***~~Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries John-Acts~~***

***~~The Gospel of JOHN~~***

***~~#1594~~***

***~~The Divinity of Christ~~***

***~~[John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1)~~***

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

WHAT astonishing majesty and dignity are displayed in these brief but comprehensive words! The other Evangelists commence their histories at the period of our Savior's incarnation: but John carries us back to eternity itself; and informs us, not only what Christ did and suffered, but *who he was*. He calls him by a very peculiar name; "The Word;" and, in other places, "The Word of Life, [1 John 1:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.1-2);" "The Word of God, [Revelation 19:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.13)." This name, as applicable to the Messiah, was not altogether unknown to the Jews; and it seems peculiarly proper to the Son, because it is by the Son that God has in all ages revealed his mind to man. And perhaps this very explanation of the term was intended to be conveyed to us by John, when he says, within a few verses after my text, "No man has seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of his Father, he has declared him, verse 18."

But, without dwelling upon matters of conjecture, let us consider,

***~~I. The testimony here given to the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

The beloved Apostle, speaking of the Lord Jesus, here declares,

***~~1. His eternal existence—~~***

"In the beginning was the Word," even before the creature existed, either in Heaven or on earth: and from him every created being derived its existence, verse 3. So Paul also informs us: "By him were all things created that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things; and by him all things are held together, [Colossians 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16-17)." Though he was born into the world in time—yet in his divine nature he existed from eternity: "He was the same yesterday, today, and forever, [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8);" "His goings-forth were of old from everlasting, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2);" "He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, [Revelation 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.8); [Revelation 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.11)."

***~~2. His distinct personality—~~***

From all eternity "he was with God;" "having a glory with him before the worlds were made, [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.5);" and having a perfect participation of all that the Father possessed, whether of wisdom and knowledge, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27), or of authority and power, [John 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.17). This appears from the council held, as it were, between the Father and the Son, respecting the formation of man, [Genesis 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.26); and man's consequent expulsion from Paradise, [Genesis 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.22); and the confounding of the projects of man's apostate race by changing their language at Babel, [Genesis 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 11.7).

Hence the Lord Jesus is said to have "come forth from God, [John 16:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.27-28)," even "from his bosom," where his everlasting abode had been. The importance of this truth is marked by the repetition of it by John, in the words following my text, "The same was in the beginning with God."

***~~3. His proper deity—~~***

"The Word was God," even "the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)," "the great God, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13)," "God over all, blessed forever, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." "He was in the form of God; and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, [Philippians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6);" and was therefore rightly "named Emmanuel, God with us, [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23);" and is with truth declared to be "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)."

Now, that this is not a mere speculative subject, I will proceed to show, by pointing out,

***~~II. The deep interest we have in it—~~***

On the very face of the question, "Whether our Savior is God, or only a created being?" it cannot fail of appearing a subject of extreme importance. Know, then, that Christ is truly God, as well as truly man: and on this truth depends,

***~~1. The efficacy of all that he did and suffered for us on earth—~~***

Had he been only a creature, he could only have done what was his duty to do; and therefore he could have merited nothing at the hands of God: or, at all events, could have merited only for himself. But being God, his whole undertaking was gratuitous; there was no obligation lying upon him to do anything, or suffer anything, for us. What he did and suffered, therefore, may well be put to our account; more especially since it was so concerted between him and his Father, when he undertook to redeem our ruined race. *His****sufferings****, though only for a season, may well be regarded as equivalent to the eternal sufferings of his people*; and his **obedience**to the law be justly considered as if all his people had perfectly obeyed it. On both the one and the other his Deity stamps an infinite value; so that, "he having been made sin for us, we may well be made the righteousness of God in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)."

***~~2. The efficacy of all that he is yet doing for us in Heaven—~~***

There is our adorable Savior seated at the right hand of God; and all judgment is committed to him, that he may complete for his people the work which he began on earth. He is appointed "Head over all things to the Church, [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22)." But supposing him to be a mere creature, how can he attend to all at once, and supply the necessities of all, in every quarter of the universe, at the same instant of time? But there is no room for such a question as that, seeing *he is the omnipresent, omniscient, Almighty God*. "Our help is, indeed, laid upon One who is mighty, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19)," upon One who is Almighty, "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)." We need not fear, therefore, however great our necessities; but be fully assured, 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)."

***~~Behold then, brethren,~~***

***~~1. How inconceivably great is the condescension of our God!~~***

I wonder not at the unbelief of those who call in question the Divinity of Christ: for if it were not so fully revealed, as that it is impossible for a truly enlightened man to doubt it, I would be ready to doubt it myself; so inconceivable does it appear, that God would become a man, and make himself the surety and substitute of his own rebellious creatures. But he is God, and therefore can do it: he is God, and therefore cannot be judged by the finite capacity of man.

In doing what he has done, he has acted like himself. He is God, and therefore I believe all that he has done for sinful man. Though himself eternal, he has been born in time: though eternally with God, he has come down and tabernacled with man: though himself the true and Living God, he has become a man, yes, and died for man upon the cross. I believe it, because he has revealed it. It believe it, because nothing less than this would have been adequate to my necessities. And were this not true, I would most gladly take my portion forever under rocks and mountains.

***~~2. What unbounded consolation has he provided for sinful man!~~***

This doctrine meets my every need. I have guilt, which nothing less than "the blood of God" can wash away, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28). I have corruptions, which none but the Spirit of God can subdue and mortify. I have needs, which none but the all-sufficient God can supply. But, having Jehovah for my friend, my surety, my righteousness, my all, I fear nothing. I hope in him; and believe in him; and glory in him; and make him "all my salvation and all my desire." Trusting in him, I will defy all my enemies, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31); and, "believing in him," I will anticipate in my soul all the glory and blessedness of Heaven! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8).

***~~#1595~~***

***~~Christ the Only TRUE LIGHT~~***

***~~[John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9)~~***

That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world.

"The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

AS in the material world there is but one source of light to all the heavenly bodies; so in the spiritual world there is one Sun of Righteousness, that lights every man that comes into the world. There are other lights: John himself was a burning and a shining light. But he, and all the rest, shined with a borrowed luster. Christ is the only true source both of light and life; as John has told us; and as I propose in the present discourse to show.

***~~I. He was the only true light previous to his incarnation—~~***

As being the Creator of all things, it was He who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." As the Former both of angels and men, he gave to each their intellectual and moral powers. Men, the lower order of beings, he endued with reason and conscience; distinguishing them by these faculties from the brute creation, which possess only that which we call instinct. When man had fallen, and lost, to a considerable degree, the faculties with which he had been invested, the Lord Jesus, agreeably to the covenant he had entered into with the Father, undertook to restore to man such a measure of light as his necessities required. This he did,

***~~1. By the republication of his law—~~***

It was the Son of God who led his people out of Egypt through the wilderness: for that people, by their murmurings, we are told, "tempted Christ, 1 Corinthians 10:9." The law, therefore, both moral and ceremonial, we suppose to have been given by him. At all events, we are sure that they were, each of them in its place, rays emanating from him; "he being the end of both, [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4)," the end to which each looked, and the end by which both were fulfilled. The *moral*was "a schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith, [Galatians 3:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.23-24);" and the *ceremonial*shadowed him forth, in all his offices, [Colossians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.17).

***~~2. By a long train of prophecies—~~***

It was "by the Spirit of Christ" that all the prophets spoke, from the very beginning, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12). And thus, with progressive clearness, was the mind of God revealed, relative to the restoration of fallen man. Whatever was made known respecting the Father and his eternal councils, it was all declared by the Lord Jesus Christ, verse 18. No information on these inscrutable subjects ever proceeded from any other quarter: all the light that was in the world emanated from Christ alone; and was confined to his chosen people. All the rest of the world were left in the grossest darkness that can be imagined, [Isaiah 60:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.2).

Moreover,

***~~II. He was the only true light, also, during his sojourning on earth—~~***

So he himself repeatedly and strongly affirms, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12); [John 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.5); [John 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.46). He explained the law, which had been obscured and corrupted by the false glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees [Matthew 5:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.21-22); [Matthew 5:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.27-28); and made himself known, in the plainest terms, as the only Savior of the world: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)."

Nor was he less a light by his *example*, "showing, in the whole of his deportment, how men ought to walk and to please God," even "by following his steps, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21)," and "walking as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)." Hence he cautioned the people of that day: "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness comes upon you: for he who walks in darkness knows not where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light, [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)."

I add, that,

***~~III. He is the only true light at this day—~~***

"God, in covenant, gave him to be a light to the Gentiles;" "to bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and to lead them in paths which they had not known; to make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight, [Isaiah 42:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.6-7); [Isaiah 42:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.16)." And all this he does at this moment, even as Paul has testified respecting him, [Acts 26:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.23).

What other source of light has any man but the written word, which our blessed Lord has inspired? or what other teacher has any man but his Holy Spirit, which Christ has promised, "to guide us into all truth?" The heathen philosophers, so far from adding one ray of light to the Scriptures of truth, have only "darkened counsel by words without knowledge." "The truth of God has been foolishness to them;" and "their wisdom has been altogether foolishness in the sight of God." Indeed, as the blind cannot see even the meridian sun, so "neither can the natural man, by any faculties of his own, discern the things of the Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." "The eyes of our understanding must be opened by the Spirit of God, before we can be fully brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of his Gospel, [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18)." As "the Day-spring from on high has visited the world, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace, [Luke 1:78-79](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.78-79);" so must "the Day-star arise in our hearts," before we shall have any just discernment of "the things which have been freely given to us of God, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12."

***~~Inquire then, I beg you,~~***

***~~1. What light you have received from the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

I ask not what proficiency you have attained in worldly knowledge; for that, however excellent, can never save the soul. But I ask, "Has God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shined in your heart, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, Christ [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)." This is saving knowledge: this alone can save you, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3). And this can be obtained from none but the Lord Jesus Christ, whose office it is to "open the blind eyes, [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6), [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5)," and to "make you wise unto salvation by faith in him." To every one among you, then, I say, "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light, [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)."

***~~2. How far you are reflecting around you the light you have received—~~***

This is done by all the planets, moving in their orbits: and this must be done by all who profess to receive their light from Christ. All must "be as stars in his hands, [Revelation 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.16);" all must "reflect his virtues, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9) and [2 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.3);" and, though it must of necessity be, that "one star would differ from another star in glory," yet "must all shine as lights in a dark world, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16);" and, in all who are truly and savingly enlightened, "their light will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)."

Let it he seen then, my brethren, by your life and conduct, "whose you are, and whom you serve." Let Christ be your pattern in all things: endeavor to "walk in the light, as he is in the light, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" so shall you be found "children of the light and of the day, [1 Thessalonians 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.4-5);" and "Christ shall be glorified in you," both in this world and in the world to come, 2 Thessalonians 1:12.

***~~#1596~~***

***~~Benefit of Receiving Christ~~***

***~~[John 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.10-12)~~***

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name."

THE blessings which administer to our worldly interest or bodily comfort, are equally welcomed by persons of all ranks and conditions: but those which have relation only to our spiritual good, are despised by many, and desired by very few. The light of the sun is not less prized by one than by another: all are sensible of its benefits, and value it accordingly. But "the Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon us," and the benighted world regards him not: "he shines in the darkness, and the darkness apprehends him not, verse 5." Some however there are, who rejoice in his coming: and as they only have learned to appreciate his worth, they only shall enjoy the full benefits he confers.

The words of the Evangelist will lead us to show,

***~~I. The contempt poured on Christ by the unbelieving world—~~***

What was said of him in that day is equally true in this:

***~~1. His own creatures "do not know him"—~~***

It was Christ who formed the universe: "the world was made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made, verse 3." He has moreover "been in the world" from the very beginning, "upholding it by his power, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)," and ordering everything in it by his superintending providence. Yet, before his incarnation, he was not known; neither yet now is he known as the Creator and Governor of the world. His name indeed is known, but he is considered only as a great prophet. The generality of those who doctrinally maintain his proper Deity, never practically realize the thought, that "by him all things exist, [Colossians 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.17)."

***~~2. His own people "do not receive him"~~***

The Jews were called "Christ's own," because he had separated them from all other people, brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and derived his human nature from the stock of Abraham, their father. Their very country was called "Emmanuel's land [Isaiah 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.8)."

But we are his in a still more appropriate sense; because he has bought us with his blood; and we have been baptized into his name; and profess ourselves to be his followers. Yet we "do not really receive him," any more than the Jews themselves did. We do not receive him in the character which he bears in the Holy Scriptures. He is:  
a *Prophet*to teach us,  
a *Priest*to atone for as,  
a *King*to rule over us and in us.

Do we receive him under these characters? We do not receive him for the ends and purposes for which he came He came:  
to justify us by his blood,  
to sanctify us by his grace, and  
to save us with an everlasting salvation.

Do we receive him for these ends?

Alas! what contempt is this which we pour upon him! We can shudder at the indignities offered him by the Jews; but we ourselves are no less criminal than the people who crucified and slew him: they through ignorance apprehended and executed him as a malefactor. We, with our eyes open, cry, "Hail, Master!" and betray him, [Matthew 26:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.49).

But that we may not continue to treat him thus, let us consider,

***~~II. The honor he confers on those who truly believe in him—~~***

A "receiving of Christ," and a "believing in him," are represented in the text as of precisely the same import. It is superfluous therefore to add anything more in explanation of the terms.

The benefits accruing from faith are the objects which next demand our attention. Unspeakable is the honor of becoming a child of God: yet to every one who believes in him, our blessed Lord gives,

***~~1. To bear this relation to God—~~***

"To the Jews belonged the adoption, [Romans 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.4)," as far as related to the external privileges of it. But we, on believing, "are made partakers of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)." We become the children of God as well by regeneration as adoption: yes, faith is at once the *means*, [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26), and the *evidence*, [1 John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.1), of our sonship with God. There is no interval of time left for us to give proofs of our sincerity, before God will acknowledge us as his: but the instant we believe in Christ, we are "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18)."

***~~2. To enjoy the privileges of this relation—~~***

The children of a stranger are not noticed by us, while our own children are admitted freely into our presence, and are the objects of our tenderest solicitude, our unremitted attention. We feed them, we clothe them, we protect them, we provide everything for them that is suited to our circumstances, and that will contribute to their welfare. In all these respects believers find God a Father to them. They can go into his presence, "crying, Abba, Father! [Galatians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.6)." and obtain from him whatever is necessary either for their support or comfort.

***~~3. To possess an inheritance worthy of that relation—~~***

Parents account it a duty to provide for the future maintenance of their children, and not merely for their present subsistence. With this view they lay up fortunes for them, which they are to inherit after the decease of their parents.

Similar to this is the provision made for those who believe in Christ. They are "begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3)." "Being sons, they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)." Nor shall they merely divide their Father's inheritance among them; but every one of them shall enjoy the whole, and have his happiness enlarged, rather than diminished, by the communication of it to others.

Learn then from hence,

***~~1. The folly of unbelievers—~~***

One would suppose, that, in calling them to believe in Jesus Christ, we urged them to make the greatest sacrifices, and to resign everything that could conduce to their happiness. But, on the contrary, we only invite them to "receive the greatest gift" which God himself is able to bestow, [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); to receive Jesus, in whom they will find all that they can possibly desire.

*We require them to surrender nothing but what will make them miserable; and to receive nothing which will not make them happy.*How unreasonable does their conduct appear when viewed in this light! If we were to offer them bags of gold, we would find them willing enough to accept as many as we could bestow. But *when we exhort them to accept Him who is of more value than ten thousand worlds*, they turn a deaf ear to our most importunate entreaties. See, you unbelievers, see your extreme folly! and remember, that the day is coming, when that rejection of Christ, in which you now glory, will become the ground of your bitterest lamentation!

***~~2. The unspeakable benefit of faith—~~***

There are many things which put a considerable difference between one man and another. The influence of wealth and dignity exalts some far above the level of their fellow-creatures. The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom has no less effect in elevating the characters and conditions of men. But all the distinctions in the universe do not avail to dignify a man so much as faith. Faith brings Christ into the soul, and puts the poorest of men into the possession of "unsearchable riches." Faith makes him, from a child of the devil, a child of God; from an heir of misery, an heir of glory. Faith elevates him:  
from death to life,  
from infamy to honor,  
from Hell to Heaven.

"Faith, even though it be small as a grain of mustard-seed," produces all these wonderful effects. Cultivate then, my brethren, this divine principle. Labor to have it in more continued exercise. Let Christ, the greatest object of faith, be more and more precious to your soul. Thus shall you be really the most distinguished characters on earth, and before long "inherit the kingdom prepared for you by your heavenly Father!"

***~~#1597~~***

***~~Christians Born of God~~***

***~~[John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13)~~***

"Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

IT is obvious, that there is at this day, even as there was in the days of Christ himself, a most essential difference between persons enjoying the same privileges and making the same professions. All the Jews professed themselves to be the people of the Lord; and Christ came to them, as bearing that relation to him. But they did not all receive him. The great majority of the Jewish nation rejected him: as it is said, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not: but to as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name."

Now, whence arose the difference between those widely-different persons? or from whence arises a similar difference among ourselves? The answer is given us in the words of my text: from whence I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. To whom Believers are indebted for all that they possess—~~***

This is marked with very peculiar precision:

***~~It is not from any creature whatever that they receive one spiritual blessing—~~***

It is "*not from blood*," or from natural descent, that they obtain anything. Ishmael was as much the child of Abraham as Isaac was; and Esau was the son of Isaac as much as Jacob: but their descent from holy parents was of no avail to transmit to them the grace of God. So, in after-ages, we are told, that "all were not Israel who were of Israel; neither because all were the seed of Abraham were they all children; that is, those who were the children of the *flesh*were not therefore the children of God; the children of *promise*alone being counted for the seed, [Romans 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.7-8)." So neither at this day does holiness flow in the blood of any person; nor can we become the Lord's people by virtue of our descent from the holiest of men.

"*Nor is it of the will of the flesh*," or by virtue of any power inherent in us, that we are made the Lord's people. All are equally "dead in trespasses and sins;" "nor can any man quicken his own soul."

"*Nor is it of the will of man*," or by any efforts of our friends, that we are made holy. We may adopt any person, whom we will, into our own family; but we cannot bring him into the family of God. Samuel, David, Hezekiah, would never have left their own children to perish, if they could, by any efforts of their own, have saved them: nor would Paul, who "had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart for his brethren's sake," have failed to communicate to them effectual aid, if he had had it at his own disposal.

***~~It is "of God alone" that any true Believer "is born"—~~***

"From God alone comes every good and perfect gift, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." *If saving grace is imparted to any of us, it is owing to the exercise of his sovereign will, and the operation of his effectual grace*. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. "Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18)." From all eternity did he select the objects of his choice, predestinating them to the adoption of children; that to all eternity they may be "to the praise of the glory of his grace, [Ephesians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-6)." All this is altogether irrespective of any works of theirs, past, present, or future, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). [Titus 3:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3-6).

In a word, that is true which the Apostle so strongly states in the Epistle to the Romans, and in such perfect conformity with the words of my text: "God has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and has compassion on whom he will have compassion. So, then, it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy, [Romans 9:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.15-16)."

***~~This being, for the most part, an unpalatable truth, I will not leave it until I have established it beyond the possibility of doubt—~~***

Behold the persecuting Saul; and trace, in all its steps, the conversion of his soul. Read the account of it in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high-priest, and desired of him (he was altogether a volunteer in this matter) letters to Damascus (a foreign country, not under the government of Judah), to the synagogues; that if he found any of this Way, whether they were men or women, (such was his humanity!) he might bring them bound to Jerusalem, [Acts 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1-2)." I ask, Could any one of his party be further off from conversion than he? "But, as he journeyed, he came near to Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light from Heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what will you have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man, [Acts 9:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.3-7)."

To him a man named Ananias was then sent by God himself, in these memorable words: "Go your way to him; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel, [Acts 9:8-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.8-15)."

Thus was he converted; the only one of all the party, as far as we know; he, the most embittered of them all, the ringleader of them all, the most unlikely of all. What a comment is this on the words of my text! and what an example of the truth contained in them! The Apostle himself, speaking of it to the Galatians, puts this very construction upon it all: "It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, [Galatians 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.15-16)."

Now precisely thus it is with every one that is brought to the faith of Christ: he is born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Nor is there one upon the face of the whole earth who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

Trusting that the point we have been endeavoring to establish is fully conceded to us, we will proceed to show,

***~~II. What encouragement we derive from that all-important consideration—~~***

Unspeakably encouraging are these two thoughts connected with it:

***~~1. All Believers have the same God to go unto for all that they can stand in need of—~~***

Had their divine life originated from man, either from themselves or others, they must have looked to man to carry it forward. But who that knows the weakness and mutability of man must not have trembled for them?

The friend, by whose kind attentions they had been converted, is absent on a journey, or is dead, and his help can no more be obtained.

Or the good dispositions which they themselves put forth, and by virtue of which they were brought to God, have been over-powered by temptation, and are no longer at their command. They feel a hardness of heart which they cannot remove, and a distraction of mind which they cannot fix. What then is to be done? The water has failed them, not in the channel merely, but at the fountain-head.

But let them reflect on God as the sole source of all that they have possessed, and then they will have this rich consolation in the midst of all their trouble and perplexity: 'Who is it that has brought me hitherto? and what did He find in me as an inducement to him to magnify his grace in me?

He saw nothing in me but sin.

He loved me only because he would love me.

He consulted nothing but his own sovereign will.

He chose me, and not I him.

He apprehended me, before he was apprehended by me.

Then to him will I look,  
in him will I hope,  
to him will I apply.

If "he was found of me when I sought him not, and made known to me when I inquired not after him," I may hope he will not turn his back upon me when I seek him; nor turn a deaf ear to me when I call upon him. My only ground of fear is, either that he is not *able*, or that he is not *willing*, to afford me the support which I stand in need of.

But of his *ability*how can I doubt, when I reflect on what he has already done for me, in quickening me when dead, and bringing me thus far on my journey heaven-ward?

Nor can I doubt of his *willingness*to help me, since the very first motions of my heart towards him were the gift of his sovereign grace, who "gave me both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Surely these thoughts must afford unspeakable encouragement to the believer under all the trials to which he can ever be exposed; while, on the contrary, if he had only a created power whereon to rely, he must on many occasions sink into utter despondency.

***~~2. The mercies they have received are to them a pledge of future blessings—~~***

This necessarily arises from the thought of God's electing love. For, why did he ever choose us? Was it to abandon us again?

Why did he ever quicken us? Was it to give us over to death again?

Why did he ever translate us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son? Was it that we might ultimately perish with an accumulated weight of condemnation?

He has told us, that the gift of "his Holy Spirit is a *pledge*of our heavenly inheritance." Now, a pledge is a part of a payment, and a pledge that the remainder shall in due time be paid: and, consequently, the work of grace already wrought in the hearts of his people is a pledge that he will carry on and perfect it within them. For "he is a God who never changes; and therefore we neither are, nor shall be, consumed." "His gifts and calling are without repentance or change of mind, on his part." "Whom he loves, he loves to the end."

The consideration of all this is a rich consolation to his believing people; as he has said: God, "willing more abundantly to show unto his people the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us." Hence the believer may be confident that "God will not cast him off;" but that, whatever he may have to contend with, "nothing shall ever be permitted to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

***~~But that this subject may not be made an occasion of any undue carnal confidence,~~***

***~~1. Let us inquire whether we have ever experienced this great change of the New Birth—~~***

It is evident there is a change to be experienced, which no created power can effect. Now then, I ask: Has any such change taken place in you? Think again: It is a change that depends not on your descent from Christian parents; a change which no endeavors of friends can ever accomplish, and which no efforts of your own can ever merit or effect: it is a new creation; and a work of God alone, as much as the creation of the universe itself!

Perhaps you will say, 'Tell me more distinctly wherein this change consists.' I will do so. It is "a receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ" as the gift of God to your souls; and "a believing in him" as your "all in all." To these is "the privilege of becoming the sons of God" assigned; and to these alone.

If, then, you are "born of God," these marks must, of necessity, be found in you. You have felt your need of a Savior; you have cried to God for mercy with your whole hearts: and you have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as "all your salvation and all your desire." Examine into this matter, my beloved brethren.

Here is the precise point of difference between the children of God and the children of the wicked one. Those who are born of the *flesh*only, may be moral and externally religious. But the child of God lives altogether by faith in the Son of God, receiving all blessings out of his fullness, and improving them all for his glory. This is a new birth: and were you as moral as Nicodemus himself, you must experience it, at the peril of your souls; and, except you be thus born from above, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God. I beg you, brethren, settle this well in your minds: for to those only who stand in this relation to their God is there "any inheritance among the saints in light."

***~~2. Let us endeavor to manifest the New Birth, by a suitable life and conduct—~~***

God had one only dear Son, whom he sent down from Heaven to sojourn upon earth. And the Scripture fully informs us what dispositions he exercised, and what conduct he pursued. And every one who is born of God will follow his steps, and "walk as he walked." He will "no longer walk according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." He will be no longer of the world, any more than Jesus Christ was of the world. He will rise above it. He will be crucified unto it; and regard it as a crucified object, that has no longer any charms for him, or any power over him.

His temperament, too, will be mortified and subdued. He will have the meekness and gentleness of Christ in his whole deportment: and since he is not able perfectly to attain the measure that was in Christ Jesus, he will aspire after it, and be satisfied with nothing less.

In a word, he will not live unto himself, but unto God, making it "his food and his drink to do the will of his Savior and Redeemer."

Now, then, brethren, this is the way in which you will live, if you are sons of God. "You will shine as lights in a dark world;" and "your light will shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day." Once somewhat attain this conformity to your Savior's image, and you will need no one to tell you whence it came, or by whose power it has been wrought. You will readily give all the glory to your God; and ascribe on earth, as you will to all eternity ascribe in Heaven, salvation to Him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!

***~~#1598~~***

***~~Incarnation and Character of Christ~~***

***~~[John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)~~***

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

IN treating on divine subjects, the mind should be impressed with holy awe: whenever we approach them, we would apply to ourselves the injunction given to Moses, and "pull off our shoes as standing upon holy ground." But of all subjects, that of the incarnation of our blessed Lord would be contemplated with the profoundest reverence. It has heights and depths, which even the heavenly intelligences themselves are unable to explore. "They are ever looking into it;" and to all eternity will behold in it fresh wonders to admire. But as "great as is this mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh," it cannot for one moment be questioned by any one who believes the Scriptures. The Evangelists, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, declare it; while, as "eye-witnesses of his Majesty," they attest it. Let us then with all humility of mind proceed to the consideration of the Apostle's testimony in our text; wherein we notice both the incarnation and the character of Christ.

***~~I. The incarnation of Christ—~~***

The person here said to be made flesh, is "the Word:" and it is manifest, that the Apostle speaks, as knowing that the persons to whom he spoke were familiar with the terms he used. At all events, we know from the whole preceding context, as also from the text itself, that the Logos or "the Word" is no other than "the only-begotten Son of God." We know that he existed from all eternity; that he was personally distinct from God the Father; that, nevertheless, he was truly and properly God; and, finally that, so far from being himself a creature, he was the Creator of all things, without any limitation or exception, verse 1-3. This is confirmed by [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7), [Colossians 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16-17).

This divine Person (the Second Person in the ever-adorable Trinity,) "was made flesh;" that is, he assumed our nature with all its sinless infirmities; and "was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted". In that state of humiliation he sojourned upon earth, as once he dwelt with his people in the wilderness; his Deity being veiled by human flesh, as formerly it had been by the Shechinah, the bright cloud, which, as the symbol of his presence, dwelt in the tabernacle first, and afterwards in the temple.

We stop not to enlarge upon this stupendous mystery; wishing rather to shorten our discussion, that we may have the more room for a practical improvement of it.

The Apostle, as we might well expect, after mentioning the incarnation of Christ, proceeds to notice,

***~~II. His character—~~***

In the primary sense of the passage, the terms "full of grace and truth" refer to the official character of Christ. He came to introduce a dispensation very different from that which had hitherto existed. The law which Moses had given to the Israelites "was a ministration of death and condemnation." And though the ceremonial law had held forth hopes of pardon and acceptance—yet it consisted merely in ritual observances, which in themselves were of no value, and which could never take away sin. But Jesus Christ came to proclaim pardon and peace to all; and was himself the substance, of which all the rites of Moses were only types and shadows.

View the *types*of every description; and there was not one which had not its accomplishment in him. View the *prophecies*, all of which were fulfilled in him. And at the same time view all the curses denounced by the moral law are turned into blessings, to all them who embrace his Gospel. Hence he is justly said to be "full of grace and truth."

We may properly include under these words the personal character of Christ. While all his instructions exactly accorded with the mind and will of God, his life was wholly without spot or blemish: he was "full of *truth*;" and "in him was no sin," "no deceit" whatever.

As to the "*grace*" that was in him, listen only to any of his discourses; hear his gracious invitations even to the chief of sinners; see him conversing with tax collectors and harlots, and allowing them to have the freest access to him; behold him "going about doing good," healing all who came to him, even hundreds in a day, and proclaiming to all of them the glad tidings of a free and full salvation: and then say whether he was not also full of grace, even like an overflowing fountain, "out of whose fullness all that believed on him might receive!"

If we needed any express testimony respecting his character, we have it from those "whose ears heard, whose eyes saw, and whose hands handled this Word of life." "They beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father."

They beheld his glory in his miracles "by which he manifested forth his glory."

They beheld his glory in his transfiguration.

They beheld his glory in the audible attestations which he repeatedly received from Heaven.

They beheld his glory in the perfections of wisdom, power, holiness, etc. which he displayed.

They beheld his glory finally in his resurrection and glorious ascension to the right hand of God.

They beheld his glory in all these things, shining as "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" veiled as his Godhead was from common eyes, they beheld in him a radiance, altogether suited to his august character.

***~~That we may not entertain these thoughts in a merely speculative manner, we would entreat you to "allow a word of exhortation"—~~***

***~~1. Inquire why Christ became incarnate—~~***

When we hear of such an astonishing event, methinks we would naturally inquire into the reasons of it. Surely there was some occasion for it; nay, we cannot conceive that it would take place without some urgent necessity. What then was that necessity? It was this. The whole human race had become guilty before God, and were no more able to restore themselves to the Divine favor than the fallen angels were. Is anyone disposed to doubt this truth? let him tell us then, why God's co-equal, co-eternal Son became incarnate. In vain will he seek for a reason, except (where Paul found it) in the lost state of man: "If one died for all, then were all dead." Know then, beloved, every one of you, that you are, in yourselves, lost and hell-deserving sinners; and that, if ever you be saved at all, it must be by the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God.

***~~2. Endeavor to obtain clearer views of his character—~~***

Though there are days expressly set apart for the consideration of the most important things relating to Christ, his formation in the womb, his nativity, his circumcision, his death, his resurrection, and ascension—yet few, very few, are in the habit of directing their attention to him. Instead of "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him," they scarcely think of him at all, or desire to receive any instruction respecting him. Hence that spiritual sloth which we behold on every side. But how different would be the state of men, if they once saw his glory, and had just views of his "grace and truth!" What "a gathering of the people to him" would there then be! How would they "flock to him as the doves to their windows!" O that God would take the veil from our hearts: And that we might so "behold his glory, as to be changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God!"

***~~3. Seek after a closer union with him—~~***

We may all be said to be united with him in some respect, because "we are partakers of flesh and blood, and he likewise has taken part of the same. But it is not his union with our nature that will save us, but our union with him; not his being one *flesh*with us, but our being "one *spirit*with him." We must exercise faith in him; and by means of that faith be united to him as branches to the vine, or as members to the head. Without this, we can never hope to receive out of his fullness those blessings which we stand in need of. *Let none of you then imagine that you have any saving interest in his salvation, until you are brought daily to live a life of faith upon him, and, through the influences of his Spirit, to devote yourselves unreservedly to his service.*

***~~4. Aspire after that which was the great end of his coming—~~***

We are constantly reminded that he came into the world, that those who believe in him might become sons of God, and enjoy everlasting life, [Galatians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.4-5). Shall we then be indifferent about that which brought him down from Heaven? How shall we bear the sight of him in the day of judgment, when we shall behold him in the very same body which he assumed on earth? How will that stupendous effort of his love, reproach and confound us! How shall we even wish that we had been permitted to perish like the fallen angels, instead of being left to contract that more aggravated guilt of sinning against a God in our own nature, and rejecting the salvation which he died to purchase for us! If we could suppose the Savior now capable of weeping, as once he did over the impenitent Jerusalem, methinks he must be now weeping over many of us, to see how his love has been disregarded by us, and that the only effect of it is to aggravate our condemnation. Let us awake from this fatal stupor; let us follow him in our hearts to those realms of glory where he now dwells; and strive incessantly for the attainment of that kingdom, where we shall be with him and like him forever!

***~~#1599~~***

***~~The Believer's Interest in Christ's Fullness~~***

***~~[John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)~~***

"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."

THE sacred writers never seem to be afraid lest they would exalt Christ too much, or ascribe to him a glory which did not properly belong to him. John in particular evinces a desire to magnify him as much as possible, and sets forth his perfect equality with the Father in as strong and perspicuous terms as language would afford. In the chapter before us he declares that Christ was not only co-existent with God before the world, but that he himself was God, the sole Creator of the universe; and in the words we have just read, he represents him as the only source of all good If verse 15 is considered as in a parenthesis, the connection between verse 14 and 16 will be clear and manifest.

That we also may be led to glorify his name, we shall show,

***~~I. What is that fullness spoken of in the text—~~***

Jesus Christ has in himself all the fullness of the *Godhead*, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). But this cannot be the fullness of which the Apostle speaks, because the Godhead is absolutely incommunicable to the creature. There is another fullness, which, according to the Father's appointment, dwells in him as our *Mediator*, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19), namely, **a fullness of everything which his redeemed people can stand in need of—**

Are we immersed in *darkness*, and sitting in the shadow of death? He is "the light of the world; and whoever follows him shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12)."

Are we inexpressibly *guilty*, and incapable of working out a righteousness for ourselves? He is "Jehovah our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)," and "the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes, [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4)."

Are we so depraved as to be "*altogether filthy and abominable*," and "insufficient of ourselves even to think a good thought?" He has within himself a fountain of grace to "cleanse us from our filthiness," and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1), [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14).

Are we exposed to severe *afflictions*and manifold *temptations*? In him is boundless compassion to sympathize with us, and irresistible power to support us, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15), [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18).

Thus He has in himself:  
a fullness of light to instruct us,  
a fullness of merit to justify us,  
a fullness of grace to renew us,  
a fullness of compassion to pity us,  
a fullness of power to save us,  
even "to the very uttermost" of all our needs, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

***~~This fullness, however, is not the same with that which resides in Jesus—~~***

There is a fullness with which believers are filled, even "all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19)."

But their fullness is widely different from his.

Their fullness is *limited*, being only "according to the measure of the gift of Christ, [Ephesians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7);" but his fullness is *unbounded*; "the Father gives not the Spirit by measure unto him," [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34).

Their fullness moreover is *derived*from him as its proper source and fountain; but his fullness is essentially *inherent*in him: "in him was life" originally, "as the Father has life in himself, even so has he given to the Son to have life in himself, [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.4); [John 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.26)."

Their fullness is for themselves alone; they have not any to communicate to others, [Matthew 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.9). His fullness is for the use and benefit of his Church: he possesses it, that, being Head over all, he may impart out of it, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23); [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10)."

Their fullness is *perishable*: though they are filled with it now, even as a house with light from the meridian sun, they would be destitute of it in an instant, if the communications of Heaven were intercepted or withheld: but his fullness is *immutable*and *eternal*—he is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever, [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8)."

That our inquiries about this fullness are not merely speculative, will appear, while we show,

***~~II. What interest believers have in it—~~***

***~~Every believer receives grace out of the fullness that is in Christ—~~***

To state the precise mode in which Jesus communicates his blessings to the soul, is impossible; nor while we remain strangers to so many things in nature, must we wonder, if there are some things in the dispensations of Grace which we cannot fully comprehend, [John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8). But the illustrations with which the Scripture furnishes us, are sufficiently clear for any purposes of useful instruction.

Christ is represented as a *vine*, of which we are the branches; and as a *Head*, to which we are united as the members. Now, as between these a vital union and constant communication are necessary, in order to the support of animal or vegetative life; so is it *by constant, though invisible, supplies of grace from Christ that the believer is enabled to maintain his spiritual life and vigor*,[John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16).

***~~He receives from Christ "grace upon grace"—~~***

The terms "grace upon grace" are variously interpreted; nor is it easy to ascertain which of the different senses is the true one. Some explain it of "the substantial grace of the Gospel," which all, both Jews and Gentiles, receive; "instead of the shadowy grace that was contained in the legal dispensation."

