, who have dishonored their profession, and grieved him by their unworthy conduct? Let us endeavor to realize this thought. Let us examine whether there is not a cause, which our blinded consciences have been too backward to condemn? And, if we can find anything that has grieved his soul, let us instantly go home, and "weep bitterly," and he will forgive us. Let us then think on our ways, and turn unto God's testimonies. Let us make haste, and not delay to keep his commandments! [Psalm 119:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.59-60).

***~~#1581~~***

***~~Christ's Accusation Before Pilate~~***

**[Luke 23:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.1-3)**

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

*Unanimity in any cause is no proof that the cause is good*. Nothing is requisite but to raise an outcry, and the passions of the multitude are soon heated; and, if there be a few artful and designing men to head them, they will concur in the most violent measures, and in the most atrocious acts.

Never was this more awfully exemplified than in the conduct of the Jews towards our blessed Lord. Of all the Benefactors that nation ever beheld, Jesus was by far the greatest: yet there we find the whole multitude of the Jews, with the priests and elders at their head, leading Jesus before the Roman governor, in order to obtainthe sentence of death against him.

We would call your attention to,

***~~I. The transaction itself—~~***

Here are three things to be noticed;

***~~1. The virulence of the accusation—~~***

How contemptuously, how maliciously, how falsely, do they speak against him! He subverts the nation! Had they called him the Instructor of the nation, the Healer of the nation, the Savior of the nation—they had done well: but to call him the Subverter of the nation, was a calumny, which one would have thought his bitterest enemies would not have dared to utter. It was not long since the very question had been publicly submitted to him; and his express answer was, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, [Luke 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.25)." What he thus enjoined on his followers, he had before sanctioned by his example, having actually wrought a miracle on purpose to pay his tax, [Matthew 17:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.25-27). And when the people would have taken him to make him a king, he by a miracle rendered himself invisible, and withdrew himself from them, [John 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.15).

***~~2. The subtlety of his accusers—~~***

They formed their accusation so as to influence the person whose decision they desired. Before the *High Priest*, they accused him of blasphemy; but before *Pilate*, they accused him of sedition; so that they might interest the feelings of each, and procure from both a sentence of condemnation against him. Their *pretended zeal*for the honor of the Roman emperor, was especially calculated to make a favorable impression on him, who, as Caesar's deputy, now governed Judea as a province of the Roman empire.

Their accusation too was founded upon assertions made by our Lord himself. He doubtless had frequently declared that he was the Christ, the King of Israel. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem but four days before, and his approbation of the Hosannas of his followers, amounted to a declaration, that he was the person spoken of by the prophet, "Behold your *King*comes unto you, riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey, [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9)."

But did he therefore subvert the people, or claim for himself the tribute that was due to Caesar? No! their *premises*in a certain sense, were true; but their *conclusions*from them were utter falsehood. They knew, however, that logical precision was not wanted in such a cause: when passion and prejudice guide the judgment, a specious plea will pass for substantial reason, and the *semblance*of truth will operate as forcibly as truth itself; especially where the accuser espouses the cause of the judge, and the accused is represented as his enemy.

***~~3. The dignity of the accused—~~***

He preserved silence in the midst of all the accusations which were brought against him; "insomuch that the governor marveled greatly, [Matthew 27:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.12-14)." And well he might marvel, that not a word of anger, or complaint, or self-vindication, would escape him. But Jesus was mute and passive, like a sheep led to the slaughter, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7), and "committed himself to him that judges righteously."

Nevertheless, when interrogated by his judge, he did answer, "Yes," and "witnessed a good confession." "Are you the king of the Jews?" says Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," replied our Lord; "I am." He would not dissemble, nor for a moment hide such an important truth. He was prepared to endure all consequences, and to yield up his life in the very way that his enemies desired. And, as the Jewish Sanhedrin had already condemned him on his own confession, [Luke 22:71](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.71), so he was willing that the Roman governor would follow their example. He was alike unmoved by impatience or revenge, by hopes or fears.

***~~II. The improvement that would be made of it—~~***

The followers of Christ are called to tread in his steps. Would we then approve ourselves worthy of that high calling? let us,

***~~1. Expect all manner of evil to be spoken of us falsely for his sake—~~***

He has warned us plainly to expect it, [Matthew 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11); and experience proves that we ought to be prepared for it. Our enemies will not only take advantage of anything we say or do, to build malignant reports upon it; but will be sure to *impute our conduct to false principles, and to load our principles with conclusions not at all deducible from them*.

We preach salvation by faith alone—therefore we are enemies to morality.

We preach the word in season and out of season—therefore we are enemies to the established Church.

If they would but inquire, they would soon find that the very reverse of what they affirm is true; but they desire our condemnation, and therefore they make up by clamor, what they lack in truth and equity.

Thus was our Lord himself treated; and "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, then much more will they those of his household. See [1 Kings 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.17). [Jeremiah 38:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 38.4). [Esther 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.8-9). [Acts 17:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.6-7). [Acts 24:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.5)."

***~~2. Submit with meekness to whatever evils we may be called to suffer—~~***

Our blessed Lord has suffered, "leaving us an example, that we would follow his steps." It is true, it is not easy to preserve meekness and resignation amidst all the treatment which we experience from "unreasonable and wicked men." But we would endeavor to "walk as Christ walked:" and be willing to "be made perfect through sufferings," even as he was. "Let patience then have its perfect work;" and, when led to indulge an impatient spirit, beg of God to strengthen you with all might "by his Spirit in your inward man".

***~~3. Be steadfast and immoveable in the maintenance of our principles—~~***

Many occasions may arise wherein we may be tempted to conceal our principles: but it is better to confess them openly, and suffer for them, than to violate our conscience and offend our God. We are expressly commanded "not to fear man, who can only kill the body; but to fear God, who can destroy both body and soul in Hell." We do not recommend it to any one to *court*persecution by a voluntary declaration of his principles to those who will only make them grounds of offence; (for that were to "cast pearls before swine;") but whenever called to give an account of our faith, let us follow the example of our Lord, and at the risk of our lives "witness a good confession."

***~~#1582~~***

***~~Herod's Reconciliation with Pilate~~***

**[Luke 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.12)**

"That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies."

It was truly said of Christ at the time of his birth, that "he would be a sign that would be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed," for by means of him, throughout all his ministry, and especially at the close of his life, such depravity was brought to light, as one would scarcely have conceived it possible for man to indulge.

To go no further than the immediate context: Pilate had been constrained to declare him innocent; yet, instead of liberating him, had availed himself of the mention of Galilee to send him to Herod, under whose jurisdiction that province was. The Scribes and Pharisees, enraged rather than pacified by Pilate's attestation of his innocence, followed him to Herod's judgment-seat, loading him with all manner of accusations, and making up in vehemence and clamor what they lacked in truth and evidence. Herod, after trying him, was forced to confirm the verdict of Pilate; yet, instead of protecting this persecuted person, arrayed him in mock-majesty, and with his soldiers poured contempt upon him, and sent him back again to Pilate as an object worthy only of derision.

Thus, while the Scribes and Pharisees unremittingly urged against him their malignant accusations, Pilate and Herod complimented each other at Jesus' expense, and made their injuries to him the means of reconciliation between themselves.

From this last circumstance we notice,

***~~I. That sin is a common bond of union among men—~~***

Sin certainly has produced in families and nations the greatest disunion: and generally causes the fiercest animosities among those who are nearest to each other. But it is also true, that sin often forms a bond of union among men.

***~~1. This is true of sin in general—~~***

The *friendships*of the world at large originate almost entirely in sin.

The *mirthful*unite for the indulgence of their pleasures.

The *licentious*unite for the gratification of their lusts.

The *convivial*unite for the exercise of (what they call) good fun.

The worldly and *ambitious*unite for the pursuit of wealth or honor.

Yes, the very *infidels*unite for the purpose of confirming and propagating their fatal tenets.

***~~2. It is true of enmity against Christ, in particular—~~***

Persons who have no other point of contact whatever, are brought together by means of this. The Scribes and Pharisees were far from being friends either to Pilate or Herod; and these two were "at enmity between themselves." Yet behold, how they all agree in persecuting Christ! It had been foretold that they would do so, [Psalm 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-2); and the history before us is declared to be an accomplishment of that prophecy, [Acts 4:25-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.25-28).

But how can we account for this? How can we account for that union which has subsisted in all ages between persons of all ranks, habits, and dispositions—in opposing Christ? It can only be accounted for from hence; that *every man has in his own bosom a rooted principle of enmity against Christ*; and that he will break down all common rules of propriety in order to give it vent. Yes, rather than not have confederates in his opposition to Christ, he will associate himself with the vilest of mankind, and avail himself of any help for the suppression or extinction of vital godliness.

But, however desirable the esteem of our fellow-creatures may be, we must say,

***~~II. That friendships cemented by sin are no objects of envy or praise—~~***

Doubtless a reconciliation between any parties that are at variance, is desirable. But unity may be purchased at too dear a rate:

***~~1. It was so in the present case—~~***

Pilate and Herod were appealed to as judges; and, when they found the accused person innocent, they would have rescued him out of the hands of his oppressors. It was no fit occasion for paying compliments to each other, when the life of an innocent person was at stake; nor were they at liberty to sport with such sacred interests.

And what was the natural effect of this solemn trifling? What, but to encourage each other in sin; to harden each other in impenitence; and to aggravate each other's eternal condemnation?

Say now, whether a friendship so formed could afford any solid satisfaction to their minds? Say, whether it would not have been better for Herod to have continued at enmity with Pilate, and even to have subjected himself to all manner of indignities for espousing the cause of Jesus, than to have brought such guilt upon his soul for the sake of gratifying a fellow-worm?

***~~2. It is so, whenever we sacrifice a good conscience in order to obtain unity—~~***

We many conciliate the favor of men by "putting our light under a bushel," and conforming to the maxims and habits of the world. We may make "the world love us, by becoming like the world." Probably many, who would have condemned Demas for continuing faithful to his high calling, commended him when they found that he had relinquished it together with the society of the Lord's people. But what do we think of his conduct? or what does he himself think of it now? Has he not learned long ago, that *the purchase of the whole world at the expense of the soul is an unprofitable bargain?*Have not many apostates borne testimony to that effect, even while they have been yet in possession of the things they coveted?

Yes; many would gladly have restored, like Judas, their ill-acquired wealth or honor, if they could but regain the peace of mind which they have lost. Know then, that the testimony of a good conscience is the first of blessings; and nothing, not even life itself, is to be desired, unless in perfect consistency with that.

***~~Conclusion—~~***

***~~1. Let us not be surprised if there are confederacies against us—~~***

As long as there continues in the hearts of unregenerate men a principle of enmity against God, we must expect it to operate as it ever has done, and to combine against us all the powers of the world.

Let not us think that the world will be at peace with us, if we unite ourselves to the Lord Jesus. "The servant cannot be greater than his Lord." When therefore we suffer like indignities with him, let us not account it hard, but rather rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake, [1 Peter 2:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-23); [1 Peter 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-16).

***~~2. Let a principle of faith and love unite and animate us—~~***

We blame not the union of Herod and Pilate, but their union in a bad cause. We have a cause in which it will be our honor to unite; and a principle, which, if truly operative in our souls, will combine us all in the prosecution of the noblest ends. See what a unity was produced among the converts on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:41-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41-47). O that the Holy Spirit might descend on us also, and that we might be all of one heart and one mind in the service of our God! Then shall we exemplify the change which divine grace effects, and glorify Him who endured such indignities for us.

***~~#1583~~***

***~~Barabbas Spared, and Christ Condemned~~***

***~~[Luke 23:13-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.13-25)~~***

"Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him." But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will."

The prophets enter very minutely into the subject of *Christ's sufferings*, in order that, instead of being led by them to doubt the truth of his Messiahship, we might see in them a demonstration that he was the very person to whom the prophecies referred. But it is not in this view only that we would dwell upon this mysterious subject: many other, and most important, ends are to be answered by the contemplation of his sufferings. We see in them his unparalleled love to us: we see also the desert of sin: and the trials which all his followers must, in a greater or less degree, be called to endure. That part of them which we are now to consider is, his condemnation at the bar of Pilate. Let us notice,

***~~I. The circumstances of his condemnation—~~***

There are three mentioned in our text; and to these we will confine our attention:

***~~1. Pilate's testimony respecting Jesus—~~***

God so ordered it, that every person who was active in putting our Lord to death, would either directly or indirectly attest his innocence. We forbear to adduce other instances; such as that of Judas, or the Dying Thief, or the Centurion; because in the passage before us we have ample scope for illustrating the observation.

Pilate here tells the whole assembly of the Jews, that he had examined Jesus, that he had examined him in their presence, and had inquired into all their allegations against him; and that, after the most careful investigation, he could not find that Jesus had been guilty of any one of those things laid to his charge. He then tells them, that he had sent both the prisoner and his accusers to Herod, who being governor of Galilee, where the crimes were said to have been committed, had the greater right to take cognizance of them; and Herod, being a Jew, must be supposed to be more competent to judge of them, as being more conversant with the Jewish laws and customs than he could pretend to be: but that neither could Herod find in him any crime worthy of death. When he found that these united attestations did not satisfy them, he repeated a second and a third time his declarations, that Jesus was innocent: and he appealed to the whole multitude of his accusers, whether any of them could substantiate so much as one single charge against him. This they answered only by clamors: and thus unwittingly confessed that they were unable in any single instance to prove their point: Thus all, both accusers and judges, confessed, that though he was to be "cut off, it was not for himself;" or, in other words, that "he was the true Messiah, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26)."

***~~2. Pilate's ineffectual attempts to save Jesus—~~***

Pilate, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, was very averse to condemn him: yet, being afraid of offending the Jews, he did not dare to acquit him. Upon the mention of Galilee therefore, he was glad to get rid of the matter altogether, and to send the parties to Herod, to be judged by him. When this expedient failed, he tried to pacify the people, by offering to inflict on Jesus the milder punishment of scourging; (though he had no right to punish in that manner a person whom he knew to be innocent;) but this would not satisfy them: they thirsted for his blood; and would be satisfied with nothing less.

Perceiving that the chief priests and elders were the chief instigators of the people, he tried to secure his object by putting the matter entirely into the hands of the people; among whom he supposed Jesus must have many friends. Accordingly he reminded them of a privilege, which by the courtesy of the Roman government they enjoyed, of having one criminal liberated at their request; and that there might he no comparison at all between the persons presented to their choice, he gave them the option of liberating Jesus—or a noted robber, rebel, and murderer, named Barabbas. This, however, through the influence of the priests, succeeded no better than the former devices.

He therefore resorted to one more contrivance. He thought that the people would feel themselves highly honored if they might on this occasion have their privilege extended to the liberating of two instead of one; and therefore, without expressing it in plain terms, he intimates to them, that if they chose to ask it, he would readily grant their request in favor of Jesus too: "What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ? [Matthew 27:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.22)." But all was to no purpose: they were bent upon destroying Jesus, and would listen to no proposal in his favor. In their pertinacity however, we see, that though they were free agents, and criminal in the highest degree, they did only what was from eternity fixed in "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23); [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28)."

***~~3. Pilate's surrender of Jesus to the will of his enemies—~~***

In proportion as Pilate wavered, the people became more urgent: and they would at last take no denial. Seeing therefore his efforts of no avail, he set the murderer, Barabbas, at liberty, and gave up Jesus into their hands; first, to be scourged, (in hopes that their pity might be moved, when they would see "great furrows ploughed upon his back,") and then to suffer death upon the cross.

Satan, methinks, exulted now in having accomplished the final destruction of Jesus: but little did he imagine, that, while he was thus "bruising the heel" of the Messiah, his own head would receive a deadly blow, which he would never to all eternity recover [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); and that the Messiah's kingdom would be immovably established, by the very means used to root it out from the earth, [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15).

We now pass on to suggest,

***~~II. Some reflections suited to the occasion—~~***

Among the multitude of thoughts which such a subject must bring to the mind, we will fix on two or three of the most important:

***~~1. How awful is the depravity of the human heart!~~***

This we can see in reference to the Jews: but we make a very defective improvement of Scripture history, if we do not use it as a looking-glass wherein to see human nature in general, and our own hearts in particular.

What was the principle by which the priests and elders were actuated on this occasion? It was envy: "He knew that for *envy*they had delivered him." And is not that principle in our hearts? Are we not told that "the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy?" Have Cain, and Ishmael, and Joseph's brethren, none resembling them among us? It is true, that men are less conscious of that principle than perhaps of any other: but this arises from its so destroying the characters of those who are exposed to its malignant shafts, as to make them appear deserving of all the evil that it inflicts upon them. But though we see not this principle in ourselves, we discover it easily enough in others; and are constrained to confess its odiousness.

And, as the same principle exists in us, so, if Jesus Christ were now to come into the world again, and live precisely in the same manner as he did before, he would excite the same inveterate hatred in us as he did in them. Suppose a poor man laying open the pride, the worldliness, the hypocrisy of all ranks of people, as well among the Clergy as the Laity, and drawing myriads after him from every quarter of the land; would this provoke no enmity? Would it beget no murderous rancor in the hearts of those whose hypocrisy was detected, and whose influence was destroyed?

We may go further, and ask, whether the same impious choice is not made at this day as in the days of old? What is the preferring of the ungodly to the godly, and sin to holiness, but a preferring of Barabbas to Christ? Yes, and so common is this, that the generality of the world would rather be seen in public with a known profligate or infidel, than with a man eminent for piety and godly zeal.

Behold then, I say, the human heart in general, and your own in particular; and while you justly wonder at the impiety of the Jews, learn no less to wonder at, and deplore, your own impiety.

***~~2. How dangerous an evil is indecision!~~***

Had Pilate determined to execute justice without regard to consequences, he would never have crucified the Lord of glory: but when he listened to the fear of man, and sought to please the Jews, he made a snare for his own feet: he encouraged the importunity which he would have silenced at first, and *sacrificed his conscience to a desire for popularity*. Unhappy man! what guilt did he contract, and what misery did he treasure up for himself by his want of resolution, [Acts 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.13-15); [Acts 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27) with [Psalm 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2); [Psalm 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9).

Thus it is also among us. We hear Christ and his religion vilified, and are afraid to defend them. We see wickedness practiced, and are afraid to testify against it. *To avoid the ridicule or displeasure of others, we are led into compliances which our conscience disapproves*. In short, we are carried oftentimes from one sin to another, through a lack of firmness to withstand the tide of fashion and custom. But, brethren, we shall have reason to deplore timidity infinitely more than any consequences which an adherence to duty can ever entail upon us.

We all see what Pilate should have done. He should have said, 'I am a judge, and I must decide according to law.' Thus should we say: 'I am a Christian, and I must act according to the Gospel: that is my directory; and nothing shall tempt me to depart from it. As for clamor, I regard it not: applause or censure are alike indifferent to me: if God calls me to perform a duty, and all the world combine to make me swerve from it, my answer to them is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge." If I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Jesus Christ.' I mean not that you are to be thus rigid in matters of indifference: but in matters of plain duty, you must "resist unto blood," and embrace death rather than make shipwreck of a good conscience.

**3. How reasonable is it that we should submit to sufferings for Christ's sake!**In suffering for him we have reason to rejoice, and to account it our highest honor. See [1 Peter 2:19-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.19-24); 1 Peter 4:12-16.

***~~#1584~~***

***~~Christ's Address to the Women Who Lamented Him~~***

**[Luke 23:26-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.26-31)**

"As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

On a cursory view of the subject, it might be thought, that the enemies of Jesus, after having secured their chief object, began to relent; since, instead of obliging him in his debilitated state to bear his cross to the place of execution, (as was customary on such occasions,) they compelled another person to carry it for him. This however was only an additional instance of their malignity. They saw that, in consequence of his watching, and fasting, and diversified sufferings, he was ready to faint; and they began to fear, that he would die before he would reach Golgotha; and consequently that they would be deprived of the satisfaction of making him a public spectacle upon the cross. Hence they spared him this fatigue, that he might be the more capable of suffering all the other miseries which they were about to inflict upon him.

Far different was the disposition of Jesus towards them. This short interval he improved for the good of those who were around him. He saw many, and especially some women, making bitter lamentation on his account: and these he exhorted not to weep on his account, but on account of themselves and their children; since the evils reserved for them were both in extent and duration far more terrible than those which he now experienced.

In discoursing upon his words to them, we shall,

***~~I. Explain his counsel—~~***

It is possible, that some of those whom he addressed were moved to pity him merely from a natural sense of humanity; while others were influenced both by faith and love. At all events, we are sure that he did not mean to forbid the exercise of sympathy and compassion; since it was his desire that these amiable qualities would characterize his followers in all ages. Love, in all its branches, was not only enjoined by him, but was distinguished by him as his commandment, which he imposed on all who professed themselves his disciples, [John 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.12); from whence Paul calls it "the law of Christ;" "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

The prohibition was rather of a comparative kind; similar to that expression of the Prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" where sacrifice is not intended to be prohibited, but only to give way, when it would stand in competition with the exercise of mercy.

In this view there was abundant reason for the counsel which Christ now gave them. With respect to himself, they had no such great occasion to weep, because his sufferings were altogether voluntary: they were also now very near their termination; and they would issue both in his own exaltation to the right hand of God, and in the salvation of a ruined world. Hence, if rightly considered, his afflictions, though so exceeding grievous, were grounds rather of gratitude and joy than of regret and sorrow.

But the afflictions which in due time would come on the Jewish women, would be such as had not existed from the foundation of the world, nor ever would be equaled to the end of time. Happy as the Jewish women accounted themselves in having children, they would then congratulate "the barren:" and, desirous as men naturally are of life, they would wish even "rocks and mountains to fall upon them," to put them out of their misery.

This prediction our blessed Lord confirms by a kind of proverb, in which he appeals to the very judgment of those whom he addressed: 'You see,' says he, 'what they are doing to me, who have never given any just occasion of offence: judge then what shall be done to them, when they have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and rendered themselves, like dry wood, proper fuel for the wrath of God?'

These then were the subjects to which he endeavored to turn their minds, not so much for the purpose of augmenting their sorrow, as of giving it a right direction, and rendering it subservient to their eternal good; for, in proportion as they anticipated the judgments that awaited that wicked generation, they would become penitent themselves, and encourage penitence in others; and thus become instrumental in saving some who were now hardened in their iniquities.

Having thus explained our Lord's counsel to the lamenting women, we proceed to,

***~~II. Engraft some further counsel upon it—~~***

We might draw your attention to the example of Christ, who even in this hour of his deepest sorrows forgot, as it were, his own personal concerns, and was mindful only of the concerns of others, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4). But we shall rather keep in view the subject-matter of his address: in reference to which we would say,

***~~1. Get your hearts impressed with the sufferings of Christ—~~***

We have before observed, that our Lord did not mean to forbid sympathy and compassion, but only to recommend in preference some other considerations, which, under their circumstances, were of more importance to them. It is true, that under any circumstances, the being affected with the relation of our Lord's sufferings, just in the same way that we would be with any tragic story, will be of little avail. It is not such an impression therefore that we are anxious to produce.

We wish you to consider, what was the *end*of those sufferings; and to behold in them, as in a mirror, your desert and danger; your hope and deliverance. Yes, you will do well to contemplate them in this view, until you weep and smite upon your bosoms with even greater anguish than his compassionate attendants ever felt.

This is the duty of every one among us; according to that declaration of the Prophet, "They shall look on him whom they pierced, and shall mourn as one mourns for his only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)."

Indeed, to attain this state of mind should be the greatest object of our lives; since without it we can have no saving interest in him; and with it we can never perish. *A humble, contrite, and believing view of Christ will infallibly transform us into his image, and bring us to the possession of his glory*, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). [John 6:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.40).

***~~2. Contemplate the probable outcome of sin, even in this life—~~***

It is in the future world that sin will receive its full recompense. But it frequently receives a tremendous recompense even here. How many have their health impaired, their fortunes injured, their reputation blasted, and their peace destroyed, by their own folly and wickedness! How many mothers have lived to see the child which they once fondled with the tenderest affection, become a source of unutterable grief: insomuch that they have envied the wombs that never bore! And how many have so embittered their lives, that they have wished for death, and would have been glad to have a rock or mountain to crush them to atoms! There is not a town, or scarcely a village, that will not afford some instances of persons, who, from having ruined their health, their reputation, their fortune, or their peace—do not wish that they had never been born.

*What is it that makes suicide so common? You will almost invariably trace it to this source: the person's sins have made him so miserable, that life itself is become a burden to him.* True is that repeated declaration of the prophet, "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)

Such are the means by which God often punishes sin in this life. Not unfrequently it happens that the partners of our guilt are made the instruments of our punishment. Thus, in the history before us, the Romans were employed by the Jews in putting Jesus to death; and they were afterwards employed by God in punishing that whole nation, to an extent unparalleled in the annals of the world.

Thus also it is often found, that those who have administered to our fraudulent gains or licentious pleasures, are the very persons through whom God visits our iniquity upon us.

Let then *the connection between sin and misery*be considered: and learn, that in holiness alone is pleasure to be found without alloy.

***~~3. Look forward with awe to the future judgment—~~***

If the Jewish matrons were bidden to weep for themselves and their children, on account of the calamities that would be endured in the siege of Jerusalem, then much more may every thoughtful person weep in the prospect of that day, when all shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. Then shall every man be recompensed according to his works.

How those who have made light of sin in this world will feel in that day, we are informed by God himself; who assures us, that sinners of every rank, from the highest to the lowest, will "cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb! [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.15-17)."