Others understand it as importing "grace upon grace," administered in copious and successive portions.

Others again think it means, "grace answerable to the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

And others, "grace upon grace sake."

Without determining which of these interpretations we would exclusively retain, we may observe, in reference to them all, that all those blessings which believers under the law enjoyed by means of types and ceremonies, we have conveyed to us in a fuller measure, and by the more simple channel of the written word: "Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly, [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10)."

Nor is there any intermission to the communications which we receive from Christ; they flow, like the waves of the sea, in constant succession and the richest abundance: whatever we have received, it will always be found true, that "he gives *more grace*, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6)."

His aim in bestowing on us such "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness," is, that he may transform us into his own likeness. And this is the effect which he produces: as a parent begets a child in his own likeness, or a seal stamps its own image on the wax impressed by it—so does the Lord Jesus communicate to us the very graces that there are in him, until we are "changed into his image from glory to glory, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

All this he does purely "of his own good pleasure," and for the honor of his Father's name. He sees nothing in us which can merit such unspeakable favors; "he is gracious because he will be gracious, and has compassion because he will have compassion, [Romans 9:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.15-16)." Nor must we forget that this is the privilege of "all," the Apostles themselves could draw from no other fountain; and it is alike open to all who will go to it, [John 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How glorious is Christ in himself, and how suited to our necessities!~~***

We admire the sun in the firmament because it pours out its blessings upon so many at once: but that can enlighten only half the globe at one time. Not so the glorious Person of whose fullness we speak: if every person in the whole creation would call upon him at the same moment, he would have no occasion to defer an answer to the request of any, for he is:  
all *eye*to see,  
all *ear*to hear,  
all *hand*to relieve!

In the very same instant he could replenish all, out of his own inexhaustible, undiminished fullness. Who then can hesitate a moment to pronounce him "God over all, blessed for ever?"

Is not this exactly such a Savior as we need? Are not we all emptiness and poverty, all weakness and misery? Is that description exaggerated which represents us as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17)." Let us adore our God for giving us such a Savior: and let us "live continually by faith in the Son of God," making him our "wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."

***~~2. How highly privileged are all true believers!~~***

The believer may survey all the fullness that there is in Christ, and claim it all as his own. All which Christ possesses in himself, all which he can do on earth, and all which he can bestow in Heaven, is the portion of every the weakest saint, according to the measure of the grace that is in him, and according to the capacity which he has for receiving more grace.

Every vessel of the sanctuary, from "the smallest cups to the largest flagons," shall be filled, [Isaiah 22:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 22.24); if any be straitened in the blessings they receive, they are "straitened in themselves, and not in him, [2 Corinthians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.12)." Blessed, thrice blessed are all that "hang upon him!"

But can the text be applied to all this assembly? Can we say respecting you, without exception, "Out of his fullness have we all received?" Would to God we could! Would to God that the graces, which were in Christ, were so conspicuous in you all, and were poured out upon you in such an abundant measure, that there might be no room to doubt of your union with him!

But let this matter be no longer in suspense: let us all go to the Fountain-head, and "draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation, [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.3);" let us "aspire after the blessedness of God's chosen people, that we may rejoice for ever in the gladness of his presence, and glory with his inheritance, [Psalm 106:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 106.5)."

***~~#1600~~***

***~~The Manifestation Which Christ Has Given of the Father~~***

***~~[John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)~~***

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known."

THE knowledge of God is the great source of blessings to mankind, but the heathen world was altogether ignorant of him, nor were the Jews themselves fully instructed concerning him: to make a full revelation of him to the world was a part of that work which was reserved for Christ himself; and this office he performed, to the unspeakable comfort of his Church and people. The Evangelist unites his testimony with that of John the Baptist in confirmation of this truth.

We shall inquire,

***~~I. What Christ has made known of the Father—~~***

God himself is invisible to the eye of sense, [1 Timothy 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.16); even Moses was permitted to see only his back parts, [Exodus 33:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.23). But Christ had a peculiar relation to the Father as "his only-begotten Son;" and a most intimate acquaintance with him, as being from all eternity, and at that very hour, "in his bosom." He has made known the Father to us, and declared,

***~~1. His nature—~~***

Mankind had gross conceptions of the Deity as a material Being: but Christ has assured us of his perfect *Spirituality*, [John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24).

Nor was the *Unity*of God clearly ascertained among the Gentiles: but Christ has left no room for doubt upon this subject, [Mark 12:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.29).

He has, moreover, revealed to us a *Trinity*of persons in the Godhead. He has affirmed in the plainest terms his own Oneness with the Father, [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30). He has spoken of the Holy Spirit as co-existing with himself and with the Father, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26), and has joined the Three together as equal in authority and honor, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19). Thus has he enabled us by faith to "see him who is invisible."

***~~2. His perfections—~~***

God had long since proclaimed his own *name*to Moses, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7); but Christ has afforded us more abundant discoveries of all his *attributes*. He has clearly shown us that:  
his *goodness*is unbounded, [Matthew 5:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.45),  
his *sovereignty*is uncontrolled [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26),  
his *power*is irresistible, [Matthew 26:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53),  
his *justice*is inflexible, [Matthew 26:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.42),  
his *mercy*is infinite, [John 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16-17),  
and his *truth*is inviolable, [Luke 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.17).

There is nothing relating to his Father, the knowledge of which could be at all serviceable to us, that he has not revealed, [John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15).

He did not however merely utter these things like the prophets of old:

***~~II. How he made him known—~~***

Christ had formerly spoken of God in and by the prophets, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11); but now he made the Father known in a different manner:

***~~1. By exhibiting a perfect pattern of him—~~***

He was himself an exact resemblance of the Father, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3), and in his conduct exhibited every perfection of the Deity, [John 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.29). Hence a sight of Jesus was, in fact, a sight of the Father himself, [John 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.7-9).

***~~2. By making known his counsels—~~***

Much of the Father's counsels had lain hidden from the foundation of the world, or had been very imperfectly revealed. Christ opened them to his hearers as they were able to bear them, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12). He made known God's intention to admit the Gentiles into his Church, [Matthew 8:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11-12). He assured us that the most abandoned of mankind would be cordially received the very instant he returned to God, [Luke 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.20); but that none of whatever character could be saved, unless they sought acceptance with God through his mediation, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). Thus by these declarations he has enabled us to attain a more perfect knowledge of the Father's mind and will.

***~~3. By exerting a secret energy on the minds of men—~~***

No man could know the Father unless Christ *revealed*him inwardly by his Spirit, as well as outwardly by the word, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27). His very disciples understood not until he opened their eyes, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45); nor can we attain to a true knowledge of God in any other way. The "word must come to us in power and in the Holy Spirit," or it will come in vain, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5); but, when applied by his Spirit, it shall teach us plainly of the Father, [John 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.25).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How glorious a person must Christ be!~~***

The description given of him shows his superiority above every created being. He is not the Son of God by creation, as the angels are, nor by regeneration and adoption, as men; but by an inexplicable generation, his "Only-begotten;" and, as well in his incarnate as in his pre-existent state, was continually "in the bosom of the Father, [John 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.13)." Nor was any other able or worthy to reveal the Father to us. Let us then entertain just conceptions of his worth and dignity, and manifest our delight in him as the saints in Heaven do, [Revelation 5:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.5-9).

***~~2. How precious ought the Scriptures to be to us!~~***

Job and David had but a small portion of the Scriptures in their hands: yet they valued them above everything in the world, [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12), [Psalm 119:72](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.72). How much more should we, who possess the sacred oracles entire! In these is recorded everything that Christ has declared; and by these we may be made wise unto salvation, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15). Let us then search them with diligence, and treasure them up in our hearts; nor let a day pass without our digging into those invaluable mines! [Proverbs 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.4).

***~~3. How inexcusable are those who are ignorant of God!~~***

It is to our shame that many of us are still ignorant of God, [1 Corinthians 15:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.34); we have not that knowledge of him that produces correspondent affections towards him.

But what excuse can we offer in extenuation of our guilt? Has not Christ declared the Father in order that we might know him? And is he not willing also to reveal him to us by his powerful energy on our souls? Some, doubtless, are more guilty than others in proportion as they have possessed means of instruction; but all will find the consequences of their ignorance most tremendous, [2 Thessalonians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8). Let all begin then to inquire after God with their whole hearts, nor rest until they have attained that knowledge of him which is life eternal, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3).

***~~#1601~~***

***~~Christ the Lamb of God~~***

***~~[John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29)~~***

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

*IN the general estimation of the world, men are reputed great who bear sway over their fellow-creatures, and are surrounded with pomp and splendor. But, with God, men are accounted great according as they possess a knowledge of his ways, and advance the ends of his government.*Hence we are told by our Lord himself that John the Baptist, a plain rustic man, clothed with coarse clothing of camel's hair, and a leather belt, and subsisting on the spontaneous produce of the wilderness, was the greatest of all men that had ever been born. And what was it that so exalted him, not only above all the monarchs of the mightiest empires, but above Abraham, or Moses, or David, or any other of the prophets? It was this: they had seen Christ only at a distance, and spoken of him only in dark prophecies; but John beheld him personally; and, having manifested him by an infallible sign from Heaven, pointed him out to others as that very Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world. Through the goodness of God, we may be as much exalted above him, as he was above others, if we behold Jesus in the character which is here assigned him; because the completion of his sacrificial work, together with the more perfect revelation of it, which we have in the New Testament, enables us to enter far more deeply into the mystery of redemption, and more fully to comply with the ends and designs of God in it, [Matthew 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.11). To forward therefore your truest advancement, we shall,

***~~I. Illustrate the character of our Lord as it is here described—~~***

Under the law there were lambs offered every morning and evening in sacrifice to God; and it is to these, and not to the Paschal Lamb, that John refers. They were to be of the first year, and without blemish, [Exodus 29:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.38-41). [Numbers 28:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.3-8): and by the continual offering up of them God was pacified, as it were, so that his wrath did not break forth to destroy his people on account of their daily transgressions.

Such a lamb was Christ: he was the Lamb whom all the others typified. He was truly without spot or blemish, [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19); and was offered on the altar of his cross, not merely for the good, but in the stead of sinners, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18). [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13). He was really a propitiatory sacrifice, inasmuch as he bore in his own body the curse due to sin, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24), and expiated all its guilt. As there was no variation of the daily sacrifices, but only a repetition of the same, so his *one offering*of himself is the sole cause of our acceptance with God: nor need that to be repeated, because the virtue of it extends from the beginning to the end of time; "he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8)." Nor is it the sin of one nation only that he takes away, but the sin of the whole world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2). He was eminently the Lamb of God, having been chosen to that office by God, and being accepted by him on our behalf in the discharge of it: He was "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)."

***~~II. Call more particularly your attention to him—~~***

***~~1. Let the careless sinner "behold" him—~~***

It is but too evident that those who live in the neglect of God and their own souls, know little of the evil and malignity of sin. But let such persons view the Son of God leaving the bosom of his Father, and assuming our nature to atone for sin: let them go to Gethsemane and behold him bathed in a bloody sweat through the agonies of his soul: let them follow him to Calvary, and hear him crying in the depths of dereliction, "My God, my God! why have you forsaken me!" Let them view him expiring under the curse and condemnation of the law; and then let them judge whether sin is so light and trivial an evil as they imagine? Let them bethink themselves, "if such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry, [Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31)." Let them behold him whom they have pierced, yes, whom they are daily crucifying afresh, and mourn, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). Let them know that what he suffered was for them; and that, if they are only willing to humble themselves for their iniquities, the benefits of his death shall extend to them. O that we might all so behold him, as to experience the efficacy of his blood in the removal of our sins!

***~~2. Let the self-righteous moralist "behold" him—~~***

How strange is it that any one who bears the name of Christ, would expect salvation by the works of the law! Why would that Lamb of God have come down from Heaven to expiate our guilt, if sin could have been taken away by means of any repentance or righteousness of ours? What truth could there be in the Baptist's assertion, if pardon were to be obtained in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ? Yes, for what end could so many thousands of lambs have bled upon the altar, but to show, that "without shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22);" and consequently, to lead the attention of all to that Lamb of God, that would in due time be offered on the cross?

Let such indignity then be no longer shown to the Savior of the world: but, as it is his office to take away our sin, let us renounce all self-righteous hopes, and trust entirely in his all-atoning sacrifice.

***~~3. Let the mourning penitent "behold" him—~~***

No sight under Heaven can be so welcome to a contrite soul as a sight of Jesus dying in the place of sinners! For, can we suppose, that he was appointed of God to make atonement for us, and that he executed his commission by dying on the cross, and that, after all, he is unable or unwilling to take away our sin? Was he designed to be an "atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world," and is there such malignity in the sins of any individual, that there is not a sufficiency in his blood to atone for them? Let us put away such disparaging thoughts of this Lamb of God: let us view him as infinite both in power and grace: let us listen to his encouraging invitation, "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22);" and let us, whatever be our state, trust in him, as "able to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him."

***~~4. Let the professor of godliness "behold" him—~~***

Well may you rejoice in the sufficiency of your Savior's merits; well may you glory in the security which his blood affords you. But remember, it is not the *guilt*of sin only that he removes, but the *power*of it also. The experience of the latter is our only evidence that we have experienced the former. "To redeem us from the love and practice of iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous for good works," was no less the intent of his death, than to deliver us from condemnation, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14), [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24)." While therefore we behold the Lamb of God as the ground of our hope, let us also behold him as a pattern for our imitation, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21). Let us follow his steps in all meekness and patience, in all purity and holiness: and let us convince the world that faith in Christ, so far from relaxing our zeal for good works, is the strongest incentive to the performance of them!

***~~#1602~~***

***~~Sight of Jesus, a Source of Joy~~***

***~~[John 1:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.45)~~***

"Philip found Nathanael and told him: We have found the one Moses wrote about in the *Law*, and about whom the *prophets*also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

A GENERAL expectation of the Messiah prevailed in Israel at the time of our Savior's advent: and when his forerunner, John the Baptist, was sent, very wonderful were the effects produced by his ministry. Though he did no miracle—yet he excited the attention of the whole Jewish nation. The sanctity of his character, and the power of his words, soon gained him the name of a prophet: and, as there had been no prophet in Israel for the space of about four hundred years, his labors were hailed as a return of God's love to his people; and persons of all ranks and orders flocked to him, and submitted to his baptism. Many began to suppose that he was the Messiah himself. That, however, he disclaimed: but he avowed himself to be the person spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah eight hundred years before, as sent of God to make known the Messiah, who was already come. Accordingly, he pointed out the Lord Jesus Christ to them, as "the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world, verse 29." This testimony of his, supported by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord Jesus at his baptism, gained credit with some.

We do not read that Jesus had yet wrought any miracle: but there was in his appearance what seemed amply sufficient to justify John's testimony respecting him; and those who were introduced to the knowledge of him were very desirous to impart to others the benefit they had received.

The first to whom the discovery of the Messiah was made, was Andrew; and he immediately communicated the glad tidings to his brother Peter. The next to whom Jesus made himself known was Philip: and he also, like Andrew, sought some friend to whom to impart this joyful intelligence; and, on finding Nathanael, endeavored to make him a partaker of his joy, saying, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

That you, also, may be partakers of the same joy, I will show,

***~~I. How amply the Lord Jesus Christ is described in the writings of the Old Testament—~~***

We may notice it,

***~~1. More generally in the writings of Moses—~~***

At the very beginning of the world, even while man was yet in Paradise, Moses informs us that the Messiah was foretold, as "the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head," and deliver men, though not without grievous sufferings to himself, from the fatal effects of Adam's transgression, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). He, at a period far distant from that, announces the Savior as a descendant of Abraham; and as one "in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, [Genesis 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.3); [Genesis 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.18).

Afterwards, he comes more fully to declare both the time of his advent, and the character he would sustain. He informs us that this Almighty Shiloh would come into the world before the power vested in the tribe of Judah would have departed from it. All the other scribes would long since have been reduced to a dependence on foreigners: but Judah's dominion would remain, and not be utterly destroyed, until the Messiah would have appeared in the world, [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.10). Moreover, he would come as a prophet; as "a prophet like unto Moses, [Deuteronomy 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18);" uniting in himself the offices of a Legislator, an Instructor, a Mediator, a Governor, a Savior.

Thus fully did Moses speak of him, independently of all the types which most accurately and minutely delineated the whole of his work and office.

***~~2. More particularly, in the writings of the prophets—~~***

Nothing can be conceived more ample or minute than the descriptions given of the Messiah in the prophetic writings. The family from which he would spring was restricted to that of David, [Psalm 132:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 132.11). [Acts 2:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.30). [Isaiah 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.1).

Yet he would not be born in a way of natural generation, but of a pure Virgin, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14).

The *place*of his birth was distinctly foretold: it would be Bethlehem: and not the Bethlehem in the land of Naphtali, but Bethlehem Ephratah in the land of Judah, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2).

The *time*also was fixed; for he must come while the second temple was yet standing [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1).

In his *appearance*, however, he would be so lowly, that it would raise many doubts among his followers, and prove a stumbling-block to many: he would be "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he would have no form nor loveliness in the eyes of those who beheld him, nor any beauty for which he would be desired, [Isaiah 53:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.2)."

In consequence of his having none of the attractions of carnal men, he would be despised and rejected by men—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: men would hide their faces from him, as one despised and held in no esteem, [Isaiah 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3)."

The *end*of his coming was also very fully declared: he would come to "bear the sins of many," "to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was to be upon him; and by his stripes we were to be healed, [Isaiah 53:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5-6)."

The *mode*in which he would conduct himself under all these trials, was also made known: "He would be led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so would he not so much as open his mouth, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7)."

The manner in which he would be put to *death*was to be by crucifixion, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10); though that was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment. And yet he would be exempted from that which was a customary attendant on it—the breaking of his legs: for, though pierced in his hands, his feet, his side, "not a bone of him was to be broken, [Exodus 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.46)."

Time would fail me to speak of the incidents which were foretold relative to his treatment while yet upon the cross:  
the insults they offered him, [Psalm 22:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.7),  
the giving him vinegar to drink, [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21),  
the casting lots on his vesture, [Psalm 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.18),  
their putting him to death between two malefactors, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12),  
the mode of his interment in the tomb of a rich man, though in his death he was numbered with the most abject of the human race. [Isaiah 53:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.9)

I will pass over these things, and only mention his *resurrection*, with the precise time it would take place, even the third day, before his body would have seen corruption, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10); and his *ascension*, also, to the highest heavens, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18); and his sending down of the *Holy Spirit* to testify of him, and to qualify his disciples for the work of propagating his Gospel, and establishing his kingdom in the world, [Joel 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.28-29).

Let all these things be considered; and you will say that there was such a body of evidence relating to the Messiahship of Jesus, as, in any considerate mind, must preclude a possibility of doubt.

The joy expressed at the finding of Jesus will lead me to show,

***~~II. What an acquisition He is to all who can truly say, "We have found him—"~~***

***~~A distant prospect of him, from the remotest ages, had been a ground of very exalted joy—~~***

We cannot doubt but that our first parents rejoiced much in the promise given them relative to "the seed of the woman;" and that Abel also felt rich consolation in his soul, while offering up a firstling of his flock, in token of his dependence on him. But in the case of Abraham we are not left to conjecture: we know infallibly, that he did foresee the day of Christ; and that, in the prospect of it, he greatly rejoiced, [John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56). Indeed the designation given him by the prophet, as "the Desire of all Nations, [Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.7)," clearly shows in what light he was regarded by those who had any insight into his proper character.

***~~At the time of his advent, and during his sojourning on earth, the discovery of him was deemed a subject of thankfulness—~~***

As announced by the angelic choir to the *shepherds*, we behold him in this view: "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, [Luke 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10-11)." And how his *Virgin Mother*gloried in him, you well know: "My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, [Luke 1:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.46-47)." In truth, all who waited for his coming, looked for him as "the Consolation of Israel, [Luke 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.25)." The delight expressed by Andrew and Philip, on their introduction to him, has been already noticed: and we cannot doubt but that all his Apostles, who so willingly left their all to follow him, found in him an ample compensation for all that they had lost, [Mark 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.28-29).

In truth, the experience of Zaccheus must have pervaded multitudes, while they listened to his words of grace, and felt, in their bodies and in their souls, the mighty working of his power, [Luke 19:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.5-6).

***~~The joy of his servants, after the publication of his Gospel, was yet greater, in proportion to the clearer discoveries which they had of his transcendent excellence—~~***

Behold the thousands on the day of Pentecost! What a change was wrought on them by the revelation of Christ to their souls! In the morning, their hearts were as full of all malignity as that of Satan himself: in the evening, you find them "eating their food with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41); [Acts 2:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46)." The people of Samaria, the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Jailor and his family—all, as soon as they heard of him, found the sure accompaniment of faith in him, [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8); [Acts 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.39); [Acts 16:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.34).

And what shall I say of the Apostle Paul? No man ever had so much to glory in as he: yet he accounted it all but loss for Christ; yes, he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, [Philippians 3:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.4-8)."

***~~And is there any difference in the experience of his servants at this day?~~***

None at all. I will appeal to all who know him. I will ask, Whether, in their estimation, he does not fully answer to "the treasure hid in a field;" and to "the pearl of great price," which every one who finds, will sell all that he has to purchase, [Matthew 13:44-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.44-46). What, though we behold him not with our bodily eyes, is our joy the less on that account? No! for "though we see him not, we love him. Yes, though now we see him not, yet, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving even now the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls! [1 Peter 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8-9)."

***~~In conclusion, I would ask two questions:~~***

***~~1. Have you attained this happiness yourselves?~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ has been fully made known among you, and "has even been set forth, as it were, crucified before your eyes, [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.1)." Observe on what slight evidence of his Messiahship his first disciples rejoiced. Neither he, nor John his Forerunner, had wrought any miracle: yet, because the Holy Spirit had descended in a visible shape upon him at his baptism, both John and others believed on him. They, moreover, could have but very indistinct views of his character; and yet they rejoiced in him.

How strong, then, should be your faith, and how exalted your joy, now that you have a full discovery of his glory; a discovery, which not even the angels in Heaven enjoyed, until it was given to them through the medium of the Christian Church, [Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10). Surely you have cause to be ashamed, if, amidst all your privileges, you remain ignorant of the Savior's love, or strangers to the salvation which he has obtained for you.

**2. Are you endeavoring to impart** **this happiness to others?**

You find not any in the days of old, who, having found the Savior themselves, did not endeavor to make him known to others. It is indeed impossible to feel our need of him, and to be experimentally acquainted with the blessedness of his salvation, and not to labor, according to our ability, to make others partakers of our joy. I know full well, that a zeal for his glory, and for the salvation of our fellow-men, will entail upon us a considerable measure of reproach, as enthusiastic, and "righteous overmuch." But why would we regard such a contemptible imputation as that?

It is remarkable, that Philip was under a mistake when he announced Jesus as "of Nazareth;" for he was not of Nazareth, but of Bethlehem. Yet because Philip supposed him to be of Nazareth, where he was not born, but had only sojourned, he willingly proclaimed his Master as of that place, notwithstanding the obloquy universally attached to it, verse 46.

So let us never be ashamed of Christ, because of the odium that attaches to a profession of his name. We would not indeed, by ignorance and inadvertence, put a stumbling-block in the way of any: but, if despised for the sake of Christ, we should welcome the shame, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it. No consideration whatever would intimidate us: but, having found "Christ precious to our own souls," we should "confess him openly before all," and commend him to all around us, as "all our salvation, and all our desire."

***~~#1603~~***

***~~The Evil and Cure of PREJUDICE~~***

***~~[John 1:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.46).~~***

And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

KNOWLEDGE is not given to any man for himself alone. As "a light is not put under a bed or under a bushel, but is set on a candlestick, that it may give light to those who are in the house;" so knowledge is imparted by God, in order that it may be rendered subservient to the good of those who are in intellectual or spiritual darkness. The example of those who were first called to attend upon our Lord is worthy of imitation in this respect.

*Andrew*, having been directed to Christ by John the Baptist, and having been convinced, by personal fellowship with Jesus, that he was indeed the Messiah, "he found his own brother *Simon*, and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus, verse 36-42."

The next day, *Philip*, who was of the same city as Andrew and Peter, was called to follow Christ: and "he, also, finding Nathanael, said to him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote of—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, verse 43-45."

In the mind of *Nathanael*, however, there existed a prejudice against Nazareth, as being the last place from whence a person of so exalted a character would ever proceed: and therefore he asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is generally supposed that this prejudice was called forth by Philip speaking of Jesus as belonging to Nazareth; when it was known that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem, [Matthew 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.4-6). But, had that been the case, I conceive that the answer would rather have been, "Can the Messiah come out of Nazareth?" and not, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" For, though Bethlehem was to give birth to the Messiah, it was not the only city from whence any good could proceed.

I rather imagine, therefore, that it was to the general bad character of Nazareth that Nathanael referred; intimating, that, so far from giving birth to the Messiah, it was scarcely possible that any good whatever would proceed from it. This prejudice was not altogether without foundation; for Nazareth was deservedly infamous even in Galilee, the whole province of which was considered as less honorable than any other part of Judea, [John 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.52). The conduct of the Nazarenes, both at the first opening of our Lord's ministry there, [Luke 4:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.22-23); [Luke 4:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.28-30), and on a subsequent occasion, [Matthew 13:54-56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.54-56), clearly showed that they were a blind and wicked people. Yet that was no reason why nothing good would come forth from thence. And, if this prejudice had not been corrected, it might have terminated in a continued ignorance of Christ, and a consequent lost of his salvation.

Let me then, from this history, show you,

***~~I. The evil of prejudice—~~***

Prejudice is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man: and it is productive of most injurious effects,

***~~1. To those who are the objects of prejudice—~~***

Prejudice has always some ground. It may indeed be founded on error, as well as on truth: but the very existence of it supposes that the person exercising it beholds, in his own opinion at least, something blameworthy in him who is the object of it: and it usually operates most forcibly in those who have taken the least pains to ascertain the truth.

Nathanael no sooner heard of the Lord Jesus as belonging to Nazareth, than he concluded, from that very circumstance, that he could not be the true Messiah: and he even appealed to Philip, whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth; insinuating, that on so plain a point, there could not be any reasonable doubt: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Now here was extreme injustice done to the people of that city: for though the majority of them might be worthless, there might be some as estimable characters as any in Israel. But it is in this way that prejudice condemns both things and persons in the mass.

*Nations*will entertain these very notions respecting each other; so that the belonging to a rival nation shall be sufficient to make a person our enemy, though we are utter strangers to his character.

The same malignant principle operates also very strongly between different *societies*belonging to the same nation. As, in Catholic countries, rival orders of men hate each other; so even in this Protestant land, where greater liberality might be expected to prevail, churchmen and dissenters are ready to question whether almost any measure of truth or piety be in the party to which they are opposed.

It is scarcely necessary to say how strongly this unhallowed disposition prevails against *individuals*. A man may have embraced sentiments which are deemed strict and precise; and may, in conformity to them, be living a more holy, mortified, and self-denying life than others around him; and this shall be quite sufficient to render him odious and contemptible to all around him. From that moment, every one shall feel himself at liberty to speak evil of him; and nobody shall dare to defend him. All he says, and all he does, shall be an occasion of offence.

John the Baptist, because he was of secluded and mortified habits, was said "to have a devil." Our blessed Lord, because he was of more "easy and social habits," was called "a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber."

And so, if we be truly pious, it will be done to us: whether we "play the flute or mourn," we shall find no sympathy, but be alike objects of condemnation; everything being viewed through the medium of prejudice, and therefore deemed extravagant and absurd.

Every one who will follow the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity shall surely find that he has this cross to bear: he shall be despised, and hated, and "have all manner of evil spoken against him falsely, for Christ's sake. In truth, the real Christian does not live under the same laws as others; nor must he expect that measure of protection that is accorded to other men. He may be traduced, insulted, injured by all; and no one will take his part: while, if he were to act, in one single instance, towards others, as every one feels at liberty to act towards him, the mouths of all would be opened against him, and a fire would be kindled which would not readily be extinguished. So true is that saying of the prophet Isaiah, "He who departs from evil, makes himself a prey."

***~~2. To those who indulge prejudice—~~***

Prejudice blinds the mind to truth, and utterly indisposes us for the reception of it. A person under its influence can see no good in him whom it condemns, and will listen to nothing that shall tend to the vindication of his character.

We have a remarkable illustration of this, in the conduct of the people of Ephesus. When they perceived that the preaching of the Apostle Paul was likely to lessen the veneration of many for the goddess whom they worshiped, they set the whole city in an uproar: and when a person named Alexander, stood forth to vindicate him, the people, as soon as they saw that he was a Jew, instead of listening to a single word that he had to say, all, for the space of about two hours, cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians! [Acts 19:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.34)." Thus they shut out all means of conviction, and kindled in their own bosoms the keenest resentments against those who sought only to make known unto them the way of life and salvation.

In the common affairs of life, men do not act thus. Our blessed Lord placed this matter in its true light, in answer to those who in the same perverse way rejected him: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say there will be rain, and it comes to pass. And when the south wind blows, you say there will be warm weather: and it is so. You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the earth, and of the heavens; and how is it that you discern not this time? [Luke 12:54-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.54-57)."

*The truth is, that if prejudice once blind the eyes, nothing whatever will suffice to remove it*: and men will rather ascribe the miracles of our Lord to Satanic influence, than acknowledge the plain and obvious inference that would be deduced from them. Thus, while this hateful disposition vents itself against the most deserving objects, it inflicts the deadliest wound on him who indulges it; inasmuch as it calls forth into activity all his basest passions, and shuts up his soul in impenetrable darkness.

Happily for Nathanael, he had a friend, who, if not able to satisfy all his doubts, was capable of giving him such advice, as, if duly followed, would issue in the removal of them.

In this advice of Philip we shall see,

***~~II. The remedy for prejudice—~~***

*Inquiry*is the obvious remedy to be applied, in all cases. To all then, who are under the influence of prejudice, I would say, "Come and see!"

***~~1. To the profane Atheist—~~***

I will grant that your prejudices are not wholly destitute of some plausible grounds whereon to stand. There are in the world many things which seem calculated to impress the mind with an idea that there is no controlling Providence to protect the good, and to punish the workers of iniquity. It does appear strange that the ungodly would be permitted so to triumph, and that the righteous would be so exposed to their malignity. But, while I grant that these things may prove a stumbling-block to the inconsiderate, I must say, that, on a closer inspection, there will be found such evidence of a Divine agency in the world as will be abundantly sufficient to remove all doubts upon the subject.

If we look at the earth, we cannot conceive that it came into existence by a fortuitous concussion of atoms: nor, if we survey the heavenly bodies, and trace them in their various courses, can we imagine, that they are left to themselves, without anyone to uphold them in their orbits. If we behold a *watch*, or any other complicated machine, we never suppose that it made itself, or that it needs not the superintendence of an intelligent agent to regulate its motions. How much less, then, can we contemplate the infinitely diversified objects of the whole creation, all preserved in their order for thousands of years, and not confess a creating power, and a superintending Providence? Only let any man "come and see," and his doubts will vanish, like the mist before the noon-day sun.

***~~2. To the proud infidel—~~***

You, too, have specious reasons for disbelieving the Holy Scriptures. There are many things which you cannot comprehend in the sacred volume. But is this a just ground for denying its divine authority? Are there not truths in human sciences which surpass your comprehension? Why, then, may you not expect to find such in a revelation from God?

Look at the evidences of our holy religion: see whether the *prophecies*, so numerous, so minute, so incapable of being accomplished by any collusion or confederacy whatever, do not determine, beyond a possibility of doubt, that they were inspired by an omniscient and Almighty God.

Mark the *miracles*, too, by which the doctrines both of the Old and New Testament were confirmed; and say whether they do not, of necessity, commend themselves as of divine origin. Only "come and see" with a candid mind, and you shall be fully satisfied that the Scriptures are indeed the word of God.

***~~3. To the self-justifying moralist—~~***

You persuade yourself, that because we deny to *works*the office of justifying the soul before God, we discourage the performance of them; and that, consequently, the doctrine which we preach, of salvation by faith alone, cannot be true. But your conclusions are erroneous altogether. If you will but examine for yourselves, you shall find, that no other way of salvation than that which the Gospel has proclaimed is suited to fallen man; nor will any other be found worthy of Almighty God. His *justice*must be honored, as well as his *mercy*; and it is only by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ that its demands are, or can be, satisfied.

And as to the performance of good works, respecting which you are so jealous, look and see whether any person, from the foundation of the world, ever exhibited a brighter pattern of morality than Paul; who yet said, "I desire to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is from God by faith in Christ." Only be candid in your examination of this point, and it shall force itself upon your mind with an evidence that is irresistible.

***~~4. The licentious worldling—~~***

'How can that be a source of happiness, which would rob me of all that I have ever delighted in, and constrain me to mortify my flesh; and, after all, would subject me to the contempt and hatred of all my friends?' This appears to you a difficulty that cannot be removed. But I would say to you also, "Come, and see!" Try what religion will really do for you: see whether its ways be not ways of pleasantness and peace: see whether there be not a more refined pleasure arising from self-denial for the Lord's sake, than in all the self-indulgence that you ever experienced. Come, and see what happiness there is in communion with God, in the testimony of a good conscience, and in a prospect of a blessed immortality. I will venture to affirm, that if you give the experiment a fair trial, *you shall find incomparably greater happiness in God than you ever found in the gratifications of sense.*

***~~Learn then, from this subject, how to act,~~***

***~~1. In reference to your own prejudices—~~***

Every man living is more or less influenced by this principle of prejudice. Piety itself will not altogether exempt us from it. Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed;" yet, though "without deceit," he was not without prejudice: and therefore it befits us all to be open to conviction, and to be willing to have our prejudices removed. We should never decline using the means of information that are open to us; but should be intent only on ascertaining the truth. Whether our prejudice refer to persons or things, we should find a real delight in having our views rectified, and should spare no pains to acquire a more perfect way.

In this point of view, the Bible Society has rendered most important services to the Church of Christ. It has brought together multitudes who were once, through the force of prejudice, alienated from each other; and has diffused among them a principle of mutual love. And if we were to cultivate more of a friendly spirit with those of the Jewish nation, it is highly probable that our mutual animosities would be soon abated, and that an easier way might be opened for them into the fold of Christ. At all events, *on our own part, prejudice should cease; and on every subject, and towards every man, our minds should be unbiased, and our souls be intent only on rectitude and truth*. We should "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)."

***~~2. In reference to the prejudices of others—~~***

*Be not offended if you see in others, the infirmities which you feel in yourselves.* Be careful, too, not to irritate or despise those who labor under them: but, with kindness and gentleness, endeavor to guide them to the knowledge of the truth.

In this respect, as in all others, our blessed Lord must be our example: "Learn of me," says he; "for I am meek and lowly in heart;" that is, I can bear with your ignorance, and be content to administer instruction in a way suited to your capacity.

Philip's conduct, too, was worthy of imitation: for, though fully convinced himself, he did not begin to argue and dispute with Nathanael, but invited him rather to examine and judge for himself. Thus we also should act: we should adopt such methods of instruction and persuasion as are most likely to remove the veil that is on our brother's heart; and should labor, not so much for the establishment of our own dogmas, as for the best interests of his soul. And, if we find any persons disposed to hold fast their delusions, we would "in meekness instruct them, if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth [2 Timothy 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25)."

***~~#1604~~***

***~~An Israelite Indeed~~***

***~~[John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47).~~***

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

IT is encouraging to reflect that *there are many whose hearts are upright before God, while, from a variety of circumstances, they are unknown to the world*. Nathanael was not yet evangelized; nor had he attained that eminence in the divine life whereby he was afterwards distinguished, yet was he among the Lord's "hidden ones," and justly entitled to the eulogy passed upon him in the text. We shall,

***~~I. Consider the character of Nathanael—~~***

If ever the character of any human being deserved particular attention, surely that must, which was drawn by our Lord himself. Let us notice,

***~~1. The terms in which our Lord's testimony is expressed—~~***

The whole body of the Jews were called *Israelites*as being descended from Jacob, to whom the name of Israel was given by God himself. But we are taught to distinguish between those who were "Israelites after the *flesh*," and those who were Israelites in a higher and more appropriate sense; for "all were not Israel who were of Israel." *Only those who partook of Jacob's spirit, were numbered among his spiritual seed:*and hence it was that Nathanael, being a heavenly-minded man, and a wrestler with God in prayer, was called "an Israelite indeed."

Jacob was represented as "a plain man," in opposition to his brother Esau, who was "a cunning man:" and though on two occasions his conduct was far from corresponding with this character, yet, on the whole, he was a person of guileless simplicity: and it is in reference to this that Nathanael is further said to be, a man "in whom was no deceit."