The inference which our Lord draws from his own sufferings, in reference to the Jewish nation, may with equal propriety be drawn from his people's sufferings in reference to the world at large. They are, in their measure, persecuted like him; and "if these things are done in the green tree, then what shall be done in the dry?" "If judgment begin at the house of God," says the Apostle, "what must the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? [1 Peter 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17-18)." If those who are comparatively as "a green tree" are afflicted by God for the purging of their sins, what must not they expect, who, like "a dry tree," are prepared for the punishment of their sins? Doubtless their misery will be inconceivably great, insomuch that they will curse their very existence, and wish that by any means they could bring it to a termination, [Revelation 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 9.6).

Brethren, know assuredly, that that day will come; and that repentance then will be too late. Then, not they only who crucified the Lord Jesus must give account of themselves to God, but those also who have "crucified him afresh" by continuing in sin, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6). Prepare then for that great account; and beg of God, that "when he shall appear, you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless, [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14)."

***~~#1585~~***

***~~The Green Tree and Dry Tree~~***

***~~[Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31)~~***

"For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

The Jews, at this day, know not how to account for the judgments that are upon them. But we can tell them the true reason: it is for the murder of their Messiah. While yet they were in the commission of that act, it was foretold by Jesus himself, that they, even their whole nation, would endure such tribulation as had not been experienced by any people from the beginning of the world; nor ever would again be, as long as the world shall stand, [Matthew 24:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.21-22).

Jesus was now, at this time, bearing his cross to the place of crucifixion. And, though the nation at large were gratified at the miseries inflicted on him, there were some whose hearts were tender and compassionate, and who greatly "bewailed and lamented him." These, however, he exhorted to weep, not for him, but for themselves and for their children; since the days were coming, when those who accounted barrenness so great a calamity, would congratulate themselves upon it; and when, to be crushed to death under rocks and mountains, instead of being dreaded, would be coveted as a blessing! verse 28-30." His own sufferings were indeed great, but, says he, "If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done when it is dry?"

Under this proverbial expression he conveyed,

***~~I. A prophetic intimation to that peculiar people—~~***

***~~They were now committing a greater sin than had ever yet been committed on the face of the earth—~~***

All other sins were light in comparison with this. Nothing had he done among them, but good. Not one among them could lay any sin to his charge. His very judge proclaimed his innocence. Yet did they, even the whole nation, rise against him, to put him to death: and when, by reason of their subjection to the Romans, they were unable to gratify their malice to the extent they wished, they delivered him up to the Roman governor, and, by their importunities and threats, compelled him to put him to death. In executing this sentence, they loaded him with every species of indignity, and strove by all possible means to

aggravate his sufferings to the uttermost. Hence it may be said of him, "Never was any sorrow like unto his sorrow!"

***~~And for this they were doomed to suffer a heavier punishment than had ever been inflicted on any other nation under Heaven—~~***

They were thus ripening themselves for vengeance, which was soon to come upon them to the uttermost. And it was to be inflicted by the instrumentality of that very people by whom they were now wreaking their vengeance upon him. They had proposed to put Jesus to death, "lest the Romans would come and take away their place and nation." And God awarded to them, as their punishment, that very judgment which they had sought to avert. Into the hands of the Romans he delivered them; and not less than one million one hundred thousand of them were slain in the siege: the rest were carried captive, or sold for slaves: and from that day to this have their afflictions been continued, with a severity which has marked, in a peculiar manner, the wrath of Almighty God against them. To this hour are they "a reproach, and a hissing," in every quarter of the globe. So that in them is the text fully verified. We have seen what was done in the green tree; and we now see what has been done, and is even yet doing, when it is dry.

But, in these words we may yet further see,

***~~II. A solemn warning to all mankind—~~***

***~~All are fitly compared to "a dry tree"—~~***

A tree which is dead draws no moisture from the ground; nor does it derive any benefit from the sun and rain. The heavenly influences which nourish and strengthen living trees, serve but to prepare the dead trees as fuel for the fire.

What a striking picture does this give us of the professing Christian world! All who call themselves Christians are planted on the same ground. But the great mass of them are dead in sin. Though, by profession, standing on Christ, and rooted in him—they receive from him no communications of grace or peace. The ordinances which enrich others, impart no blessing to these; but rather tend to render them more dead, and more fit for the eternal fire that shall consume them. Years pass away, and no change, but for the worse, is wrought upon them: so that the very attempt to make them fruitful is altogether in vain.

***~~And what can be prepared for them?~~***

What but cutting down and then cast into the fire? They shall not always be left to cumber the ground thus. Look at every individual tree, and you shall see an axe already lying at the root, ready to inflict the fatal stroke, the moment that the expected order for it shall be issued. But, O who can conceive the fierceness of that fire which shall then consume it; or, rather, that shall ever prey upon it unconsumed; the fire itself being never quenched, nor the material that feeds it being ever wasted? In the green tree, the calamities were soon at an end: but to the dry tree, eternity itself shall be the duration of its torments.

The things indeed which were done in Christ were inconceivably terrible, notwithstanding his perfect innocence: but, if they were so terrible in him, when sin was *imputed*to him, what shall they be in those who are laden with iniquities, from their youth up even to their dying hour? Truly, no tongue can utter, no imagination can conceive—the miseries that await those who, in the midst of all the advantages of Gospel ministrations, continue dead in trespasses and sins.

Sufficient has been spoken for the explaining of the text, both in its prophetic import and its more general application.

***~~We may now give somewhat fuller scope to our observations, while we call you to notice,~~***

***~~1. The double aspect in which our Lord's sufferings would be viewed—~~***

We ought to view them as an *atonement*to God—and as an *exemplar*to man.

As an ATONEMENT to God, we delight to contemplate them; seeing that they are "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, atonement, and satisfaction, for the sins of the world." Behold him, brethren, bearing his cross to Calvary, and there exhibited, a naked bloody spectacle, to angels and to men. Behold him, I say, and bear in mind that he is a victim dying under the load of your sins, and effecting reconciliation for you with your offended God.

At the same time we must not forget, that, as an EXEMPLAR *he shows to us what is the desert of sin, and what must infallibly overwhelm the impenitent and unbelieving sinner*. Hear him, under the depths of anguish, crying, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me!" See him dying under the wrath of God, who for our sakes "was pleased to bruise him," and know that such hidings of God's face, and such endurance of his wrath, must be the everlasting portion of all who die in their sins. Yes, these things, which in the green tree were done for a season, shall be done in the dry tree, to all eternity.

Never shall we have a just view of the Savior's sufferings, unless these widely-different considerations be combined.

***~~2. The double operation which they would have upon our minds—~~***

Hope and fear would both be called forth into united and harmonious exercise.

Need I say that HOPE would be generated in our souls? There is no other ground of hope for any man; nor any reason for despondency to the vilest sinner upon earth. What cannot those sufferings expiate? and for what can they not prevail to obtain pardon? Not even the sin against the Holy Spirit is excepted on account of its enormity, but because, in its very essence, it contains a contempt of this all-sufficient remedy. I hesitate not to say, that *that very blood which was then shed on Calvary will cleanse from all sin, even from the sin of shedding it!*Lift up your eyes to Him, then, upon the cross, my brethren; and you shall, though your views be very indistinct, experience, like the wounded Israelites at the extremity of the camp, a healing efficacy to your souls.

Yet I would have you FEAR: for *if God spared not his own Son, when sin lay upon him only by imputation, be assured he will not spare those who hold fast their iniquities in impenitence and unbelief*. If God was a consuming fire to the green tree, be assured that he will be so likewise to the dry tree. To all, then, I say, "Fear and tremble before the God of Heaven; and lose not one hour in seeking reconciliation with him through the Son of his love."

***~~#1586~~***

***~~Christ Interceding for His Enemies~~***

***~~[Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34)~~***

"Then Jesus said: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

As one of the most essential qualifications for a due discharge of the priesthood was, a disposition to "commiserate those who were ignorant and out of the way, [Hebrews 5:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.1-2)," so it was the express office of the priest to "offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7)." Our blessed Lord, who was our great High-Priest, showed himself on all occasions, but more especially in the instance before us, abundantly qualified for the office he had undertaken; and, in the very hour that he offered himself a sacrifice for sin, he particularly pleaded the cause of those who ignorantly "crucified him as a malefactor, verse 33."

In discoursing on his words we shall show,

***~~I. In what respects ignorance extenuates the guilt of rejecting Christ—~~***

***~~There doubtless have been instances wherein men have known the Gospel, and yet refused subjection to it—~~***

The *sin against the Holy Spirit*seems evidently to include in it a willful, deliberate, and contemptuous rejection of Christ in opposition to the clearest convictions of our own minds; and there is every reason to believe that this sin has often been committed. Many also have "sinned willfully after they had received the knowledge of the truth [Hebrews 10:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26)," and have so "fallen away, as never afterwards to be renewed unto repentance, [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6);" from whence it is evident that *all contempt of the Gospel does not proceed from ignorance.*

***~~Yet, generally speaking, a rejection of Christ arises from an ignorance of his true character—~~***

This was certainly the case with respect to those who crucified our Lord. The prejudices of their education, together with the mean appearance of our Lord, blinded their eyes, so that they knew not how to acknowledge him as their Messiah. This our Lord himself confessed in the text; Peter also declared the same, [Acts 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.17); and Paul expressly says that, "if they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory, [1 Corinthians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.8)."

And is it not the same with respect to us? Would the profane person scoff at the followers of the blessed Jesus, or neglect to seek a saving interest in him, if he knew what a gracious, merciful, loving, and adorable Being he despised, [John 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.3). Or would the self-righteous moralist feel such reluctance to submit to the Gospel, if he had any just conceptions of the suitableness and excellency of that salvation which it offered to him? Surely, however this might happen on some occasions, we cannot conceive that it would be a general, or even a common, practice.

***~~This view of men's conduct certainly extenuates their guilt in rejecting Christ—~~***

*We must not imagine that ignorance is a sufficient excuse for sin*; for the very petition in the text intimates that, notwithstanding the murderers of Christ knew not what they did, they contracted guilt, and needed forgiveness. And in other passages of Scripture it is said, that men perish for lack of knowledge, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6); that "Christ will take vengeance on them" for their ignorance, 2 Thessalonians 1:8; and that "he who formed them will show them no favor, [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11)."

But though ignorance cannot remove our guilt, it certainly extenuates our guilt. The more opportunities of information any persons had, the more guilt they contracted in rejecting the truth; on which account our Lord's hearers were altogether inexcusable, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22), and were involved in deeper guilt than even Sodom and Gomorrah, [Matthew 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.15).

On the other hand, *the less light any one had in his mind, the less was the malignity of his offence*. Paul tells us that this was, in a measure, the ground of his obtaining mercy, 1 Timothy 1:13; for that, if he had persecuted Christ as he did, and at the same time been aware of what he was doing, he would have been almost beyond the reach of mercy. And we are informed that in the final judgment the sentence denounced against the impenitent and unbelieving, will be proportioned to the light and knowledge against which they had sinned; "the servant that knew not his Lord's will, will be beaten with few stripes, while he who knowingly disobeyed it will be beaten with many stripes, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48)."

The reason of this is evident; for an ignorant rejection of Christ perhaps will consist with a desire to please God, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9), [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2); whereas that *rejection of him that militates against the clear convictions of our own mind argues a deep-rooted love of sin, and an inveterate hatred to God and his Christ*John, 15:23. While therefore the latter is "a sin unto death, [1 John 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.16)," and a sure forerunner of perdition, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19), [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39), the former may be repented of and forgiven.

But, however true this statement may be, we cannot but admire,

***~~II. The wonderful love of Christ in urging this plea on behalf of his murderers—~~***

In contemplating this part of our subject, let us consider,

***~~1. What his conduct was towards his murderers—~~***

Justly might he have aggravated the guilt of his murderers, and said, "These are they among whom I have wrought all my miracles; and multitudes of them have experienced my power to heal: yet this is the way in which they requite all my kindness! I desire therefore, O my Father, that you would vindicate my cause, and execute upon them some signal vengeance as you have on others, whose guilt was infinitely less than theirs. Let the earth open to swallow them up, or lightning descend from Heaven to consume them, or fire and brimstone be rained down upon them, or an angel slay hundreds of thousands of them in an instant."

He might at least have said, as the martyr Zechariah did in similar circumstances, "May the LORD see this and call you to account! [2 Chronicles 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 24.22)." But instead of this, he prayed that they might be forgiven: he sought out the only extenuating circumstance that could be thought of, and urged it as a plea on their behalf. This was a conduct truly astonishing, and worthy of an incarnate God!