***~~2. The facts by which that testimony is confirmed—~~***

The first evidence which we have of Nathanael's integrity, is**his openness to conviction**. He labored under the prejudices which obtained through the whole of his nation, and thought that nothing good could proceed from Galilee: but when invited by Philip to "come and see" for himself, he instantly complied, in order that he might form a right judgment respecting the momentous question that was then agitated, the Messiahship of Jesus. Such candor uniformly characterizes the true Israelite.

The next thing we notice in him is, **his readiness to follow his convictions**. What were the particular circumstances that had taken place under the fig-tree, whether Nathanael had been adverting to Jacob's vision, or had been praying for divine instruction relative to the expected Messiah, or indeed what had been the precise workings of his mind—it is not possible for us to say. But Jesus intimated to him that he knew all that had passed there, and had approved the workings of his mind. This declaration, accompanied with a decided testimony respecting his character, convinced Nathanael that he was the true Messiah; and drew from him an unequivocal acknowledgment of his divine mission. Such a readiness to receive the truth is a further ingredient of guileless integrity.

We have yet another proof of his sincerity in **his determination to approve himself to God at all events**. He could not but know that the prejudices he had imbibed, were common to the whole nation; and that to become an open follower of Jesus would expose him to much obloquy and contempt. But he would not confer with flesh and blood: having found the truth, he embraced it boldly; and from that moment became a stated attendant on his Lord. This, above all, displayed the uprightness of his soul: and this decided conduct, *this prosecuting of his duty without any fear of consequences, is the surest test of radical and unalloyed integrity.*

If our Lord's testimony stood in need of confirmation, we could not wish for more ample proof of its truth than arises from the facts that are here adduced.

After such a delineation of Nathanael's character, we may well,

***~~II. Commend it to your imitation—~~***

It is not to gratify our curiosity, but to edify our souls, that so many bright examples are set before us in the Scriptures. Paul exhorts us not only to be followers of him, but also to "mark those who walk after his example." That you may be induced to imitate the example now set before you, consider,

***~~1. The excellence of such a character—~~***

The righteous is deservedly said to be "more excellent than his neighbor." To compare a guileless person with one that is sensual or profane, would be to compare "light with darkness, and Christ with Belial." Let us therefore institute the comparison rather between a *true Israelite*, and the most moral and specious of those who retain any allowed deceit: and then the superiority of a Nathanael will appear in its true light.

The *hypocrite*may have clearer views of divine truth, and appear in many respects to greater advantage before men, but he is radically a lover of sin, and a vassal of the wicked one. While the *guileless*person is transformed into the divine image, and is a friend, a favorite, a child of God.

Shall not this consideration operate upon us? Can we need any other inducement to imitate the glorious character before us?

***~~2. The importance of attaining such a character—~~***

The time is shortly coming when all of us must appear in the presence of Christ: and, as he discerned the character of Nathanael so as to pronounce upon it with infallible certainty, so does he now weigh our spirits, as in a perfect balance, in order that he may give to every man his proper portion of censure or approval.

Of those who were truly upright he will say, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom was no deceit: I saw him under the fig-tree; I heard his groans; I saw his wrestlings with God in prayer; I treasured up his tears in my vial; and I testify before all, that his heart was right with God.'

But of those who harbored any *secret iniquity*he will say, 'Behold a man that was called an Israelite, but he was in reality a dissembler with God: he had "a name to live, but he was really spiritually dead:" I saw him under the fig-tree; I marked the *secret lusts*which he harbored in his heart, and the allowed neglects of which he was habitually guilty: he would follow his convictions, and devote himself to me as far as his ease, his honor, and his interests would permit—but no further: and therefore, *on account of his secret reserves, and his allowed deceit, he must take his portion with the hypocrites and unbelievers*.'

Who can reflect on the consequences of that decision, and not desire so to live that Jesus may bear a favorable testimony on his behalf?

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who do not so much as profess to be true Israelites—~~***

You boast perhaps that, whatever you are, you are not hypocrites: but, though you make no profession of religion before men, the very calling of yourselves Christians implies that you acknowledge yourselves bound to follow the steps of your Divine Master. *Compare then your conduct with your obligations*, and think what your doom must be in the day that he shall judge the world!

***~~2. Those who are Israelites, but not in truth—~~***

If it were as easy to deceive God as it is to maintain a blameless appearance before man, we would be less anxious about your eternal interests. But *the Lord Jesus searches the heart and tries the thoughts; and will judge men to happiness or misery, according to the real state of their souls*. We are told that he who commits sin is of the devil; and, that whoever is born of God does not practice sin. This must certainly imply, that if we have any allowed deceit, we are not true Israelites, nor can we have our portion with them. O lay to this to heart; and seek "that you may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless,"

***~~3. Those who are Israelites indeed—~~***

The ungodly world may brand you with the name of hypocrites and deceivers; but the Lord Jesus looks upon you with pleasure and delight, and will now in your hearing, as it were, and before long in their hearing also, bear testimony to your integrity, to the unspeakable comfort of your souls. O be careful to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man.

Remember that, as your comfort depends on the preservation of your integrity, so does his honor.

The ungodly may do what they will, and no reflections are cast upon religion: but if a *true Israelite*does anything unworthy of his profession, the Gospel itself, yes, and the Lord Jesus Christ also—he is condemned for it. Cut off occasion then from those who seek occasion to calumniate the way of truth; that while you have the comfort of your integrity, God may be glorified by it, and his enemies be put to silence.

***~~#1605~~***

***~~The Water Turned into Wine~~***

***~~[John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.11).~~***

"This beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

AFTER thirty years of privacy, the time was come for our Lord to enter on his public ministry. He had received both visible and audible testimony from Heaven, and had been pointed out by his forerunner, John the Baptist, as "the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world." Now at a marriage feast he begins in a private and unostentatious way that series of miracles to which he afterwards appealed as incontrovertible proofs of his Divine mission. Who the parties were, whose nuptials were here celebrated, we know not: but, from the peculiar interest which the mother of Jesus took in accommodating the guests, we think it highly probable, that they were some friends or relatives of her own. But, however that might be, our blessed Lord made that feast the occasion of working his first public miracle, and thereby of manifesting forth his glory.

The two points for our consideration are,

***~~I. The manifestation which our Lord here gave of his glory—~~***

***~~He, by a miraculous power, turned water into wine—~~***

It is probable, that, when it was known that Jesus was to be at the feast, more guests came than had in the first instance been expected. Hence, after a time, the wine which had been provided, was exhausted. On this account the mother of Jesus intimated to him, that this would be a good occasion for exercising that miraculous power which she knew him to possess. But this was a liberty which she was not authorized to take: and therefore our Lord gently and respectfully reproved it; saying, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come. *Woman*, was as respectful a term as any he could use. Persons of the highest distinction were so addressed." From the direction which she immediately gave to the servants, it is evident that she did not consider the answer as a refusal, but only as an intimation that the time and manner of displaying his own glory must be left altogether to him. (We may here observe, by the way, that, if she was reproved for offering him advice when he was on earth, what shall we think of the Papists, who pray to her to issue her commands to him, now that he is on his throne in Heaven?)

At the season he saw fit, he ordered the servants to fill with water six large water-pots, which had been placed there with a view to some purifications or ceremonial washings, and they were immediately "filled to the brim." He then ordered the servants to draw out from those vessels, and to carry the cup to the governor of the feast. The master of the banquet, unconscious of the miracle that had been wrought (which, however, the servants who had drawn the water knew), commended highly the superior flavor of this wine, and thus unintentionally proclaimed the miracle to the whole company. It was a miracle that did not admit of any doubt: for the vessels, being all filled to the brim, did not admit of any wine being mixed with it: and all the servants were vouchers for the miracle, and witnesses that no collusion had been practiced.

***~~By this miracle he manifested his divine glory—~~***

By it he demonstrated his sufficiency for the work he had undertaken: for after that act of omnipotence and love, what was there that he either could not, or would not, effect in behalf of those who trusted in him? Whatever might be their needs for the *body*, he could supply them in an instant; or, whatever might be their necessities for their *souls*, he could make ample provision for them in the hour of need. And if in this instance he had wrought a miracle to give them what might easily have been dispensed with, what would he not do for them which was essential to their well-being either in time or in eternity?

He might indeed withhold for a season, what they, through impatience, were too eager to obtain: but he would grant to all his believing people whatever would be needful for them, only reserving to himself the times and the seasons of imparting his blessings, together with the manner and the measure which his own wisdom would see most conducive to their welfare.

Such being the manifestation which he here gave of his glory, let us notice,

***~~II. The effect produced by it on the minds of his disciples—~~***

Nathanael had been convinced by one proof of Christ's omniscience, and exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel! [John 1:47-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47-50)." Thus this one miracle, which displayed his omnipotence, was sufficient to confirm and establish the faith of his disciples: "He manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him:" that is, they were filled with a deeper conviction of his Messiahship; they were stirred up to place a more entire affiance in him as their Savior; and they were quickened to surrender up themselves more fully and unreservedly to his service. This was right; this was what the occasion called for, and what the miracle which they had seen, fully justified John afterwards refers to this miracle, as having made a deep impression on all their minds, [John 4:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.46).

Now then this is the effect that would be produced on our minds:

***~~1. We should receive him as the true Messiah—~~***

We cannot wish for clearer evidence than that which the miracles of our Lord afford us. Our blessed Lord appeals to them as decisive and incontrovertible proofs of his divine mission, and consequently of the truth of all that he spoke, and of the efficacy of all that he either did or suffered for the redemption of the world. Let no doubt then ever rest on your minds in relation to this matter: but say with Peter, "We believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God! [John 6:69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.69)."

***~~2. We should place full trust in him under that character—~~***

"Our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption," should be sought in him alone. We should see "all fullness of spiritual blessings treasured up in him for us," and we would "receive them daily out of his fullness," even "as a branch receives its sap from the vine," or a member of our body its energies from the head. "The life which we now live in the flesh we would live altogether by faith in the Son of God, as having loved us and given himself for us." The whole world would be to us as nothing in comparison with him; and we would "determine to know nothing," either as an object of confidence or as a ground of glorying, "but Jesus Christ and him crucified."

***~~3. We should surrender up ourselves entirely and unreservedly to his service—~~***

This is what all his disciples did. Matthew left his receipt of custom, and Peter and John their nets, and all his followers their respective vocations, to follow him, and consecrate themselves to him. And this is what we also must do: we must "deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily for him, and forsake all for him;" "not counting even life itself of any value," if it may be sacrificed for him, and to the honor of his name. This is what the whole of his mediatorial work calls for at our hands; and this is no more than "a reasonable service" for every one of his redeemed people to render to him.

From a larger view of what passed on that occasion,

***~~I would yet further suggest two useful hints:~~***

***~~1. It is our privilege to seek, and to enjoy, the presence of the Lord Jesus in our social meetings—~~***

Religion is far from encouraging a morose seclusion from society, or from prohibiting even occasional festivities, provided they be conducted with prudence and sobriety. Doubtless what we call conviviality may easily be carried to excess: but I conceive that the very circumstance of our Lord's working his first miracle at a wedding feast, and of his supplying of more wine for the use of the guests during the remainder of the feast. We are not to suppose that our Lord administered to excess. But, that our liberty may not be turned into licentiousness, we would always invite the Lord Jesus Christ, if I may so say, to be a guest with us: for he has promised to "come unto us, and to sup with us, and to manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world, [John 14:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22-23). [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)."

Need I say how sweet our feasts will then be? Who that has ever enjoyed Christian society in a truly Christian way, has not found an infinite distance between the conviviality of the ungodly world and the refined enjoyment of heavenly converse? The very best of worldly fellowship is but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot," where the blaze that brightens the scene for a few minutes, soon expires in offensive smoke.

But where the Lord Jesus Christ grants his presence, the savor of the feast still abides upon the soul, and affords reiterated gratification in the recollection of it. Such seasons, however long since enjoyed, will afford us comfort even in a dying hour; so truly is it found on all occasions, that our blessed Savior gives us the best wine last. Let Jesus be present at our feasts, and there will be in them neither levity nor excess; but our very festivities, instead of contributing to sensuality, shall be made to administer to the good of our souls.

***~~2. If we will leave our concerns to his disposal, he will surely glorify himself at last—~~***

If at any time our necessities are at all urgent, we are too apt to dictate to our Lord as to the time and manner of our relief. But such presumption, whoever may be guilty of it, will surely meet with a rebuke. It is sufficient for us to know that Jesus is both *able*and *willing*to supply our every need, and that he has pledged himself, that "those who seek him shall lack nothing that is good." Who has not already on many occasions found, that his own impatient desires, if gratified at the time, would have proved injurious to him, and that the very delay of which he once complained, has proved of most essential service to his soul?

Let us then habitually commit our concerns to our all-wise and all-gracious Lord, and look to him to glorify himself in his own time and way. Then shall we have reason, before long, to say, "He has done all things well!" and shall find at the last, that our very straits have contributed to his honor and our own eternal good!

***~~#1606~~***

***~~Buyers and Sellers Driven out~~***

***~~[John 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.17)~~***

"His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for your house will consume me."

[Psalm 69:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.9) "for zeal for your house consumes me"

WE are apt to think that we receive no benefit from what we read or hear, unless it produces an immediate effect upon us: but the word, like seed, often springs up long after it has been sown. God often brings it to our minds by some great and singular occurrence: and then we see a beauty and importance in it which we never saw before.

The Apostles themselves forgot many things which were spoken to them by our Lord, until the Holy Spirit brought them to their remembrance. They had often heard this Psalm read in their synagogues; but probably never reflected on the passage before us, until our Lord's conduct suggested it to their minds, and cast the true light upon it.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The circumstances which brought these words to their remembrance—~~***

Our Lord, for the first time after his entrance on his public ministry, went up to Jerusalem at the Passover. There he found that the temple of God was scandalously profaned; and he immediately set himself to rectify the abuses that were there tolerated—

The outer court of the temple was appropriated to the use of the Gentiles: but many of the Jews had rendered it a place of merchandise. There they exposed for sale the cattle that were proper to be offered in sacrifice, and stationed themselves with tables of money for the accommodation of the strangers who might want to exchange their foreign coin. Every one had need for a half shekel for the service of the temple, [Exodus 3:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.13-16). Thus they insulted the Gentiles and greatly dishonored God.

To correct this evil, our Lord exerted his divine authority. He drove out the cattle, and ordered the doves to be removed. He overturned the tables of money, and commanded all the traders to depart; nor did any of the people dare to oppose his sovereign command.

This act of his could not fail of attracting universal notice:

It manifested,

***~~1. His holy indignation against sin—~~***

Such a profanation of the temple was indeed a grievous sin: nor could his righteous soul behold it without the utmost abhorrence. His anger was justly excited by the indignity offered to his Father. To have felt it less, would have been a crime; and to have refrained from manifesting it, would have been a mark of cowardice. We indeed are not called to manifest our displeasure in the same authoritative way; but we would never behold sin but with pain and grief; nor can our indignation be ever sinful, provided it be directed against sin as its object, and be felt only in proportion to the malignity of the offence committed. We can never err, if we follow the example of those eminent saints, [Psalm 119:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.53); [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136); [Psalm 119:158](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.158); [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.1).

***~~2. His courageous zeal for God—~~***

The priests themselves were accessary to the dishonor done to God: if they did not encourage it for gain, they at least promoted it by connivance. Thus they, no less than the traders, were interested in maintaining the abuse, and, no doubt, would be forward to uphold it with all their power; but Jesus feared not the face of men, though all would combine against him. He resolutely determined to suppress these gross abominations, and, without any regard to consequences, set himself to perform his duty. Thus would we move undaunted in the way of duty; nor ever be deterred from it by the dictates of carnal policy, [Jeremiah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.17).

***~~3. A miraculous power over the minds of men—~~***

What but this could prevent their rising against him? He detected their hypocrisy, reproved their impiety, mortified their pride, opposed their interests, and loaded them with disgrace. He did this singly, unarmed, unsupported, and in opposition to the existing authorities: yet, behold, they were all constrained to yield submission to his will. We cannot doubt but that he miraculously overawed their minds: nor was this a less exertion of omnipotence than any other of the miracles which he wrought.

The sight of these things particularly affected his immediate followers, and brought to their recollection a portion of Scripture which they had never before noticed,

***~~II. The words themselves—~~***

***~~The words were justly quoted in reference to Christ—~~***

In their primary sense indeed they had their accomplishment in David. David elsewhere expresses in very strong terms his zeal for God, [Psalm 101:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.3-8); nor can we forget how he manifested it when he danced before the ark, [2 Samuel 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 6.14). But David confessedly is a type of the Messiah: some parts are applicable to himself, and some to Christ alone. [Psalm 69:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.5) cannot well be applied to any but David; nor can verse 21 be applied to any but Christ. It is thus that *the literal and prophetic parts of scripture are continually intermixed*.

The words before us may very properly be applied to both; indeed the strength of the terms would almost lead us to confine them to Christ. His holy soul was inflamed with incessant zeal for God's honor; nor did he ever allow one opportunity of promoting his glory to pass unimproved. The occasion now before us called forth the strongest exertions of his zeal, and manifested the full accomplishment of this prophecy in his person.

***~~They are also replete with useful instruction to us—~~***

They reprove the shameful lack of zeal among his followers.

God is greatly dishonored by men on every side: his name is blasphemed, his word despised, his authority rejected. Does it become his people to behold these things with indifference? Would they not resemble Paul when he beheld the idolaters at Athens, [Acts 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.16). Would they not imitate John, [Mark 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.18), and adopt the words of Jeremiah, [Jeremiah 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.17). Would they not reprove sin in others as well as abstain from it themselves, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11). But how miserably defective are even good people in this particular! How often do fear or shame restrain them from bearing their testimony for God!

Alas! what a sad contrast does our conduct form with that of our Lord! Have we not reason then to be ashamed, and mourn for our neglect? But *many, so far from rebuking sin in others, indulge it in themselves*: even in the very house of God they harbor worldly and carnal thoughts; nor are at all concerned to have their hearts purified from vile affections. Surely this cannot but be most offensive to the heart-searching God. Let us remember the solemn caution given us by the Apostle, [1 Corinthians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.17).

With respect to others, let us never presume to use the petulant language of Cain, [Genesis 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.9), but rather endeavor to obey the injunction which God has given us, [Leviticus 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.17). And, with respect to ourselves, let us seek in all things that conformity to Christ which is required of us, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6).

***~~They afford us a proper example for our imitation—~~***

Phinehas of old was called to execute the judgment he inflicted on Zimri He was a ruler himself, and acted by the command of the chief magistrate. Compare 1 Chronicles 9:20. [Numbers 25:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.5); [Numbers 25:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.7-8). Thus Jesus, as the Prophet of the Most High, was called to vindicate God's honor. In the same manner we would do whatever our place and station require: we must not all take on ourselves the office of magistrates, or assume the authority which does not belong to our situation and circumstances.

***~~Our zeal must be regulated by the word of God:~~***

It must be in a good cause; and in support of truth and virtue, [Romans 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2).

It must be pure; and free from bigotry, ostentation, or wrath, [2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16).

It must be discreet, not precipitating us into unfitting conduct, Jude verse 22, 23.

It must be proportioned, in a measure, to the occasion that excites it.

It must be uniform, opposing sin in ourselves, as much as in others, [Revelation 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.19).

Such a zeal as this cannot be too vigorously maintained, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11). An intemperate zeal will injure the cause it attempts to serve; but that which is duly tempered with meekness and wisdom, will be productive of much good, [Galatians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.18). Let us then check the unhallowed zeal that would call fire from Heaven, [Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54), and cherish that which is meek, humble, pious and benevolent, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17). Thus shall we approve ourselves to be God's peculiar people, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14); and, while we please our God, we shall be a blessing to all around us.

***~~#1607~~***

***~~The Resurrection, a Proof of Christ's Messiahship~~***

***~~[John 2:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.18-19)~~***

Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

THE work of reformation usually involves in difficulties those who undertake it. They who are the objects of it, however justly reproved, are sure to take offence, and to condemn the zeal which censures them. No one can doubt but that the turning of God's House into a place of merchandise was a very shameful practice; or, that to suppress it was highly commendable: yet, when our blessed Lord exerted his authority to check this abuse, the people, instead of applauding his zeal, expressed great dissatisfaction, and demanded of him, what right he had to interfere in that matter. The very awe which was impressed on all their minds, whereby they were constrained to yield to the rebukes of a poor man unsupported by any human authority, might have convinced them, that a power more than human existed in the person of the Lord Jesus: and, if they had taken occasion to make inquiries respecting him in a befitting spirit, he would no doubt have given them all reasonable satisfaction: but, as their demands arose from mere petulance, he declined satisfying them by any fresh miracle, and referred them to an event yet distant, which, when accomplished, would be a perfect answer to every inquiry.

To place this matter in a just point of view, we shall show,

***~~I. To what event our Lord referred—~~***

The occasion on which the words were spoken, will reflect considerable light on the words themselves. It was common with our Lord to make the things which were immediately before him subservient to his purpose of conveying spiritual instruction: and this he did on the present occasion. He had purged the temple from the abuses to which it had been exposed. The act itself, all things considered, was miraculous. A miracle was required of him to prove his right to exercise such authority: but he, not choosing to gratify this unreasonable demand, told the Jews, that, as they had defiled the material temple, so they would destroy the temple of his body: and that, as he had purged the one, so he would in three days rebuild and restore the other: and that this latter miracle would abundantly vindicate his claim to the authority he used.

In this figurative prediction he intimated,

***~~1. That his own body was typically represented by the temple—~~***

Both were formed, the one by man, and the other by God himself, as a residence for the Deity, [Hebrews 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.2); and in both God given to dwell: in the one symbolically, by a visible cloud; in the other really, personally, bodily, even in all his fullness, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9).

***~~2. That they would in due time destroy it—~~***

His words are not to be construed as a command or advice, but simply as a prediction. He knew what they would do: he knew "what his heavenly Father had determined before to be done:" he knew what he had undertaken both to do and suffer for us: and he frequently, from his very first entrance on his ministry to the close of it, foretold the precise manner of his death, together with the various circumstances which would accompany it.

***~~3. That he, by his own power, would raise it up again in three days—~~***

"He had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again:" and he declared that he would put forth this power to the confusion of all his enemies. He fixed the time of his resurrection, agreeably to the predictions of the prophets concerning it; a time amply sufficient for ascertaining the reality of his death, though not sufficient for his body to contract any corruption. On the accomplishment of this prophecy he rested all his pretensions to the Messiahship; and by it he would prove, that "he was indeed the very Christ".

The accomplishment of this event need not at this time to be insisted on: it is more to our purpose to show,

***~~II. How it proved his Divine authority—~~***

We are told that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead." If it be asked, How did his resurrection prove his Messiahship? we answer,

***~~1. No impostor would rest his pretensions on such an appeal as this—~~***

An impostor would rather confirm his authority by an appeal to something which he might accomplish in his life-time, in order that his credit might be raised, and his hands be strengthened for the furtherance of his designs. At all events, he would not found his hopes of success on a matter so entirely out of the reach of all human power, where the failure might be so easily, so speedily, so demonstrably ascertained: to do this would be to counteract all his own wishes, and to expose himself and his adherents to utter contempt. Such conduct would be perfect madness: and therefore we cannot suppose that our blessed Lord, who on all occasions manifested such consummate wisdom, could have pursued it. Had he been an impostor, he would at least have selected some other test, more within the bounds of credibility, and less open to detection.

***~~2. Supposing such an appeal made in support of an imposture, God would never work a miracle to sanction and confirm it—~~***

That God has permitted wonderful things to be wrought by liars and impostors, is certain: but he has at the same time afforded means for discovering the imposture; or rather, he has permitted those very wonders for the purpose of manifesting his own superior power, and confirmed thereby the faith of his people, while his enemies were hardened in their own willful delusions, [Exodus 7:11-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.11-20); [Exodus 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.22); [Exodus 8:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.7-8); [Exodus 8:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.17-19). [Acts 8:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.9-11). But in raising up Jesus from the dead, he has not only given us no contrary testimony to counteract the impression, but has left us no room for doubt.

This must have been done by himself alone: none but an Almighty power could effect it. On this one point the whole weight of our Lord's pretensions rested. Our Lord was willing to be thought an impostor, if this miracle were not wrought in his favor. What shall we say then? If God knew him to be an impostor, he himself interposed to give weight and efficacy to his imposture: he interposed to deceive his own people, and to blind the eyes of those who were most desirous to serve him aright. But can this be true? Can we for a moment admit the thought? The inference then is clear and undeniable; that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

But it is not in speculative truths that we would rest. We proceed therefore to inquire,

***~~III. What practical instruction is to be gathered from it—~~***

In this part of our subject, we shall limit our observations to the event as it stands connected with the occasion on which it was foretold. We have before seen that it was referred to in confirmation of the authority which our Lord had exerted. It shows us therefore,

***~~1. That God is indignant with those who pollute his temple—~~***

It is common to imagine, that the frequenting of the house of God at certain seasons must of necessity be a service pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. But *can our bodily presence there be pleasing to him, if our hearts be altogether occupied with the world?*If our farms and our merchandise, our lusts and our pleasures, fill our minds, what will it profit us to bow our knees, or to repeat our forms of prayer? It is not thus that we are to worship God: "we are to worship him in spirit and in truth;" and our external services, while destitute of spiritual affections, are gross hypocrisy: and we, in presenting such services, are no better than those whom our Lord accused of turning his Father's House into a house of merchandise.

But it is not from the *outward*temple only that evil would be expelled: *our hearts are "the temples of the Holy Spirit*," and are therefore, at the peril of our souls, to be preserved pure: "If any man defiles the temple of God," says the Apostle, "him shall God destroy, [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17)." What reason have we all to tremble at this solemn declaration!

Consider, brethren, what grievous abominations have been harbored there! what a mass of filthiness, "filthiness both of flesh and spirit," has God seen in us! what pride, envy, malice, wrath! what worldliness! what sensuality! alas! alas! "It is indeed of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, even because his compassions fail not."

We may plead custom, and a variety of other excuses, just as they did who defiled the material temple: but if our hearts be not now purged by the grace of God, it is in vain to hope that he will ever make them his residence in a future world. Let us then beg of him to drive out every evil disposition: and, whatever scourge he may see fit to use for this purpose, let us never wish to be delivered from the pains it may inflict, until we have fully experienced its sanctified effects.

***~~2. That whatever pollutes his temple shall yield to the almighty power of Christ—~~***

When we see the extreme depravity of our hearts, and compare it with the purity of God's holy law, we are ready to say, that it is impossible for us ever to become what God requires. But he who exerted such power over the minds of those who "made the temple a den of thieves;" who could literally have destroyed the temple and built it again in three days; and did actually raise to life again his own "crucified body;" He, I say, can easily effect the renovation of our hearts: with him all things are possible: whatever difficulties we may have to surmount, "his grace is sufficient for us."

We need only look to his Apostles, "who were men of like passions with us," and we may see what he can do for us. "It was by the grace of God that they were what they were:" and God is still the same as in the days of old; "his arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear."

It is to carry on his work in our hearts that Jesus is risen: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Let us then pray that we may know him in the "power of his resurrection," and "be sanctified wholly;" and that "our whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)." "Faithful is He who has called us, who also will do it, [1 Thessalonians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.24)."

***~~#1608~~***

***~~The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration~~***

***~~[John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3).~~***

"Jesus answered and said unto him: Truly, truly, I say unto you, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

AS there is an essential distinction between divine and human knowledge, so is there a very great difference in the ways by which each of them is to be obtained; the one being attainable only by rational investigation, the other attainable only by faith. Reason indeed must judge whether such or such things be revealed; but when that point is clearly ascertained, faith must receive the truth simply on the authority of God; and that too, no less when it lies beyond the sphere of our reason, than when it may easily be comprehended by it.

The manner in which revealed truths are inculcated seems to imply this; for the prophets enforced their declarations, not with arguments, but with, "Thus says the Lord:" and our Savior, with an authority which none but himself ever presumed to exercise, and which strongly marked his equality with the Father, disdained to use any other confirmation than that of his own assertion. This appears, as in numberless other passages, so particularly in his conversation with Nicodemus; when, instructing him in the mysterious doctrine of regeneration, he required a full assent to it upon the testimony of his own word. May we bow to his authority, while we consider,

***~~I. The NATURE of regeneration—~~***

The mistakes which very generally obtain respecting this subject being first rectified, the truth will be more clearly seen:

***~~Many suppose that baptism is the same with regeneration—~~***

In the early ages of Christianity these terms were often used as synonymous, because it was taken for granted that none but truly regenerate persons would submit to a rite which engaged them to separate themselves from an ungodly world, and exposed them to the most imminent peril of their lives.

But there is a wide difference between the two; regeneration being absolutely necessary to salvation; while baptism, as in the case of the dying thief, may under some circumstances be dispensed with. Besides, it was doubtless the great design of our Lord and his Apostles to regenerate and convert men: but were they so intent on administering the rite of baptism? Our Lord, we are told, "baptized no man;" and it is said of Paul, that "God sent him not to baptize;" yes, he himself "thanks God that he had baptized none but Crispus and Gaius."

Again, if baptism and regeneration be the same thing, we may use them altogether as synonymous terms: now it is said that "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4)," and that "he neither does practice sin nor can practice sin, because he is born of God [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9)." But if we would say the same of all that are baptized, would not the worldly and sinful lives of many flatly contradict us? It appears then from the superior importance of regeneration, from the design of Christ and his Apostles respecting it, and from the properties ascribed to it in Scripture, that it neither is, nor can be, the same with baptism. *Baptism is an outward work of man upon the body; regeneration is an inward work of God upon the soul.*

***~~Others think that regeneration imports no more than an outward reformation, or at most, a partial change of the inward man—~~***

But can we conceive that, when a ruler of the Jews came to our Lord, acknowledging him to be a teacher sent from God, and desiring to be instructed in those things which he was come to reveal, our Lord would tell him that wicked men could not be saved without reforming their lives? Did Nicodemus need such information as that?

Or, if this was all that our Lord meant, would this teacher in Israel have been so astonished at it? And would not our Lord have instantly rectified his misapprehension, and shown him that there was no cause for astonishment? Can we imagine that our Lord would have confirmed the mistake, by representing this doctrine as an incomprehensible mystery, which man can no more fathom, than he can ascertain the hidden causes, or mark the exact boundaries, of the wind?

Yes, would he have left this man so bewildered, saying, How can these things be! if he had meant no more than, that a wicked man must reform his life?

Nor is it less evident that regeneration does not consist in a partial change even of the inward man. To what purpose would we boast of having experienced the illumination of Balaam, [Numbers 24:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.4), the humiliation of Ahab, [1 Kings 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.29);, the confession of Judas, [Matthew 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.4); [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13); [Acts 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.21); [Acts 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.23), the confidence of the unbelieving Jews, [John 8:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.41-42); the attention of Ezekiel's auditors, [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31); the reformation of Herod, [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20); [Mark 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.27); or (what perhaps includes all these together) the promising appearance of the stony-ground hearers, [Matthew 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-21); if, like them, we rest in any partial change? Surely, if our righteousness exceeds not theirs, we cannot hope that we shall be happier than they in our final doom.

In opposition to all such erroneous notions, the Scripture itself defines regeneration to be "a new creation, wherein old things pass away, and all things become new, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)."

The author of this work of regeneration is the Holy Spirit, who by a supernatural agency renews our inward man, and makes us partakers of a divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4). Our faculties indeed remain the same as they were before; but there is a new direction given to them all.

Our *understanding*is enlightened, so that we behold ourselves, and Christ, and the world, yes, everything else too, in a very *different*light from what we ever did before, [Acts 2:37-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37-47).

Our *will*is changed, so that instead of following, or even desiring to follow, our own way, we surrender up ourselves altogether to God's government, saying most sincerely, Not my will, but yours be done, [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6).

Our *affections*also are exercised in a very different manner from what they were before, so that, instead of being called forth principally by the things of time and sense, they are set upon things spiritual and eternal, [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2).

Regeneration is a *radical*change, though we do not say that this change is *perfect*in any man, (for there still are sad remains of the old and corrupt nature even in the best of men; the leprosy is never wholly removed until the walls are taken down.) But the change is *universal*in all the faculties, and *progressive*throughout our lives: nor can it be effected by any efforts of man, or by any other power than that of God, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13).

As the Scriptures give this extensive view of regeneration, so they fully declare,

***~~II. The NECESSITY of the new birth—~~***

"The kingdom of God" sometimes imports the kingdom of *grace*on earth, and sometimes the kingdom of *glory*in Heaven. Indeed both are one and the same kingdom, subject to the same Head, composed of the same members, and governed by the same laws. Grace is glory begun; glory is grace consummated. But for the purpose of illustrating our subject, we observe that:

***~~1. Without regeneration we cannot enter into God's kingdom of grace—~~***

There are many duties to be performed, and many privileges to be enjoyed, by the subjects of God's spiritual kingdom, which an unregenerate man can neither perform nor enjoy. Who can doubt whether it be our duty to "repent in dust and ashes," to "live by faith in the Son of God," or to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts?"

But can an unregenerate man do these things? We acknowledge that he may restrain in many respects his outward conduct; but can he root out from his heart the love of the world, and the love of sin? Can he truly loath and abhor himself as well for the unhallowed corruptions of his heart, as for the grosser transgressions of his life? As well may he attempt to create a world as to effect these things by any power of his own.

Again, it is the Christian's privilege to enjoy that "peace of God which passes all understanding," to "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit," and to be transported with that "joy which is unspeakable and full of glory."

But can an unregenerate man possess that peace, when his iniquities are not forgiven? Can he look forward with delight to the coming of the day of Christ, when all his desires and pursuits terminate in this lower world? Can he be so elevated with holy joy, when there is nothing in his state which does not rather call for rivers of tears?

But if anyone doubt what answer he must return to these questions, let him go to his chamber, and see whether he be competent to form his mind to these sublime employments; and he will soon find that no power but that which created our souls at first, can form them anew after the Divine image.

***~~2. Without regeneration we cannot enter into the kingdom of glory—~~***

There is a fitness for the heavenly inheritance, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12), which everyone must attain, before he can enjoy the felicity of the saints in light. As, on earth, no occupation can afford us pleasure, if we have not an inward taste and relish for it—so, in Heaven, we must have dispositions suited to the state of those above. But where is this disposition to be obtained, if not in this life? Can it be thought that there shall be "repentance in the grave," and that we shall become regenerate in a future state?

Shall he, who never supremely loved his God, become at once inflamed with devout affection towards him after death?

Shall not he, who never was renewed after the Divine image, rather behold with dread and horror the holiness of God, and tremble at the sight of that Lamb, whose dying love he despised, and whose blood he trampled under foot?

Shall he, who never sought one hour's communion with God in secret, delight to have no other employment to all eternity?

No! "as the tree falls, so it lies;" "he who was unjust will be unjust still; and he who was filthy will be filthy still."

As there is this reason on the part of man, so is there a still more cogent reason on the part of God.

*God*has declared with repeated and most solemn assertions, that "unless a man be born again, he shall never enter into his kingdom." And has he spoken thus merely to alarm us? "Is he a man that he would lie, or the son of man that he would repent?" Will he dishonor himself to favor us? Will he violate the rights of justice, holiness, and truth—in order to save those, who, to their dying hour, rejected and despised his offered mercy?

If all the world tells you that you shall be admitted into Heaven, believe them not: for the Judge of living and dead has with the strongest possible assertions declared, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!" Let us not then deceive ourselves with such vain hopes: for they can terminate in nothing but disappointment and ruin.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The unregenerate—~~***

You cannot surely be at a loss to know your real state, if you will examine candidly whether you have ever experienced such a change in your *views*, *desires*, and *pursuits*, as has been described? O, let every one put home to his conscience this question, *Am I born again?*And know that neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision will avail you anything, but a new creation, [Galatians 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.15). You must be born again, or perish!

***~~2. The regenerate—~~***

*Peter*, writing to such persons under the severest persecution, begins his Epistle with congratulations, [1 Peter 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.1); [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-4); and *Paul*bids us under the heaviest calamities to be thankful for renewing grace Colossians, 1:11-13. Do you then bless God in every state, and "show forth the virtues of him who has called you to his kingdom and glory? [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9)." Let your renovation be progressive; and never think that you have attained anything until grace is turned into glory!

***~~#1609~~***

***~~The Brazen Serpent a Type of Christ~~***

***~~[John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15).~~***

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life."

A more instructive portion of Scripture than this before us we cannot easily find. The conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus was intended to lead him to the knowledge of salvation: and, being directed to a person of his rank, and high attainments in morality, it will serve as a model for our instructions to the greatest and best of men.