***~~2. The wonderful love displayed in it—~~***

Suppose he had at such a time been praying for his friends, it would have argued most unbounded love; but to be praying for his enemies! to plead the cause of those who by their clamors had compelled his judge to deliver him up into their hands, and to be imploring the richest mercies for those who were loading him with all manner of insults and indignities!*What love was this!*that in the midst of his agonies he would lose all sense of the injuries he was receiving, and, without a murmuring or vindictive word, would occupy himself wholly about the welfare of his enemies, dreading nothing so much as their ruin, and desiring nothing so much as to have them partakers of his glory! Well might the Apostle call this, a "love that surpasses knowledge, [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19)."

***~~To improve this subject, let us reflect,~~***

***~~1. How earnest we should be in seeking knowledge—~~***

Some might be ready to conclude that, if ignorance is an extenuation of guilt, it were safer and better to continue ignorant. But let us not mistake; it is not willful ignorance that is to be considered in this view, but that ignorance which is unavoidable, or, at least, unintentional. Besides, ignorance is sure to keep us from Christ, and consequently to bring us into condemnation: and *it will be a poor consolation to a damned soul that its guilt was not of the most aggravated kind*.

There is no way of escaping condemnation but by believing in Christ; and we cannot believe in him unless we know him: therefore we must seek divine instruction as the only means of everlasting salvation. This is the declaration of God himself, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3). May the Lord grant that we may ponder it in our minds, and be regulated by it in our lives!

***~~2. What encouragement we have to pray for mercy—~~***

Never were more atrocious sinners on the face on the earth than those for whom Christ prayed: nor was any prayer ever more signally answered than that he offered for them: for no less than three thousand of those very people were forgiven in an instant, and adopted into the family of God. It was in answer to that prayer that the very blood which they had profanely desired "to be upon themselves and upon their children, [Matthew 27:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.25)" in a way of judgment, came upon them in a way of mercy, and cleansed them from the guilt of shedding it.

Who then among us need despair of mercy? If Christ interceded so for persons in the very act of crucifying the Lord of glory, will he not intercede for mourning penitents? If he obtained mercy for those who rejected him, will he not much more for those who "desire to be found in him?" Let us not despond, but *carry all our iniquities to him, that they may be cleansed by his atoning blood, and be forgiven through his prevailing intercession*.

***~~3. What obligation lies upon us to forgive one another—~~***

The generality, when injured, are ready to search out every possible aggravation, in order to lower their adversary in the estimation of others, and to justify their own resentment against him. But how differently did Jesus act! Yet "he suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21)." Let us then cultivate a forgiving spirit, yes, even towards those whose malice is most inveterate, and whose conduct towards us is most injurious. It was thus that Paul, [1 Corinthians 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.12-13); and Stephen, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60), trod in their Master's steps: and thus must we, if we would find mercy at his hands in the day of judgment, [Matthew 18:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.35).

The express command of Jesus to every one of us is, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44)." And indeed, *if we do not exercise this forgiving disposition, we cannot repeat the Lord's Prayer without praying for our own damnation*, [Matthew 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.12); [Matthew 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.14-15). "Let us therefore be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us, [Ephesians 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.32)."

***~~#1587~~***

***~~Our Lord's Answer to the Penitent Thief~~***

***~~[Luke 23:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.42-43)~~***

"And he said unto Jesus:*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom*.

And Jesus said unto him: *Truly I say unto you, Today you shall be with me in Paradise!"*

The history of Christ in every view is replete with wonders: in every part of it we trace a mixture of dignity and debasement. When he lay in a manger, the Wise Men were conducted to him by a star. When he was tempted by the devil, an angel ministered unto him. He was now dying as a malefactor, and "crucified through weakness," yet did he, in answer to the Thief's petition, assert his power to save.

***~~I. The Thief's petition first requires our attention—~~***

This petition, if duly considered, will appear very remarkable.

***~~It implied an acknowledgment of our Lord's dignity—~~***

Our Lord had often asserted himself to be a king, [John 18:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.37). in reference to which Paul speaks, [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.13). For this he was:  
accused, [Luke 23:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.2);  
mocked, [Matthew 27:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.28-29);  
condemned, [John 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.12), [John 19:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.14-15);  
and crucified, [Mark 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.26).

Yet then did the malefactor acknowledge him as a king. He beheld him on the cross as though he had seen him upon his throne! He proclaimed him Sovereign of the invisible world. His petition in this view was stronger than any assertion could be.

***~~It implied further a trust in his mercy—~~***

Often had our Lord been entreated to heal disorders of the *body*, [Mark 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.10); [Mark 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.4); but rarely had any made application to him on behalf of their *souls*. The Thief, however, offered his petition only for spiritual blessings. He did not ask to have his life prolonged, or his pains mitigated, but that his soul might be saved; and for the obtaining of mercy he relied simply on the grace of Christ.

Nor did he express a doubt of Christ's power or willingness to save. He did not say, "If you will," or "If you can," as others had done on less important occasions, [Matthew 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.2). [Mark 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.22). Yet was his trust tempered with the deepest humility. He did not presume to offer such a request as the ambitious disciples had done, [Mark 10:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.37). But like the Canaanites, [Matthew 15:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.27), was contented with the smallest expression of his mercy, "*Remember*me."

What acceptance he met with will appear from considering,

***~~II. Our Lord's answer—~~***

Our Lord had never refused those who came to him for bodily cures; he now testified the same readiness to relieve spiritual wants.

***~~In his answer, Jesus displayed the freeness of his grace—~~***

He granted the Thief's petition without a moment's hesitation. When the innocent Joseph entreated Pharaoh's butler to remember him after his restoration to his place at court, the ungrateful butler forgot him two long years; nor would have thought of him then, but from absolute necessity.

What different treatment did this guilty Thief receive from his offended Lord! He conferred the desired blessing without upbraiding. How justly might our Lord have upbraided him for his whole course of life, his late repentance, and especially his behavior even upon the cross! [Matthew 27:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.44). But he was God, and acted like God. [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5) and [Luke 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.20); [Luke 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.23). He bestowed his mercy without prescribing any conditions. He did not require the Thief to do anything in order to merit his mercy. Thus did he exemplify what he had commanded his prophet to proclaim, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1).

***~~In his answer, Jesus displayed the fullness of his grace—~~***

Often has God bestowed *more*than his people have desired, [1 Kings 3:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.11-13), or [Matthew 18:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.26-27). Here our Lord infinitely exceeds the Thief's request. He promises, not a remembrance merely, but converse "with himself." This converse too shall be enjoyed, not on earth, but "in Paradise." It means the place where departed saints dwell in the presence of God, [2 Corinthians 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.2); [2 Corinthians 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.4) and [Revelation 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.7).

It shall moreover be enjoyed by him "that very day." Neither our Lord nor his apostles ever countenanced the idea of the soul sleeping until the resurrection. See [2 Corinthians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.8).

Of all this he assures the Thief in the most solemn manner. What must now have been the feelings of the pardoned criminal? Had the executioners now offered to release him, surely he would have said like Paul, [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23). What a comment does this afford us on God's gracious declaration [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.8-9)!

***~~To guard this subject against abuse, we must suggest a caution—~~***

Some may take occasion from pardon of the dying Thief, to defer their repentance; but it does not afford any just ground for such conduct. The case was singular as it respects both. Christ was now in the lowest state of humiliation; Divine wisdom judged it necessary therefore to give to the world some *signal display of his dignity and glory*. Hence the whole creation was constrained to bear testimony to him, [Matthew 27:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.45); [Matthew 27:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.51). And the Thief was chosen from among men to be a monument of his power and grace. But such an occasion never will occur again; and therefore no similar interposition is to be expected, and the Thief, like other malefactors, had most probably disregarded the means of grace, and never heard of Christ before. Yet *now he confessed his sin, rebuked his companion, vindicated Christ, and committed himself entirely to his mercy.*

But how different was this exercise of grace from what we generally see on a death-bed! And what little reason have we to expect that such grace shall be given *us*in our last hours, when we are now despising the offers of Grace and Mercy which are made to us continually! It is extreme folly, therefore, to reject the present overtures of mercy in expectation of such a miraculous conversion at the last.

***~~Nevertheless we may derive from this history much encouragement—~~***

It forbids any, however long or heinously they may have sinned, to despair. It points out the simple way in which we may attain salvation. The substance of our Lord's answer is applicable to every penitent. Such joy is offered to all, [Romans 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12-13); let all seek it in the same way [Psalm 106:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.4).

***~~#1588~~***

***~~The Effect of Christ's Death on the Beholders~~***

***~~[Luke 23:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.47-48)~~***

"The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away."

Rapid are the revolutions of the human mind: like the sea, it is easily agitated by every gust of wind, and driven with violence in whatever direction it may happen to be impelled. God has given us reason to guide us and to keep us fixed to our purpose; but we are slaves to passion, and yield ourselves willing instruments of all who have skill and inclination to move us. We have a striking instance of this fluctuating disposition in the Jewish populace: they had been so impressed with the wonders which Jesus had wrought in confirmation of his divine mission, that they all followed him with acclamations and hosannahs into Jerusalem: but by the artifices of the chief priests and rulers, they were, in the space of three days, made as clamorous against him, all of them demanding, as with one voice, that he would be crucified. Scarcely however had they prevailed, but another change took place in their minds; and they were as sorry at seeing what they had accomplished, as they had just before been eager to accomplish it.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The effects which Christ's death produced on the beholders—~~***

The execution of criminals is of itself calculated to impress the mind with pity for the sufferers, and to evince the evil of those crimes for which they suffer: but the crucifixion of our Lord drew the attention of the spectators to their own state, and led them to contemplate their own guilt and danger in being accessary to it. Observe the *effect*it produced,

***~~1. On the multitude—~~***

The chief *priests*and *rulers*, it would seem, were not at all affected with it. Their envy, their pride, their resentment had taken too deep a root within them to allow them to listen for a moment to the voice of conscience.

But the *multitude*, who were mere instruments of their rage, began to consider what they had done. The three hours of darkness had given them time for reflection: the recollection of all that Christ had done for their nation, led them to consider what return they had now made him for all his unparalleled kindness; and the earthquake convinced them that they were in the hands of an angry God. Now therefore they began to express their regret and sorrow at having lent their aid to so cruel a deed, so wicked a conspiracy.

Now they showed that sin has a far different aspect when committed, from what it had previous to the commission of it. Even Judas, when he saw what was likely to be the consequence of his treachery, was filled with compunction, and would have gladly reversed the deed to which his covetousness had impelled him. So these now wished that they had not yielded to the instigations of their rulers, or allowed themselves to participate in so foul a crime. How far their repentance was genuine, we are not able to say: though we think it probable that numbers of them were among the converts on the day of Pentecost.

But of this we are sure, that sin, of whatever kind, when once it is viewed aright, will cause us to "smite our bosoms" with anguish, and to forsake the company of those who hold fast their transgressions: and that, if this effect be not produced upon us now, we shall "weep and wail and gnash our teeth" with unavailing sorrows to all eternity!

***~~2. On the Centurion—~~***

He, and those whom he commanded, had attended there, not so much from choice as from necessity: accordingly we find both in him and them a mind more open to conviction: for they, though heathens, became the advocates of Him, whom his own nation had rejected and abhorred. The miraculous signs attendant on the death of Christ, together with the whole conduct of that righteous Sufferer, and the peculiar manner in which he resigned his life, evincing indisputably that it was not taken away from him, but that he surrendered it voluntarily into his Father's hands; all this together convinced the Centurion, that Jesus was the very person whom he had professed himself to be.

Hence, in the hearing of all around him, he exclaimed, "Certainly this was a righteous man!" "Truly this was the Son of God! Compare [Matthew 27:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.54)."

There were two grounds on which Jesus had been put to death; the one was, that he was a blasphemer, for making himself the Son of God; the other was, that he was a rebel against Caesar, for making himself a king. In opposition to both of these accusations the Centurion affirms that he was no rebel, but "a righteous man;" and that he was no blasphemer, but "the very Son of God." Thus, while the Jews were pouring contempt on God, the Centurion "glorified him;" and, while they hardened their hearts against him, he and his fellow-soldiers "feared greatly."

What a blessed pledge was this of the conversion of the Gentiles! and what a reproof is this to us, who can hear of these transactions without any emotion, and neglect that Savior whom he acknowledged!

From the effects of Christ's death on the beholders, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The reflections it suggests to us—~~***

Among the numberless considerations which naturally arise from this subject, we will select such only as have not been anticipated under any other view of our Lord's sufferings, and only two or three of them.

Observe then from hence,

***~~1. That the best of causes may be violently opposed—~~***

If we were speaking to Jews, we would have need to prove the excellence of Christianity; but to a Christian assembly, it is scarcely necessary to prove that the cause of Christ is the best of all causes. We see in the Gospel the most stupendous display of God's wisdom and love; a plan for the saving of a ruined world, and for restoring men to the Divine favor, through the mediation and intercession of God's only-begotten Son.

We see, or at least profess to see, how suited the gospel is to our necessities, and how sufficient for our wants. If we are Christians indeed, we know by sweet experience that it is an inexhaustible source of peace and joy, of righteousness and true holiness.

Yet with what vehemence was it opposed at its first establishment! Not all the wisdom and innocence of Jesus, nor all the benevolent miracles that he wrought, could disarm his enemies: though "it was without a cause that they hated him," they hated him unto death. In like manner they persecuted unto death his chosen messengers, and myriads of his faithful people. Yet, in the review of all which was done to stop the progress of his religion, we Christians do not hesitate to affirm that his cause was good; and while we execrate the memory of his opposers, we canonize his followers as saints and martyrs.

But what is the treatment which his cause meets with at this hour? Is there not the same hostility against it, though *the exercise of that hostility is moderated by the laws under which we live.*People indeed will pretend that the cause which they oppose, is not the cause of Christ; just as the Jews denied that they were opposing the cause of God, and even pretended to be actuated by zeal for God. But as they opposed the Holy Scriptures, so do modern persecutors; and in so doing they both fulfill the Scriptures, and unwittingly confirm the very truths they oppose. Whatever misrepresentations therefore men may adduce to vilify the truths and people of God, the religion of Christ is the same as it ever was; nor does the contempt poured upon it diminish in the least degree the respect in which it would be held. *We must not think the worse of the Gospel because it is despised, but must weigh it in the balance of the sanctuary, and estimate it by its own intrinsic worth*.

***~~2. That the cause of Christ will ultimately triumph—~~***

The chief priests and rulers congratulated themselves on their success, when they saw the despised Nazarene entombed. But behold, the breath had scarcely departed from his body before his triumphs began; so true is that saying of the Apostle, "He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on his cross! [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)."

The whole multitude who attended his crucifixion, smote their bosoms with penitential sorrow; and the Centurion who presided at his execution, confessed him in the presence of his murderers! Thus early were the first-fruits of the Gospel reaped, and speedily afterwards followed an abundant harvest.

The *resurrection*and *ascension*of Christ proved to his enemies how vain were all their efforts against him: and the descent of the *Holy Spirit*on the day of Pentecost gathered thousands to his standard in one day. From that time his religion spread throughout Judea and the whole Roman empire; and we, at this distant place and period, are witnesses for him that his cause has triumphed, and that it shall finally prevail throughout all the earth. God had set the world at defiance; and had pronounced obedience to the Gospel to be the true wisdom of every man, of kings and governors, as well as of the lowest classes of society, [Psalm 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-6); [Psalm 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9-12) with [Acts 4:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.25-26). And, agreeably to his predictions, "the stone which the builders disallowed, is become the cornerstone." Let men then continue to oppose the Gospel as they will, it shall "run and be glorified, and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit:" it is a rock that defies all the power or policy of Hell itself: and, as "all who fall upon it shall be broken—so, on whoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Happy would it be if the enemies of Christ would avail themselves of the space allowed them for reflection, and would consider what an unequal contest they are endeavoring to maintain! They think that they are fighting against a few weak enthusiasts: but they are "fighting against God" himself, who, in the person of his Son, addresses them, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" The Lord grant that the admonition given on that occasion to that bitter persecutor, may be remembered by us all; "It is hard for you to kick against the goads!"

***~~3. That the proper effect of his death is to produce penitence and faith in all—~~***

We see the propriety of their conduct who smote their bosoms, and publicly professed their faith in Christ: we even congratulate them in our minds on their speedy experience of such a blessed change. But was this conduct proper in them only? Is there no occasion for similar emotions among *us?*

Perhaps, instead of opposing, we approve and profess the Gospel: but who among us has not opposed the establishment of Christ's kingdom in his own heart? Though we did not unite with those who crucified him on Mount Calvary, have we not "crucified him afresh," by continuing in sin? Truly there is even more cause for us to "smite our bosoms," than there was for that multitude to do so: for they sinned "through ignorance;" "they knew not what they did." But we sin against light and knowledge, yes, against our own most solemn vows of allegiance to him. The smallest knowledge of our own hearts will furnish us with a catalogue of sins that we have committed against him, a catalogue that would reach up to Heaven.

This then I say; let us imitate the penitent multitude and the believing Centurion: and in this especially let us imitate them, in not moving from the place where we are, without first abasing ourselves before God for the guilt we have contracted, and looking unto Jesus for the expiation of it.

Doubtless the change that took place in them, was wrought by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office is "to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and show them unto us." That Spirit is promised "to us, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Let us then pray for the influences of that same Spirit upon our hearts; that, through his powerful operations, we may "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)."

***~~#1589~~***

***~~The Necessity of Christ's Sufferings and Exaltation~~***

***~~[Luke 24:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.26)~~***

"Ought not Christ to have *suffered*these things, and then enter into his *glory*?"

*An ignorance of the Scriptures is far more injurious to us than we are apt to imagine, for it lies at the root of all our errors both in faith and practice.* The infidels of old denied the doctrine of the resurrection, "not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God."

The Jewish rulers crucified their Messiah, because they were ignorant of the character in which, according to the Scriptures, he was to appear; and thus *they unwittingly fulfilled the very Scriptures which they professed to reverence*.

The disciples of our Lord himself were confounded at the death of their Master, and averse to credit the reports of his resurrection, because "they knew not the Scriptures that he must rise again." Our blessed Lord, after his resurrection, joined two of them in their way to Emmaus; and when he found how ignorant and incredulous they were, he reproved them; and, to convince them that "the Messiah ought to have suffered the very things which he had suffered, and in that way to enter into his glory," he expounded to them the principal prophecies relating to those events.

His appeal to them on that occasion leads us to consider,

***~~I. The necessity of Christ's sufferings unto death—~~***

There was no necessity for Christ to undertake the redemption of man; but, supposing him to have undertaken it, then there was a necessity for his sufferings unto death,

***~~1. To fulfill the Scriptures—~~***

The death of Christ had been exhibited in *types*from the very beginning: all the *sacrifices*offered by Adam, Abel, Noah, and the Jews themselves, marked out a suffering Messiah.

The same also was declared in many express *prophecies*. Not to mention the intimation of it given in the first prophecy, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15), nothing could be more plain than the declarations of Isaiah on this subject, [Isaiah 52:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14); [Isaiah 53:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3-5). It seems perfectly astonishing to us, that people professing to regard his writings as prophecies of the Messiah, would ever make the crucifixion of Christ a stumbling-block, or account the doctrine of his cross foolishness. How decisive too is the testimony of Daniel, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26); as is that also of Zechariah, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7). But besides these general testimonies, there are particular intimations respecting all the most minute circumstances of his death; the collective view of which forms a body of evidence that is altogether irresistible.

But how could these be fulfilled if Jesus would not suffer? They must all be rendered null and void, and the veracity of the inspired writers, yes, of Him also who inspired them, must be forever impeached.

***~~2. To answer the ends of his mission—~~***

For what did Jesus come into the world? Was it not to bear the sins of men in his own body, and, by rendering satisfaction to God for the sins of his people, to make the exercise of mercy compatible with the rights of truth and justice? But how were these ends to be attained?

The *obedience*of Jesus, however perfect, could not answer these ends. The law denounced death against the transgressor: and death must be inflicted on him, or on his surety. If therefore Jesus was to be a surety for man, he must undergo death; he must bear that which man would have borne: nothing but this could satisfy the demands of the law: and if man were saved without the death of his Surety, the whole authority of the law must be cancelled, and the Law-giver himself be dishonored in the sight of all his creatures.

We grant, for argument's sake, that the mercy of God would be magnified in such a way of pardoning transgression: but then what regard would he show for the rights of justice? What would become of his truth and faithfulness? How could "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other?" The perfections of God would be set at variance, and some would triumph at the expense of others. But this would be directly contrary to the ends of Christ's mission: and therefore our Divine Surety must suffer death, in order to answer the ends for which he became incarnate.

With the death of Christ is connected—

***~~II. The necessity of his exaltation to glory—~~***

The two cannot be separated: there was a necessity that the latter would take place,

***~~1. To complete his work—~~***

The work of the high-priest was not finished when he had shed the blood of his sacrifice. He must carry that blood within the veil, and sprinkle it upon, and before, the mercy-seat: and he must then burn incense before the mercy-seat: nor, until this was accomplished, could he come out to bless the people.

Thus must our great High-Priest not only offer himself as a Sacrifice, but "enter into Heaven with his own blood, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24)," and, together with that, present also the incense of his own intercession. If he would not do this, he would leave his work unfinished, and consequently of no avail. But how would he do this, if he would not "enter into his glory?"

Nor is it his *priestly*office only that would be made void; his *prophetic*and *kingly*offices also would be incomplete: he teaches men by his Spirit; but "the Holy Spirit would not have been given, if Jesus had not been glorified, [John 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.39);" it was necessary that he would go into Heaven, that he might send the Spirit down from thence, [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7). Nor could he exercise his kingly government unless he were enthroned on high, and invested with power to subdue all things unto himself, [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11). "God exalted Him, that every knee would bow," etc. Hence, then, *his exaltation was as necessary to the completion of his work, as his humiliation was to its commencement*.

***~~2. To give to his people a solid ground of hope—~~***

If our surety, who had been carried to prison for our debt, were kept immured in it, we would have reason to fear that he was unable to fulfill his engagements: but if we saw him liberated, we would conclude that he had fully discharged our debt. Thus if our blessed Lord had never been exalted to Heaven to enjoy "his glory," which he possessed previous to his incarnation, we would feel many misgiving thoughts respecting the acceptance of his sacrifice, and the efficacy of his mediation. But when he is restored to that glory which for our sakes he had laid aside, we cannot entertain a doubt respecting his sufficiency for our full and complete salvation.

Though by dying on the cross he appeared unable to save himself, yet, by his ascending to Heaven afterwards, we are assured of his power to save us. Because he raised up himself, we know he can raise up us; and, "because he lives, we trust assuredly that we shall live also." Nor are we left to conclude this from uncertain reasonings; for Peter expressly tells us, that "God raised him up, and gave him glory that our faith and hope might be in God."

To obtain a just view of our Lord's address, it will be proper to notice,

***~~III. The peculiar force of his appeal—~~***

There is a very striking energy in the text, as connected with the preceding and following verses: it intimated,

***~~1. That they ought to have been better acquainted with the Scriptures—~~***

The Jews had the sacred oracles read and expounded to them every Sabbath-day; and therefore they were inexcusable in not being well acquainted with their contents, especially with those great truths which related to their Messiah. And the Apostles, above all, were blame-worthy, because they had enjoyed the ministry of our Lord himself.

How blameable then are *we*, if we are ignorant of that which relates to Christ; we, who have all the light of the New Testament as well as of the Old; we, who can compare the prophecies with the history of their accomplishment; we, to whom the Bible is accessible at all times; and who have its contents statedly and plainly opened to us!

We are apt to think our ignorance of the Scriptures excusable, because we are not scholars, or because we must attend to our worldly callings: but the disciples were poor fishermen, and therefore as excusable as any persons upon those grounds. Yet our Lord justly and severely reproved their ignorance: and most assuredly he will reprove us also in the day of judgment, for not using better the means of instruction which he has afforded us, unless we search the Scriptures, and labor diligently to acquaint ourselves with the things belonging to our peace.

***~~2. That the Scriptures, whether men are acquainted with them or not, shall surely be fulfilled—~~***

The Scriptures had foretold the *sufferings*, and the consequent *glory*, of the Messiah; and therefore it ought not to have been a matter of surprise that the events had corresponded with the predictions. Thus everything relating to men's acceptance or rejection of the Messiah, is foretold; and, whatever they may think to the contrary, every jot and tittle of it shall be accomplished.

The eternal sufferings of the impenitent and unbelieving, may appear as improbable as the sufferings of the Messiah. And the eternal happiness of the contrite and believing, may seem as unlikely as the exaltation of Jesus, who was crucified. But, in matters that are revealed, we must not reckon upon probabilities or improbabilities: *whatever is foretold, is as certain as the power and veracity of God can make it.*Those who look to our once crucified, but now exalted, Savior, and make him the sole ground of their hope and confidence, are as sure of being in Heaven as if they were already there, provided they continue to exercise faith on him, and show forth their faith by their works. Those, on the contrary, who neglect the Savior, or make anything of their own the ground of their confidence, are as sure of everlasting misery as if they were already enduring it in Hell, unless they repent, and embrace the Savior with their whole hearts.

That which "ought" to be, according to the Scriptures, shall be. Neither the fears of the timid, nor the presumption of the bold, shall at all change the decrees of Heaven. Yes rather, the agents, whether men or devils, who most labor to counteract the will of God, shall be taken in their own craftiness, and be the active, though unsuspecting, instruments of accomplishing his designs.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How awful must have been the state of man that such things would be necessary for his recovery!~~***

Inexpressibly dreadful must have been that *guilt*which required the sufferings of God's only dear Son to expiate it; and most deplorable that *helplessness*which could not be remedied but by his consequent exaltation to glory.