The first point which our Lord insisted on was the necessity of a new birth: for, whatever our attainments are, it is impossible for us to enter into Heaven until this has taken place in our souls; since we brought nothing into the world with us but what is sinful; and we must possess a spiritual nature, before we can be capable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom.

But besides this, it is necessary also that we be savingly interested in his atoning sacrifice: for, having once contracted guilt, we must be purged from that guilt, before we can be admitted into the Divine presence: and there is nothing but his atoning sacrifice that can avail for this.

Hence our Lord, after showing Nicodemus that he must experience a change of nature by means of a new and heavenly birth, tells him, that he must prepare to see the Messiah crucified for the sins of men, and must look to him for the healing of his soul as the dying Israelites did to the brazen serpent for the healing of the wounds inflicted by the fiery serpents in the wilderness.

The parallel which our Lord here draws between the brazen serpent and himself, represents that as the type, and himself as the antitype: and, that we may fully understand it, I will trace the resemblance,

***~~I. In the occasion on which the type was instituted—~~***

***~~The Israelites were dying of the wounds received from the venomous serpents—~~***

They had provoked God by their murmuring and rebellion, [Numbers 21:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.4-6); and to punish them God had sent venomous serpents which they could not avoid, and whose bite was mortal. To heal themselves was beyond their power. Multitudes died: and many, finding that they must die, unless God would graciously interpose for them, entreated Moses to intercede for them: and in answer to his intercession God appointed that a brazen serpent would be erected, and that by looking to it they would be healed.

***~~Similar to this was our state when God gave his Son to be nailed upon the cross—~~***

Through the agency of that old serpent the devil, sin had entered the world, and inflicted a deadly wound on every child of man. To heal ourselves was impossible. Death, eternal death, awaited us. And, as the only means of averting it, God, in tender mercy, sent his only beloved Son into the world to die for us, and to save all who would look unto him for salvation.

But if there was in this respect a great *resemblance*between the occasions that existed for the erection of the serpent, and the exaltation of our blessed Lord upon the cross, there was also a material *difference*between them:

the one being in answer to the prayers of men, the other being given unsolicited and unsought;

the one also being appointed as a mere arbitrary ordinance, that had no suitableness to the end proposed; the other being appointed to make satisfaction for the sins of men, and to merit in our behalf the Divine favor.

In both cases, however, the occasion was the same: death was inflicted as the punishment of sin; and the remedy, the only remedy, against it, in either case, was to look to the object, proposed by God, and lifted up by man, for our relief.

But let us contemplate the type yet more particularly,

***~~II. In the end of its appointment—~~***

***~~The serpent was erected that all who were bitten might look unto it and live—~~***

An assurance was given to Moses, that all who looked to the brazen serpent would live. And so it proved, in fact. Not one who directed his eyes to it, died. However desperate his wounds might be, or however distant he might be from the object, so as scarcely to have any clear view of it at all, yet, instantly on looking to it he was healed.

***~~And does not the crucifixion of our Lord ensure the same benefit to those who look unto him—~~***

It matters not how long, or how grievously, any man may have sinned, provided he looks truly and humbly to the Lord Jesus Christ as dying for him.

As for the brazen serpent, it had no suitableness whatever to the end proposed. It was a mere arbitrary appointment of God, and was available in that view alone.

But the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross under the guilt of all our sins, and offered a full and perfect satisfaction for them to Divine justice.

True, indeed, to the judgment of carnal reason, that also appears "foolishness;" but it was in reality the most stupendous effort of "divine power and wisdom;" and it has in itself a proper suitableness and sufficiency for the salvation of all who trust in it. We may therefore safely assure every child of man, that, if he believes in Jesus, "he shall never perish, but shall have eternal life."

Nor shall the conferring of this benefit be delayed. The sight of the brazen serpent healed instantly the dying Israelite: and so shall a sight of Jesus instantly remove the guilt of all our sins, and infuse into our souls a new and heavenly life.

Nor shall the blessing ever terminate. The benefit that accrued to those who looked to the brazen serpent lasted but for a time: but that which the believer in Jesus shall receive, shall endure for ever and ever.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who feel not their need of such a remedy—~~***

Such persons existed in the camp of Israel: but where shall one be found in our camp? Where is there one whose whole man is not impregnated with the venom of sin? If you feel it not, that only shows that your wounds are the more deep and deadly: but know assuredly, that, unless you be brought to a sense of your perishing condition, your doom is sealed; and in a little time you will perish forever!

***~~2. Those who would substitute some other remedy in the place of Christ—~~***

What would have become of any man who would have persisted in devising some mode of healing himself, instead of looking to the brazen serpent? He must of necessity have died.

Just so, no other fate awaits you, if you will be substituting your own works, whether in whole or in part, in the place of Christ. Every other hope must be utterly renounced, and Christ alone be made the one object of your trust.

***~~3. Those who desire the healing of their souls—~~***

Make the Israelites a pattern for yourselves. When they felt in themselves that they were dying, they sought after God through Moses their mediator; and confessed their sins, and implored mercy, and thankfully availed themselves of the offered benefit, seeking it humbly in God's appointed way.

Thus then do you also: seek your God through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man; and with deep contrition implore mercy at his hands. Then direct your eyes to the cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for you; and doubt not but that you shall be made *monuments of his grace and mercy to all eternity*. Let no doubt about his sufficiency, or your own worthiness, keep you from him: for he "is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" and "whoever" believes in him shall assuredly be saved, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)."

***~~4. Those who doubt whether this mode of healing will not encourage sin—~~***

Such doubts were entertained in the Apostle's days, but Paul spurned at the idea with holy indignation: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." What do you think? Would an Israelite have taken one of the fiery serpents to his bosom, because he had been healed of his wounds, and because the same means of healing were yet open to him?

How much less would one who has felt the bitterness of sin, cherish it any longer in his bosom, because he has obtained deliverance from its guilt and condemnation! When he reflects that nothing but the crucifixion of the Son of God could heal him, will he think lightly of his sins? Will he not rather "look on him whom his sins have pierced—and mourn, and be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born?" Truly this is the proper effect of faith in Christ, who, if he redeems us from guilt and condemnation, will also "purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

***~~#1610~~***

***~~The Love of God in Giving His Son for Man~~***

***~~[John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16).~~***

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

THE doctrine of our reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, is calculated to impress our minds with a deep sense of the love of Christ in undertaking for us; but, if not cautiously stated, it may give us very erroneous conceptions respecting the Father.

If, for instance, we imagine that the Father needed the mediation of his Son to render him propitious, then we must ascribe all the glory of our salvation to the Son, and consider the Father merely as acquiescing in the Son's wishes, and showing mercy to us for his sake. But the whole plan of our salvation originated with the Father: the very gift of a Savior was the fruit of the Father's love; and therefore, in contemplating the wonders of Redemption, we must trace them to their proper source—the love of God the Father.

To this view of things we are led by the text; in elucidating which, we shall not form any particular arrangement, but simply take the several expressions contained in it, and use them as so many mirrors to reflect light upon one central point, the love of God the Father in sending his only-begotten Son to die for us.

***~~Consider then, first, the Giver—~~***

If man confers a benefit upon his fellow-creature, we are not surprised; because there is no man so elevated, but he may need the assistance of his inferiors; nor is there any man so depressed, but he may, at some period or other, have it in his power to requite a kindness. But "God" is totally independent of us "Our goodness extends not to him, [Psalm 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.2)." "It is no profit to him that we are righteous, [Job 22:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 22.2-3)." *He would have been equally happy and glorious, though no creature had ever been formed; and he would remain so, if every creature in the universe were annihilated.*How astonishing, then, was it, that he would condescend to look on us; yes, that he would take such an interest in our affairs, as to supply, at a most incalculable price, our pressing necessities! Even in this first view of his love we are lost with wonder.

***~~But our admiration will be greatly increased, if we reflect upon the gift—~~***

It was his Son, "his only-begotten Son," whom he has given. It was not a creature; no, not the first of all created beings, but his co-equal, co-eternal Son, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2); who from eternity had been in his bosom, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13), and "daily his delight, [Proverbs 8:22-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-30)." A less gift than that would not have sufficed for our redemption: and a greater gift, God himself was not able to bestow. In comparison with this matchless gift of his son, ten thousand angels would have been as nothing; yes, all the hosts of Heaven would not have been more than a grain of sand is in comparison with the universe. Yet God, seeing our desperate plight, "sent his own Son to be a atoning sacrifice for our sins [1 John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.9-10)." What manner of love was this! How "incomprehensible are its breadth and length, and depth and height! [1 John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.9-10) with [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

***~~Additional luster will be reflected on this mystery, if we consider the manner in which he bestowed this gift—~~***

God waited not to be asked. Indeed no creature could have asked for such a favor: the thought could not have entered into the mind of any created intelligence; nor, if it had occurred, could he have presumed to utter it. But God needed no suggestion from his creatures: his love preceded their requests. God, instead of following our first parents with denunciations of wrath—gave, unsolicited, that promise, which was the foundation of hope to them and all their posterity, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). It even provided for their wants before those wants existed, yes, before the creatures themselves had any being. He himself is love, [1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16); and the exercise of mercy is his delight, [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18). He neither had, nor could have, any inducement from without: all his motives were found within his own bosom. The displaying of his own unbounded love was a sufficient reason for his utmost exertions: he showed mercy for mercy sake; and "gave," because it was the joy of his soul to give.

***~~But how will this stupendous love be heightened in our esteem, if we take into consideration the persons on whom this gift was bestowed!~~***

It was *not given to angels*, though angels needed it as much as we. This was a mercy reserved for fallen man, even for "the world" that lies in wickedness, [Hebrews 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.16). To form an estimate of the world, let us look around us, and see to what an awful extent iniquity abounds. Or, if we would have our judgment still more according to truth, let us look within our own hearts, and see what horrible abominations are harbored there. We know nothing of others, but by their words and actions: but we have a juster criterion within our own bosoms—we may search into our own thoughts and desires; we may discern the sinful mixture that there is in all our motives and principles of action: in short, we may see such "a world of iniquity" within us, as may well constrain us to say, with David, "Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all, [Psalm 36:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 36.1)" Yes, in our own hearts there is an epitome of all the evil that is in the world: and, if we know anything of ourselves, we shall stand *amazed that God would look upon such a world as this, and give his only dear Son to save those who so abundantly merited his hottest indignation*.

***~~We cannot do justice to this subject, if we do not further notice God's ultimate design in bestowing this precious gift upon us—~~***

We must, but for this marvelous effort of divine love, have perished in our sins! Having resembled the fallen angels in their sin—we must have resembled them also in their misery! But "God would not that we would perish." Notwithstanding the greatness and universality of our guilt, he would not that we would suffer according to our desert; and therefore he interposed for our deliverance.

But this was not all. He desired to restore us to our forfeited inheritance, and to bring us to the possession of "everlasting life." It was not enough for him to save us from perishing—he must also renovate us after his own image, and make us partakers of his own glory.

What stupendous love was this! That he would ever think of receiving such hateful creatures into his presence; that he would lay a plan for the exalting of them to thrones and kingdoms in Heaven; and that he would even give his only-begotten Son out of his bosom to effect it! How infinitely does this surpass all the comprehension of men or angels!

***~~The condition which he has imposed for our participation of these benefits, yet further illustrates and magnifies his love—~~***

Suppose God had said, "Find me fifty righteous, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or only ten, and for their sakes I will pardon and save all the rest, [Genesis 18:24-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.24-32);" we must all have perished, because among the whole human, race there is "not one righteous, no, not one, [Romans 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10)."

Suppose that, instead of this, he had said, "I will give my Son to die for your past offences, and will bring you back to a state of *probation*; whereby, if you fall not again from your righteousness, you shall be saved." This offer had been exceeding kind and gracious; but we would not long have reaped any solid advantage from it: we would soon have broken the covenant again, and been involved in the same misery as before.

Suppose God had said, "I foresee that a renewal of your former covenant would be to no purpose; and therefore my Son shall work out a righteousness for you; and I require nothing of you, but to add to that a righteousness of your own, that the two righteousnesses together may form a joint ground of your acceptance with me." Alas! we would have been in as deplorable a state as ever; for we never have done, nor ever can do, one single act, which, if weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, will not be found lacking.

But suppose God yet further to lower his demands, and to say, "I will give you a complete salvation through the blood and righteousness of my dear Son; and I will require nothing of you, but only to render yourselves *worthy*of it"—still had our state been altogether hopeless; for we can no more render ourselves worthy of such a mercy, than we can create a world!

This was well known to God; and therefore he proposed none of these things: he requires only that we would believe in his Son, and accept freely what he so freely offers. It is true, that, if even this depended on ourselves, we would certainly perish: because *without the grace of God we cannot exercise saving faith*,[Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29); but still this is the condition, which alone is suited to our helpless state; because it implies a total renunciation of all merit or strength in ourselves, and leads us to Christ, that we may find our all in him. O how does this enhance the love of God! And in what bright colors does that love appear, when viewed in the light which so many mirrors reflect upon it!

***~~If anything can add to the luster with which his love already shines, it is the extent in which the offers of these benefits are made—~~***

There is not a human being upon earth, who shall not be a partaker of all these benefits, if only he believes in Christ. There is no limitation, no exception: God gave his Son, that "whoever" believes in him would not perish.

Past sins, however numerous or heinous, are no bar to our acceptance with God, if only we accept his mercy on the terms on which it is offered. This is the uniform testimony of Holy Writ, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1); [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17); [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37). O let us magnify God for his mercy; and be telling of the wonders of his love from day to day!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How aggravated must be the condemnation of those who reject the Gospel!~~***

Our Lord says, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but *men loved darkness*rather than light, because their deeds were evil, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19)." Let this sink down into our ears: for, if such love cannot melt us into contrition, and such goodness bring us to repentance, then we may well expect a most accumulated weight of vengeance at the hands of an offended God.

***~~2. How groundless are the fears of many who embrace the truth!~~***

Many sincere Christians are troubled in mind; some on account of their temporal wants, and others on account of their spiritual necessities. But "if God has delivered up his own Son for us, will he not with him also freely give us all things! [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32)." And "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life! [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10)." These are unanswerable arguments; and they would compose our minds under trials, of whatever kind.

***~~3. How deeply should we all be affected by the love of God!~~***

Pungent indeed is that question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4)." The more we consider how God has loved sinners, the more we shall see, that he has indeed done all for us that he could do, consistently with our free agency, and his own honor. And when he has so loved the world, are we at liberty to forget him? Does such love call for no return? or are we to requite it only by increased impiety? O let every one of us say, "What shall I render to the Lord?" And let his love to us constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to him.

***~~#1611~~***

***~~The End for Which God Sent His Son~~***

***~~[John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.17).~~***

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

AN expectation generally prevailed among the Jews that their Messiah would interpose on behalf of their nation alone, and bring all other kingdoms into subjection to them. Our Lord took frequent occasions to rectify this mistake, and to show, that he was to be the Savior, not of one people only, but of the whole world.

In this discourse with Nicodemus, he introduces this important subject in such a way as to inform his mind, without shocking his prejudices. Having explained to him the nature and necessity of regeneration, and shown him, by reference to a well-known type, the way of salvation, he declares, that the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews, were to participate in the benefits of his coming; and that God, in sending him into the world, had as much respect to the welfare of the benighted heathens as of his chosen and peculiar people. To elucidate the words before us, we shall show,

***~~I. That, supposing God to send his Son into the world, it was far more probable that he would send him to condemn the world than to save it—~~***

That God would ever send his Son into the world at all is such a mystery as must for ever fill the whole universe with amazement. But supposing him to make known his determination to do so, the probability certainly was that it would be for our destruction rather than our salvation.

***~~1. Consider what was the state of the world at the time God sent his Son—~~***

Had he seen the greater part of mankind lamenting their fall, wishing earnestly that some way could be devised for their recovery, and struggling, but with unsuccessful efforts, to get free from sin, we might have supposed that God would exercise mercy towards us, and open a way for our restoration through the sacrifice of his Son. But when the whole mass of mankind were up in arms against him, when not one of the whole human race (except a few whose hearts he himself had touched) desired reconciliation with him; yes, when all were utterly averse from it, and desired nothing so much as to live in sin with impunity, and wished for no better Heaven than the unrestrained indulgence of their lusts; for what end could God send his Son, but to execute upon them the vengeance they deserved?

***~~2. Consider for what end God had previously sent messengers from Heaven—~~***

God had on some remarkable occasions commissioned angels to perform his will: and though, when sent to some highly-favored individuals, they were messengers of mercy, yet, when sent to the avowed enemies of God, they were, for the most part, ministers of wrath to execute the most signal vengeance. Who can contemplate *Sodom*and the cities of the plain; who can call to mind the *Egyptian first-born*; who can survey one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers lying dead in the *Assyrian*camp—and not tremble at the thought of a messenger being sent from Heaven? Suppose then we would hear that God was about to send his own Son from Heaven to execute his will with respect to the whole world, and especially such a world as this; what would any one imagine, but that, as it was not a particular city or nation that God was about to punish, but a whole world, he had determined to employ his own Son; and that the judgments he was about to inflict, would be great in proportion to the power and dignity of the executioner! As for conceiving the idea that he would send his Son to save the world, it would not so much as enter into the mind of any created being.

***~~3. Consider that God certainly foreknew the way in which the world would treat his Son—~~***

If God had not certainly foreknown all future events, he might perhaps have reasoned thus: "I have sent to that wretched world my servants the prophets, and instead of attending to them they have persecuted them even unto death: but if I would send them my Son, surely they would reverence him; they would not dare to lift up a finger against him; they would be so struck with wonder at my condescension and love, that they would return instantly to their allegiance. Rather therefore than they would perish, I will send them my Son to save them."

But God knew that instead of reverencing his Son, they would no sooner see him, than they would exclaim, "This is the heir; come let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours!" He knew full well that, however manifest the credentials of his Son, and however indisputable the evidences of his divine mission, they would not believe in him, but would cast him out of the vineyard and slay him.

What then must we suppose God would say on such an occasion? Surely he would speak to this effect: "If I could hope that they would reverence my Son, I would overlook all the injuries done to my prophets, and would even send my Son for their salvation: but I know they would all thirst for his blood; *they would pluck me from my throne if they were able*; and, if I would put my Son into their power, they would load him with all manner of indignities, and put him to the most ignominious death. Shall I then, foreseeing these things as I do, put him into their power? No! that would be unworthy of my majesty, and degrading to my Son. I may possibly send my Son; but, if I do, it shall not be to save the world, but to condemn them according to their deservings."

These considerations fully evince the improbability that God would ever use the mediation of his Son in a way of mercy towards us. Yet we must add,

***~~II. That, notwithstanding it was so improbable, God did really send his Son, not to condemn, but to save the world—~~***

The frequency with which we hear of this stupendous mystery, prevents the surprise which the declaration of it must otherwise excite. But, whatever the ignorance of scoffers, and the pride of infidels may suggest, be it known to all, that God did send his Son,

***~~1. To expiate sin—~~***

God knew that it was impossible for man to atone for sin. Yet it was also impossible that sin could be forgiven, unless an adequate atonement were offered to the Divine Majesty. What was to be done?

The angels, even if they were willing, were not able to undertake our cause. There was but one, even in Heaven, that was competent to the mighty task of appeasing incensed Majesty, and of satisfying offended justice. There was none but Jesus, the best-beloved of the Father, who from eternity had lain in his bosom. And would the Father give him? Yes! "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." "He prepared him a body," and "sent him to be a sin-atoning sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world!" What amazing love! Eternity will not suffice to explore and celebrate this stupendous mystery!

***~~2. To work out a perfect righteousness for us—~~***

Mankind were as unable to provide for themselves a righteousness wherein they might stand before God, as they were to make an atonement for their sins. But, behold, God would not leave us destitute; he gave his Son to fulfill the law which we had broken, and, "to bring in an everlasting righteousness," "which would be unto all and upon all those who believe." The name given him on this very account is, "The Lord our Righteousness." Clothed in his unspotted robe, the vilest of returning prodigals may stand perfect and complete in the presence of their God. Every one of them may say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength."

***~~3. To exalt us to glory—~~***

It was not only to begin, but to carry on and perfect our salvation, that the Father sent his Son into the world. He is to be both "the author and the finisher of our faith." Having delivered our souls from the guilt of sin, and from the powers of darkness, he will raise up our bodies also from the grave, and exalt us to sit upon his throne for evermore! Never will he cease from his work, until he has fully and finally accomplished it on behalf of his people. How wonderful is this! Surely it almost exceeds belief: that, instead of condemning the world, God would send his Son to save it, to save it by laying down his own life as a ransom for us, and by managing all the concerns of every one of his elect until he shall have finally established them in the possession of their heavenly inheritance! Hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth: yes, let all the choirs of Heaven make it the everlasting subject of their highest praises.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have no regard of their own salvation—~~***

Alas! how little effect do the wonders of redemption produce on the world at large! But what an aggravation of their guilt will it be to have poured contempt upon the Son of God! Surely *God's greatest mercy will prove their heaviest curse*. The very devils will have more to say on their own behalf than they. Satan himself may say, "I never had salvation offered to me; I never sinned against redeeming love." But careless sinners are daily "trampling under foot the Son of God," who lived and died to save them. O lay this to heart, and seek a saving interest in him who alone can deliver you from the wrath to come.

***~~2. Those who are ready to doubt whether they ever can be saved—~~***

Many such there are in the Church of Christ. But did God send his Son to execute a work which he was not able to perform? Or has Jesus manifested any backwardness to fulfill his engagements? Let not any be afraid: for he cannot but have a sufficiency to supply all our wants, provided we commit ourselves entirely to him.

***~~3. Those who are enjoying salvation—~~***

While you are reaping the blessed fruits of the Father's love, surely you will often say, what shall I render to the Lord?*If he gave up his dear Son for my salvation, shall not I give up a bosom lust for his glory?*Think how much you are indebted to him; and endeavor to glorify him with your body and your spirit which are his.

***~~#1612~~***

***~~Men's Hatred of the Light~~***

***~~[John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-21).~~***

"This is the condemnation: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

IT appears strange to many that the everlasting happiness or misery of the soul would be made to depend on the exercise of faith. The declaration of our Lord, That "he who believes shall be saved, and he who believes not shall be damned," is regarded by them as a "hard saying;" they see no proportion between the work and the reward on the one hand, or between the offence and the punishment on the other.

In the words before us we have a solution to the difficulty. We are taught that faith and unbelief are not mere operations of the mind, but exercises of the heart; the one proceeding from a love to what is holy; the other from a radical attachment to evil. Our blessed Lord had repeatedly inculcated the necessity of believing in him, in order to a participation of his offered benefits. He had also represented unbelievers as "already condemned," even like criminals reserved for execution.

To obviate any objection which might arise in the mind of Nicodemus in relation to the apparent severity of this sentence, he proceeded to show the true ground of it, namely: That, *in their rejection of him, men are actuated by an invincible love of sin, and by a consequent hatred of the light which is sent to turn them from sin.*

In opening the words of our text, we shall show,

***~~I. What is that light which has come into the world—~~***

Christ is called "The light of the world," "The true light," "The Day-star," and "The Sun of righteousness that arises with healing in his wings." But,

***~~It is the Gospel which is here said to have "come into the world"—~~***

The glad tidings of salvation were now published by Christ himself; and both the manner in which that salvation was to be effected, and the manner in which it was to be received, were clearly revealed. Our blessed Lord had in this very discourse with Nicodemus declared, that "the Son of Man was to be lifted up upon the cross, as the serpent had been in the wilderness," in order that all who were dying of the wounds of sin might look to him and be healed. He had repeated again and again this important truth, on which the salvation of our fallen race depends. This mystery had from eternity been hidden in the bosom of the Father; but now it was made fully manifest. This "light was now come into the world."

***~~The Gospel, in this view of it, is fitly designated under the metaphor of "light"—~~***

Light is that, without which no one thing can be discerned aright. And how ignorant are we, until the light of the Gospel shines in our hearts! We know nothing of ourselves—of God, of Christ, or of the way to Heaven. We cannot even appreciate the value of the soul, the importance of time, the emptiness of earthly vanities. We may indeed give our assent to the statements which we hear made upon these subjects; but *we cannot have an experimental and abiding sense, even of the most obvious truths, until our minds are enlightened by the Gospel of Christ.*

Light causes all other things to be seen in their true colors. Thus does also the Gospel: in setting forth the Son of God as dying for our sins, it shows us the *malignity of sin*; the *justice of God*which required such an atonement for it; and, above all, the wonderful *love of God*in giving us his only dear Son, in order that we might have peace through the blood of his cross.

Light carries its own evidence along with it. Thus does also that glorious Gospel of which we are speaking: it is so peculiarly suited to the necessities of man, and at the same time so commensurate with his wants; it is so calculated to display and magnify all the perfections of the Deity, and is in every respect so worthy of its Divine Author; that it commends itself to us instantly as of heavenly origin, the very masterpiece of Divine wisdom!

One would imagine that such light would be universally welcomed: but since this is not the case, we shall proceed to show,

***~~II. Whence it is that men reject it—~~***

It is but too evident, that, as in former ages, so now also, men reject the light. But whence does this arise?

It is not because they have any sufficient reason to reject it. If there were anything in the Gospel that rendered it unworthy of men's regard, they would have some excuse for rejecting it. But,

***~~They cannot say that it is inapplicable in its nature.~~***

We will appeal to the world, and ask, What is there, that guilty and helpless sinners should desire? Should they wish for a Savior? Should they be glad that the whole work of salvation would be committed into his hands? Should they be especially desirous that nothing would be required of them, but to receive with gratitude, and improve with diligence, what the Savior offers them? In short, should they be glad of a free and full salvation? This is precisely such a salvation as is provided for them in the Gospel.

***~~They cannot say that it is inadequate in its provisions.~~***

If the Gospel brought salvation to those only who were possessed of some amiable qualities, or to those who had committed only a certain number of offences; if it made any limitation or exception whatever in its offers of mercy; if it provided pardon, but not strength, or grace to begin our course, but not grace to persevere; if, in short, it omitted any one thing which any sinner in the universe could need, then some persons might say, 'It is not commensurate with my necessities.' But we defy the imagination of man to conceive any case which the Gospel cannot reach, or any need which it cannot satisfy.

***~~They cannot say that it is unreasonable in its demands.~~***

It does indeed require an unreserved surrender of ourselves to God: and on this account it appears to many to be strict and severe. But let anyone examine all its prohibitions and all its commands, and he will find them all amounting in fact to these two: "Do yourself no harm!" and, "Seek to be as happy as your heart can wish!" If there be anything in the Gospel which bears a different aspect, it is owing entirely to our ignorance of its real import. The more thoroughly the Gospel is understood, the more worthy of acceptance will it invariably appear.

***~~The only true reason is, that they "hate the light."~~***

Until men are truly converted to God, "their deeds are universally evil;" yes "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually." Now the Gospel is a light which shows their deeds in their proper colors.

***~~It reproves their ways.~~***

They have been "calling good evil, and evil good; and putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." In reference to these things, it undeceives them. It declares plainly, that those who do such things as they have done, and perhaps have accounted innocent, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

***~~It mortifies their pride.~~***

It not only shows them that they are obnoxious to the wrath of God, but that they are incapable of averting his displeasure by anything which they themselves can do. It brings down the proud religionist, and places him on a level with harlots. It requires every man to acknowledge himself a debtor to divine grace for every good thing that he either has or hopes for. *All this is extremely humiliating to our proud nature.*

***~~It inculcates duties which they are unwilling to perform.~~***

Humility and self-denial, renunciation of the world and devotedness to God, enduring of shame and glorying in the cross. These, and many other duties, it enjoins, which to our carnal and corrupt nature are hateful in the extreme. Yet the Gospel inculcates them with a strictness not to be lowered, a plainness not to be misinterpreted, and an authority not to be withstood.

These, these are the grounds on which the Gospel is rejected. If it would admit persons following their own ways, or of their accommodating its precepts to their own views or interests, they would give it a favorable reception. But as it requires all to people be cast into the very mold which it has formed, and will tolerate not the smallest willful deviation from its rules—it is, and must be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly. "They love darkness rather than it; nor will they come to it, lest their deeds would be reproved."

A just view of these things will prepare us for contemplating,

***~~III. Their guilt and danger in rejecting it—~~***

Doubtless every kind of sin will be a ground of "condemnation." But men's hatred of the light is that which chiefly, and above all other things,

***~~1. Aggravates their guilt—~~***

The Gospel is a most wonderful provision for the salvation of fallen man. It is the brightest display of Divine *wisdom*, and the most stupendous effort of Divine *goodness*. The rejection of this therefore, especially as proceeding from a hatred of it, argues such a state of mind as no words can adequately express. The malignity of such a disposition rises in proportion to the excellence of the Gospel itself.

We presume not to weigh the comparative guilt of men and devils, because the Scriptures have not given us sufficient grounds whereon to institute such a comparison. But the guilt of those who reject the Gospel far exceeds that of the heathen world: the wickedness of Tyre and Sidon, yes, of Sodom and Gomorrah, was not equal to that of the unbelieving Jews: nor was the guilt of those Jews, who rejected only the warnings of the prophets, comparable to that of those who despised the ministry of our Lord.

In like manner, those who live under the meridian light of the Gospel in this day will have still more to answer for, than the hearers of Christ himself; because his work and offices are now more fully exhibited, and more generally acknowledged. And in the day of judgment the Gospel will be as a millstone around the neck of those who rejected it: not having been a savor of life unto their salvation, it will be a savor of death unto their more aggravated condemnation.

***~~2. Insures their punishment—~~***

If men did not hate the Gospel itself, there would be some hope that they might in due time embrace it, and be converted by it. If they would even come to the light in order that the true quality of their works might be made manifest, then we might hope that they would be convinced of their wickedness, and be constrained to flee from the wrath to come. But when they dispute against the truth, and rack their invention in order to find out objections against it; when they indulge all manner of prejudices against the Gospel; when they withdraw themselves from the ministry of those who faithfully preach it, and say, as it were, to their minister, "Prophesy unto us *smooth things*, prophesy deceits!" then what hope can there be of such persons? Their hearts are so hardened, that it is scarcely possible to make any impression upon them: if a ray of light does shine into their minds, they will endeavor to extinguish it as soon as possible; they will go to business, to pleasure, to company, yes, to intoxication itself, in order to stifle the voice of conscience, and to recover their former delusive peace.

Alas! they are not only perishing of a fatal disorder, but they reject with disdain the only remedy that can do them good! They therefore must die, because they persist in drinking of the poisonous cup that is in their hands, and dash from their lips the only antidote and cure!

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

In so saying, you *reprove*us!

Behold! we declare unto you, that light, even the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ, has now come into the world.

You lovers of darkness, reject not this blessed Gospel. Little can sin contribute to your happiness, even while you are most capable of tasting its pleasures: but what it can do for you in a dying hour, or in the day of judgment, it is needless for me to say. Do not let your love os sin keep you from coming to the light. Surely it is better that "your deeds would be reproved," while you have opportunity to amend them, than that you would continue in them until you experience their bitter consequences!

You would not travel in the dark when you could enjoy the light of day, or refuse the assistance of a guide that would lead you into the path which you professed to seek. Only then act for your souls as you would do in your temporal concerns, and all shall yet be well. Believe in Christ, and you shall yet be saved by him; as well from the *guilt*of sin, as from the *condemnation*due to it.

You who profess to love the light, be careful to "walk as children of the light." Bring everything to the touchstone of God's word. Try your spirit and temper, as well as your words and actions by this test. See whether you take the precepts of Christ as your rule, and his example as your pattern. For the sake of the world too, as well as for your own comfort, you should come continually to the light. If you would conciliate their regard for the Gospel, or remove their prejudice from yourselves, you should "make your works manifest that they are wrought in God." You should let your light shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in Heaven.

***~~#1613~~***

***~~Conversion of Souls a Ground of Joy~~***

***~~[John 3:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.29-30).~~***

"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

OF all the passions in the human bosom, there is none more hateful than *envy*. When allowed to reign without control, there is not anything which it will not perpetrate. The rage of Cain, the conspiracy of Joseph's brethren, the implacable enmity of the Jewish priests against the Lord Jesus Christ, clearly show to what cruelties envy will impel those who are under its dominion. Doubtless in those who have the smallest degree of piety, this *malignant principle is weakened, and in a measure subdued: but it is not eradicated*: it is one of those corruptions, which, by varying their appearances, retain possession of us under the semblance of good: nor, until we have made very considerable advances in the divine life, are we able fully and effectually to guard against its deceitful workings.

We are assured that *Joshua*was truly pious; yet from an envious zeal for his Master's honor he was desirous of silencing those who by divine inspiration prophesied in the camp, [Numbers 11:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.27-29).

The *disciples*of our Lord were actuated by no better principle, when they forbad a person to cast out devils in his name, because he did not follow with them, [Mark 9:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.38).

The complaint which *John's disciples*also made to him respecting the multitudes who submitted to the baptism of Jesus, originated in the same feeling. Some Jews had taken occasion, from Jesus re-baptizing the disciples of John, to represent John and Jesus as "opposing each other; and, from the difficulties of determining which of the two was right, they maintained, that it was better to adhere to the washings appointed by Moses, than to comply with the rites which these rival innovators were introducing. The disciples of John, fearing that their Master's credit would suffer, and his influence be subverted, come to him to complain of Jesus for usurping an authority that did not belong to him, and for undermining the authority of John, from whom, in fact, he had, as they thought, derived his influence.

In answer to this complaint, John reminds them, that the very testimony which he had borne to Jesus, was sufficient to show them their error: for he had from the beginning represented his own office as a short and temporary one, which was to cease, as soon as the attention of men would be turned to Him, whose forerunner he was: and consequently, that the accomplishment of this great object would be to them a source, not of pain and grief, but of gratitude and thanksgiving.

This idea he illustrates by the similitude of a bridegroom delighting in his bride, and thereby exciting in his friends, not an envious repining, but a sympathetic joy. As for the diminution of his own influence, this, he tells them, was agreeable to the very design of his coming; and, like a star which had served its purpose in the night, he was contented to be eclipsed, now that the Sun of Righteousness had risen to illumine the world.

From this general view of our text, we observe,

***~~I. That the conversion of souls to Christ is a ground of joy—~~***

The success of a bridegroom who has obtained possession of his bride, is usually deemed a ground of joyful congratulation. Now the conversion of a soul to Christ is fitly represented under this similitude. The Scripture often speaks of him as the Husband of his people, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5). [Hosea 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19-20), and of the Church as his bride, [Ephesians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.23); [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27); [Ephesians 5:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.31-32). To mark this correspondence, is needless: indeed, it is better to take it in a general view, than to attempt to trace it in particulars The greatest delicacy should studiously be observed on all such subjects as these. Suffice it to say, that the metaphor is just; that all who are truly converted give up themselves to Christ, and are thereby made partakers of all that he possesses.

Contemplate now what a ground of joy this is,

***~~1. To the believer—~~***

Consider from what a state he is taken: how base by nature! how vile by practice. (Ezekiel through the whole 16th chapter strongly describes this,) but the foregoing caution must not be forgotten in following his train of ideas. Consider to what a state he is raised: to what exalted honor! to what immense wealth! to what unspeakable felicity! Has not such a one good reason to rejoice?

***~~2. To the heavenly Bridegroom—~~***

We know that, strictly speaking, he is not capable of having his happiness increased by anything that we can do—he is altogether independent and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the Scriptures speak of him as still affected with joy and sorrow, just as he was in the days of his flesh. In conformity then with them, let us think what must be his feelings, when he sees the blessed ends of his incarnation and death accomplished! To convert and save sinners was the end of all that he did and suffered for us; and when he beholds them converted to himself, "he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11)." To illustrate this idea, he gives us a variety of parables, [Luke 15:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.5-6); [Luke 15:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.9-10); [Luke 15:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.23-24); yes, he condescends to use by the prophet the very similitude in the text, in order to express the satisfaction of his soul in such events, [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.5).

***~~3. To the Bridegroom's friend—~~***

As the friends both of the bride and bridegroom are often accessary to their union, and rejoice when they see the wishes of all the parties accomplished—so the friends of Christ, his ministers especially, exert themselves to bring sinners unto him. It is for this they labor, for this they pray; yes, for this they live, and for this they are content to die. Their one object is, that sinners may be born to God, and be united to Christ in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. In the pursuit of this, their labors, their concerns, their sufferings are great. Can they then do otherwise than rejoice, when they see that they have not "labored in vain or run in vain?" If they "travail, as it were, in birth, while they stand in doubt," must they not rejoice, when their doubts are all dispelled? See how Paul rejoiced in the conversion of men in 1 Thessalonians 3:7-10; and such are the feelings of every minister, in proportion as he is animated with Christian zeal and love.

While the Baptist thus unselfishly declares that the conversion of sinners to Christ was to him a source of joy, he predicts,

***~~II. That it shall advance in despite of every obstacle—~~***

Those who are the instruments of diffusing the knowledge of Christ must wax and wane: however distinguished they may be for a time, they must soon "decrease." But Christ and his interests must "increase."

He must increase,

***~~1. In the estimation of his chosen people—~~***

The envy of some, and the malignity of others, will be exerted to dampen the ardor of our affections, and to shake our fidelity towards him: and, where a profession of regard for him has been lightly taken up, the enemies of Christ will succeed in drawing us from our allegiance to him. But, if we "have received the grace of God in truth," we shall never yield to their solicitations: and, "if any go out from us, it is because they were not of us: for, if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19)."

The true Spouse of Christ may be tried and tempted; but she will never renounce her connection with him, or be unfaithful to her engagements. The more she is assaulted from without or from within, the more she will flee to him for support: and her experience of his kindness will endear him to her ever more and more; so that her love to him will be more ardent, her affiance in him more uniform, and her adherence to him more determined. Never will he be more dear to her, than when she has suffered the loss of all things for him. The language of her heart will be, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with you!" "All other things will be counted but dross and dung in comparison with the knowledge of him." In short, she will "grow in grace, as she grows in the knowledge" of her Divine Husband.

***~~2. In the estimation of the world at large—~~***

The Baptist's words were soon verified: for, in the space of a few years, the knowledge and love of Christ were diffused throughout all the Roman empire. But his influence is yet only in its commencement. There is a time coming when it will extend to the remotest corners of the earth: "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall do him service." "All shall know him, from the least unto the greatest;" and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord." "Then shall his wife have made herself ready, and the marriage of the Lamb shall come: and blessed indeed will they be who shall then be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb, [Revelation 19:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7-9); [Revelation 21:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.9-11)." This is "the increase" which we assuredly look for; and of it there shall be no end, [Isaiah 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.7). [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44); [Daniel 7:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.27)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who profess to desire a union with Christ—~~***

Happy those who feel a desire after him! But there must be in every one of us a fitness for him, before he will acknowledge us as his. Let not this however be misunderstood. There cannot be in us anything that can deserve his love, nor anything that shall induce him to set his love upon us: *we have not a good thought or desire which has not been first of all given us by him*. But still, if we would be his in deed and in truth, we must have our desires supremely fixed on him, and every adulterous affection mortified. It is not a divided heart that he will accept. We must give ourselves wholly to him; or he will never admit us into the relation of his Spouse. See what holy jealousy Paul manifested on this head; and with what tender concern he urged the consideration of this subject on his Corinthian converts, [2 Corinthians 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2-3). So, beloved, we would urge it upon you. Deceive not your own souls. In forming human connections, we may impose upon one another: but we can never impose on Jesus: and if we would be acknowledged by him as his bride, we must present ourselves to him as a chaste virgin, with a determination to be his, even his alone.

***~~2. Those who profess to be actually united to him—~~***

It is scarcely needful to say that you must endeavor to "walk worthy of your high calling." If you profess to stand in such a relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, "what manner of persons ought you to be in all manner of conduct and godliness!" See then that you live in a state of constant communion with him, 1 [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.3), and of entire dependence on him, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30). [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); Be zealous for his honor, and studious to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4).

Endeavor also to commend him unto others. There is no room for jealousy here. The light of his countenance, like the light of the sun, will not be the less enjoyed by you because it is imparted to others. On the contrary, the more successful you are in bringing others into a participation of his benefits, the more will your own souls overflow with joy.

And the very weakest among us, that is really the Bridegroom's friend, shall find that he does not testify of Christ in vain: however incapable he may feel himself to recommend the Savior to others, he shall see some fruit of his labor, and have reason to say, with John, "This my joy is fulfilled."

***~~#1614~~***

***~~The Necessity of Faith in Christ~~***

***~~[John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36).~~***

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

*A FAITHFUL minister will find many occasions of rectifying the views and dispositions of his hearers; nor will he fail to improve the opportunities that occur of leading them to a more intimate acquaintance with their Lord*.

Some of the followers of John the Baptist having heard of the popularity of Jesus, were envious of his success, and jealous for the honor of their own teacher. But this holy man answered their complaints with much wisdom and humility; and having, in the strongest terms, given his testimony to the Divine mission of Jesus, he confirmed his word with the solemn declaration which we have just read. This record contains the sum and substance of the Gospel. It sets before us,

***~~I. The one condition of our salvation—~~***

We do not mean to say that there is anything to be done, whereby we are to earn or merit Heaven (in this respect our salvation has no conditions except those which were performed by Christ) but that,

***~~We must believe in Christ in order to obtain salvation—~~***

The duty here enjoined is not so easy as men generally suppose. If it merely imported a notional consent to the truth of Christianity, it might then be performed without any difficulty or self-denial. But to "believe in the Son of God" is, to believe that he is the only, and the all-sufficient, Savior of our ruined race. If we do not feel our need of him; if we are not convinced that we can never obtain salvation by any works of our own; if we do not make earnest application to him at the throne of grace; and if we do not trust altogether in his blood and righteousness, we cannot believe aright. This, and nothing less than this, is the condition of our acceptance with God.

***~~Nor is there any other condition so suitable as this—~~***

We may be ready to think that the performance of good works were a much fitter condition than faith. But if salvation were by works, no flesh living could be saved; because no man ever has kept, or ever can keep, the whole law of God. Nor would we be at all more safe, if sincere obedience were the term of our acceptance; because as no man has perfectly fulfilled the law, so no man has done all that he might have done; in many instances we might have mortified our sinful dispositions more, and approved ourselves more diligent in the discharge of our duty. Besides, if we were saved by any works of our own, we would have something whereof to glory, and might ascribe, even in Heaven itself, the honor to ourselves. Whereas the appointment of salvation by faith secures happiness to the most unworthy, if really penitent; and necessitates all to give the glory of their salvation to God alone.

The Baptist having thus made known the condition of our acceptance with God, proceeds to declare,

***~~II. The state of those who comply with it—~~***

About this, which might have been thought a dubious point, no doubt whatever is expressed. The believer has,

***~~1. A title to eternal life—~~***

*There is not any title whatever to an earthly inheritance so secure as that which the believer has to Heaven.* He has the promise of Jehovah. He has a covenant sealed with Emmanuel's blood, and confirmed with the oath of God himself—and, provided he can appeal to God respecting his sincere reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, he may put in his claim even at the bar of judgment, and demand, if we may so speak, all the glory of Heaven as his unalienable inheritance. God has said, "He who believes shall be saved;" and if we only prove our performance of the condition, we need never doubt the fulfillment of God's promise.

***~~2. The beginning and pledge of it in his soul—~~***

The life which a believer has in his soul is of the same kind with that which he shall possess for ever. He has the same reconciliation with God, the same delight in him, and the same sense of his favor. The Spirit of God that is within him is often called "a pledge" of his inheritance; because that Spirit, in his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences—is a foretaste of Heaven, and a pledge that the soul possessed of it shall in due time enjoy all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world. He has only to wait the appointed hour, and his abode shall be in the presence of his God, where nothing that can trouble or defile him shall ever enter. Say, brethren, could an angel from Heaven announce to you more joyful tidings than these?

But it is not thus with all. Widely different is,

***~~III. The state of those who do not comply with it—~~***

Here we may observe the same strength of assertion as in the former case. The text positively affirms, that

***~~They shall not enter into Heaven—~~***

Unbelievers often seem as confident of obtaining eternal happiness as if all the promises of God had been made to them in particular. But they will be awfully disappointed as soon as ever they enter into the invisible world. "They will knock at the gate of Heaven, crying, Lord, Lord, open to us! But he will answer them, Depart from me, I never knew you." A flaming sword will prohibit their entrance into Paradise, and an impassable gulf be fixed between them and the celestial spirits. This is the declaration of God, nor can it ever be reversed.

***~~They shall be made eternal monuments of God's wrath—~~***

They will not be persuaded that God is angry with them; and because they feel not his judgments now, they think they never shall. But *God even now is filled with wrath against them; and they are preserved only as condemned criminals in a dungeon, until the hour appointed for their execution shall arrive*. God's eye is ever upon them, not for good, but for evil. He views them as guilty of the most flagrant disobedience. He regards them as despisers both of his majesty, and of his mercy. He is incensed against them for "trampling under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit." And soon the wrath which even now "abides on them," "shall come upon them to the uttermost!"

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let all inquire seriously whether they truly believe. Let those, who have not hitherto come to Christ as lost and perishing sinners, guard against those workings of self-righteousness which would keep them from him. And let "those who have believed be careful to maintain good works".

***~~#1615~~***

***~~Christ a Fountain of Living Water~~***

***~~[John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10).~~***

"Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

OUR blessed Savior, though "Lord of all," was a man like unto us in all things, sin only excepted: he hungered, he thirsted, he was weary. He put forth his Almighty power to heal the maladies of others; but would not exercise it for the exempting of himself from human infirmities. In journeying from Judea to Galilee, he was overcome with weariness; and was necessitated to ask, from a woman of Samaria, who was come to the well by which he was sitting, a draught of water to quench his thirst. I conceive that, from the beginning, his object in addressing her was more to impart good to her, than to obtain relief to himself: for, instead of noticing, as he might well have done, her backwardness to comply with his request, he lost not a moment in revealing himself to her, as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

From his address to her, we shall take occasion to consider,

***~~I. The characters under which our Lord here presents himself to our view:~~***

***~~1. He first speaks of himself as "the great Gift of God" to mankind—~~***

Such indeed he was. In comparison with Him, all other gifts are as nothing; nothing, in respect of internal worth; and nothing, in respect of the benefits accruing from them. He is no other than "Jehovah's Fellow." Yet to such a degree did God love the world, that he gave Him, even his only-begotten Son, to become a man for us. Nor was it to instruct us only that God sent his Son, but to save us; to save us by bearing our iniquities in his own body on the cross; and by working out a righteousness, whereby we might be justified, and find acceptance with him. No other gift that God was able to bestow was of equal value with this, or could have effected this great end. Well, therefore, may all other gifts vanish from our sight before him, as the stars are eclipsed by the noon-day sun: and well may He, by way of eminence, be called "The gift of God."

***~~2. The Fountain of all good—~~***

Little did this woman think who it was that thus addressed her. He appeared to be a mere man, needing a little water to quench his thirst: but he was indeed "the fountain of living waters, [Jeremiah 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.13)," the one and only source of good to a ruined world. By "living water" we understand all the blessings of salvation; "all fullness" of which is treasured up in him at this moment: and "out of his fullness may every sinner in the universe receive."

Our Savior's address to her yet further shows us,

***~~II. The benefits which will accrue to us from the knowledge of him—~~***

If once we get a just view of his character,

***~~1. We shall surely apply to him for his benefits—~~***

If *temporal*blessings, however great in value, were spread before us, we might conceive of their being beheld with indifference: a conviction of their emptiness might well raise our minds above them, so that we would not condescend even to ask for a participation of them. But can all the blessings of *grace*and glory be contemplated with indifference? Can we behold an inexhaustible treasure of them laid up expressly for us, and not desire them? No! it would be impossible; especially if we knew that they were all to be obtained by asking. To every creature under Heaven may our Lord justly say, "If you knew what I have to bestow, you would ask of me."

We may as well suppose Hell to be opened to our view, without calling forth a desire to escape it; and Heaven, without creating a desire to obtain it; as imagine a view of Christ, under the foregoing characters, to be disclosed to the soul, and no desire to be excited there for the enjoyment of his blessings.

***~~2. We shall infallibly be made partakers of them—~~***

Not even the Samaritan woman, stranger as she was, and profligate, would have solicited his favor without obtaining it: much less shall any person now be allowed to seek his face in vain. He says to all, "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Nor would he have us straitened in our requests: his promise to the trembling suppliant is, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." Nothing would be too great for him to give, if only we sought him in humility and faith. Pardon, peace, holiness, and glory, would all be poured into our souls in rich abundance; yes, "his Spirit, which he would give us, would be within us a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life."

***~~Know then, all of you,~~***

***~~1. That the Lord Jesus Christ is here present with you—~~***

We see him not corporeally, as the Samaritan woman did: nevertheless, he is spiritually present with us, as he has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world;" and, if you will seek communion with him, you shall not be disappointed of your hope. He is, in reality, the same as ever he was. Still is he the great gift of God to man. Still is he the fountain of all spiritual good. Still does he complain of our forgetfulness of him, and declare he will impart out of his fullness to every inquiring soul. He put the Samaritan woman upon asking of him; saying, in fact, "Ask of me." So says he now to every one of us, "Ask of me, and I will give you living water."

***~~2. That you, no less than the poor Samaritan, need the blessings which he offers—~~***

Which of you needs them not? Which of you can find any other fountain from whence to quench your thirst? Which of you will not one day bitterly lament that you lost the present opportunity? I beg you, then, avail yourselves of your Lord's present condescension and grace; and let your souls take of him, and live for ever.

***~~#1616~~***

***~~The Living Water~~***

***~~[John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14).~~***

"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

OUR Lord invites us to learn of him. To encourage us, he declares that he is meek and lowly in heart. Never was this disposition more displayed than in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. She was of the most abandoned character; yet he condescended to instruct her. And, when she slighted his offered mercies, he endeavored to recommend them to her more favorable acceptance. We shall consider,

***~~I. What is that water which Christ will give—~~***

The woman understood our Lord only in a literal sense. But in his words there was a mystical meaning.

***~~By the water which he offered her, he meant the Holy Spirit—~~***

The Holy Spirit is often represented in the Scriptures under the figure of water. It is he of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks when he says, that God will pour out water upon thirsty souls, [Isaiah 44:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3). Ezekiel also explains himself as referring to him, when he promises to the Church, in Jehovah's name, that clean water would be sprinkled on them to cleanse them from their pollutions, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27). We are taught by God himself to put this interpretation on similar expressions used by our blessed Lord, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39). By the help of these passages we ascertain beyond a doubt the import of that before us.

***~~This water he had full authority to give—~~***

Jesus had not received the Spirit by measure only, like other prophets, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34); he had the residue of the Spirit abiding in him, [Malachi 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.15); yes, he had all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). As mediator he was commissioned and empowered to bestow this Spirit, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8) and [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.33). He received, in order that he might give. Hence he frequently arrogated to himself this power.

Thrice did he claim this authority in his conversation with the Samaritan women, and often afterwards in the plainest terms, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26); [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7); [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14). He actually exerted it while he continued upon earth, [John 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.22); and in a more abundant measure after his exaltation to Heaven. The effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost is expressly ascribed to him, [Acts 2:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.33). before cited. Hence we may understand why the Holy Spirit is so emphatically called the Spirit of Christ, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11).

To excite her desire after this living water, he proceeded to set before her,

***~~II. The properties it possesses—~~***

Contrasting it with that which he had solicited at her hands, he told her it was,

***~~1. This living water is satisfying in its nature—~~***

Water from an earthly spring will quench the thirst only for a short time; nor will it at all allay our appetite another things. The men of this world are insatiable in their desire after the vanities of time and sense. The more they have of pleasure, riches, or honor, the more they want, [Job 20:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.22). But a draught of this living water will satisfy the soul: of this heavenly spring indeed, all who have once tasted, will wish to drink again; yes, they will pant after it as the deer after the water-brooks. But their desire of earthly things will be greatly abated. The consolations of the Spirit will be regarded by them as the only satisfying portion, [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2); they will make everything else appear insipid, as the beholding of the meridian sun will obscure in their eyes the splendor of all inferior objects, [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25). [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

***~~2. This living water is heavenly in its tendency—~~***

The supplies of water in "a well" are constant and uniform: so the Spirit operates in the heart of man. There will indeed be seasons when his operations will be less manifest: but he will always reside in us as a principle of life, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17); he will excite holy and heavenly affections in our bosoms, [Galatians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.6); he will keep Heaven itself in our view, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14); and the one aim of all his motions will be to lead us to everlasting life: nor, if we cherish his motions, will he fail of bringing us to the possession of it, [Romans 8:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13-14).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How glorious a person must Christ be!~~***

The Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father, [Acts 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3-4); yet Christ has power to send him into our hearts. He can as easily bestow him on us, as we can give a cup of water from a spring. Even though the whole world would ask him, he could impart the Spirit to all of them at the same instant, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39). [Isaiah 55:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.2). Let us then entertain worthy thoughts of him, and look to him for constant supplies of this living water, [Philippians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.19) and [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16).

***~~2. How earnest should we be in our application for this heavenly gift!~~***

The worldly man is indefatigable in his pursuit of earthly vanities: but which of them can be compared with this living water? Which of them can give us life? or satisfy the soul? or bring us to glory? O that we might thirst after this, and this alone! Then would the invitations of Christ be precious to our souls, [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17), and we would speedily receive his promised blessings, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18).

***~~3. How dead ought we to be to all earthly things!~~***

Our Lord represents all who have received his Spirit as thirsting no more. Hence *we can have no evidence that we have drunk of the living waters, but in proportion as our thirst for other things is abated*. Let those, who profess to have the Spirit dwelling in them, consider this. The Scriptures that confirm this truth are numberless, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). [John 2:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.15-17). [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9). May God impress them deeply on our hearts! Let the world then be crucified unto us, and us unto the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14); and if we would indeed be found partakers of Christ, let us both *live*in the Spirit and *walk*in the Spirit, [Galatians 5:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24-25).

***~~#1617~~***

***~~Salvation Is of the Jews~~***

***~~[John 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.22).~~***

"Salvation is of the Jews."

THIS is part of the answer of our blessed Lord to the Samaritan woman. He had taken occasion, from an observation of hers, to show her that he was well acquainted with the most secret history of her past life; and not from report merely, but from his own omniscient mind, from which nothing could be hidden. He had told her, that "she had had five husbands;" (all of whom, it is probable, had put her away for her adulteries;) and that "the person with whom she was now living was not her husband."

She, wishing to avoid so painful a subject, proposed a question relative to a controversy which then existed between the Samaritans and the Jews, as to the place where God was to be worshiped. Our Lord, satisfied with having manifested to her his character as a prophet of the Most High, graciously waved the prosecution of a subject which was so painful to her, and turned his attention to that which she had submitted to him. In reply to her question, he informed her that the time was coming when all distinctions of places would be lost; so far, at least, as related to acceptable worship: for that all, of whatever place or country, who would worship God in spirit and in truth, would be accepted by him.

At the same time he informed her that the question itself must be determined in favor of the Jews. The Samaritans, indeed, had much to say in their own behalf, and in support of the cause which they maintained. They could say, that on Mount Gerizim, for the sanctity of which they pleaded, Abraham himself had built an altar, [Genesis 12:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.6-7), as had Jacob also; (for Shechem, where he built it, was so close to Mount Gerizim, that a man's voice might be distinctly heard from the one to the other, [Genesis 33:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 33.18-20) with [Judges 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 9.7);) and that, consequently, that place had a prior claim to Zion, on which no altar had been raised, until many hundred years had elapsed.

They could also with truth affirm, that Moses himself, under the special direction of Jehovah, had commanded, that all the congregations of Israel, as soon as they would gain possession of the Promised Land, would assemble round Mount Gerizim; and that from thence the blessings of Jehovah would be pronounced, while his curses would be declared from Mount Ebal, which was near to it, [Deuteronomy 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 11.29); [Deuteronomy 27:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.11-13). They could also appeal to the Jewish Scriptures, that Joshua and all Israel had actually complied with this command, [Joshua 8:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.33-34); and had thereby sanctified that mountain in a more especial manner, and marked it out as the place which God had chosen for his more peculiar worship in all future ages.

But, in answer to all this, our Lord informed her, that the Samaritans "knew not whom they worshiped." Though they occupied the land of Israel, they were not Israelites, but foreigners, whom the king of Assyria had sent to occupy the land, when he carried captive the ten tribes of Israel, [2 Kings 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 17.24). Nor did they, in reality, know the true God: for it was only in consequence of the judgments which God had inflicted on them for their idolatries, by sending lions to devour them, that they had ever thought of worshiping him at all. To avert his displeasure, they had desired that a Jewish priest might be sent back to the land, to instruct them how to worship Jehovah; but, at the same time, they retained their own idolatries; thus "they feared the Lord *and*served other gods, [2 Kings 17:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 17.25-27)." The Jews, on the contrary, worshiped Jehovah alone; (for never after the Babylonish captivity did they return to idolatry;) and they possessed that revelation of God's will, through the knowledge of which alone any human being could be saved: "You worship you know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews."

Thus was the controversy determined in favor of the Jews. But that being no longer of any consequence to the Church, we forbear to notice it any further; and shall fix our attention on that general declaration, which is still of as great importance as ever, that "salvation is of the Jews."

It is of them *originally*, as derived from them.

It is of them *instrumentally*, as communicated altogether by them.

***~~I. It is of the Jews, as being originally derived from them—~~***

The way of salvation has been one and the same, from the very moment that the promise was given in Paradise, that "the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head." But, having been only traditionally handed down, it was but very imperfectly known, even in the family of Abraham; and by the world at large it was almost, if not entirely, forgotten. But it pleased God, when he brought out from their bondage in Egypt the descendants of Abraham, to give them a written revelation of his will, and to make known to them the way of salvation, not only in its great leading article, the sacrifice of Christ, but in many minute particulars, as we shall see by an investigation of their Ceremonial Law.

The Jewish religion, so far as the way of salvation was concerned, was founded altogether on sacrifice. No person could approach unto God without a sacrifice: but by means of sacrifices specially appointed, every one might hope to obtain forgiveness of sin, and acceptance with his reconciled God. For this end there were sacrifices offered every morning and every evening throughout the year; and on the Sabbath-day they were doubled [Numbers 28:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.3-4); [Numbers 28:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.9-10); but on the great day of annual atonement they were multiplied, with the most significant rites that can be imagined. The high priest was to take the blood of the sacrifices, and to carry it within the veil, and to sprinkle it upon the Mercy-seat, and before the Mercy-seat, in token that the hopes of all Israel were founded upon the sacrifices thus offered as an atonement for their sins, [Leviticus 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.14). After that was done, he was to offer incense, and then to come out and bless the people.

But, as has been observed, there were many peculiar ordinances appointed for their instruction, as to the more minute points to be attended to in this great work. On some occasions, the offenders themselves were to lay their hands upon the head of their sacrifices: on some other occasions, the blood of the sacrifices was to be sprinkled on the offerers: on some other occasions the blood was to be sprinkled, mixed with water, [Leviticus 14:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.6-7). [Hebrews 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.19).

The efficacy of all these offerings was pre-eminently marked in the ordinance of the scape-goat. One goat having been killed, and its blood carried within the veil, another goat, called the scape-goat, which had been chosen by lot for this purpose, was brought forth, and had all the sins of all the Children of Israel laid upon it by the hands of the High Priest; and it was then led, with all the guilt of Israel upon its head, into the wilderness, never more to be seen by man; so that all the people might see that their iniquities were taken away, and that the punishment due to them would not be inflicted.

Now, *all this was designed to shadow forth to that people the way of salvation*. And, in truth, to those who had any spiritual discernment, salvation was exhibited with a clearness quite sufficient for the circumstances under which the people were. They were children; and were to be taught like children, by types and shadows: and *all who looked through those types to the sacrifice which they shadowed forth, were saved as effectually as we are by looking back upon the offering which has now been once offered upon Calvary*.

In all this was Christianity depicted. On what are the hopes of Christians founded, but on sacrifice, even the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ? Except through his atoning blood, not a creature in the universe can ever come to God. In presenting that offering, he himself was the Priest, as well as the victim: and having offered himself up to God upon the cross, he rose from the dead, and went with his own blood within the veil, there to present it before the Mercy-seat: and on that he founds his all-prevailing intercession.

But, let us come to a few particulars, and we shall see how the light beams upon us from every part of the Jewish Scriptures. We have said, that, on some occasions, the offender laid his hands upon the head of his offering, just as Aaron did on the scape-goat, when he confessed over him all the sins of all the Children of Israel. This teaches us, that it *is not sufficient for us that the Lord Jesus Christ has been offered for our sins: we must go to him: we must confess over him, as it were, our sins: and we must by faith transfer to him our guilt, and declare before God, that we have no hope whatever but in his atoning blood*.

It has been said also, that on some occasions, the offerer was sprinkled with the blood of his offering: and this, also, must we do; taking, as it were, the bunch of hyssop in our hands, and dipping it in the Redeemer's blood, and sprinkling our own souls with it, as the only possible means of purging our consciences from guilt, and of bringing us into a state of peace with God.

It is in reference to this that we are said to "have come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than that of Abel." The sacrifice of Abel received, indeed, a sweet token of God's favorable acceptance; but the blood of our sacrifice washes all our sins away, and gives us a title to an everlasting inheritance.

It has been observed, that, on some occasions, the blood was mixed with water, and then sprinkled on the offerer. This shows us, that we must have the Holy Spirit also poured out upon us: according as it is said, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you." The Lord Jesus Christ, we are told, "came not by water only, but by water and blood:" and this very mystery was intimated at the time of our Savior's crucifixion, when the soldier pierced our Savior's side, and forthwith came, in two distinguishable streams, blood and water: the one to cleanse us from the guilt of sin; the other, from its power: according as it is written, "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

We might prosecute this subject in a great variety of particulars, and show in all of them the correspondence between the salvation shadowed forth by the law, and that exhibited by the Gospel. But we wish to keep the subject as simple as possible, and not to perplex it by too great a variety.

There is, however, one point which it is of great importance to mention. It will be remembered, that, when Moses was about to make the tabernacle, a very strict and solemn command was given to him, (the injunction is repeatedly mentioned in the Pentateuch,) "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount." The same injunction was given to David, also, when he was desirous to build the temple. And Paul very particularly notices the former, as of vast importance.

But whence was it that such stress was laid on this apparently unimportant matter? It was from hence: The law was given to shadow forth the Gospel: and it was to be the model to which the whole edifice of Christianity was to be conformed, in every minutest particular.

Now, if there was any one thing added to the tabernacle, or omitted in it, or altered in any respect, it would not be a perfect representation of Christianity. But the two were to correspond with each other, as the impression with the seal: and if there were anything in the tabernacle superfluous or defective, the correspondence would be lost, and God would be greatly dishonored. But the necessary care was taken: Moses was faithful in all his house as a Servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: and the same fidelity has Christ shown as a Son, whose house are we, if we "hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end."

Thus it appears that *we have received salvation originally from the Jews; to whom, in every particular, it was first revealed*. But we go on to observe,

***~~II. Secondly, That we have also received it instrumentally from them, in that it has been altogether communicated to us through their ministrations.~~***

It was first preached to us by *Moses*and the *prophets*. We would have known nothing of a Messiah, if they had not pointed him out. We have already seen how much we are indebted to Moses for his writings, which make known to us the very first prophecy of a Savior; and show us how Abel, and Noah, and Abraham, found acceptance with God. To him we owe it, that the model shown to him in the mount was so carefully copied, that there is not so much as a pin in his tabernacle which has not its corresponding article in the Christian Edifice. From him we have such a view of Christianity as the Gospel itself can scarcely be said to afford. Doubtless, until the ceremonies prescribed by him had the true light reflected on them, they were very obscure: but now that they have been explained to us from above, we see the Gospel embodied, as it were, and made visible even to the eye of sense.

Who that contemplates one goat offered in sacrifice to God, and the other bearing away all the sins of all the people of Israel that had been laid upon his head—does not see, before his very face, what the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is daily effecting for all who believe in him?

Even the moral law itself, which Moses also has recorded, has the very same tendency, and, in the ears of all who understand it, proclaims the utter impossibility of being saved, except by the sacrifice that would in due time be offered; insomuch that Paul calls it "a schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ." All the prophets concur with him in the very same testimony; and proclaim with one voice, that "there is no remission of sins but by blood;" and that "there is no other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." We are told, that "to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins."

Ask we of *Isaiah?*His testimony is, "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."

To the same effect speaks also the Prophet *Daniel*: "the Messiah shall be cut off; but not for himself." "He shall make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness."

And *Joel*points him out, as "that Lord, on whom whoever shall call, shall be saved."

The last and greatest of all the prophets was *John the Baptist*: and he pointed out the very Savior himself in these emphatic words; "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Here we see the union of the law and of the Gospel to be precisely such as we have represented it. The lamb was at that very time offered every morning and evening in sacrifice to God for the sins of Israel; and here was Jesus pointed out as the Lamb that would take away, not the sins of one people only, but of the whole world.

And what was the testimony borne by *our Lord*himself? Did he not declare, that He had come to "give his life a ransom for many?" Did He not, when he administered the sacramental cup to his disciples, say, "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins?"

But what did his Apostles say, when the time was come for the full disclosure of the great mystery of Redemption? They with one voice declare, that "he died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; and that "all who believe in him are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the parallel between the law and the Gospel is distinctly drawn; so that nothing is left to imagination or conjecture; but all is declared on infallible authority to have been accomplished in him, to the unspeakable advantage of our souls; since, "if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh—then how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the Living God."

And to whom are we indebted for all this knowledge? To Jews, from first to last: to Jewish prophets and to Jewish Apostles: yes, the very Savior himself who effected this salvation, and to whom they all bore witness; he himself proclaimed it; he himself displayed its power while he yet hung on the cross; and after his resurrection he gave this commission to his disciples, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved: and he who believes not, shall be damned."

Now, what of all these things can we learn from the philosophers of Greece and Rome? No more than from the beasts themselves! It was hidden from them altogether. If we want to know what kind of a Savior was to come—we must learn it from the Jews. If we would know what ground there is to believe that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies; to Jews we must go to obtain the desired information. If we would learn how we are to come to the Savior, and to obtain acceptance through him; we must sit at the feet of Jews, and receive instruction from their lips. We have not a hope that is not founded on their word; nor can a ray of consolation shine into our souls, that is not emitted from their writings. We do not sufficiently consider this: but we ought never to forget how greatly we are indebted to the Jews: since, whether in its primary structure or its subsequent conveyance, our "salvation is altogether of them"—of them *originally*, of them *instrumentally*, of them *exclusively*: so that not a soul among us shall ever go forth from this devoted land to the mountains of eternal bliss, but as instructed, instigated, and assisted by a Jew.

**From this subject we cannot but learn our duty in two important respects:** first, to seek this salvation for ourselves; and next, to exert ourselves in order to impart this salvation to those from whom we have received it.

***~~First, then, let us seek this salvation for ourselves.~~***

It cannot be that Almighty God would have done so much for our salvation, and we be at liberty to neglect it. The Apostle's question is full of solemn and impressive energy, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?" Surely, if God has given his only dear Son to be a sacrifice for sin; if, in order to prepare the world for the reception of him, he shadowed forth all his work and offices with such precision, that it would be impossible for any considerate mind not to see and understand the way of salvation; if Prophets and Apostles, for such a series of ages, bore witness to him at the peril of their lives, in order that we might know him, and be partakers of his benefits; does it befit us to despise it all, as if it were no better than a cunningly-devised fable?

Surely, we must see that it is our bounden duty to flee for refuge to this hope that is set before us. We must remember what the very term "Salvation" implies: it implies, that we are LOST. For if in ourselves we are not lost, we cannot need a Savior. But we are lost, every one of us; for we are sinners, condemned by God's righteous law; and "the wrath of God abides on us." I fear it will appear harsh to say, that we are in this respect on a footing with the fallen angels, even with "the spirits that are already in the prison" of Hell. But, if I say the truth before God, this is the only difference between them and us: *they*are lost beyond redemption. Whereas *we*, though lost, have salvation offered to us: but, if we neglect this salvation, we shall perish, under a load of guilt beyond all expression aggravated, and under a punishment beyond all conception terrible. Whatever may have been the guilt of the fallen angels, from this, at least, they are free; they have never poured contempt on a redeeming God, never rejected a offered salvation: but these are the sins that will be charged on us, if we embrace not the salvation which is revealed to us in the Gospel.

I say, then, to every soul before me, seek this salvation which the Jews have brought unto you.

Seek it *simply*, mixing nothing with it, but relying altogether on the atoning blood of Christ, "who, though he knew no sin, was made sin for you, that you, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him."

And seek it *humbly*, confessing over the Lord Jesus Christ your every sin, and transferring it by faith to his sacred head.

In point of dependence, *you must renounce your most righteous acts as much as your vilest sins*; and you must look to his blood to cleanse you from the iniquity even of your holiest things.

Seek it *constantly*too: it was every day in the year that the offerings for sin were made: and every day and hour must you look to your great Sacrifice, if you would have it available for your eternal good.

Seek it, moreover, *unreservedly*. Neglect not the water, any more than the blood. It will be a fatal mistake to think of ever being saved by the sacrifice of Christ, if you are not renewed and sanctified by his Spirit. These two are inseparably joined by God himself; and it will be at the peril of your souls, if ever you attempt to put them asunder.

Lastly, I would say, seek it to the *full extent of your necessities*. I have purposely deferred until now all mention of the sacrifices that were appointed for the sins of ignorance. They are particularly stated in the fourth chapter of the Book of Leviticus. There you will see, that, if a man had ever so ignorantly and unintentionally contracted defilement, (say, by the touching of a bone or a grave, or anything that had been previously touched by one unclean,) he must bring his offering, as soon as ever he discovered that he had transgressed. If he would refuse to bring his appointed offering, he must be cut off from the Lord's people, as a despiser of the law, and a rebel against his God.

Thus must *we*do, even for the slightest inadvertence or defect. And if, from an idea that our offence has been light and trivial, we hope to remove its guilt by any other means than the blood of Christ, we shall surely perish. If we had ever violated God's holy law but once, and that only by an inadvertent thought, there remains for us but one way of salvation, one only door of hope: and, if we will not enter at that door, and walk in that way, "there remains nothing for us but a certain fearful looking-for of wrath and fiery indignation to consume us!"

I say then, again, to every soul among you, seek for salvation in Christ alone. There was but one brazen serpent erected in the camp of Israel—and there is but one Savior appointed for the whole world. "There is no other way unto the Father but by Him." And "those who come to God in his Son's name, he will never cast out."

Next, let us exert ourselves to impart this salvation to those from whom we have received it—the Jewish people. I appeal to all: if we are so indebted to the Jewish people of former ages, would we not endeavor, in some respect, to requite them by showing kindness to their descendants? and if we are constrained to say that "salvation is of the Jews," would we not, now that the Jews themselves are ignorant of that salvation, endeavor to impart to them the light which we enjoy, and constrain them, in their turn, to say, "Salvation is of the Christians?"

For, surely, if it be of *them*in its commencement, it is, and ought to be, of *us*in its progress and consummation. I would ask, is it not a scandal to the whole Christian world, that they would have so long and so shamefully neglected those to whose ancestors they are so greatly indebted? It was never God's design that we would "hide our candle under a bushel," and conceal it from the very persons who have put it into our hands. On the contrary, Paul expressly says, that as we have been benefitted by their unbelief, so we would strive to benefit them by our faith: "As we in times past have not believed God, but have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; so have these also now not believed, that through our mercy they also may obtain mercy." While, therefore, we withhold from them the instruction which God has qualified us to impart, we defeat the very designs of God himself, and may well have required at our hands the blood of all who perish through our neglect.

If we would know in what way we ought to exert ourselves for them, we need only inquire how they exerted themselves for us. Behold the *Prophets*and Apostles, in the different ages in which they lived: which of them all, with the exception of the Prophet Jonah, did not engage in his work with zeal, and execute it with fidelity? Of all the *Apostles*, there was but one who did not actually seal the truth with his blood; as John also was willing to do, if he had been called to it.

All the first Christian converts, when driven from Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word," happy if by any means they might impart to us benighted heathens the salvation which they had found.

Would not, then, some measure, at least, of that zeal be shown by us? Should not their souls be precious in our eyes, as ours were in theirs? It is a shame to us that we think so lightly of this matter; and that we, who ought to take the lead in everything that is good and great, are so backward to exert ourselves in this holy cause. I well know that sloth and indifference will furnish us with reasons enough for delay: but I would ask: what reason has any man for neglecting this duty, which might not have been urged with still greater force by the Jews for a neglect of us?

The attempt to convert the Jews might have been deemed visionary a few years ago: but shall it be judged visionary now? I say, without fear of contradiction, that the efforts which have been made within these few years have produced a great effect, if not in numerous conversions—yet at least in that which must precede conversion; and which conversion may reasonably, in many instances, be expected to follow; I mean, the conviction of their minds of the truth of Christianity.

I do say, that this effect is seen, felt, and acknowledged by the Jews themselves: and if the periodical publications which are issued forth on this subject were perused, the truth of this assertion would most abundantly appear. Permit me, then, to call the attention of this assembly to this momentous subject; and to press on all who hear me this day, to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty," even against the mighty prejudices of the Jewish people, and the no less formidable indifference of the Christian world. A good example here would be felt throughout the land, and would tend not a little to diffuse, both among Jews at home and Jews abroad, the light which we possess, and the salvation we enjoy. I ask, is that true which our Lord has spoken, "If you believe not that I am He—you shall die in your sins?" If this be true, then that whole people are perishing by millions. And shall we allow them thus to "perish for lack of knowledge?" God forbid! If any of us know what salvation is, we ought to impart it to others.