We may judge of the state of man by that to which the fallen angels are reduced. There would have been no difference between them and us to all eternity, if Jesus had not undertaken for us. And such indeed is the state of those who are not interested in the Savior: for, as far as respects their happiness, it is the same thing not to have a Savior, and not to be savingly interested in the Savior that there is; only indeed their guilt is awfully increased by their contempt of him.

Think then of this, you who neglect the Savior: as far as respects any hope of mercy: you are in the condition of the fallen angels, while you continue to neglect him: but, as to your final doom, you must perish under the aggravated guilt of rejecting and despising your incarnate God. O that you may consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before you!"

***~~2. How blessed is the state of those who are savingly interested in the Savior!~~***

Guilty and helpless as you are in yourselves, you have no need to despond when you reflect on what has been done for your salvation. Supposing that you would be restored to the favor of God, what can you think of what "ought" to be done, either for God's honor or for your security, which has not already been done for you?

Would you have a Surety? There is one.

Would you have him to be God? He is so.

Would you have him suffer all that you ought to suffer? He has done so.

Would you have him invested with glory that he may perfect in you the work which he has begun? He is so.

Inquire of God himself what ought to be done: search the Scriptures from one end to the other: see what the prophets spoke: see what our Lord himself spoke—and then try if you can find one thing omitted which has not been already accomplished, or is not accomplishing at this moment.

Rejoice, then, Believer, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice! You may be at present suffering like our Lord, and may be ready to doubt whether you shall ever behold the face of your God in peace: but "the word of the Lord is tried," and "the Promises are sure to all the chosen Seed." Soon you shall be with your exalted Lord, and, having suffered with him awhile, shall eternally be glorified together.

***~~#1590~~***

***~~The Blessedness of Communion with Christ~~***

***~~[Luke 24:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.32)~~***

"And they said to one another: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

*The divine authority of the Christian religion was chiefly to be proved by the resurrection of Christ.*Hence our Lord gave his disciples the most unquestionable evidence of his resurrection during the space of forty days previous to his ascension to Heaven. After several other manifestations of himself to different disciples on the day of his resurrection, he entered into conversation with two of them on their way to Emmaus: under the appearance of a stranger, he then expounded to them all the most important parts of the Mosaic and prophetic writings, and showed them, that there was no just reason for them to be so disconcerted by his death, or so incredulous about his resurrection, since their own Scriptures had so clearly declared that the Messiah would die and rise again.

Arriving at Emmaus, he accepted their invitation to abide with them at the house where they were going: and at supper, he took the bread, and implored the Divine blessing upon it, and broke it, and gave it to them, just as he had been accustomed to do in former times. Now their eyes were opened; and in this unexpected guest they recognized their Lord and Master.

It pleased him however, for wise and gracious reasons, to withdraw himself suddenly from them, and to leave them to make their own reflections upon all that had passed. Accordingly, no sooner had they recovered their surprise, than they addressed one another in the words of our text, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

This kind of appearance, and this mode of communicating instruction, were peculiar to the occasion, and must be looked for no more. Christ is personally gone into Heaven, where he will abide until the time of the restitution of all things. But we must not therefore imagine that all fellowship has ceased between himself and his people; for he will still, in a spiritual way, maintain communion with them, and give them such discoveries of himself, as shall cause their "hearts to burn within them."

In confirmation of this truth, we shall show,

***~~I. That communion with Christ is yet the privilege of his believing people—~~***

While we disclaim all idea of visions, and impulses, and wild enthusiastic conceits, we do affirm that Christ will yet "manifest himself unto his people, as he does not unto the world:"

***~~1. In the private duties of the closet—~~***

Christ has said to his redeemed people, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." This is to be understood, not of his bodily presence, but spiritual presence; according to what Paul prayed for in behalf of Timothy, "May the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, [2 Timothy 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.22)."

*In reading and meditating on the****Scriptures****, he will, by his Holy Spirit, cast a light upon the Scriptures*, as he did in this exposition which he gave to the disciples; fixing our attention upon those points which are of primary importance, and "opening our minds to understand them, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)." He will give us that spiritual discernment which is necessary for a right perception of their import, [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14), and will so impress them on our hearts as to make them effectual for all the purposes of his grace, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14). Sometimes he will cause his word to distill as the dew, or to descend as the rain and snow, which do not fall to the earth in vain, [Deuteronomy 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.2), [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11); and at other times he will cause it to pierce as a sword, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12), or to burn like fire, or, like a hammer, to break the rocky heart in pieces, [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29).

In ***prayer***also he will give "boldness and access with confidence by faith in him, [Ephesians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.12)." His Holy Spirit will "help our infirmities and teach us what to pray for as we ought," and "make intercession in us with groans which cannot be uttered, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26)." He "will draw near to us while we draw near to, him [James 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.8)." He "will hear us and answer us," and say, "Here I am! [Isaiah 58:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.9)." He will also impart to us the things we pray for, and give us "grace sufficient" for every occasion that can arise, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

Thousands can yet attest the truth of these things: they have gone to his throne of grace weak, dejected, disconsolate—and have lost all their burden there, and come away filled "with joy and peace in believing."

***~~2. In the public ordinances of religion—~~***

Our Lord has particularly promised, that "where two or three are met together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them, [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.20)." In the public assemblies of his people therefore he will assuredly be present. Indeed it is his presence there which alone makes them effectual for the end designed: and "if he go not up with us, it is to little purpose that we go" thither.

It is he who gives energy to the word preached: "though Paul would plant, or Apollos water, it is He only that gives the increase, [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7)." Ministers are merely the instruments whereby God communicates his blessings to the Church. Good is then done, and *sinners are converted to God, when the power of the Lord is present to work, and when the word comes to their hearts, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance*, 1 Thessalonians 1:5." Hence it is that persons, who but a little time before "knew not that the Lord God was in that place," are constrained to cry out, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven! [Genesis 28:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.16-17)."

***~~3. In the common duties of life—~~***

There is no time, nor place, where the Lord Jesus will not grant his presence to those who call upon him. In a crowd, in the midst of business, no less than in the retired and lonely walk, will our Lord be with them, [Genesis 28:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.15). He will even be as "their shade upon their right hand, [Psalm 121:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 121.4-8)," to keep them from all evil, and to load them with his richest benefits: "his goodness and mercy shall follow them;" yes, "he himself will walk with them, and dwell in them," so that in every possible situation they shall be enabled to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)." How often has this been realized in social converse, and in the chambers of the sick!

If this be the privilege of his people, it may justly be said,

***~~II. That it is the most exalted privilege they can possibly enjoy—~~***

There is no satisfaction that a human being can possess, that is at all to be compared with that which arises from communion with his God and Savior. The pleasure it affords is,

***~~1. The most refined—~~***

That which is usually called pleasure, is, for the most part, unworthy of the name: the *gratifications of sense*are suited only to our animal nature, and enjoyed only in common with the beasts.

Even *intellectual*pleasures, though more suited to us as rational beings, are yet far below the desires which we feel, and the capacities with which we are endowed. The Christian is "made partaker of a Divine nature;" and he can be satisfied with nothing less than the enjoyment of the Divinity himself.

Accordingly this is his actual attainment. The Spirit of God inspires him with a living hope, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3)," and "a peace that passes all understanding;" and so reveals and "glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ" in his soul, [Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16), [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14), as to make him "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)." Yes, the joy that he imparts is a pledge and a foretaste of Heaven itself! [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14).

***~~2. The most independent—~~***

For all other pleasures we are dependent either on outward circumstances, or on the state of our own minds. If, for instance, we are racked with pain, or bowed down with grief, or standing on the brink of the grave, no earthly thing will afford us any comfort. Not so the pleasure of which we are speaking; that is even advanced by the lack of other things, and never is enjoyed with so rich a zest, as when it has nothing to aid, but everything to counteract it. Then it is that the excellency of communion with Christ appears in its true colors.

***~~3. The most ennobling—~~***

Earthly pleasures prevent, for the most part, the ascent of the soul towards Heaven: but communion with Christ raises the soul to Heaven, and progressively transforms it into the Divine image, 2 Corinthians 3:18.

***~~4. The most diffusive—~~***

Other pleasures we are content to enjoy alone: but this no one ever tasted, without instantly feeling in his soul a desire to impart it to those around him. "Come unto me, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." "Draw me" says the Church "and we will run after you, [Song of Solomon 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.4);" for no one that is drawn would ever willingly come alone; he would, if possible, draw all others along with him.

***~~Some questions which may possibly arise in the minds of those who desire communion with Christ, we shall now endeavor to answer—~~***

***~~1. How are we to attain it?~~***

*It is not to be sought for in the circles of gaiety or in the cares of business, but in reading the word of God and prayer.*We are aware, that all persons cannot dedicate to these exercises an equal degree of their time, nor is it necessary that they should: but all may, and must, devote some portion of their time to this great pursuit.

God has given us six days for worldly labor, and if the Lord's day was conscientiously consecrated to the Lord, we would not long be unacquainted with the subject before us: "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit," would soon he known to us by sweet experience. "Search the Scriptures," says our Lord; "for they testify of me." Again, "He spoke a parable, to teach us that we would pray always, and not faint."

These are the occupations in which we should take delight: and like the Apostles in their way to Emmaus, we would make the great mysteries of redemption a subject of our deepest research, and of our most familiar converse. Were we thus to sincerely seek after Christ, we would soon have the veil removed from our eyes; and God would "shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ."

***~~2. How are we to distinguish it?~~***

I grant that there are enthusiasts who pretend to such impulses, and such communications as the Scriptures do not warrant us to expect: and it is certainly desirable to be on our guard that we be not led astray by them. But we must not despise those spiritual manifestations which God does grant to his people, because there are enthusiasts who profess to have experienced more. We do not reject good coin because a spurious coin is sometimes obtruded in its stead: but we learn to distinguish between them. Just so, in reference to the subject before us, we would "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

We apprehend then that the genuine experience of communion with Christ may be distinguished from enthusiastic pretensions to it, both by its rise, and its operation on the mind.

Enthusiasts found their pretensions on some visions, or dreams, or on the word of God coming in a peculiar manner to their minds: and they are filled with pride, and conceit, and an unhallowed presumptuous confidence, which are certain indications of spiritual delusion.

The true child of God, on the contrary, is humbled in the dust by the favors given to his soul: he prostrates himself like Abraham and Moses, [Genesis 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 17.3), [Exodus 34:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.8); and covers his face with his mantle, as Elijah, [1 Kings 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.13); and abhors himself, like Job, in dust and ashes [Job 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.4); [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6). Nor is he hasty to talk of these manifestations: he will strive indeed to bring others to similar enjoyments; but he will not be forward to boast of his own; and the confidence which they create within him renders him tenfold more watchful against every occasion of sin. By such marks as these it will not be difficult for a humble person to judge; but such is the blinding efficacy of pride and vanity, that it is little less than a miracle if an enthusiast be ever brought to try himself by them.

***~~3. How to improve it?~~***

We know of no better advice than that of Paul, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption." God is a jealous God. There are no bounds to his love to those who truly honor him and walk circumspectly before him; "He will rejoice over them to do them good," but if we presume upon his favor, and give way to any sin, we may soon provoke him to withdraw from us. What God himself then said to his people respecting the Angel of the Covenant, whom he sent to bring them into the land of Canaan, I would say to you, "Beware of him, and obey his voice; provoke him not: for he will not pardon your transgressions, [Exodus 23:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.20-21)." As merciful as he is towards repenting sinners, he will not endure any secret abomination in the hearts of his believing people; and if he beholds any, he will hide his face from them until it be put away. If then he has made you new creatures, and sealed you for his own, be careful to "glorify him in your body and in your spirit, which are his."

***~~#1591~~***

***~~Christ's Resurrection~~***

**[Luke 24:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.33-34)**

"So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

Among the various proofs of the truth of Christianity, that which arises from the credibility of the witnesses is by no means the least: nor is their credibility established by anything more than by their backwardness to believe the resurrection of Christ, upon which the whole of Christianity is founded. They had been repeatedly informed by our Lord, that he would die and rise again on the third day; yet upon his death they were totally confounded and disconsolate.

Two of them conversing together on their way to Emmaus, were overtaken by a person whom they knew not, but who was none other than Jesus himself. He inquired into the subject of their conversation: upon which they told him what expectations they had once formed concerning their deceased Master; they once thought that it had been He who would have redeemed Israel; but now their hopes were at an end. They had heard indeed that he was risen that morning from the grave; that certain women who were of their company had seen a vision of angels, who testified that he was alive; that moreover some others had gone to the sepulcher, and found that it was even so as the women had said: but yet they could not credit these reports. After their conference, Jesus manifested himself to them, as he had already done to many others; by this they were convinced; and, notwithstanding the day was far spent, instead of staying, as they had intended, at Emmaus, they returned that same hour to Jerusalem, that they might acquaint the other disciples with these joyful tidings, and bear their testimony to the truth of the things which had been reported. And when they came to Jerusalem, they found the Eleven gathered together, and others assembled with them, all overcome by the weight of evidence, and full of this wonderful event; and heard them saying one to another, "The Lord has risen indeed!"

From these words we shall take occasion to consider,

The importance of Christ's Resurrection;

The proofs of it; and

The uses we would make of it.

***~~I. The importance of Christ's Resurrection—~~***

Paul, instructing his beloved Timothy what to do and teach, particularly gives him this advice, "Remember that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead." It was necessary that he would remember the resurrection of Christ on many accounts; partly for his own comfort, because all his hopes of salvation were founded on it; but principally, that by endeavoring to establish this point, he might *convince the ignorant*, and *confirm the enlightened*. Whatever else he might omit, it was necessary that he would insist much on this, because it was a doctrine of the utmost importance: For,

***~~First, If Jesus has not risen, he was an impostor.~~***

Our Lord, in his discourses, had frequently foretold his resurrection: sometimes he reminded his hearers of the Prophet Jonah, who, as a type of him, was three days and three nights in the belly of a whale. At other times he declared it in still plainer terms; "Destroy this Temple (namely, his own body), and in three days I will raise it up again." And to his disciples he said repeatedly, that he must be crucified, and that on the third day he would rise again. Now, though his disciples understood none of these things—yet there was evidently, among his enemies, some expectation of his resurrection; because they made sure the sepulcher, sealed the stone, and set a guard to prevent it, or at least to prevent his being stolen away; so that, by ascertaining that he was not risen, they might prove him a deceiver. And, had he not risen, they had accomplished their utmost wishes: they had detected him in deluding his followers, and thereby manifested him to be an impostor.

But by rising according to his own word, he manifested that he was no impostor; but, as the Apostle says, he declared himself to be the Son of God, "with power by his resurrection from the dead."

***~~Secondly, If Jesus has not risen, the Apostles were false witnesses.~~***

It was the grand truth which they were to establish: for when another Apostle was to be chosen in the place of Judas, the traitor, they were to "take one who had accompanied them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day wherein he was taken up from them, that he might be ordained a witness with them, of His resurrection." Accordingly, they "went everywhere, giving witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

When some among the Corinthian Church denied the resurrection of the dead, Paul proved it from the resurrection of Christ; and that again he proved by the most undeniable arguments: and then he very justly added, "If Christ is not risen, then we are found false-witnesses of God."

***~~Thirdly, If Christ has not risen, the Gospel is an imposition.~~***

The very ground-work of all the Gospel is the resurrection of Christ, "that he died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification;" for as his death was necessary, because he had undertaken to pay our debt, so *his resurrection was also necessary, to show that he had fully discharged it*. If therefore he is not risen, then all preaching of the Gospel, all credit given to it, and all hope of deliverance through him is vain; and this is what the Apostle himself has said, "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain."

***~~Fourthly, If Christ has not risen, the Old Testament is also false.~~***

It is said, "He rose again according to the Scriptures;" His resurrection was typified, perhaps in the exaltation of Joseph from the prison to the government of the Egyptian kingdom. Probably also, in the live bird which was dipped in the blood of one that had been sacrificed and let loose into the air. There can be little doubt but that Isaac's restoration, as it were, from the dead, was intended to prefigure it; and it is absolutely certain, that Jonah was a type of Christ in that particular: that type, therefore, must be fulfilled in Christ, or else it was false.

It had also been foretold by David; "You will not leave my soul in Hades, neither will you allow your Holy One to see corruption:" by this passage the Apostle Peter, in his first Sermon, convinces three thousand of the Jews that Jesus was to rise. And indeed it intimates the time of his continuance in the grave; for in Judea bodies began to corrupt on the fourth day; so that he must rise before that time, because he was to see no corruption. Thus the Old Testament, as well as the New, must be false, if Christ ha not risen.

***~~Fifthly, If Christ has not risen, we, notwithstanding we are believers in Christ, are yet laden with the guilt of all our sins.~~***

By believing in Christ, we profess to be delivered from condemnation and to be cleansed from the guilt of all sin: but it has already been shown that if Christ has not risen, then:  
he is a deceiver,  
his Apostles are false witnesses,  
the Gospel is an imposition, and  
the Old Testament itself is false,  
so that we must of necessity be under the guilt of our sins as much as ever. And this is what the Apostle has also said, "If Christ has not risen, you are yet in your sins."

***~~Sixthly, If Christ has not risen, there neither is nor ever will be so much as one person in Heaven.~~***

All those eminent saints that we suppose to have been exalted to Heaven, died in the faith of Christ; of Christ, who *would*come; or of Christ, who *did*come. They themselves disclaimed every other hope but through Christ; and if they were deceived by him, woe be to them; for the Apostle testifies, "If Christ has not risen, you are yet in your sins; then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished;" so that not one of them is saved, if Christ be not risen.

We see then of what importance the doctrine of the Resurrection is! For if it is not true, then Christ is an impostor. The Apostles are false-witnesses. The Gospel is an imposition, (and consequently the Apostle's preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain). Moreover, you are yet in your sins, and all the saints that have ever lived have perished. Surely a doctrine of such importance ought to be well considered, and unquestionably proved. I proceed therefore,

***~~II. To the proofs of this doctrine—~~***

Time will not allow us to enter into a lengthy discussion of this point; nor indeed is it as necessary for us to do so, as it was for the Apostles; for the minds of men in these days are open to conviction; whereas the Apostleshad to combat with all the prejudices of those who put him to death. A few proofs therefore may suffice. We will prove it then,

**First, from the testimony of angels.**At the sepulcher of our Lord there appeared, both to the women and to others, a vision of angels, who told them that he was risen, saying, "He is not here but is risen; come, see the place where the Lord lay."

**Next, from the testimony of his friends.** He appeared to many, and ate and drank with them at different times after he rose from the dead. He allowed them to handle his body, to put their fingers into the print of the nails, and to thrust their hand into his side. And the very incredulity of all his disciples, and especially of Thomas, convinces us that they would not have believed it without the fullest evidence. He moreover appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once, and in the presence of them all was taken up into Heaven.

**Next, from the testimony of his enemies.** Where did the Apostles begin to preach Christ? At Jerusalem, the very place where he had been crucified; and that too within a few days after his death: and so clearly did they prove that he who had been crucified was risen from the dead, that in the first sermon three thousand of his enemies were converted and became his followers! Paul declared, that the greater part of the five hundred who had seen his ascension, were then alive.

Now, if it had not been true, it must have been strange that so many would enter into such a conspiracy, from which they could derive no advantage, and which would most probably expose them to persecutions and death: and it must be a miracle indeed if neither fear nor self-interest had induced someone or other of them to discover the cheat, particularly since there was one traitor even among the Twelve Apostles.

But the very falsehood which the enemies framed on this occasion, was a testimony in favor of what they endeavored to disprove. They said, "His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept." Now this was the most absurd falsehood that ever was contrived; it confutes itself; for it might be asked, 'If you were not asleep, Why did you allow them to take him away? And if you were asleep, How could you tell that they did take him?'

**The last testimony shall be from God himself.**Jesus had said, that after his ascension to his Father, he would send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and that the Father also would send the Spirit in his name. Accordingly on the day of Pentecost, God poured out the Spirit upon the disciples, and immediately after upon great numbers of his enemies, and thereby bore the strongest testimony both to the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Here then are the united testimonies of Angels, of Friends, of Enemies, and of God himself. If these are not sufficient, further arguments would be multiplied to no purpose.

We come then,

***~~III. To set before you the USES which we would make of this doctrine—~~***

*Doctrines are of no value any further than they have a practical effect.* In order therefore to improve that which has been now established, permit me to point out in two or three particulars the uses which we are taught to make of it.

***~~We would, in the first place, consider the Resurrection of Christ as a pledge of our resurrection.~~***

In the Old Testament the resurrection of the body was but obscurely intimated; but in the New Testament it is clearly revealed. Whatever difficulties may appear to arise from the innumerable changes which our bodies shall have undergone, He who first created us out of nothing, knows how to reunite our scattered atoms; and with him all things are possible. Moreover he has assured us that he will do so: He has told us, that this frame of ours, which is sown in the earth a weak, corrupt, dishonored body—shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory!

Of this the Resurrection of Christ is a pledge; for the Apostle says, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of those who slept." The first-fruits were a sheaf taken from the field, and waved before the Lord as the appointed means of obtaining his blessings upon the whole harvest: so we, by virtue of Christ's Resurrection, and through the favor which he has procured for us, shall in due time be raised, and "our vile body shall be made like unto his glorious body!"

Let us remember therefore, that this life is only a state of probation for another; and that, though our mortal part sleeps for a little season in the dust, "the hour is coming," as our Lord expressly tells us, "when all who are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

**Another use which we would make of Christ's Resurrection is, to consider it as a pattern of our life.**

In this view the Holy Scriptures frequently represent it: Paul tells us that "We must be planted in the likeness of Christ's Resurrection;" that "like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father—even so we also would walk in newness of life." And again he says, "Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more; death has no more dominion over him; for in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he lives, he lives unto God. Likewise also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus plainly is his Resurrection proposed to us as a pattern for our life; and this it would be, in the *source*, the *manner*, and the *end*of it.

As to the **source**of his Resurrection, it was by the glorious power and operation of the Father. It is by the same divine power that we must be quickened from our death in trespasses and sins: that same Spirit which re-animated his body must restore our souls to life.

As to the **manner**of his Resurrection, it was irresistible; the stone, the seal, the guard were all in vain. So must we break through every obstacle that might detain us in the ways of sin. No desire of man's applause, no regard to worldly interests, no delight in sensual indulgence—must keep us from following the steps of our Divine Master.

As to **the**end of his Resurrection, he rose, that he might "live unto God:" and such must be our life on earth; we must live unto God in a state of holy communion with him, making his word our rule, his glory our aim, and his service the joy and delight of our souls. Nor is there any doubt, but that a life, thus begun in this world, will issue, like Christ's, in a life of endless happiness and glory.

***~~The last use of his Resurrection which I propose to mention, is that we would make it the ground of our hope.~~***

Our salvation is most generally ascribed to the death of Christ; but sometimes also to his Resurrection: and when Paul mentions them as joint grounds of our hope, he seems to lay the greater stress upon his Resurrection; "Who is he who condemns? it is Christ that died, yes, rather that is risen again."

Nor is this without reason; for, by means of his Resurrection, he is enabled to execute his priestly office. The High Priest under the law was not only to slay the sacrifice, but to carry its blood within the veil, to sprinkle it before the mercy-seat, and to cover the mercy-seat with a cloud of incense: and this, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews informs us, Jesus is now doing. He has offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, and now he has entered into the highest heavens with his own blood, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

By his Resurrection also, we are assured, that God has accepted his sacrifice on our behalf: for if it had not been accepted in this view, Christ must have deceived his followers, and God must have countenanced that deception, by giving the author of it such a signal testimony of his approbation. And as God would not have done this, we may look to him now with confidence as a reconciled Father: and we are fully warranted to do so, because Peter has said, that "God raised up Jesus from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

We are further assured by the Resurrection of Christ, that he has all power committed to him in Heaven and in earth, and is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him: and therefore Peter says again, that "we are begotten to a living hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

But that particular consideration which above all renders the Resurrection of Christ a ground of hope, is that *he rose, as he died, not in a private capacity, but as the Head and Representative of all his people*; on which account we are said to be "risen in him," and to be now "sitting with him in heavenly places." However therefore the members of his mystical body upon earth may be still contending with the enemies of their salvation, they may rejoice in an assured expectation of victory through Christ their Head. They may already triumph in the thoughts:

that the guilt of their sin is expiated;

that God is reconciled;

that the hosts of Hell are vanquished;

that Heaven is opened;

that grace is promised; and

that glory is reserved for them at their departure hence.

Who then would not hope in this exalted Savior, especially when we are so expressly told that he rose again for our justification!

Seeing then that his Resurrection enables him to execute his priestly office; seeing it assures us that his sacrifice is accepted for us; seeing it is the means of his being invested with almighty power; and seeing that by means of it his whole mystical body is risen and exalted with him—then happy shall we be, if He ise our hope and our confidence: but if He is not, we must be entirely hopeless and undone for ever; for there neither is nor can be any other ground of hope. We may have the faith of Abraham, the repentance of David, the self-denial of John the Baptist, the knowledge of the Apostles, and the fidelity of Stephen—yet all in vain; if Christ is not risen, all this will profit us nothing; we must inevitably perish notwithstanding all; for thus says the Apostle, in a fore-cited passage, "If Christ has not risen, you are yet in your sins; then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished:" so that Abraham, David, John the Baptist, the first martyr, Stephen, yes and all the Apostles, are perished—if Christ has not risen.

If then these words of Paul are true, we see the pernicious tendency of their doctrines of those who would persuade us to renounce our dependence upon Christ, and to rely on our own works as the ground of our hope.