We feel this obligation in some measure to the heathen, to whom we are not at all indebted; and yet overlook it in reference to the Jews, from whom we have received all the light and knowledge we possess. This ought not to be so: this should not continue one hour longer: we ought all to rise, as one man, to repair, as far as possible, our past neglect, and to fulfill our duties to God and man.

But, if we will still continue to hide our talent in a napkin, know all of you, that you shall be called into judgment for it, and that the doom of the unprofitable servant must await you. But "let me hope better things, though I thus speak, even things that accompany salvation." I thank God that some at least have awaked to the calls of justice and of mercy; of *justice to God*, who has entrusted them with their talents; and of *mercy to the Jews*, who so greatly need their improvement of them. And I pray God that this spirit may abound more and more; and that those who embark in this good cause may soon have the happiness to see that "they have not labored in vain, nor run in vain."

***~~#1618~~***

***~~The Worship Which God Requires~~***

***~~[John 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.24).~~***

"God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

BRETHREN, you are all upon the brink of eternity! You are all sinners. As sinners, you stand in need of mercy at the hands of God: and God is willing to bestow mercy upon every one of you, without exception. But he must be inquired of, in order that he may do this for you: and he must be inquired of, not in a cold and formal manner, but in sincerity of heart; for "He is Spirit; and all who worship him, must," as my text informs you, "worship him in spirit and in truth."

Let this declaration sink down into your ears; and let it operate strongly on your minds, while we contemplate it;

***~~I. As an answer to a particular inquiry—~~***

Our Lord was conversing with a woman of Samaria, and had shown to her that he was perfectly acquainted with all the evils she had committed in her former life, and with those in the indulgence of which she was still living. She, not wishing to hear anything further upon a subject so painful to her mind, sought to turn the conversation into another channel; and for that purpose inquired what his sentiments were on a point that was at issue between the Jews and the Samaritans, namely, whether God was to be worshiped at Jerusalem, or at Mount Gerizim in Samaria? Our Lord, in reply to her question, tells her that the time has now come, when the Father was no longer to be worshiped in any one place more than another; but that in every place under Heaven, those, and those only, would have access to him, who "worshiped him in spirit and in truth."

***~~This directly met the inquiry which had been made—~~***

Until that time external worship had certainly prevailed in the services of God's people, whose access to him was chiefly in the use of prescribed forms, which were shadowy and typical, and were confined to one city, and to one particular building in that city. The directions which God had given in relation to this matter, even before his people came into possession of the promised land, were very specific: "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall you seek, and thither shall you come; and thither you shall bring your burnt-offerings, etc., etc. and there you shall eat before the Lord your God, [Deuteronomy 12:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 12.5-7)."

At the time when the temple of Solomon was consecrated, the people were instructed, that, if they would go out to battle, or be carried captives to a foreign land, they must turn towards that place, when they made their supplications to the Lord for help or mercy: and an intimation was given, that, even if they would "return to God with all their heart and all their soul," it would not suffice, unless they also "directed their prayers towards that place, [1 Kings 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.44); [1 Kings 8:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.48)."

From hence, as well as from the examples of their holiest prophets, [Psalm 28:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 28.2). [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10), they were led to suppose that no prayer would be accepted, but such as would be offered in that precise manner. There was indeed under that very dispensation ample evidence that that conclusion was erroneous: for God had said, "This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2)."

Still, however, this matter was not generally understood, until our blessed Lord proclaimed, that Jehovah was Spirit, and therefore not confined to any place, but pervading all space, and accessible to all who desired to draw near unto him. He no longer now was to be approached with mere bodily service, or in carnal ordinances, but "in spirit," as opposed to the one, and "in truth," as opposed to the other: and those who so approached to him would never "seek his face in vain."

***~~In this view it is of importance to us also—~~***

We are apt to lay an undue stress on external worship; and to imagine, that a peculiar measure of acceptance is to be found at the table of the Lord, more than at any other time or place. (Let me not be here misunderstood, as though I would undervalue the ordinance of the Lord's Supper: for it is our bounden duty to commemorate our Lord's death in that ordinance; and from a spiritual and believing participation of the bread and wine, we may undoubtedly expect the richest benefits.) But from a mere formal attendance on that ordinance we receive no spiritual good. It is to the heart alone that God looks: if the heart is not right towards him, no service whatever can be "acceptable in his sight:" but, if the heart is under the influence of penitence and faith, its offerings, under whatever circumstances they are presented, shall surely be accepted by him.

That this truth may be more fully brought before you, I shall consider the text,

***~~II. As an instruction suited to all times and circumstances—~~***

The thing which God expects, is, that there be a correspondence between the feelings of our heart, and the offerings of our lips—

If, for instance, we *confess our sins*before him, it is not sufficient that our *words*be humble; our *spirit*must be humble too, and a holy penitential sorrow must fill our hearts.

If we present our *petitions*before him, it is not sufficient that we ask for such things as are good and desirable, but we must feel an ardent desire after them in our souls, and plead for them with an importunity suited to the importance of them.

So also, if we return *thanks*to God, we must not rest in unmeaning compliments, but adore and magnify our God from our inmost souls.

If there is not this *correspondence between our feelings and our words*, what "truth" is there in us? Our services are no better than a solemn mockery, that must offend, rather than please, the Majesty of Heaven.

***~~Such sincerity the very nature of God requires—~~***

"God is Spirit," who pervades all space. He is equally present with all his creatures; nor is there a thought in the heart of any person in the universe, that is not "naked and open before him." Were he able to behold our actions only, he might be pleased with our services, though unaccompanied with any devout affection: but when "he searches the heart, and tries the thoughts," and "weighs" with infallible accuracy "our very spirits," how can he listen to our heartless addresses with any satisfaction? Truly such prayers must be, as he declares they are, an utter "abomination unto him."

When some under the Jewish dispensation brought to him "the blind, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice," he appealed to them, "Whether it was not evil?" Says he, "When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. [Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.8)."

What then must he say to those who think to impose upon him by prayers which proceed "from the lips only, while the heart is far from him? [Matthew 15:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-9)."

Assuredly he will say, "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them! [Isaiah 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-14)."

***~~Listen to me then, while I make your prayers a subject of strict inquiry—~~***

It is to be feared that many of you, who would yet wish to be thought good Christians, live without even the *form*of prayer. Look back only to this very morning; look back to the past week; look back throughout your whole lives—and see whether you have ever spent one single hour in secret prayer to God?

Ah! does not conscience condemn the greater part of you? Have not many of you, as far as prayer is concerned, lived rather like brute beasts, than as rational and immortal beings? Or, supposing you have kept up a *form*of prayer, has it not been a mere form? You who teach your children to repeat some form of prayer in your presence, know very well that their recitations are not true prayer: and what is yours better than theirs? God, in whose presence you read or repeat your forms, knows how to estimate them, while they are offered without any suitable emotions.

The way for you to judge of them is this: set before your eyes a person perishing in the sea, and supplicating deliverance from his perils; and then compare your feelings with his. His feelings you can easily conceive: and if yours have no correspondence with them, no such sense of danger, no such desire of help, no such thankfulness for the efforts used in your behalf, you have yet to learn the nature of prayer, and yet to begin that work, without which you must perish in your sins.

***~~But let me not conclude without adding a few words of encouragement—~~***

It is probable that some may be ready to write bitter things against themselves, because they have no *fluency*in prayer. But it is not by our fluency in utterance that God judges of our prayers, but by the humility of our minds, and the fervor of our desires. *A sigh, or groan, proceeding from a broken and contrite heart, is of more value in his sight, than the richest effusions of eloquence that ever proceeded from the lips of man.* Never was there a more acceptable prayer offered by mortal man than that of the Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Take courage then, you who are dejected because you find not such utterance as you could wish. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. [Romans 8:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26-27)"

Only let there be a sincerity of heart before him, and your very breathings shall be heard, and descend in blessings on your souls; for "he seeks such to worship him," and will fulfill the desire of those who so approach him. If only you "look to him, you shall be lightened;" and if you hope in him, you shall assuredly be made partakers of his kingdom and glory."

***~~#1619~~***

***~~Conviction of Sin, a Preparative for Salvation~~***

***~~[John 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.29).~~***

"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

LITTLE do we know what a day or an hour may bring forth. It was probably owing to an unexpected temptation that this Samaritan woman fell into the sin which led to that wicked and abandoned course which she afterwards pursued. And to what the world in general would call a most accidental circumstance, she was indebted for the salvation of her soul.

It happened, as we say, that the Lord Jesus Christ came to relieve his weariness and thirst at Jacob's well, where she also had come to draw water. There, contrary to what might have been expected, the Savior entered into conversation with her, and brought conviction to her mind, and revealed himself to her as the promised Messiah; and made her, who had been an occasion of evil to many, to become to many the means of their salvation: for, on being interrupted in her conversation by his disciples, who had gone into the adjacent city to purchase food, she herself went into the city, and said to all whom she met, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

In considering this address of hers to her fellow-citizens, I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. The power of God's word to produce conviction of sin—~~***

Our Lord had told her what were undoubtedly the most remarkable occurrences of her life, that "she had had five husbands, and that the man with whom she was now living was not her husband." This brought all her former life so strongly to her recollection, that it seemed as if he had "told her all things that she had ever done." And this is no uncommon effect of God's word upon the mind and conscience; as Paul has told us: "But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" [1 Corinthians 14:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.24-25)."

It then appeared, and frequently does also at this hour, that a preacher may be led to touch on some points so forcibly and circumstantially, as to seem as if he had been actually made acquainted with the secret history of one or other of his hearers, and were intentionally developing to his audience the history of that particular individual.

Now, whence is this? I think it may be well accounted for, by considering what the Spirit of God effects, when he applies any single word with power to the soul.

**1. He "opens the eyes of the understanding.** [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45). [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18)."

A man that is blind cannot see anything: but when his eyes are opened, he sees all the things that are before him, and within the reach of his visual organs. Thus it is when God is pleased to give us a spiritual discernment: we do not see this or that particular sin only, but our entire defection from God, and our whole life, as one continued course of rebellion against him.

***~~2. He discloses to us the inmost recesses of the soul—~~***

The soul of man may fitly be compared to the chambers of imagery in Ezekiel's vision. All is transacting there in secret; and nothing is known but to God himself; until God directs his servant to a hole in the wall, by which a variety of things may be discerned.

Now, thus it is that the Spirit of God opens sometimes a hole, and sometimes even a window or a door, by means of which the interior of the soul is made manifest, and the sinner is enabled to see things of which he had before a very indistinct idea.

We may conceive an expensive gravestone, beautiful to behold by those who see only its exterior. But, when it is laid open, and all its foul contents are exposed to view, it is too loathsome an object to look upon without the utmost disgust and abhorrence. It would not be necessary to take an accurate survey of the offensive object in all its parts: a person would readily say, 'I have seen it all.' And so, *when God gives to a man a sight of his chief corruptions, it appears as if every transaction of his life had been made to pass before him*.

***~~3. He awakens conscience to a discharge of its proper office—~~***

Conscience, in an unconverted man, neglects its duty altogether. It ought to observe and weigh our every act, and to report to us its true character, even as it appears before God himself. But, when the Spirit of God *awakens the conscience*by the word of God, it estimates aright our whole character, and without flattery makes us known to ourselves.

It exerts itself then with authority;  
it makes the whole life pass before it in review;  
it sits in the throne of judgment;  
it speaks in the name of God himself;  
it passes sentence even on the most secret actions of our lives;  
it takes into its account all attendant circumstances of aggravation;  
and it anticipates the judgment of the last day.

Thus we may account for the impression made on the mind of this Samaritan, and the report she gave on leaving the Savior's presence. Though everything that she had ever done had not been distinctly told to her, it appeared as if it had; and the effect upon her mind was the same as if it had.

But, that the power of God's word may yet more clearly appear, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The effect of conviction, when produced—~~***

Mark the effect of it on her; you see in her,

***~~1. A desire to receive instruction—~~***

Man in his natural state has no wish for instruction in the things that relate to God. He is satisfied with his own crude notions, and is averse to have them tried by the standard of Holy Writ. "He hates the light, and will not come to it, lest his deeds would be reproved."

But when the Spirit of God has fixed conviction on the mind, a man will be glad to know the truth: his very first inquiry will be, "What must I do to be saved?"

Thus the woman, thinking that that was true which Jesus had said to her respecting his Messiahship, and that his perfect knowledge of her secret history was an evidence of it, was desirous that her fellow-citizens would give her their judgment concerning it: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" She thought them competent to judge, and took for granted that they would give her their unbiased opinion upon this momentous question: and though it was but too probable that the notoriety of her character would bring upon her some cutting reflections, she did not care, if only she might obtain satisfaction to her mind.

It is particularly noticed, that "she left her water-pot behind her!" and this she did, not merely that she might not be detained; (for the detention could at the utmost have only been a few minutes;) but probably forgetting for the time her earthly business, through the ardor of her mind in the pursuit of heavenly knowledge.

And thus it is that every awakened soul will act. It will desire saving knowledge: it will pursue it at the risk of all the obloquy which may attach to a desire after it: and it will postpone all earthly things, to the acquisition of it.

***~~2. A candor in our inquiries after it—~~***

Where the heart is unaffected, incredulity and scepticism usually take the lead; and a greater degree of evidence than the subject well admits of, is required.

But, where a person feels his guilt as a sinner, and his utter incapacity to save himself—he will feel a predisposition to receive the truth. He will not with skeptical indifference say, "Is this the Christ?" but, with a wish that his pretensions to that character may be found true, "Is not this the Christ?"

It may be said, that here was an undue bias. But I deny that it was an undue bias. In a matter which is itself indifferent, we may be indifferent: but in a matter which concerns the glory of God and the salvation of the soul, indifference would be highly criminal. The misery of man is seen, felt, acknowledged. Here purports to be a revelation from Heaven, and a Savior sent us by Almighty God for the redemption of man. This is not to be a matter of speculative inquiry. It would be examined with a desire that it may be true. The precise state of mind which every person would experience, is that which was experienced by the man whose eyes the Lord Jesus Christ had opened. The Lord Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man answered, not coolly and indifferently, "Who is he?" but, with befitting anxiety, "Who is he, that I may believe on him? [John 9:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.36)."

Though credulity is not good, neither, on the other hand, is incredulity: there is a just medium between the two, a readiness to believe on sufficient evidence. The readiness of the other disciples to believe in Jesus was commended, while the incredulity of Thomas was blamed. And this shows us the precise state of mind which deep conviction generates; a candor in our inquiries after truth, with a sincere desire to embrace it the very instant it is fairly laid before us with a weight of evidence sufficient to sustain it.

***~~3. A wish that others also may be partakers of it—~~***

It was not from a mere desire to ask their judgment that the Samaritan woman went into the city, but with a hope that her fellow-citizens might participate in the blessings which she had experienced in her soul. This is clear: for they themselves said, that they had believed because of her word: so that she had not been a mere inquirer, but a *preacher*also.

This is the invariable effect of deep conviction on the mind; it will stir up the person to make others acquainted with the same important truths as have been useful to his own soul. No truly enlightened person will keep his discoveries to himself. He will say to his friends and neighbors, "Come, and see!"

This is declared by our Lord in various parables The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, and the Prodigal Son: Luke 15; and, in confirmation of it, the Church, in most appropriate and expressive language, says, "Draw me; and we will run after you." Draw me, and I will never be content to come alone: I will draw all I can along with me.

We have hitherto noticed only the acts of this woman. But we would not entirely overlook her person and character, which may well supply us with our concluding observations.

***~~Observe, then,~~***

***~~1. How unbounded is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

We have seen how his word wrought conviction on her soul; and eventually imparted salvation to her, and to others by her means. But we have not sufficiently considered either *who*she was: An alien and a hostile Samaritan; or *what*she was: Even such an abandoned wretch, that it was a shame even to be seen speaking to her. Yet to this woman did our Lord reveal himself more fully and plainly than he had done to any one of his disciples, verse 26.

How sweetly encouraging is this fact! Who that considers this, can despair? Or, rather, who does not here see an intimation of the grace that would afterwards be shown to the Gentiles, and of the mercy that would be exercised towards the chief of sinners? Know, then, that no past iniquities shall be any bar to your acceptance with him, if only you will humble yourselves before him, and believe in him, as the Christ, the Savior of the world.

***~~2. What encouragement we all have, to exert ourselves for him—~~***

It was but little that she knew: and little could be expected from any testimony of hers. Yet, what she spoke sank down into the ears of all that heard it, and was rendered instrumental to the bringing of them to Christ. Let none then say, "I am ignorant: I am sinful: I, as a female, am unauthorized to speak." Though every one is not authorized to preach, every one, in his own proper circle, is bound to declare what God has done for his soul: and if every one would exert himself as this woman did, especially in bringing others to the means of grace, that they may hear for themselves, we would see conversions far more numerous, and blessings far more widely diffused through the world.

The lepers of Samaria, when they found plenty in the deserted camp of the Syrians, said, It is not good to keep the glad tidings to themselves. And can we, after having found salvation, do well in keeping it to ourselves? No! we would invite others to participate in the blessings we enjoy; and, being converted ourselves, would do all in our power to strengthen and to save our brethren, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32).

***~~#1620~~***

***~~Christ's Diligence in Serving God~~***

**[John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34).**

"Jesus said unto them: My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work."

OUR blessed Lord, throughout his whole life, was the most illustrious pattern of condescension to man and of fidelity to God. Both these dispositions were eminently displayed in the history before us. Notwithstanding he was already exhausted with a long and fatiguing journey, he had been laboring for the salvation of a most abandoned adulteress: and when urged to intermit his exertions for a little while in order to recruit his strength by some necessary refreshment, he declared, that food was not so delightful to a famished body, as the prosecuting of the great ends of his ministry was to his soul.

From his words we shall take occasion to,

***~~I. Consider our Lord's example—~~***

Jesus, in his human and mediatorial capacity, was the Father's servant. And the work assigned him was to reveal in a more perfect manner the will of God, and to save mankind by his own obedience unto death.

In this work he engaged,

***~~1. With fervent affection—~~***

Nothing could exceed the *delight*with which he undertook the arduous task, [Psalm 40:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.7-8); nothing could exceed the *zeal*with which he accomplished it, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50). Whether we view his private addresses to God, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7), or his public ministrations among men, He was filled with joy at the least prospect of success, verse 35. We shall see that in him was that prophecy accomplished, "The zeal of your house has eaten me up, [John 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.17)."

***~~2. With indefatigable diligence—~~***

From the commencement of his ministry to the end of it not a day was unemployed. Frequently, after having labored all the day, he spent the night in prayer, and resumed his labors with the returning light. Like the sun in the firmament, he proceeded in one steady course through all the cities, towns, and villages; nor ever ceased from his work, until he could say, "It is finished!"

***~~3. With undaunted resolution—~~***

What continual opposition did he endure! He was truly "a sign spoken against," or a butt of contradiction, [Luke 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34). There was not anything however perverse, scandalous, or contemptuous, but his ears were assailed with it from day to day. From the very first discourse he uttered until the hour of his crucifixion, his enemies never ceased to seek his life, [John 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.8). Yet did he persevere in the face of every danger, and at last complete his obedience, by surrendering up his life upon the cross.

That we may profit from this great example, we will,

***~~II. Propose it for your imitation—~~***

***~~We also have a work to do for God—~~***

Our work is great; but O! how different from that which was committed to our Lord! We have not to satisfy the demands of justice, or to endure the wrath due to sin. Blessed be God! that was the Redeemer's, work; and it has been finished by him on our behalf. The work which we have to do is to believe in Christ, [John 6:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.29), and, from a sense of his love to us, to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

Let us then engage in it,

***~~1. Heartily—~~***

"Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with all our might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)." A lukewarm service is unacceptable, yes, hateful to God, [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). Let us then first labor to know the will of God, and then endeavor to do it with our whole hearts. Let us be "fervent in spirit, while we serve the Lord, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11)."

***~~2. Uniformly—~~***

It is not an occasional act of zeal that will please God, but a steady conscientious, uniform discharge of our duty. Our spirit, alas! is often faint; and even, when "the spirit is willing, our flesh is weak." But we must counteract our sloth, and "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10)."

***~~3. Courageously—~~***

We shall surely meet with reproach and persecution, if we set ourselves in earnest to serve the Lord, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12). But let us "remember him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, [Hebrews 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.3)." Woe be to us if we draw back through the fear of man, [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38). We must hate, not only father and mother, but even our own life also, if we would be Christ's disciples, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). Let us then "take up our cross daily" after Christ's example, and "suffer with him, in order that we may be also glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are unconcerned about the work of God—~~***

Has not God appointed you a work to do; and ought you not to have begun it long ago? Is it expedient to leave it to a dying hour? What if you would die before it is finished? O, begin instantly; for the "night comes, wherein no man can work."

**2. Those who do his work deceitfully**—

God has pronounced such persons accursed, no less than if they did nothing for him, [Jeremiah 48:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 48.10). His service must be your "food" and drink; the joy of your souls, and the business of your lives. See then that you "approve yourselves to God as servants that need not be ashamed, [2 Timothy 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.15)."

***~~3. Those who are in a measure conformed to their Savior's image—~~***

Bless your God, who has thus far enabled you to serve him. But O! think how much you fall short of your heavenly pattern! Forget then what is behind, and press forward for that which is before you, [Philippians 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-15). So shall you in due season "rest from your labors," and be welcomed as good and faithful servants to the joy of your Lord, [Matthew 25:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.21)."

***~~#1621~~***

***~~The Happy State of the Church~~***

***~~[John 4:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.35-36).~~***

"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."

AMAZING was the condescension of our blessed Lord. No one was too base or too vile for him to notice with his favorable regards. His enemies cast this as a reflection on his character, that he was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." The woman with whom he had been conversing was certainly of as abandoned a person as can well be conceived. But the result of his conversation with her was most extraordinary: for, through her, a vast multitude flocked to hear him, and that, too, with a readiness of mind to receive his instructions, insomuch that they appeared like "a field of grain white already to harvest."

This expression of our Lord respecting them will properly lead us to consider,

***~~I. The prospects opening around us—~~***

The times in which we live are perhaps as remarkable as any since the apostolic age. Though religion has been on the increase in this nation for half a century—yet it is within these twenty years that the spread of it has become so remarkable, as to attract the notice of all who are in the least observant of what relates to the kingdom of God. Before that time, it might have been said, "There are yet four months to the harvest," and any prospect of reaping a harvest of immortal souls is distant. But now we may say, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Observe what the state of things is,

***~~1. Abroad—~~***

Was there ever such a cooperation seen, as that which now exists throughout almost the whole of Christendom for the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, and for the translation of them into all the different languages of the world? A few years ago such a combination of zeal in the interests of religion would have been thought to be scarcely within the regions of possibility. The multitude of missions, too, which are now established in every quarter of the globe, are no less worthy of our especial notice. A field laden with the ripened produce of the earth scarcely differs more from that which is lying fallow, than the face of Christendom does in these respects from its aspect at any period during the last two hundred years.

***~~2. At home—~~***

Here it comes more within our own more immediate observation. See the societies formed throughout the land for every benevolent purpose, and especially for whatever may advance the kingdom of Christ on earth; such as, for the education of children, the circulation of the Bible, the support of missions, etc., etc. Together with this, true piety also has increased to a vast extent. We may well therefore regard our whole country as "a field, that is white already to harvest."

Let us now extend our views to,

***~~II. The encouragement we have to make a suitable improvement of them—~~***

All should labor to the utmost of their power, to advance the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. And to this we have equal encouragement,

***~~1. In the event of good success—~~***

The work of God is here compared to a harvest, which a successful preacher may be said to reap. A man who reaps his field considers himself well repaid for his labor, because he lays up in his barns wealth which will support him through the year. But how much better is the Christian Minister repaid! for he "gathers fruit unto life eternal." What he reaps, will be laid up in the granary of Heaven, and will itself endure through eternal ages; yes, and endure also as "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore, [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20). Were he to gather but one sheaf of corn, he would be richly recompensed for a whole life of labor: but if his efforts are crowned with a larger measure of success, he will have proportionable ground for joy and gratitude to all eternity. [1 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.16).

***~~2. In the event of ill success—~~***

The man who sows his field may be disappointed in a variety of ways: an untoward season may destroy his crop; or an invading enemy deprive him of it; or death may arrest him before it is reaped. But the spiritual "sower shall rejoice together with the reaper," and have "his own reward according to his own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8)." The Lord of the harvest will not allow any one of his laborers to work for nothing. In the very work itself he shall find a rich reward; and "though Israel be not gathered—yet shall he who sought their welfare be glorious before the Lord, [Isaiah 49:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.5)."

Hosea prophesied for seventy years, and Isaiah fifty; and both of them had reason to complain, "Who has believed our report?" But are they therefore without a recompense? No! What "they sowed, we reap: they labored, and we have entered into their labors." And, as they shall participate in our joy, so shall we the joy of those who shall reap what we have sown.

***~~Let us then,~~***

***~~1. Be on our watch to do all the good we can—~~***

Our blessed Lord was sitting weary by a well-side: yet, when an opportunity afforded itself of instructing the Samaritan woman, he embraced it, accounting it "his food to do the will of him who sent him, verse 6, 14, 24, 34." And who would have thought that such effects would flow from that single conversation?

So it may be with us. We make many attempts apparently in vain: but who can tell what one single act of benevolence may produce? Let the occasion before us encourage us to "be instant in season and out of season," and to "sow both early and late, not knowing which shall prosper," or what blessings may result from an individual effort, [Ecclesiastes 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.6).

***~~2. Increase our labors as opportunities for labor are increased—~~***

The field for labor is the world. Heretofore but small portions of it have been open to us; but now men are calling to us from every quarter of the globe, "Come over and help us!" Let us then extend our labors far and wide: yes, let us make it "our very food to do the will of God;" having a constant appetite for it, and accounting every day as lost, in which we have not done something for the souls of men.

Let the nature of the harvest animate us. Think of immortal souls; and, whether reaped by us or not—yet if reaped by others, at whatever distance of time, in consequence of what we have sowed, reckoned to us as "our joy and crown!" Let us, I say, gird up our loins to this good work; and we shall surely "rejoice, in the day of Christ, that we have not labored in vain, or run in vain, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16). [Daniel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.13)."

***~~#1622~~***

***~~Conversion of the Samaritans~~***

***~~[John 4:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.41-42).~~***

"And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

THE conversion of the Gentiles was not an object of our Lord's personal ministrations: "he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet there were some particular occasions whereon he testified his regard for them, and gave them pledges of that mercy which was afterwards to be displayed towards them by the ministry of his Apostles. Of this we have an instance in the passage before us.

He not only declared his Messiahship to the Samaritan woman whom he met at Jacob's well, but spent two days with the Samaritans in the city of Sychar, and converted numbers of them to the obedience of faith. From the testimony which she gave of him, they entertained high thoughts of his character; but from a personal acquaintance with him they were convinced that he was the Savior of the world. This is the account which they themselves gave of their own experience: and from it we shall take occasion to,

***~~I. Distinguish between the kinds of faith here mentioned—~~***

We ought to seek clear views of religion in general, but especially of its fundamental points. Now there is no subject more important, nor any about which more mistaken notions are entertained, than the nature of saving faith. But the distinction is here drawn for us with great accuracy.

***~~The faith which the Samaritans first exercised was founded on mere report—~~***

The woman had testified to them that Jesus had told her the secrets of her heart, even such as could be known only to the Most High God: and had appealed to them whether this was not a convincing evidence that he was the long-expected Messiah. Her argument was plain and conclusive: and, as she had no motive for deceiving them, they believed her report of him, and acknowledged the justness of her conclusion.

We do not mean to disparage this kind of faith: it was good as far as it went; and it was productive of solid benefit to the persons who possessed it, inasmuch as it removed all their prejudices, and disposed them to form a more accurate judgment for themselves. But still we cannot regard this faith in any other light than as a *speculative assent, grounded upon human testimony*.

It seems to have been not unlike to that which is so common among ourselves, which arises from a view of the evidences of our religion. We see that all the ancient types and prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and that most unquestionable miracles were wrought by him and his Apostles in confirmation of his word; and therefore we say that he is, and must be, the Messiah. Yet those who are most versed in this kind of reasoning, are not always suitably *affected*with it: their knowledge of Christianity is, in many cases, *merely speculative*, *residing in their heads, but never descending into their hearts, nor influencing their lives.*

We cannot therefore consider this as a saving faith. Being unproductive of good works, it is dead; and, if carried no further, will leave the possessor of it in the state of those unhappy spirits, of whom it is said, "They believe, and tremble! [James 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.17); [James 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19)."

***~~The faith to which they afterwards attained, was founded on their own experience—~~***

During the two days that our blessed Lord stayed among them, they heard him discourse on the things relating to his kingdom. They perceived that "he spoke as never any man spoke;" and "his word was with power." As Jesus' teaching had before probed the heart of the woman at the well, so it searched their hearts, and disclosed to them all their hidden abominations. It showed them, that they themselves were lost, yes, that the whole world also was in a perishing condition; and that He was sent by God on purpose to deliver them.

From the correspondence which they saw between the character he sustained and the necessities they felt, they were assured "that he was the Christ, the Savior of the world:" and they determined to rely on him, as their Savior, and their Redeemer.

Now this was saving faith: it brought them fully to Christ for the ends for which he was sent into the world: "With their hearts they believed on him unto righteousness: and with their mouths they made confession unto salvation, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10)." This faith was very different from that which they first exercised: it was more distinct, more assured, more influential over their hearts and lives. They had more full and complete views of the objects of Christ's mission: they "had within themselves a witness" of the suitableness and sufficiency of his salvation: and they instantly became his open and avowed disciples, in spite of all their former prejudices, and the prejudices of all around them.

*Certainly we must look for good works as fruits and evidences of this faith*: but this faith, supposing it to be sincere, will assuredly issue in salvation.

We proceed to notice,

***~~II. The importance of making this distinction—~~***

Two facts will serve to illustrate this:

***~~1. For lack of distinguishing aright, many sincere persons are distressed—~~***

The nature of saving faith has, as might well be expected, been a subject of controversy in the Christian world. It is to be lamented, that, while some have placed the standard too low, others have raised it too high. A *full assurance*of our own personal acceptance with God has been supposed by many to be an essential part of true faith: and hence multitudes who have really "fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before them," are disquieted from day to day, because they do not feel in themselves that assurance.

But God does not require us to believe more than he himself has revealed: and where has he revealed that any particular individual among us is in a state of salvation? or where has he said that the belief of our own personal assurance of salvation is necessary in order to our obtaining a genuine saving interest in him? Indeed, such a declaration would be absurd: it would be a contradiction in terms: it would require us to believe that a thing does exist, in order that it may exist; which is as absurd, as to believe that we are well, in order that we may be well; or that we are in Heaven, in order that we may be in Heaven.

A thing must exist, before we can know that it exists; and therefore the knowledge of our acceptance with God cannot precede that acceptance; much less can it be necessary in order to our acceptance with him.

As for straining metaphorical expressions in order to found doctrines upon them, it is injudicious in the extreme. It is far better to examine what that faith was, which was exercised by the saints of old, and which they found effectual to their salvation: and if we do that, we shall always find, that the faith by which they were saved, was a faith of *affiance*, and not that which is generally (but improperly) called a faith of *assurance*. Assurance is necessary, so far as it relates to Christ's ability and willingness to save us; but it is not necessary in relation to our own personal acceptance with him. This is desirable, no doubt, and a great source of comfort to the person who possesses it: but those who do not possess it, may yet be in a state of salvation, and enjoy much consolation in the hope that they shall not finally be cast out.

Is there anyone then among us under such circumstances; let him be of good courage, and in humble confidence cast himself upon the mercy of a reconciled God, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10), *If he perishes at the foot of the cross, he will be the first that ever perished there.*

***~~2. For lack of distinguishing at all, many insincere persons are ruined—~~***

The generality of persons seem to have no idea of any faith beyond that of a mere assent to certain propositions of the gospel: and, if they have never set themselves to *oppose*Christianity, they take for granted that they are believers. They were born in a Christian land, and have been educated in the Christian faith, and therefore they suppose that all is well with their souls. If they are licentious in their conduct, they will allow perhaps that they are deficient in their morals; yet they never suspect that they are materially wrong in their faith. But let them look around, and see what is the fruit of such faith as they possess: do they find it productive of any such effects as resulted from the faith of the first Christians? No! *it leaves the possessors of it under the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as much as the heathen themselves*. How then can this be saving faith, of which it is said, It "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world?"

Yet under this delusion the generality of Christians both live and die: Is it not important then that they would be told, that "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)." Surely, whatever such persons may imagine, if ever they be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, they will say, Now we believe in Christ, not because we have been told by our parents that Christianity is true, but because we have heard him ourselves speaking to us in his word, and have felt that he is exactly such a Savior as our necessities require.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Let us not deceive ourselves by resting in a spurious and inefficient faith—~~***

Paul exhorts us to "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith." And truly, when we see what little influence our faith has had upon us in times past, we may well suspect that it has not been of a right kind. If we continue in our delusion any longer, our error may soon be past a remedy.

***~~2. If enlightened ourselves, let us endeavor to enlighten others—~~***

Some may say, The vileness of my character, or the weakness of my capacity, render it unfit for me to attempt the instruction of others. But, if we only consider what honor God put upon this vile adulteress, in making her the instrument of drawing multitudes to Christ, we shall see that no one need be discouraged. An angel could be no more to us than what God made him: and God is pleased to use the weakest instruments, in order that "the excellency of the power may appear to be of him." Let us therefore, each in his place and station, "declare what the Lord has done for our souls;" and invite others to "come and taste how gracious the Lord is."

***~~#1623~~***

***~~The Nobleman's Son Cured~~***

***~~[John 4:49-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.49-51).~~***

The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives."

So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"

IF the rebukes of God are in one view tokens of his *displeasure*, they certainly in another view are expressions of his *regard*, and have frequently been forerunners of peculiar mercy. The Canaanite woman was frowned upon, as it were, by our Lord, as utterly unworthy to taste the children's bread; yet was immediately afterwards admitted to a participation of it.

Thus the nobleman, who now addressed him, received a reprimand for his backwardness to believe; but was nevertheless favored instantly with an answer suited to his wish.

The circumstances related in the text lead us to observe,

***~~I. That weak and strong faith differ widely in their effects—~~***

***~~This is particularly discoverable in the history before us—~~***

The nobleman's faith, though weak, induced him to take a considerable journey that he might find Jesus, and brought him to apply to Jesus with much humility and respect. Yet he could not refrain from limiting the power of Jesus, and prescribing to him the time and manner in which his request would be granted. And because his petition was not granted at first, he grew impatient, and intimated his apprehensions, that, if the relief were not instantly afforded, it would soon be too late even for Jesus himself to intervene.

But when his faith was strengthened by the word and Spirit of Christ, the tumult in his mind subsided, the irritation yielded to composure, and his apprehensions were banished by a firm expectation that the promised blessing would be given. Though he saw no change with his eyes—yet he doubted not but that a change had taken place; and he left it to Jesus to accomplish his own word in his own way.

***~~Such are the various effects produced in us also by a similar cause—~~***

The weakest faith, if truly sincere, will bring us to Jesus with reverence and humility; and will make us urgent with him to bestow upon us his benefits. Nor shall we regard any trouble in seeking him, provided we at last obtain the desired blessings: but if our "hope be deferred, it will make our heart sick." We shall become impatient, if the *pardon*which we seek is not instantly sealed upon our consciences, or the *victory*we solicit be suspended for a while in dubious conflict. We shall be ready to dictate to Jesus both the time and manner of his

intervention, and to limit his powers according to our own narrow apprehensions of them. When our faith is strengthened, we shall rest more simply on his declarations and promises. We shall not, like Zachariah, want a sign to confirm them, or, like Rebekah, use sinful means of hastening their accomplishment, [Luke 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.18). Compare [Genesis 25:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 25.23); [Genesis 27:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.8-10). We shall be willing to let him work in his own way. Though we see not his word yet accomplished, nor know in what way it shall be fulfilled—yet we shall be satisfied, and content to wait until he shall clear up to us what is dark and intricate, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16). Our expectation will be patient, and our confidence in him will be assured. Like Abraham, we shall not stagger at his promises, but give him the glory of his faithfulness and omnipotence, [Romans 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.20).