What! are we better than those saints of old? Or would it avail us anything if we were? No! we might be possessed of every virtue that ever adorned a human being, and in the highest degree that it ever appeared in a fallen creature, and perish at last—if we made anything but Christ the ground of our hope.

Let us look then to this exalted Savior. Let us regard his Resurrection as:

the pledge of our resurrection,

the pattern of our life, and

the ground of our hope.

And then we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle; "Who is he who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God who justifies: Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather that is risen again."

***~~#1592~~***

***~~The Gospel to Be First Preached at Jerusalem~~***

***~~[Luke 24:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.46-47)~~***

"Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

The Apostles were to be Christ's chosen witnesses respecting all that he had *said*, and *done*, and *suffered*in the world. To qualify them for this office, he gave them all needful instruction, not only while he sojourned openly among men, but in the interval between his resurrection and ascension. He opened to them more particularly the principal *types*and *prophecies*that related to him, and "then opened their minds also that they might understand them:" and thus, by exhibiting the Gospel more fully to their view, and strengthening their organs of vision to behold them, he prepared them for the ministry which they were now speedily to undertake.

The necessity of the death and resurrection of Christ we have before considered. We now fix our attention on the directions which he gave them,

***~~I. To preach the Gospel to all nations—~~***

***~~The Gospel comprehends two points, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"—~~***

Repentance is unknown to the law: that says, 'Do this, and live;' and in the event of transgression, denounces a curse against us, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). Whatever there was of repentance enjoined by Moses and the Prophets, it was altogether from a respect to that sacrifice which was in due time to be offered for the sins of men. That it is an evangelical duty, appears from its comprehending the substance of John's preaching, [Matthew 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.2), and of Christ himself, [Matthew 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.17), and of the Apostles also, both at, and after, the day of Pentecost [Acts 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38); [Acts 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.19); [Acts 17:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.30); and to bring men to it, was the end for which Christ died and rose again. This therefore must be preached as an essential part of the Gospel.

"Remission of sins" also is a distinguishing feature of the Gospel of Christ: it is indeed the glory of the Gospel, that it makes provision for our attainment of that blessing. Not that the remission of sins is bestowed on account of our repentance: repentance prepares the mind for a due reception of it; but it is for the sake of Christ alone that it is bestowed: and therefore in our preaching we must particularly mark, that this mercy is the purchase of his blood, and the gift of his grace.

***~~These are to be preached to all nations—~~***

The blessings of the Mosaic dispensation were confined to the House of Israel; but those of the Gospel are to be extended to all mankind.

They are equally necessary for all, free for all, effectual for all: there is not a human being that does not need to repent and seek remission of sins in the name of Christ; for "there is no name but his, whereby any man can be saved."

Nor is any person excluded from these mercies, if he does not himself thrust them away from him; for "the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

Nor shall any have reason to complain that they are not sufficient for him; for "all that believe are justified for all things." Hence the offer of them must be made to all; "we must go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Our Lord however enjoined his Apostles,

***~~II. To begin their ministration of it at Jerusalem—~~***

It had been foretold that "the law would go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." But there were also important reasons in our Lord's mind, why his Gospel would in the first instance be published there. It would be eminently useful,

***~~1. To confirm his truth—~~***

If the Apostles had left Jerusalem, and gone at once to the heathen, it would have appeared as if they had despaired of succeeding where their testimony might be inquired into, and were practicing an imposition on those who were unable to contradict them. Thus the Gospel would have been universally regarded as "a cunningly-devised fable." But by beginning at the very place where their Master was crucified, and bearing their testimony respecting his resurrection, in the very place where he had been put to death, and before the people who were most interested in controverting their statements; and being enabled too to confirm their word with signs and miracles; being successful also in convincing hundreds and thousands that Christ was indeed risen, and was the only Savior of the world—all this carried such conviction along with it, that even to this hour the enemies of Christianity are confounded by it, nor can find any reasonable plea for doubting what is so firmly and incontrovertibly established.

***~~2. To magnify his mercy—~~***

When we reflect on all the miracles that Christ had wrought in support of his assertions, and what indignities had been offered to him by all ranks and orders of people at Jerusalem; and at last what a cruel death they had inflicted on him; we might well expect that he would exclude that murderous city from any share of his mercy. He might well have said to his disciples, "Go and preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations; but do not go near Jerusalem, that wicked city that has filled up the measure of its iniquities in the murder of its Messiah."

But instead of laying any such injunction on them, he commands them to be peculiarly mindful of that city, and to begin their ministrations there: so that, if they would have access to the priests, who demanded sentence against him, or to any of the people, who, in the various ways, by mockings, by scourgings, by nailing him to the cross, by piercing him with the spear, executed it upon him—they might declare to them his readiness to forgive all their trespasses, and, by the blood he had shed, to cleanse them from the guilt of shedding it.

What wonderful mercy was here! James and John, upon a small provocation that was offered him, would have called down fire from Heaven to consume a whole village: but their Lord, after having sustained the utmost injuries that ingenious cruelty could inflict, was anxious only for the salvation of the persons that had inflicted them. Here was mercy, such as none but God could exercise! [Hosea 11:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8-9).

***~~3. To encourage sinners to the end of time—~~***

It is common with men, when convinced of sin, to despond, as if they had sinned beyond the reach of mercy: the advantages they have lost, the favors they have abused, the iniquities they have committed, seem to form such a load of guilt as can never be removed from their souls. But who ever lost more advantages, or abused more favors, or committed greater iniquities, than those who "crucified the Lord of glory?" Yet they were the first objects of our Redeemer's pity and compassion. So then shall it be with all who truly desire to find acceptance with him: "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound!" even as Paul "obtained mercy, that in him, as the very chief of sinners, God might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

***~~To improve this subject, we would entreat you,~~***

***~~1. To embrace this salvation—~~***

"To you is the word of this salvation sent;" and as ambassadors from Christ, we beseech you to receive it with all thankfulness. Nor think it a hard matter to repent, and flee to Christ, when the remission of your sins is suspended on it, and shall be insured by it. O let not Christ shed his blood in vain; nor us, as his ministers, commend to you his grace in vain!

***~~2. To imitate this example—~~***

Do you admire this unbounded love of Christ to sinners? Know that, in this, "he has left you an *example*, that you should follow his steps." You have been greatly injured perhaps by a fellow-creature: return not then the injury; but render good for evil, and blessing for cursing. This is to tread in the steps of Christ, and to approve yourselves his true disciples.

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink: and labor to heap coals of fire on his head," to melt him into love. "Be not overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good."

***~~#1593~~***

***~~The Ascension of Christ~~***

**[Luke 24:50-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.50-53)**

"Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into Heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen."

Amidst the various proofs given by our Lord to his disciples respecting his Messiahship, there was one of pre-eminent authority, namely, the ascending up to Heaven in their immediate presence. He had not risen in their presence, because his frequent appearances to them for the space of forty days after his resurrection would be a sufficient evidence to them that he had risen: but if, in his ascent to Heaven, he had withdrawn privately, they would not have known where he was gone; since they could not go up thither to obtain a personal interview with him, or to ascertain the truth of his ascension. Hence our blessed Lord, having accomplished all that was necessary to be done on earth, led them out to Mount Olivet, and went up from the midst of them to Heaven, giving them ocular demonstration that his removal from them was such as he had taught them to expect: "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father, [John 16:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.28)."

In the account here given us by Luke, we notice two things;

***~~I. Our Lord's departure from his disciples—~~***

"Having loved his own, he loved them to the very end;" and expressed his love to them most particularly in the very instant of his departure: "He lifted up his hands, and blessed them:" and it was in this very act that he was taken up from them, "While He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into Heaven." Now his removal in the midst of this act ought not to be passed over as a mere accidental and uninteresting occurrence; it surely may be considered as intimating to us,

***~~1. What was his object in coming into the world—~~***

We are told by Peter, that "God sent him to bless us, [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26)." Man was cursed as a transgressor of God's law: nor could he by any means, remove the curse or obtain any blessing whatever. Sin interposed an insurmountable obstacle in his way. But Jesus undertook to remove this obstacle: to expiate the guilt of sin by the sacrifice of himself, and thus to open a way for man's reconciliation with his offended God. This sacrifice he had now offered, and had "finished the work which God had given him to do." Now therefore he authoritatively pronounced his disciples blessed:

blessed, as believing in his name;

blessed, as savingly interested in his death;

blessed, as committed to his protection;

and blessed, as fellow-heirs of his glory.

Just as the high-priest, after offering his sacrifice, was to bless the people, [Leviticus 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 9.22), so now Jesus intimated that the end of his incarnation was accomplished, and that, as our Great High-priest, he was empowered to bless his people with all spiritual and eternal blessings, [Genesis 14:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.18-20).

***~~2. What would be his occupation when he was departed from the world—~~***

He was not now going to relinquish their concerns: on the contrary, he would still be as mindful of them as ever. He was going to Heaven upon their business; "as their forerunner,"

"to prepare places for them;"

"to make continual intercession for them;"

to take on himself the management of the universe for them;

and to receive a fullness of all gifts and graces for them,

that "they might receive out of it" according to their several necessities.

His removal, though it interrupted the sight of his person, and the hearing of his voice, would not interrupt the communication of his blessings. He would still load his disciples with the richest blessings, and "not them only, but also all who would believe in him through their word:" and, if we now look to him with the eye of faith, we may behold him, as it were, at this very instant occupied as he was at the moment of his departure from the world: he is still blessing, blessing, blessing his believing people: "having received gifts for men, he is daily and hourly bestowing them, even on the most rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell among them, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18)." Yes, he will yet further extend his favors to the remotest corners of the earth: for "in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, [Genesis 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.3). [Psalm 72:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.17)."

If we look only to the past history, we shall be surprised at,

***~~II. The effect it produced upon them—~~***

When our Lord had told them of his intended departure, they were "filled with sorrow;" but now that he was really gone, they were altogether as full of joy: but they were now better instructed in the nature of his kingdom than they had been before. Indeed even to the last they retained some expectation of a temporal kingdom, [Acts 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.6-7); but his departure from them effectually dissipated that delusion; and taught them to look up to him for far higher blessings.

Now the effect which was produced in them by the sight of his ascension, ought equally to be wrought in us by the recollection of it; and I shall have addressed you to no purpose, if you do not depart from this place with a measure of those very feelings with which the Apostles were impressed on this occasion.

***~~I call upon you therefore now,~~***

***~~1. To adore him—~~***

He is worthy of all adoration; nor can we doubt but that the "worship" paid to him by his disciples, was such as they paid to Jehovah himself. The prayer which they almost immediately afterwards offered up to Heaven for the appointment of a successor to Judas, was addressed to Him, [Acts 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.24), just as Stephen's afterwards was, at the very time that he beheld the Father himself sitting on his throne, [Acts 7:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59-60). Let us then adore Him as our incarnate God: and remember that, in so doing, we most truly and acceptably serve our heavenly Father, [John 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22-23), [Philippians 2:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-14).

***~~2. To rejoice in him—~~***

Who can contemplate Him seated on his throne of glory, and constituted "Head over all things to his Church," and not rejoice in him? We are commanded to "rejoice in him always, [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4);" such joy is the characteristic mark of all his people, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3); and it ought to be as elevated and as fervent, as our feeble nature will admit of, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). If the Apostles, notwithstanding they were bereft of his bodily presence, and were as yet but partially acquainted with the benefits that were to result from his ascension, "returned to Jerusalem with great joy," then much more should we, to whom the full extent of those benefits is opened, "rejoice with exceeding great joy." Let Israel then "rejoice in him that made him and redeemed him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King! [Psalm 149:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.2)."

***~~3. To consecrate ourselves to him—~~***

The Apostles from this time appear to have given themselves up wholly to the exercises of devotion. This was right in their peculiar circumstances; but was not intended as a precedent for us. We have civil and social duties that call for our attention, and which must on no account be neglected.

Yet, as far as relates to the affections of the soul, we must consecrate ourselves as entirely to God as they. We would be "sanctified wholly to the Lord, in body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23." He has "bought us with a price; therefore we should glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:20." Let us then serve him in his temple at the appointed seasons of public worship; and let us serve him in our closets, where no eye sees us but his.

***~~4. To wait for the accomplishment of all his promises—~~***

Our Lord had promised to his disciples, that "they would in the space of a few days be baptized with the Holy Spirit;" and had told them to wait at Jerusalem for that gift, verse 49 and [Acts 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.4-5). At Jerusalem therefore they waited in expectation of the promised blessing.

And have we no promises to be fulfilled to us? Has he not given us "exceeding great and precious promises," comprehending everything that we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity? Let us then wait for the accomplishment of them to our souls. In due time "Jesus will come again from Heaven in like manner as he went to Heaven," and then will that last promise be fulfilled, "I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." O that in the meantime he may find us with "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed," and ourselves as those who "wait for the coming of their Lord!"