Nor does God fail to distinguish these different degrees of faith by different tokens of his approbation. This will appear while we observe,

***~~II. The more we exercise faith, the more evidence of its efficacy and acceptance will God grant unto us—~~***

***~~The experience of the nobleman well illustrates this truth—~~***

His faith while it was yet weak, prevailed for the obtaining of the mercy he desired. Jesus kindly overlooked his impatience, and granted him even more than he had asked. This was a rich reward of faith. But when the nobleman returned home in full expectation of finding everything true which Jesus had declared, his faith received a yet stronger confirmation from the account which the servants gave him; and the more minutely he inquired into the circumstances of his son's recovery, the more fully was he convinced that it had been effected by the invisible agency of the Lord Jesus. By this was his faith yet more abundantly confirmed, insomuch that both he and all his family became disciples of Jesus, verse 52, 53.

***~~The same may be traced in the experience of all believers—~~***

The smallest degree of true faith will surely bring them the pardon of their sins, and whatever is absolutely needful for their salvation. "If their faith be only as a grain of mustard-seed, it shall move mountains:" but, if they be strong in faith, they shall see the glory of God in a far more conspicuous manner, [John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40). They may not indeed immediately see God, as it were, in the act of working; but they shall see frequent reason to exclaim, "What has God wrought!"

When they come to compare events with the promises of God, they will be constrained to acknowledge and adore his good providence. They will see how indebted they have been to his gracious interposition for many deliverances from danger, supports in trouble, and victories in their spiritual warfare. They may indeed, like Joshua himself, be so stumbled for a moment by some dark dispensation, that they shall almost doubt whether they have not been under a delusion, [Joshua 7:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.6-9). But like him, they shall be enabled to look back for a series of years, to recount the mercies of the Lord, and to bear testimony to his unalterable truth and faithfulness, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14). Upon a review of their lives, they shall have as clear evidences of a divine interposition in their favor, as if they had seen a miracle wrought before their eyes.

***~~To improve this subject, we would suggest some suitable advice—~~***

***~~1. Let all personal or domestic troubles lead us to Jesus—~~***

"We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." None are exempt from it in this valley of tears. The nobleman is as much exposed to it as the beggar; but God sends it for good. *He sends us adversity that we may be led to consideration*; and many have found cause to bless him for their troubles. Many must say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Hear *the rod*, and him that has appointed it." Its voice to us is, "Seek the Lord while he may be found;" "turn, turn, why will you die."

Improve afflictions thus, and you will be thankful for them to all eternity. What a mercy in the outcome did the sickness of the nobleman's son prove both to the nobleman and all his family! And most assuredly, *if your troubles would prove the means of bringing you to an acquaintance with Jesus, and an experience of his grace, you will never regret the means by which the mercy was conferred upon you*.

***~~2. Let us never prescribe to Jesus, or limit the power of his grace—~~***

The Lord knows best how to deal with his people. He went to the *Centurion's*house because he was both humble and believing; but refused to go to the *nobleman's*house, that he might more effectually correct his pride and unbelief. Thus he may pursue various methods with us; but he will act in all things with consummate wisdom. He will "abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence." Let us then commit ourselves to him, saying, "*When*you will, and *what*you will, and *as*you will." In this way we shall have our minds composed, and our thoughts established. And though he may lead us, as he did the Israelites, by a very tedious and circuitous path—yet we shall find at last that it was the "right way [Psalm 107:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.7)."

***~~3. Let every fresh discovery of his mercy make us more solicitous to bring others to him—~~***

The nobleman doubtless related to his family all that Jesus had spoken to him; and was instrumental in bringing all his family to believe in him. And shall not we make this improvement of his mercies given to us? Shall we not exhort those over whom we have influence, to trust in his word? Surely if we express a concern for their bodily welfare, we would be no less solicitous for the salvation of their souls. And if we have found the benefit of believing in him ourselves, we would labor that all around us may be partakers of that benefit. By telling of his goodness, we shall pay him that tribute which he expects at our hands, and anticipate that employment in which we hope to be occupied to all eternity.

***~~#1624~~***

***~~The Man Healed at the Pool of Bethesda~~***

***~~[John 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.14).~~***

"Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him: See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

MOST men will make good resolutions in a season of affliction; but few carry them into execution when they have obtained deliverance. They, however, to whom troubles are sanctified will remember the vows that are upon them. They will repair as soon as possible, not to houses of dissipation or amusement, but to "the temple" of God; and, while others are only hardened by their mercies, these will be favored with fresh manifestations of God's love. The man whom our Lord addressed in the text, experienced this. When he was returning thanks for the cure he had received in his body, Jesus instructed him for the good of his soul. We shall consider,

***~~I. The mercy given to him.~~***

***~~Bethesda was a pool that possessed very singular qualities—~~***

The name Bethesda signifies a house of mercy. The pool so called had the property of healing all manner of disorders: its healing operations, however, were confined to certain seasons; they depended also on the agency of a superior power. Multitudes of diseased persons constantly attended there; and five porches were built for their accommodation. When that healing power was first given to it cannot be ascertained; probably God had but a few years before endued it with those qualities, in order to prepare the people for their Messiah, and to typify his works.

***~~In the porches around this pool an impotent man had long waited in vain—~~***

He had labored under an infirmity thirty-eight years, and had long attended there in hopes of a cure; but he had no friend to help him with sufficient speed; nor had the people charity enough to let him take his turn. Everyone consulted his own good in preference to his; and thus his efforts were daily frustrated, and his hopes continually deferred.

***~~But Jesus seeing him, wrought a miracle in his favor—~~***

Jesus needed no solicitations to excite his pity. Though unasked, he offered the man effectual relief. Little indeed did the man understand the import of our Lord's question, verse 6, 7; but Jesus uttered the irresistible command, and instantly was health restored to this diseased man. Yes, he, who but the moment before could not get into the pool for lack of help, now easily took up his bed and walked: nor was he intimidated by those who accused him of violating the Sabbath. He rightly judged that the person who had power to heal him thus miraculously, had also authority to direct his conduct.

For a short season the man knew not the name of his benefactor, but soon after enjoyed an interview with him in the temple. On this occasion the Evangelist relates,

***~~II. The admonition given him—~~***

***~~It was sin which had brought this infirmity upon him—~~***

God often punishes transgressors even in this life, [Psalm 107:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 107.17-18). This was extremely common under the Jewish economy; nor are there lacking instances under the Christian dispensation, [1 Corinthians 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.30). If we could dive into the secrets of the Most High, it is probable we would trace many of our troubles to sin as their proper source.

***~~Nevertheless this did not preclude the exercise of mercy towards him—~~***

Jesus was full of compassion even to the most unworthy. He often selected such to be the chief objects of his mercy, [1 Timothy 1:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13-16). Indeed, the displaying of his sovereignty and grace, is a principal end of all his dispensations, [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7).

***~~But he solemnly cautioned him against sin in future—~~***

Though Jesus pities sinners, he abhors their sin; nor will he accept the persons of those who live in it, [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46). He reminded the man of the deliverance he had experienced, and guarded him against the cause of his past calamities. This admonition too he enforced with a most weighty argument. The years of misery that the cripple had endured, were nothing in comparison with hell-torments: these will hereafter be the recompense of sin; nor will any feel them so bitterly as apostates.

To make a right improvement of these events; we must yet further consider,

***~~III. The instruction to be derived from both.~~***

***~~1. To us divine ordinances are what the pool of Bethesda was to the Jews—~~***

Here, my brethren, is healing for every disorder of the soul. But the waters have no healing virtue in themselves: "If Paul plants, or Apollos waters, it is God alone that can give the increase." But Jesus is present here, as he has said, "Wherever two or three are met together, there am I in the midst of them." And his address to every individual among us is, "Will you be made whole?"

Nor would anyone have reason to complain that others run away with the blessing, provided that he himself were really desirous to obtain it. It is not the most active, but the most humble, who shall succeed here. O that we were all as sensible of our wants, and as anxious to obtain relief, as were the people that frequented that pool! Truly, not one would depart without obtaining the desired benefit.

Dear brethren, you are too apt to be satisfied with attending upon ordinances, and to think that the mere attendance is sufficient, though you reap no solid benefit from them.

But it is not in this way that you can hope to receive any blessing from the Lord. You must be sensible of your urgent and pressing wants: you must come to God's house, expecting to receive benefit to your souls: you must implore of him to give effect to his word, and so to accompany it with his blessing that it may prove "the power of God to your salvation." Then shall you find "the word living and powerful" as in the days of old; and "being renewed in the spirit of your minds," become happy monuments of God's power and grace to all around you.

***~~2. If we have derived benefit from them, we must manifest it by a holy and consistent walk—~~***

Every man that has received the grace of God in truth, will revolt at the idea of continuing in sin, as the Apostle did; "Shall I continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall I who am dead to sin, live any longer therein? [Romans 6:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.1-2)." Nor must we be unwilling to listen to the motive suggested by our Lord to this favored man, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you." It is quite a mistake to imagine that a fear of God's judgments is legal. It is often inculcated both in the Old Testament and the New, [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13). [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38). [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21). [Revelation 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4-5). If Paul himself cherished this principle in his bosom as an incentive to watchfulness, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27), who are we, that we would conceive it to be unworthy of a place in our hearts?

Doubtless "the love of Christ is to influence" us in the first place: but still we are never to forget our liability to fall; since it is expressly said, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" and, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." In a word, "the grace of God that brings salvation to us, teaches us to deny sin of every kind, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world" Therefore, if, like this impotent man, we have received healing of the Lord, let us glorify him by a life of open, resolute, and unreserved obedience. And if the world raise a clamor against us, let it suffice us to reply, 'We are following the commands of our heavenly Benefactor.'

***~~#1625~~***

***~~Christ's Equality with the Father~~***

***~~[John 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.17-18).~~***

"Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

THE whole Christian world is much indebted to the zeal of the blind, and bigoted, and persecuting Jews in our Lord's day; since they elicited many important truths which might not otherwise have been brought to light.

For instance, when they accused our blessed Lord of violating the Sabbath-day, they led him to mention with approbation David's eating of the show-bread in a case of extreme necessity (an act which we could not otherwise have ventured to justify); and to expound as a general vindication of such conduct, that declaration of the prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, [Matthew 12:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.2-7)."

Here a similar accusation leads him to vindicate his own conduct on still higher principles; namely, his own equality with God the Father, and *his right to dispense with laws instituted only for the benefit of man*. True, this brought upon him still severer censure from his opponents, who judged him worthy of death for so arrogant and impious a claim. But they would have seen, from the miracle which he wrought, that he was fully authorized to do what he had done, and that he was no other person than he professed himself to be.

To open this subject to you, I will show,

***~~I. How far the Jews were right in their interpretation of our Lord's words—~~***

***~~The expression which our Lord had used was, doubtless, exceeding strong—~~***

Compare [Matthew 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.8) with the text.

He called God his Father, evidently in a more emphatic and appropriate sense than any mere man could presume to do. The Jews at large regarded "God as their Father, [John 8:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.41);" but no one had ever dared to arrogate to himself so near and peculiar a relation to God as our Lord did on this occasion. The very argument he used showed in what sense he intended his words to be taken: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." My Father continues all his works of providence on the Sabbath-days, as well as on any other day: and I, by reason of my relation to him, possess the same right, and am free therefore from all imputation of blame in exercising it. This, I say, is the force of our Savior's words; and if they be not so understood, they afford no vindication of himself whatever.

***~~The Jews were right in their interpretation of them—~~***

They marked the emphatic manner in which Jesus had claimed that high and peculiar relation to the Father, his own, in the most appropriate sense; they marked also the force of the argument founded on that relation: and they justly said, that he arrogated to himself equality with God.

But they were wrong, exceeding wrong, in so hastily judging him a blasphemer. They, if they could not believe his words, had a vast abundance of works from which to judge, and which bore ample testimony to the truth of his assertions, [John 10:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.37-38). In their hasty judgment, then, they were wrong; but in their interpretation of his words they were right. For our blessed Lord, instead of correcting their views as erroneous, confirmed them all as just and true. He proceeded to declare, that neither his Father nor himself acted apart from the other: that, on the contrary, there was a perfect unity of mind, and will, and purpose, and operation between them; nothing being done by the Father, but it was done by the Son likewise; that all men might honor the Son even as they honored the Father; and that, in fact, those who did not thus honor the Son did not truly honor the Father who had sent him, verse 19-23.

From hence we may see,

***~~II. What construction we must put upon them—~~***

If the Jews were right in their construction of our Lord's assertion, then we must regard his words,

***~~1. As an avowal of his own proper divinity—~~***

When, on another occasion, our Lord had said, "I and my Father are one, the Jews took up stones to stone him;" and when our Lord said, "Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of them do you stone me? They answered, For a good work we stone you not; but for blasphemy; and because that you, being a man, make yourself God, [John 10:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30-33)." And truly, *if he was not God, they were correct in their judgment*. For what would we say if Moses or Paul had used such language, and founded on their relation to the Deity a right, a personal right, to supersede the laws which God himself had instituted? Would we not have accounted them guilty of blasphemy? Then so was Christ, if he was no more than man.

But, in fact, he spoke only what all the prophets had long since declared concerning him. "He, though a child born, and a son given, was the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6);" "Jehovah's fellow, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)," "Jehovah our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

And to the same effect all his holy Apostles also testify respecting him. Did the Father create, and does he also uphold, the world? This is true of the Son likewise, as Paul expressly asserts: "For by him were all things created that are in Heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things are held together, [Colossians 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16-17)." Again it is said, that "God has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things; by whom also he has made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, upholds all things by the word of his power, [Hebrews 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.1); [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)."

What a confirmation is here of those words of our Lord, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." What a confirmation, too, of the construction put upon them by the Jews, "that he made himself equal with God, verse 19. He does the same things in the same manner." Yes, truly, "being in the form of God, even in his incarnate state he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7);" and the very words which were used by him on this occasion must be considered as an open avowal, on his part, that he was "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)," even "God over all, blessed for evermore, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

***~~2. As a warrant to us to rely upon him for all that we stand in need of—~~***

"In him," as we have said, "dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)." "In him, too, as Mediator, there is all fullness treasured up, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," that "out of his fullness all his people would receive, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." He is constituted "Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23)."

Let us only see what he did, when on earth, to the bodies of men: that he now does to their souls: Yes, pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory, would he at this instant confer on us, if we would but seek them at his hands. See [Mark 2:5-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.5-12). [Revelation 21:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.17-18). [Luke 23:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.42-43).

Was he incessant in his labors, rendering even the Sabbath-day subservient to his great work? So will he now impart to our souls continually, and to the full extent of our necessities: and not only will he not intermit his labors on the Sabbath-day, but he will rather pursue them with redoubled energy on that holy day, sanctifying, rather than profaning, it by that blessed employment.

In all this he will show himself equal with the Father. He has said "You believe in God; believe also in me, [John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1)." And "everyone who believes in him shall most assuredly be justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)," and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17)."

***~~From hence then learn,~~***

***~~1. To dismiss prejudice from your minds—~~***

The Jews were blinded by prejudice, and therefore could see nothing in the miracles of our Lord to justify their affiance in him. Had they been candid, and open to conviction, what blessings might they not have enjoyed! But they turned his every word and work into an occasion of offence, and augmented their own eternal condemnation by the very means used for their salvation.

Thus it is that prejudice works at this day. Multitudes are so offended at something which they account wrong, that they have neither eyes nor ears for those things which are of the greatest possible importance to their souls. A departure from some outward observance which they venerate, shall swallow up all the best qualities that the holiest of men can possess, all the best actions that he can perform, and all the best instructions he can give.

Only think, my beloved brethren, what the Jews lost on this occasion; and how different their condition now is, in the eternal world, from what it might have been if they had obeyed the counsels of our Lord; and you will see that the advice I now give you is worthy of your deepest attention.

***~~2. To exercise a simple faith in Christ—~~***

In the days of his flesh, he inquired of persons who solicited his help, whether they believed him able to confer on them the desired blessing: and so he now says to every one among you, "According to your faith be it unto you." O what would he not do for us, if only we would call upon him? Truly, if every one of us could flock around him, importuning mercy for our souls, virtue at this very instant would go forth from him, to heal us all. Do you think, brethren, that he is less able or less willing now to hear us, than he was in the days of his flesh? No, indeed! Even "a touch of the hem of his garment" would be sufficient for the effecting all that our necessities require.

***~~#1626~~***

***~~Christ's Vindication of His Own Divine Character~~***

***~~[John 5:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21-23).~~***

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."

AMONG the various beauties by which the Holy Scriptures are distinguished, we cannot but notice *the artless simplicity with which the most sublime doctrines are delivered*—they are not introduced with studied care, as they would be in human compositions; but arise incidentally, as it were, out of things which have but a remote connection with them.

Our blessed Lord had healed an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and had bidden him to take up his bed whereon he had lain, and walk away with it. The Jews, instead of glorifying God on the occasion, accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath, and sought to kill him for having wrought this miracle on the Sabbath-day.

Our Lord, in vindication of himself, said, that he did no more than what his heavenly Father did; for his Father carried on his works both of providence and grace on the Sabbath, as well as on other days; and that he himself did the same. At this answer the Jews took still greater offence. They saw that Jesus arrogated to himself a peculiar relation to God, even such a relation as was in effect an assumption of equality with God, verse 18. Hence "they sought the more to kill him," on account of what they conceived to be the summit of impiety and blasphemy.

Jesus was now compelled to answer for himself on these grounds: and he told the Jews, that though they were correct in supposing him to claim an equality with God, they were mistaken in imagining that he therefore set up himself against God. On the contrary, there was a perfect union of sentiment and affection, of will and operation, between them; and neither did his Father, nor he, do anything, without the most perfect concurrence and cooperation of the other: and so far was this from interfering with God's honor, that it was purposely arranged in the eternal counsels, in order that God might be honored in the person of his Son: nor would God consider himself as honored by anyone, who would not honor him in the precise way which he himself had appointed.

Thus, out of this perverse conduct of the Jews arose an assertion and vindication of the divinity of Christ: they forced him to vindicate his apparent violation of the Sabbath, and then to maintain the ground he had assumed in his vindication of it: and thus we are indebted to their perverseness for one of the clearest and most important statements in all the sacred volume.

Let us now, in discoursing on these assertions of our Lord, consider,

***~~I. The account he gives of his own character—~~***

Had the Jews been mistaken in what they supposed to be the scope of our Lord's assertions, he would have set them right: he would have told them plainly, that he did not intend to claim equality with God. But, instead of intimating that they had misunderstood his meaning, our Lord acknowledged that he did claim an equality with God; and, in confirmation of that claim, he asserted that a Divine authority belonged to him, both essentially, as God, and officially, as Mediator.

***~~1. Essentially, as God—~~***

It is undoubtedly the Divine prerogative to "kill and to make alive, [Deuteronomy 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.39);" nor is it possible for any creature to restore to life that which is really dead. But the Lord Jesus Christ "quickens whom he will." As the Father had, by the instrumentality of his prophets, raised some to life, so Christ declared, that he would raise some by his own power. The *persons*, the *time*, the *manner*, were altogether at the disposal of his own will, by which alone he would be regulated in the dispensing of his favors. Moreover, he "quickens also the souls of men when dead in trespasses and sins;" and administers this gift also according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Would any mere creature have dared to arrogate to himself such a power as this? or would Jesus have given such an answer as this, if he have not designed to maintain his claim to an equality with God?

***~~2. Officially, as Mediator—~~***

When it was determined in the Divine counsels that the Son of God would assume our nature, it was determined also that the government of the universe, and of the Church more especially, would be committed to his hands; and that he would judge the world whom he had redeemed by his blood, [Acts 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.42); [Acts 17:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.31). This, though primarily belonging, as it were, to the Father, was delegated to the Son, because he had assumed our nature, verse 27, and because it was expedient that he who had "purchased the Church with his blood" would be empowered in his own person both to reward his friends and punish his enemies.

But this office could not be executed by him, if he were not omniscient: he must know, not only every thought, word, and action, of all mankind from the beginning of the world to the end of it, but every possible circumstance that can at all tend to determine the precise quality of each. In a word, to exercise this office, he must be the omniscient God.

Judge then, whether in claiming this office he did not yet further confirm the suspicion of the Jews, that he affected an equality with God. It is not to he conceived, that, if this had not been his design, he would have answered in such a way: for, *if he was not really and truly God, the whole tendency of his answer was to mislead their judgment, and to justify their accusations against him as an impious blasphemer*.

But, not contented with establishing his equality with the Father, he informs them of,

***~~II. The regard which, in that character, he demands—~~***

Though he affected not the honor that comes of man, verse 41—yet he could not possibly relinquish the honor which belonged to him both in his personal and official capacity: he could no more absolve the people from their allegiance to him as God, that he could cease to be God. He therefore shows them,

***~~1. The extent of that honor which he requires—~~***

Whatever honor is due unto the Father, that Jesus claims as due unto himself; and he requires "all men" to pay it to him. Is God to be adored on account of his infinite perfections? Is he to be the one great object of our faith and love? Are we to *confide*in him under all circumstances, to *obey*him at all events, to *delight*ourselves in him at all seasons? Such adoration, such faith, such love, such confidence, such obedience, are the unalienable right of the Lord Jesus: and it is particularly to be observed that the putting of this honor upon the Lord Jesus was the very end and design of God the Father, when he delegated to the Son the office of governing and judging the world; "He committed all judgment to the Son, that all men might honor the Son, even as they honor the Father."

***~~2. The necessity of paying it to him—~~***

It might be thought sufficient to honor the Father: and so it was while the Father alone was known: but when he had revealed himself in the person of Christ, and "made all his glory to shine in his face;" when "in Christ he had reconciled the world unto himself," and had "treasured up all fullness in Christ," and invested him with "all power in Heaven and earth" for the completion of the great work that had been assigned him; then he demanded that all men would honor him in the person of Christ: and, if any would refuse so to honor him, he would reject their persons, and abhor their offerings. Yes, whatever reverence they might profess towards him, he would deal with them as rebels against his authority, and as despisers of his mercy.

Thus our Lord obviates the great objections which might be supposed to lie against the validity of his claim. It might have been thought that the Father would be jealous of his own honor, and consider any communication of Divine glory to his Son as an infringement of his own peculiar rights. But, behold! the very contrary is here declared: for, not only is that very communication designed by God, but all honor that is not accompanied with that communication is abhorred by him.

***~~Surely we may see from hence,~~***

***~~1. How defective are the views of the generality—~~***

The religion of the generality is only Judaism divested of its rites and ceremonies. They acknowledge a God, who, they think, has given us commandments; in obeying which we shall secure his favor, and by disobedience to which we shall incur his displeasure. It is true, if you begin to speak of Christ, they will acknowledge all that the Gospel relates concerning him: but they make very little account of him in their religious system.

How different are their views from those suggested in the text!

There we see, that Christ is the fountain of all spiritual life; and that he dispenses life to men according to his sovereign will and pleasure.

There we see, that to honor Christ is the only true way of honoring the Father.

There we see, also, what unsearchable riches of consolation are treasured up for the believer; in that the very Person who bought him with his blood, is set over all things both in Heaven and earth; and the very Person who paid that ransom for him, and renewed and sanctified him by his grace, shall judge him in the last day.

Ah! what do nominal Christians lose by their ignorance of Christ! Dear brethren, know that Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" in God's account; and that, if you would be saved by him, you must make him your "All in all."

***~~2. How defective is the practice of us all—~~***

We have spoken a little of the honor due unto the Father: but if we would have a fuller apprehension of it, let us contemplate the honor that is paid to him in Heaven: let us imagine what are the feelings of all the angelic hosts, and of all the spirits of the just made perfect Such then would be our views, and such our feelings towards the Lord Jesus Christ. We would begin our Heaven upon earth.

True it is, that when we speak of such a state, men will immediately begin to caution you against excess. They will tell you also that such a state would be incompatible with the necessary affairs of life. But where does God caution us against excess in religion, provided our religion be of a right kind? or what are those affairs which could not be conducted, if all men possessed the highest measure of true religion? Were Joseph, David, Daniel, impeded in their temporal duties by their religion? Or is there any one relation of life which will not be filled to more advantage by one who possesses true piety?

*The true reason why men so decry genuine piety*,*is that they feel themselves condemned when they behold it exhibited in the conduct of the godly*; and the less of such light they behold, the more quiet they hope to be in the prosecution of their evil ways.

But we must not regard the cavils of men, or put them in competition with the commands of God. We know full well how all the ransomed of the Lord are occupied in singing praises "to Him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb!" What forbids then that we would be so occupied now? It is our duty, our interest, and our happiness, to "follow the Lord fully:" and I pray God we may also follow him, and delight ourselves in him; that when we are dismissed from the body, and translated to the realms of bliss—we may change our place and our company, but not our employment!

***~~#1627~~***

***~~The Believer's Happy State~~***

***~~[John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.24).~~***

Truly, truly, I say unto you, He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death unto life.

THAT there will be a future judgment, we all know: and that Jesus Christ is appointed to be the Judge, is also generally acknowledged. But what his rule of judgment will be is very imperfectly understood. That our *works*will be inquired into, and form the ground of decision either against us or in our favor, is admitted on all hands: but that our *principles*will be scrutinized, and enter most essentially into the consideration of our Judge in determining our eternal state, is far from being generally expected or conceived. Yet that is declared by the Judge himself, even by our blessed Lord, and in the plainest terms.

Having told us that "the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son," he adds, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death unto life."

Now, from the manner in which this truth is affirmed, we see at once both the certainty and importance of it: and therefore, with confidence, I will set before you,

***~~I. The character here described—~~***

Of course, our Lord did not mean to say, that all who heard his discourses, but that all who so heard them as to make them the rule of their faith and practice, would be saved. Consider then,

***~~1. What the great subject of our Lord's discourses was—~~***

He represented himself as sent by God the Father to expiate upon the cross the sins of men; and "to bring in an everlasting righteousness," whereby all who would believe in him might be saved.

***~~2. What must of necessity be experienced by all who would receive it aright—~~***

They must feel themselves to be sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation. They must be convinced of the utter impossibility of ever reconciling themselves to God by any works of their own. They must see Christ to be the true Messiah, sent by God to be the Savior of the world. To him they must apply themselves, and to God the Father through him; having no hope but in his blood and righteousness, nor any plea whatever but his obedience unto death. In the daily habit of their minds they must come to God by him with deep humiliation and with fervent prayer; and must consecrate themselves to God as his obedient servants, determined to follow, without hesitation or reserve, his revealed will.

Such, in few words, is the character described.

We notice,

***~~II. The blessedness connected with it—~~***

This is set forth as it exists,

***~~1. In prospect—~~***

"Never" shall a person of this character "come into condemnation." However much he may have provoked the Divine displeasure in former times, he now enjoys "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." However God's anger may have waxed hot against him at a former period, "it is turned away from him now," and all "his iniquities are cast into the very depths of the sea." He has nothing to fear. Being "found in Christ," "there is no condemnation to him:" on the contrary, he is "presented faultless before God," and "stands before him without spot or blemish."

***~~2. In possession—~~***

"He" already "has eternal life," both in title and in actual possession. He can claim eternal life, as given to him by covenant and by oath. Numberless are the promises made to those who "lay hold on God's covenant;" and he may confidently rest upon them, expecting every one of them to be fulfilled in its season: for "it is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure:" and sooner would Heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it would ever fail.

But it is not a *mere title*to it that he possesses; for it is already begun in his soul. He has actually experienced, so far as it respects his soul, a transition similar to that which will hereafter take place in reference to the body. He once lay, as it were, in the grave, altogether "dead in trespasses and sins:" but now "he has passed from death unto life."*A new principle of life has been infused into him; so that he has new views, new desires, new pursuits, and new habits*—and is altogether "a new creature in Christ Jesus." "He lives no longer to himself, but unto him who died for him, and rose again."

The whole of this subject being so plain and obvious, I have not judged it necessary to enter very fully into it in a way of discussion, that I may have the more time to improve it in a way of application.

***~~Two things, then, I earnestly request of you, my beloved brethren:~~***

***~~1. Inquire carefully into the state of your souls before God—~~***

Inquire whether, like Mary, you are sitting at the feet of Jesus, and receiving with obedient regard his every word. Say whether his written word be your daily study and delight; and whether you diligently apply his word to yourselves, for the correcting of every sinful habit, and for advancing the life of God within you.

Inquire whether, in obedience to his word, you are relying solely upon him, and coming to the Father through him, and pleading his merits and mediation as the only grounds of your salvation.

Carry your inquiry yet further; and see whether your transition from death to life be so clear and manifest, that it admits not of any reasonable doubt. Are you "crucified with Christ" to all the vanities of this world? and are you "living entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," "receiving everything out of his fullness," and improving everything to his glory?

If these things be indeed your daily experience, then is all the blessedness annexed to such a state your assured portion.

But consider, I beg you, the sad alternative. If these things be in you, "you shall not come into condemnation:" but if you have only the *appearance*of them, and not the *reality*, then does condemnation await you at your departure hence; yes, our blessed Lord expressly tells you, that "you are condemned already, and that the wrath of God abides on you! [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36)." What a fearful thought is this! How can you bear to live in such a state, or endure even to have your state a matter of doubt or suspense?

If it were at an *earthly*tribunal only that condemnation awaited you, it were a tremendous prospect: but to be condemned by the omniscient Judge and be sentenced by him to everlasting misery, is so terrible, that I wonder the apprehension of it does not utterly overwhelm you. My heart's desire and prayer to God for you, brethren, is, that not one of you may be ever subjected to such a doom as this.

***~~2. Pursue with all earnestness the blessedness that has now been set before you—~~***

Surely it is worth seeking for, and will richly repay all that you can either do or suffer to obtain it. Were you urged to commence a life of suffering, such as the devotees of idols inflict upon themselves, you might well undertake the painful task, and submit to all that could be inflicted on you. But we call you to nothing of this kind. We invite you only to come to Christ, and to "hear his word, and to believe in the Father who has sent him:" and shall this be deemed hard?

Even in this present life, the blessedness of having a title to Heaven, and the very life of Heaven begun in your souls, would richly repay you. How much more, then, will all the glory and felicity of God himself, so far as a creature can enjoy it, recompense your labors? Be in earnest, brethren. There is nothing under Heaven worth seeking after in comparison with this. Let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom:" and in dependence on it, go to the Father, and "lay hold upon him," and remind him of his covenant: yes, take all "his exceeding great and precious promises," and plead them before him: and see whether it shall be in vain to call upon God.

No, indeed: He will be merciful unto you: he will seal a sense of his pardoning love upon your soul; and make himself over to you as your God and portion for ever. Call to mind the assurance given you in my text: "Truly, truly, I say unto you." Thus shall it be done to the believing soul. What more can you want to comfort and encourage you? Only come to God in his appointed way, and all this blessedness shall be yours.

***~~#1628~~***

***~~The Resurrection~~***

***~~[John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28-29).~~***

"The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves 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."

FROM the resurrection of Christ we may infer, that we ourselves also shall rise from the dead. Indeed, he is called "the first-fruits of those who sleep;" and therefore we may expect that there will be a complete harvest in due time. To this effect also we are informed in the words before us: from which we shall be naturally led to consider,

***~~I. The certainty of the resurrection—~~***

By many it has been "thought incredible that God would raise the dead." But "their error proceeds from not knowing the Scriptures, or the power of God, [Matthew 22:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.23); [Matthew 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.29)." Consider then,

**1. What the Scriptures speak concerning it**—

They have recorded many instances wherein the dead have been raised, [1 Kings 17:17-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.17-23). [2 Kings 4:32-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.32-37). [Luke 7:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.12-15). [John 11:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.43-44). [Acts 9:36-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.36-41) and especially [Matthew 27:52-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.52-53). Even in the Old Testament there are many strong intimations of it [Exodus 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.6) with [Mark 12:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 12.26-27). [Isaiah 26:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.19). [Hosea 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.14) with [1 Corinthians 15:54-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.54-55) and especially [Job 19:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 19.25-27); and in the New, Testament it is declared in everywhere. See 1 Corinthians 15.

***~~2. The power of God to effect it—~~***

See what God has done: look at the whole creation, and then ask whether He who formed the universe out of nothing, cannot as easily re-unite our scattered atoms (whatever changes they may have undergone), and restore to every one his own body? Yes, it was the voice of Jesus that spoke the universe into existence; and that same voice will call forth into renewed existence all that are moldered in their graves.

See, moreover, what our God is doing. We forbear to notice the succession of day and night, and summer and winter; or the reviving of birds and insects after long intervals of suspended animation. We call your attention rather to the changes wrought upon the *seed*that is cast into the earth: it dies, and rises again, in appearance different, in reality the same.

What more striking image of the resurrection could be presented before our eyes? Surely in this we have a pattern of the change that shall be accomplished in us at the last day; and a pledge that "our bodies, which are sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonor, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory."

As no doubt can remain upon our minds respecting the certainty of the resurrection, let us next consider,

***~~II. The outcome of it—~~***

***~~There will be an immense difference between the states of different men—~~***

Who can conceive all that is implied in "a resurrection to life?" If in some respects we may borrow images from the present life in order to illustrate it, in other respects that new and heavenly life will form a perfect contrast to all that we now experience. It is true, that all the faculties of our bodies shall be employed in the service of our God: but it is also true that they shall never clog the soul in its operations; their capacities shall be exceedingly enlarged; they shall never be subject to weariness or lack of any kind; they shall be as full of activity and blessedness as the soul itself.

On the other hand, Who shall declare what is the full import of "a resurrection to damnation?" We are shocked at the very sound of the word "damnation," how much more would we be so, if we knew all that is comprehended in it! It is in vain to attempt to describe the anguish which the body shall endure in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. But we are persuaded that the soul will bitterly bewail the necessity it is under of being re-united to that body, which once, instead of governing it aright, it pampered and obeyed. And its misery will be fearfully augmented by the increased capacity of anguish which it will derive from its union with the body.

***~~This difference will correspond with, and be founded on, their moral characters—~~***

The Scriptures uniformly declare the connection that exists between our present conduct and our future state. Nor need we be afraid of stating the truth precisely in the same manner, provided we bear in mind what is implied "in doing good, and doing evil." To do good is, to serve God cheerfully and without reserve. Now the very first commandment of God is that we "believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." This at once lays the axe to the root of all self-righteousness; and necessitates us to look unto Christ both for righteousness and strength. And we do not hesitate to say, that all who serve God in conformity with this fundamental principle, shall have a resurrection to life.

If, on the contrary, we "do evil," neglecting this adorable Savior, and living to ourselves rather than to him, we shall certainly "come forth to everlasting shame and contempt, [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)."

Each of these truths is so firmly asserted in the Scriptures, that no doubt of them can be entertained, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8). [Romans 2:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.6-10). We need only to have them brought home with more feeling to our hearts.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

Consider for which of these states you are preparing. You may delay, under the idea that the time will never come: but "the hour is coming," as fast as the wings of time can bring it forward. Let not your preparation for it be deferred: for life is uncertain, and death is certain; and as death finds you, so will judgment find you. If you live and die as obedient followers of Christ, you will be happy. If you rely not on him, or devote not yourselves unreservedly to him, it will not be in the power of God himself to save you: for "he cannot deny himself;" and he has expressly said, that all such persons shall have "a resurrection to damnation!"

***~~#1629~~***

***~~John the Baptist's Character~~***

***~~[John 5:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.35).~~***

"He was a burning and a shining light."

IT might well be expected that the advent of the Messiah would be marked by such concurrent circumstances, as would carry conviction to every dispassionate mind, that the person assuming that character was indeed the person predicted by Moses and the prophets. Accordingly we find, that there was a person sent as the forerunner of our blessed Lord, to prepare his way, and to bear witness to him.

This person was John the Baptist, [John 1:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.6-8), himself a most extraordinary man; so extraordinary, that the Jewish rulers doubted whether he was not the Messiah: but he disclaimed all pretensions to that honor; and rested satisfied with executing the office which had been assigned to him, [John 1:19-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.19-27). To this man's testimony our blessed Lord appealed; at the same time testifying respecting him, that "he was a burning and a shining light."

In confirmation of this assertion respecting John, I will,

***~~I. Point out the peculiar excellencies of his character—~~***

Of course I cannot enter into all the parts of his character: I will content myself with specifying three things which pre-eminently distinguished him:

***~~1. The clearness of his knowledge—~~***

In this he excelled all who went before him. Many prophets had spoken plainly of Christ, declaring both his sufferings, and the glory that would follow them. But they spoke of Christ at a distance of several hundreds of years, and understood not the prophecies which they were inspired to record, [1 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-11). But John pointed out the Messiah himself, and directed the people to Jesus, as "that Lamb of God, who, by the sacrifice of himself, would take away the sins of the world, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29)." In this act, not only was the typical nature of the Mosaic offerings distinctly recognized; but the Lord Jesus Christ was made known as fulfilling in his own person what had been so long shadowed forth in the daily sacrifices. Thus did he "give the knowledge of salvation to the people for the remission of their sins, [Luke 1:76-77](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.76-77);" a knowledge which pre-eminently exalted John above all the prophets that had gone before him [Luke 7:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.26-28).

***~~2. His faithfulness and his zeal—~~***

The first thirty years of his life he spent in retirement, and in the closest walk with God. And, when he entered on his office as the Messiah's harbinger, he came in the most self-denying way, "having his clothing of camel's hair, and a leather belt; while his food was locusts and wild honey, [Matthew 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.4)." As to the manner in which he executed his office, nothing could exceed his fidelity. To all persons, of whatever rank, he preached with undaunted boldness; and declared, as far as he was able, the whole counsel of God.

When many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to his baptism, he, well knowing their hypocrisy, addressed them in these animated and pungent strains: "You generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits fit for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire! [Matthew 3:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.7-10)."

Even before Herod himself did he manifest the same undaunted courage; telling him plainly, that "it was not lawful for him to live in an incestuous relationship with his brother Philip's wife;" and exhorting him without delay to put her away, [Mark 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.17-18). He well knew at what peril he exercised this fidelity: but no personal consideration could induce him to withhold, or modify, this beneficial counsel. Herein, then, he approved himself to be a prophet indeed, and rendered himself a pattern for ministers in all ages.

***~~3. The holiness of his life—~~***

"He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb, [Luke 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.15)." And so holily did he live, that Herod could not but reverence and stand in awe of him, and in many instances, comply with his admonitions, [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20). In the whole of his ministrations his attention was particularly turned to the advancement of practical religion; enforcing upon all those peculiar duties which their situation called for, or which their peculiar circumstances tempted them to neglect.

Those who were under good impressions from his ministry, consulted him, as might be expected, what they would do in order to evince the efficacy of the principles they had imbibed from him. "When some asked him, What shall we do? He answered, He who has two coats, let him impart to him that has none: and he who has food, let him do likewise." When tax collectors made the same inquiry, to them he said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." And when soldiers requested the same information, he said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages, [Luke 3:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 3.10-14)." Thus he showed how anxious he was that all would bring religion into their daily practice; *not allowing it to evaporate in mere sentiments and professions, but carrying it into effect, in the whole of their life and conduct*.

Having thus set before you the character of this blessed man, I will,

***~~II. Commend it to your imitation—~~***

***~~Far, very far, in general, are men from admiring such a character as this —~~***

By many, even of this holy man it was said, "He has a devil." The Rulers and Pharisees rejected his counsel altogether, and would not submit to his baptism, [Luke 7:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.30)." And though many were well affected towards him, and "rejoiced in his light, they rejoiced in it only for a season," and at last he fell a sacrifice to his fidelity.

Thus, at this time, if a man were to resemble him, he would find but little acceptance with an ungodly world. In fact, he would by many be thought to be more under the influence of demoniac delusion than of sound reason and solid piety. His*deadness to the world would be regarded as most contemptible fanaticism, and his faithfulness in reproving sin would be condemned as most insufferable presumption*.

***~~Nevertheless, I cannot but earnestly commend his character to the imitation of all—~~***

From ministers in particular his example demands the most respectful attention. Certainly the same degree of austerity that he practiced is not necessary now. Our Lord has shown that under this new dispensation a greater measure of *liberty*is allowed, provided we be duly careful that in no instance it degenerate into *licentiousness*. But with respect to an entire devotion of the soul to God, and a faithful discharge of our ministry, there is to be no difference between us and John: we must be as faithful in our ministrations, and as holy in our lives, as he.

But to Christians of every class is this bright example applicable. Every follower of Christ is called to be a "light in the world, [Matthew 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14)," yes, "a burning and a shining light." His soul, inflamed with fire from Heaven, would burn with holy love; nor would the fire, once kindled on the altar of his heart, ever be allowed to go out, [Leviticus 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 6.12). To all around him he would "hold forth the word of life, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16);" and so "cause his light to shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to glorify their Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Be "willing, then, to rejoice in his light"—~~***

Surely such a ministry as his, so instructive, so faithful, so convincing, is an unspeakable blessing to every one who enjoys it. And such a ministry we have, not in him only, but the holy Apostles, yes, and in multitudes of the present day. Show, then, that you duly appreciate the labors of these men, and "be followers of them, as they are of Christ".

***~~2. Let your joy in that light be both abiding and progressive—~~***

Of the myriads who were impressed by the ministry of John, there were very, very few who became steadfast in the faith. All the disciples of John, and Jesus, and his twelve Apostles, and his seventy disciples, amounted to no more than five hundred, after the ascension of our Lord. *The great mass of those who appeared hopeful, were turned aside by fear, or by the vanities of this sinful world*. Be on your guard then, brethren, against everything that may produce this sad effect on you: and beg of God that your "path may be like the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

***~~#1630~~***

***~~Christ's Appeal to the Scriptures~~***

***~~[John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39).~~***

"Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and these are th Scriptures which testify about me."

WHEN our Lord professed himself to be the promised Messiah, and claimed an authority equal to that of Almighty God, it was necessary that he would bring abundant evidence of his Divine mission, and prove, by testimonies of the most unquestionable kind, his title to the honor he assumed. Nor was he backward to give all the proof which the occasion required.

He appealed to the testimony of John the Baptist, whom the whole Jewish nation considered as a prophet, and whose testimony therefore ought to have great weight with them. He appealed also to his own miracles, which were so great and numerous as to be in themselves an indubitable evidence that God was with him.

He further appealed to the testimony which his heavenly Father also had given to him at his baptism, both by an audible voice from Heaven, and by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him.

Lastly, he appealed to the Holy Scriptures, which the Jews themselves received as the word of God, and which bore testimony to him; even such testimony as would be found to agree exactly with his person and character in every respect. As these had existed for centuries, and might be compared with all that he had either done or taught, their testimony must be unexceptionable, and must carry conviction to every mind.

From the words before us we shall be led to notice,

***~~I. The transcendent excellency of the Holy Scriptures—~~***

Two things are here spoken respecting them:

***~~1. They reveal unto us eternal life—~~***

*Human Reason*never could suffice for discovering the immortality of the soul. *Philosophy*never enabled any man so to establish the certainty of a future state, as to render it an article of general belief, or to produce any considerable influence on the minds of those around him. Many have reasoned well upon the subject, and spoken what approximated to the truth: but they never could with certainty affirm a future state of rewards and punishments; much less could they tell us how to avoid the one, and obtain the other.

But the Scriptures have drawn aside the veil and shown us that this present world is introductory to another, in which men shall exist to all eternity. The Old Testament, it is true, speaks but darkly on this point: yet was it sufficiently clear to impress the Jewish nation at large with a persuasion that both the souls and bodies of men would live in a future state of existence. The Sadducees, who were the free-thinkers of the day, were exceptions to the general rule. The national creed in these respects accorded with what was more fully revealed under the Christian dispensation. "By the Gospel, life and immortality have been fully brought to light;" yes, and the way of salvation been clearly revealed: so that we who live under its benign influence, do not merely think, but know, that there is for those who believe in Christ, a salvation treasured up, a "salvation with eternal glory." *In this respect therefore a very child among us is better instructed than all the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome.*

***~~2. They testify of Christ Jesus our Lord—~~***

"The testimony of Christ," we are told, "was the spirit of *prophecy*" from first to last. The testimony which the Scriptures have borne to Christ is clear; not like the ambiguous answers of heathen oracles, which were so formed, as to be, without any great difficulty, accommodated to any event; but clear and precise, and incapable of any other interpretation than that which, upon the very face of it, it professed.

Take, for instance, the prophecy relating to the time and place of our Savior's birth; and it was as much understood before his advent as afterwards, even by those who had not the grace to welcome his arrival. It was also copious, so that no one thing which could by any means be desired to designate the Messiah's advent, was omitted.

His *person*, his *work*, his offices were all described and shadowed forth: the nature of his salvation was fully delineated, and the extent of his kingdom declared. Nothing was left for any reasonable man to desire either for the rectifying of his views, or the ascertaining that those views were correct. It was in the highest possible degree convincing. The prophecies concerning him were so minute that they could never have entered into the mind of an uninspired man, nor could by any possibility have been accomplished by any contrivance or conspiracy of men.

Though a Jew, our Lord Jesus was to die, not a Jewish, but a Roman death, the death of the cross. Yet in his crucifixion he was not to suffer all that was usually associated with that punishment; for "not a bone of him was to be broken." On the other hand, there were to be inflicted on him indignities, never associated with that punishment in other instances; he was to be scourged before his crucifixion, and to be pierced to the heart with a spear after it. The very taunts with which he was to be insulted on the cross were accurately and literally foretold; as was also the cruelty in offering him vinegar in the midst of all his torments. The division of one of his garments, and the casting of lots upon the other, were among the circumstances which no human being could have divined, and which no impostor would have ventured to predict. And who would ever have imagined, that one so ignominiously treated in his death, would yet "have his grave with the rich?" The very price which was to be paid for his blood, together with the subsequent application of it in the purchase of a potter's field, and the untimely death of the person that betrayed him; these, and a great variety of other circumstances equally minute, prove beyond a doubt that Jesus was the person testified of, and that the testimony borne of him was divine.

Had the different witnesses been contemporaneous, it might have been supposed possible that these infinitely diversified circumstances would have been devised and executed by means of a well-concerted conspiracy. But the witnesses lived in ages and places far distant from each other, even many hundreds of years apart: yet all the prophets did so harmonize with each other in all their various predictions, that no room is left for doubt but that they were wholly unconnected with each other, and altogether under the direction and influence of the Spirit of God. Thus whether we consider the *testimony*itself, or the *witnesses*by whom it was delivered, we can have no doubt but that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Such then being the excellency of the Scriptures, let us contemplate,

***~~II. Our duty in relation to them—~~***

This is clear and manifest:

***~~1. We must "search the Scriptures" for ourselves—~~***

Possessing such Divine records, we should apply ourselves diligently to the study of them. *We should search them with simplicity of mind, desiring to learn from them the will and mind of God, and determining through grace to comply with them in every respect, receiving implicitly whatever they declare, and obeying without reserve whatever they command. We must not bring to them any of our own prejudices whereby to judge them, or anything of our own passions with which to limit them. We must bring to them the simplicity of a little child, submitting our own wisdom to the wisdom of our God, and our own will to the will of God.*In fact, we must desire to *know*God's will in order that we may *do*it. Like Samuel we must lend to every word of God a willing and obedient ear, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

We have a most instructive example in the conduct of the blind man whom Jesus healed. Jesus asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The man immediately replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" The whole bias of his soul was towards his God; and his desire of instruction was for the sole purpose of glorifying God by the strictest possible conformity to his holy will. And if we resemble him in these respects, we are assured, that we shall be enabled to "know of every doctrine whether it be of God, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17)."

Of course, we must prosecute our search with all diligence. The very word, "Search," imports, that we would sift every word, as miners sift the earth in the pursuit of precious jewels; and must exercise all our faculties about it, as dogs do in the pursuit of their prey. *A slight and cursory perusal of the Scriptures will be of little use; nor will a formal habit of reading*, as some do, the psalms and lessons for the day, answer the ends for which we are to read the Scriptures. There must be in us a habit of weighing every sentiment, and of imploring God to convey to our minds its true import.

Diligence alone will not avail for the full understanding of the Scriptures. We must have the eyes of our understanding opened by the Spirit of God; and his aid will only be given to us in answer to fervent prayer.

We must, in fact, never approach the Scriptures without that petition of holy David, "Open my eyes, O Lord, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

Hence these two, diligence and prayer, are united by Solomon as equally necessary for the attainment of divine knowledge: "If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and 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. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding." [Proverbs 2:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.3-6).

But in particular we must search the Scriptures with a more especial view to derive from them the knowledge of Christ. As they all testify of him, so it would be our most anxious care to see and learn what they do testify. A mere *academic*knowledge of Scripture, though good, will bring with it no saving benefit. Nor will an *historical*knowledge of Scripture; no, nor even a *speculative*knowledge of its doctrines and its precepts, avail us anything. It is the knowledge of Christ, and that alone, that will convey to our souls the blessings of salvation. "This is life eternal, to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." In the great mystery of a crucified Savior "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!" And "in comprehending the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ as revealed in that mystery, we shall be filled with all the fullness of God."

My dear brethren, even good people do not sufficiently bear this in mind. Men, in going into the fields, obtain, for the most part, that which they are in pursuit of. One obtains health, and another pleasure; but it is the botanist alone who acquires the science of herbs. So in perusing the Holy Scriptures, whatever else men may obtain, none will obtain the knowledge of Christ in all the glory of his person, the extent of his love, and the fullness and excellency of his salvation—but those who go to them with this express view, and bend all the force of their minds towards the attainment of them.

You will remember that the Cherubim upon the mercy-seat were in a bending posture looking down upon the ark, that peculiar symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ as mediating between God and us. This Peter explains to us, declaring respecting all the wonders of salvation revealed to us in the Scriptures, that "the angels are desiring to look into them, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12)." Be then, brethren, in this posture whenever you take the sacred volume into your hands, and, like the Apostle Paul, seek to your dying hour to know more and more of Christ, "of the power of his resurrection, and of the fellowship of his sufferings:" for, in proportion as "you behold the glory of Christ, you shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

***~~2. Endeavor to diffuse the knowledge of them to the utmost of your power—~~***

The command to "search them" evidently implies the duty of promoting in others also the knowledge of them. In this respect the Christian world has done well in spreading the Holy Scriptures both at home and abroad, to an extent altogether unprecedented. And in the work of translating the Holy Scriptures, and of sending forth missionaries to diffuse the knowledge of them, this age has also excelled all that have ever gone before it.

But who would ever have thought that a great part of the Christian world would set themselves against the circulation of the Scriptures, and would actually prohibit their people from reading them? Yet this is done by the *Church of Rome*in every quarter of the world. The governors of that Church will not suffer the word of God to be read, except by their special permission, and with their corrupt glosses, which in ten thousand instances obscure and falsify its meaning. And what shall we say to this? I stand amazed at such conduct in a Church professing itself the Church of Christ. I know not whether is the greater—the impiety or the cruelty of such conduct.

The Lord Jesus Christ says, "Search the Scriptures." 'No,' says the Papist; 'you shall not search them: I will not even allow them to be in your possession: and if they be given to you, I will wrest them out of your hands.'

But if it is replied, "In them we have eternal life;" 'I care not for that,' says the Papist; 'you shall perish, rather than I will allow you to read that book.'

'But Christ has said, "They testify of me;" and I want to know what they testify.' 'I care not for that,' says the Papist; 'I will not allow you to know what they testify: you shall not hear their testimony any farther than I please to inform you of it, and then you shall know it only as corrupted and falsified by me.'

What such corrupt priests will answer at the bar of judgment, God alone knows: but I fear their doom will be very terrible, seeing that they will have to answer for the souls of thousands whom they have kept in the sorest bondage, and blinded to their eternal ruin.

Judge then, brethren, whether you would not endeavor to counteract this impious tyranny, and to diffuse the knowledge of salvation through the perishing millions of your fellow-subjects. I don't mean that you would do this in a spirit of opposition, but in a spirit of love. And as the legislature at their request has made them partakers with you in all civil and political privileges, so do you, unsought and unsolicited, labor to impart unto them the full enjoyment of your spiritual privileges, in the knowledge of Christ, and of his salvation.

***~~#1631~~***

***~~The True Reason of Men's Destruction~~***

***~~[John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40).~~***

"You will not come to me, that you might have life."

TO doubt whether men wish to be saved or not, may appear absurd. No man would hesitate to answer such a question in the affirmative. But though every one would prefer happiness to misery, they are but few who really prefer the *way*that leads to happiness. The text may be addressed to the generality among ourselves with the same propriety as to those who rejected the invitations of our Lord in the days of old. We shall take occasion from these words to inquire,

***~~I. What are the benefits of coming to Christ—~~***

To "come to Christ" is a frequent expression in the Scriptures:

***~~Let us first consider what is implied in this act—~~***

It imports not an outward attendance on his person, but an inward affiance on him for salvation. It imports a coming to him with humility as sinners: with faith as to the only Savior: and with love as to our rightful Lord and Master.

The full import of this act may perhaps be more clearly understood by expressing the very words and manner in which a sinner comes to Christ, "O my Lord and Savior, behold I am vile, and justly deserve to be for ever spurned from your footstool, etc. But you have died for sinners, even the chief, etc. I have no hope but in you, etc. O receive a poor prodigal, etc. I look for redemption through your blood. O let your blood cleanse me from all sin, etc. And while I trust in your name, enable me to depart from all iniquity, etc. Be my only Lord, and let every thought and desire of my heart be brought into captivity to your holy will, etc."

***~~From a sincere coming to Christ, the most inestimable benefits will arise—~~***

Temporal, spiritual, eternal life will flow from it. Even the temporal comforts of life are enjoyed by none so much as by him who believes in Christ; nor is there any other person who holds them by so sure a tenure, [1 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.8). He cannot fail of possessing them as far as they will conduce to his spiritual welfare. But spiritual life is a far richer blessing; and this is the believer's assured portion. His soul shall be endued with a new and vital principle of grace, [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10). Christ himself will live in him and be his life, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4).

As Lazarus when raised was enabled to perform the functions of physical life, of which he had been rendered, for a season, incapable, so shall the believer's soul, which was once dead in trespasses and sins, be quickened to the discharge of all the duties and offices of the spiritual life.*He shall enjoy sweet communion with God in secret, and find his supreme delight in fulfilling his blessed will.*The man who thus daily comes to Christ for righteousness and strength is incomparably the happiest man on earth; but his happiness does not terminate with his present existence. No! he shall also possess eternal life. Believer, you have a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory awaiting you at your departure hence. What a recompense is this of all your labor! What encouragement to come continually to Christ does such a prospect afford you!

One would suppose that, with such prospects, all would be pressing toward the Savior with their whole hearts. Let us then proceed to inquire,

***~~II. Whence it is that any fall short of these blessings?~~***

The reason assigned in the text is the most just and most humiliating of any. There is no unwillingness in Christ to save us, but we are *unwilling*to go to him for salvation.

***~~1. We are indifferent about spiritual life—~~***

We consider all pretensions to a new and spiritual life as enthusiasm, and therefore disdain to apply to Christ for it. As for eternal life, we do not wish to hear anything about it. If the prospect of temporal advancement be held out to us, we can cheerfully and intensely bend our minds to the attainment of it; but if Heaven and all its glory is offered to us, we slight it utterly. We choose to talk of any subject rather than religion, and universally agree to banish that from our conversation. If at any time the thought of eternity be obtruded upon us, we turn from it with disgust; and are uneasy until some other topic is brought forward. Even in the house of God we hear of heavenly things as if they were fables and unworthy of our attention. We love our own ways, though they will end in death; and will not endure to be told of Heaven, because we cannot reconcile our minds to the *way*that leads thither. To this effect is that declaration of Christ, "They that hate me, love death, [Proverbs 8:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.34-36). It is Christ who speaks here, verse 22-31."

***~~2. We are averse to the way in which alone it is to be obtained—~~***

We will not come to Christ for life: this appears to be too humiliating. If we could obtain life by any works of our own, we would gladly do them; but we cannot bear to be so entirely indebted to another. We do not choose to acknowledge ourselves lost and undone. We hope to establish some righteousness of our own. Hence we neither do, nor will, come to Christ for life and salvation. Besides, this way to life is too strict: as we do not like to come with humility and faith; so neither do we feel that love which will instigate us to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service. We think that less religion will suffice, and are determined to perish, rather than endure such drudgery. In every ungodly sinner are the words of our Savior verified, "How often would I, but you would not, [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What ground for self-condemnation will there be in the day of judgment!~~***

Every condemned sinner, however full of excuses now, will then have his mouth shut; yes, even now a moment's reflection must convince us, that every sinner's condemnation is the effect of his own obstinacy.

Who among you does not know, that he ought to read the word of God, and to seek his face, and to repent of sin, and to flee to Christ for refuge, and to give up himself to Christ in a way of holy obedience? Yet you will not do it! Your conscience at times remonstrates with you: yet you will not obey its voice: and your recollections of this in the eternal world will be one of the most bitter ingredients in the cup which you will drink to all eternity.

***~~2. What astonishing grace and mercy are there in the Lord Jesus Christ!~~***

His reproof contains in it a most gracious invitation. He addresses all of us at this instant, "Come unto me and I will give you life! [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28)." Let none resist him any longer. Let us go to him, and he will never cast us out, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37).

***~~#1632~~***

***~~Men's Lack of Love to God~~***

***~~[John 5:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.42).~~***

"I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."

OUR blessed Lord "needed not that any would testify of man: for he himself knew perfectly what was in man, [John 2:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.24-25);" and, consequently, without any reference to overt acts, could determine what was the state of every man's soul before God. Yet, in making known his decisions upon character, he, for the most part, appealed to fact; especially if his testimony was to their discredit.

In declaring Nathanael to be "an Israelite indeed, and without deceit," he referred to secret transactions, known only to God and to Nathanael himself: but, in denouncing those whom he was now addressing as destitute of the love of God, he appealed to their obstinacy in rejecting him, notwithstanding the full evidence he had given them of his Messiahship, verse 38, 40, 42.

It is probable that this testimony of his gave great offence: yet is there occasion for it to be given respecting multitudes in the present day; and, no doubt, if he were here present, he still would be constrained to say of many, "I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts."

In confirmation of this, I will show,

***~~I. That such characters do still exist—~~***

But where must we look for them? Can it be supposed that a single individual of this character is to be found in the midst of *us?* Go round to each individual in rotation, and ask each separately, "Have you the love of God in you?" Perhaps there is not one who would not reply, "Yes, I hope and trust I have." Some, I can have no doubt, would be quite indignant at the question; and would answer with disdain, "What! do you suppose I am a downright reprobate?" In this respect there would be but little difference between the different classes of the community. The *Moral*would deem their morality a decisive proof of the point. Nor would the *Immoral*account their immoralities any proof to the contrary: they would find reasons enough for their deviations from the straight line of duty, without impeaching the integrity of their own hearts before God, and their attachment, on the whole, to him.

The *Old*would conclude, of course, that they could not have attained to their age without having at least secured this first principle of all religion. The *Young*would intimate, that, though they make no profession of religion, they are not so destitute of it as this question would imply.

All would consider it as a libel upon the Christian Church to suppose that such a character would be found within its pale, unless perhaps among those whose whole habits proclaim them to be addicted to every species of iniquity.

But it was to those who had been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision, and who were attending the ministry of our blessed Lord, that the words in my text were addressed: and therefore it is more than probable, that still, even among professing Christians, there are some who answer to this character; and of whom, one, who had a perfect knowledge of them, might say, "I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts"

But the existence of such characters will not be doubted by any of us, when once we have seen,

***~~II. How they may be known and distinguished—~~***

Doubtless such characters may be known, by themselves at least, if not by their fellow-creatures also. Our fellow-creatures, it is true, can judge only by outward acts, because they cannot discern the workings of the heart: but the point may be ascertained by ourselves at all events, if on examination we find,

***~~1. A habitual lack of those dispositions which are essential to love to God—~~***

Wherever love exists, there must be an esteem of, a desire after, and a delight in, the object beloved: and these feelings must bear some proportion to the worthiness of the object himself. Now, of course, if God be that object, he must exceed all created good in our estimation, as much as the meridian sun surpasses the faint radiance of the glow-worm. And, inasmuch as we can never be happy without him, we must thirst after him, even as the hunted deer thirsts after the water brooks; and find in the enjoyment of his presence every desire of our souls completely satisfied.

Now, we can be at no loss to discover how far our experience accords with this. At all events, if we be utter strangers to all these exercises of mind, the matter is clear—a voice from Heaven could not make it more clear than the testimony of our own conscience has already made it.

What would we ourselves judge of the professions of a fellow-creature, who pretended to feel a suitable regard for us, while in no one of these respects did he ever manifest it in the smallest degree? The judgment, then, that we would pass on him, we must pass on ourselves; and conclude, for a certainty, that *the total absence of all these dispositions towards God proves that the love of God is not in us.*

**2. A habitual indulgence of those dispositions which are repugnant to love** **to God—**

It is not an occasional failure in our duty that will prove us destitute of love to God: for, then, where would so much as one lover of God be found? But if there are in us a habitual indulgence of feelings absolutely inconsistent with the love of God, then also will the point be clearly decided.

For instance, God has said, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, [1 John 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15)."

Again, it is said, "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shuts up his affections of compassion from him, how does the love of God dwells in him, [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17)."

Again, it is said, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, 1 [John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.3)."

Now here are marks given us whereby we may know infallibly the state of our souls towards God. If the world and its poor vanities rival him in our hearts, the matter is clear. If we have so little regard for God, that we can shut up our affections of compassion from our destitute fellow-creatures, instead of relieving them for his sake, then also the point is decided for us.

And, lastly, if our love to God does not actuate us so far as to ensure a willing obedience to his every command, then also no doubt is left about the point at issue: we are in every one of these cases declared to be obnoxious to the charge contained in our text.

I say, again, an occasional defect will not warrant so distressing a conclusion; but if our failure is *universal*, *habitual*, and *allowed*, the inference from it is undeniable; and we are declared by God himself to be destitute of any true love to him.

Let us, then, in reference to such unhappy characters, contemplate,

***~~III. In what an awful condition they are—~~***

No words can adequately describe the misery of such a state. The persons who are obnoxious to this charge, are in a state,

***~~1. Of fearful delusion—~~***

However pointed out by God, they put far from them the accusation, and boldly deny the charge. They cannot conceive of themselves as persons so lost to all that is good, as to have no love of God whatever in their hearts. They will admit that they do not love him so ardently, or serve him so fully, as they ought: but they will not admit that they have no love to him. They substitute some good sentiments respecting God in the place of real love to him; and thus, deceiving themselves by their own vain imaginations, they neglect to humble themselves before God on account of their extreme wickedness.

Truly, if there were but *one*such person in the midst of us, one who was buoying himself up with some fallacious conceits, while God said respecting him, 'There is a wretch that has no love to me!' who among us would not be ready to weep over him? and who would not labor to undeceive him, while yet a discovery of his error might be available for his welfare?

***~~2. Of just condemnation—~~***

It is not possible but that such persons must be objects of God's wrathful indignation. In fact, they are the very image of Satan himself! For what can be said worse of Satan than this, or what can characterize him more justly than this, that he has no love to God? It is not necessary that a man would have committed murder or adultery, to deserve the wrath of God. If he has no love to the Supreme God, to Him whose perfections are infinite, to Him who every moment maintains him in existence; if he has no love to Him who gave his only dear Son to die for sinners, and offers his Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify him, and would gladly confer on him all the blessings both of grace and glory; his desert of God s wrath is unquestionable. Paul says, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema!" There is not a creature in the universe that will not assent to the same denunciation, in reference to the wretch that loves not God.

***~~3. Of utter incapacity for happiness, even if he were actually admitted into Heaven—~~***

Suppose a man, destitute of love to God, were admitted into Heaven; what happiness could he find there? Amidst all the heavenly hosts, there would not be so much as one with whom he could hold communion, or have one single feeling in sympathy. As for God, the God whom he hates, he could not bear the sight of him. The sinner would know, that it was in vain for him to assume any appearances of love; for that his heart could not but be known to God, and consequently he must be an object of God's utter abhorrence. For the employments of Heaven, it is obvious he could have no taste: and he would solicit a dismissal from the place, where everything he saw and heard must, of necessity, generate in him the bitterest feelings of envy, malignity, and despair. To take his portion under rocks and mountains would be to him a deliverance from scenes to which he was utterly averse, and from vexations painful to him as Hell itself.

***~~Application,~~***

***~~1. Let every one of us institute an inquiry into this matter—~~***

Paul exhorted the Hebrews of old to "examine themselves, whether they were in the faith:" so now I would say, "Examine yourselves," whether there is in you any love to God. Do not take it for granted, without examination; and be careful, also, not to try yourselves by an inadequate test. Take the tests that have been before proposed; and see what is the habitual state of your minds in relation to them. To what purpose will it be to say, you love God; when the entire course of your feelings and habits declares the contrary? You cannot deceive God; nor can you prevail on him to give in your favor a judgment contrary to truth. Bring the matter to a trial. Be not content to leave it in suspense. Indeed, if you can be content to leave it in doubt whether you love God or not, you can have no clearer proof that you are altogether destitute of his love: for the smallest sense of love to him that could exist in your soul, would make you uneasy, until you had placed the existence of it beyond a doubt.

***~~2. Let us not be satisfied until we can appeal to God, and say, "You know that I love you"—~~***

Thus Peter was enabled to reply, in answer to the question thrice put to him by our blessed Lord, [John 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.15-17); and we also would be able to make a similar appeal to the heart-searching God respecting our love to him. And why would we not? Of defects, every one of us must be conscious; yes, of such *defects*, that, if God were to enter into judgment with us according to them, we must perish.

But of our *desires*after God, and our supreme delight in him, and our determination of heart, through grace, to please him, we may be conscious; and this consciousness may well abide in us, as a source of most exalted joy. I pray God that this joy may be ever yours, my beloved brethren; and that when we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, God himself may bear testimony to us all, as having borne a distinguished place among his faithful, loving, and obedient servants.

***~~#1633~~***

***~~True Faith Incompatible with the Love of Man's Applause~~***

***~~[John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44).~~***

"How can you believe, who receive honor one from another, and seek not the honor that comes from God alone?"

IT is certain that great care is requisite in interpreting the Holy Scriptures; lest, on the one hand, we explain away their meaning altogether; or, on the other hand, we take occasion, from the strength of some particular expressions, to maintain doctrines which they do not fairly establish. And the more unqualified any declarations are, the greater caution we would use in affixing to them their true import.

The passage before us is of the deepest importance to every soul of man: but on the explanation of it, its force must entirely depend. Shall it be said, that no kind of faith will consist with our seeking honor from man, rather than from God? Or, that the mere "receiving" of honor from man is incompatible with true faith? Either of these positions would be utterly false. Let us then proceed to the consideration of these words with that care which their importance demands; and may God, of his infinite mercy, guide me, while I endeavor to show,

***~~I. What we are to understand by "believing" in Christ!~~***

It can never surely be meant, that we cannot receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God, or have a general view of the leading doctrines contained in them, while we are seeking honor from man: for the mere weighing of evidences, and determining according to evidence, are acts of the mind, which every man of sense, whatever be his feelings as to human applause, is capable of performing. Certainly *much more than a bare assent must be comprehended in the faith*here spoken of. It must import two things:

***~~1. A receiving of Christ, as he is set forth in the Holy Scriptures—~~***

The Scriptures speak of our "receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). [Colossians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6)." We must receive him as the gift of God the Father to a sinful world; and must receive him, too, for all the ends and purposes for which he is given. If we embrace him not under all the relations, and for all the ends for which he is sent, we reject him, rather than acknowledge him; and put him away from us by unbelief, instead of receiving him into our hearts by faith.

It is not optional with us to separate his offices, and to acknowledge him in those only which are agreeable to our own minds. Whatever "God has made him to us," that he is to be with our full consent—our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our complete redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

***~~2. A surrender of ourselves to him, as his obedient followers—~~***

Without this we can never be acknowledged by him as his: "If any man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." And so unreserved must our surrender of ourselves to him be, that, if we be not ready even to lay down our lives for him, we shall be regarded by him in no other light than as aliens or traitors. A faith which does not operate in this manner, and to this extent, is no better than "the faith of devils." It is "dead faith," and will leave the soul dead to all eternity, [James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19-20); [James 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.26).

Such, then, is the faith of God's elect; and such is the faith of which our Lord speaks in the words before us; a faith that "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world."

Having ascertained what is meant by faith, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Who they are who are declared incapable of exercising it—~~***

The mere "receiving" of honor from man has no such effect: for the good man passes "through honor as well as dishonor, and through good report as well as evil report." It is the *seeking*of honor from man that is here spoken of; that is, the seeking of it, either independently of "the honor that comes from God," or in preference to it. All desire of man's approbation is not wrong: a child may properly seek the approbation of his parent; a servant, of his master; a subject, of his prince. But *to make man's approbation the main object of our pursuit*, is to put man in the place of God: and this can never be pleasing to the Supreme Being; who is "a jealous God," and "will not give his glory to another [Isaiah 42:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.8)."

Nor is it necessary that what we do would be substantially and in itself evil, in order to provoke God to jealousy. Our actions may be good in themselves; and yet, if they be done to please man, their character is altogether changed, and they become hateful in the sight of God. Almsgiving and prayer are good; but if either the one or the other be done in order to obtain applause from man, it is vitiated, and debased, and execrable: and fasting itself is odious, when proceeding from no better principle than this, [Matthew 6:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-5); [Matthew 6:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.16-18).

It was this base desire of man's applause which chiefly characterized the Pharisees of old, [Matthew 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.5); and, where-ever it prevails, it destroys all pretensions to uprightness before God, and all hope of ever being acknowledged by Christ, as his disciples: as Paul says, "If I yet pleased men, I could not be the servant of Jesus Christ, [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)."

In like manner we err, if we seek man's approbation, in preference to the honor that comes from God. The two often stand in competition with each other; or rather, I would say, are always opposed to each other, where the higher duties of Christianity are concerned: for, of "the circumcision of the heart, which is in the Spirit and not in the letter," we are told, "its praise is not from men, but from God, [Romans 2:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.29)."

Indeed the praise of God is frequently not to be obtained without incurring the deepest odium from men. But, when that is the case, there must be no hesitation on our part whom to obey, and whose honor to seek. Our reply to the whole universe must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge." Neither parental authority, nor brotherly affection, must have any weight with us in opposition to God. For, if "we come to Christ, and hate not father and mother, and brother and sister, yes, and our own lives also," in comparison with him, "we cannot be his disciples, [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)."

But in these two respects the persons described in our text are essentially defective. In respect of moral virtue, as it is called, they may be exemplary enough; and it is even taken for granted that they are so, by their "receiving of honor from men," which may be supposed to be accorded to them on account of their virtues: but, inasmuch as they do not utterly despise man's approbation in comparison with God's, and even "glory in shame" itself for the Lord's sake, they are incapable of exercising a true and saving faith in the Lord Jesus. I say again, It is not the immoral man, of whom our Lord speaks—but of the man who, from any cause whatever, prefers the praise of man before the praise of God.

But why can they not exercise faith in Christ? Let us inquire,

***~~III. Whence their incapacity arises—~~***

The disposition to prefer the applause of man,

***~~1. Unfits them for discerning truth—~~***

External evidences, as I have before observed, they may judge of: but the real excellency of the Gospel is hidden from their eyes. The glory of Christ, and the beauty of holiness, they cannot appreciate; because they possess not that spiritual discernment whereby alone they can be seen, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). There is a film over their eyes: "their eye is evil; and therefore their body and soul are full of darkness, [Matthew 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-23)." Sin and "Satan have altogether blinded them, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4)." The sublimer truths, when offered to their view, produce only the effect which a flood of light does when poured upon a disordered patient in a dark chamber.

"They hate the light, and will not come to it John, 3:19-20;" and when truth is set before them, they reply, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it, [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60)." Especially if they be called to renounce self altogether, and to glory in Christ alone, they have no ears to hear it: they are like those of whom our Lord said, "Why do you not understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my words, [John 8:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.43)."

***~~2. Indisposes them for walking according to the light they have—~~***

Much, doubtless, they may see: but they are kept in bondage by "the fear of man that brings a snare." As far as relates to a speculative view of the truth, they may have a strong conviction of it; so strong as, in the common acceptance of the term, to be said to possess faith. Thus we are told, respecting many who beheld our Lord's miracles: "Among the chief rulers, many believed on him: but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they would be put out of the synagogue: for *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*,[John 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42-43)." Here their incapacity to give themselves up to Christ is marked as proceeding from the very same cause to which it is ascribed in the text: "They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Thus it is that this evil principle operates in ten thousand instances, keeping men from an attendance on public ordinances, from the society of the Lord's people, and from that public confession of Christ, whereby they ought to glorify his name.

***~~3. Leads them into courses directly contrary to the truth—~~***

A desire of worldly favors draws men, of necessity, not only to a neglect of what is good, but also to the positive commission of evil. The world will never be satisfied, until they bring us, in some measure at least, into a conformity with their views and habits. The compliances which they first desired are perhaps innocent: but gradually they increase their demands upon us, until they ensnare our feet, and defile our conscience, and lead us to dishonor our holy profession, if not altogether to renounce the faith.

***~~Now let me make this subject—~~***

***~~1. A matter of appeal—~~***

Our blessed Lord appeals to the persons themselves, whose spirit he reproves. And I also will venture to ask of you, my brethren, Whether you have not found in your converse with others, that a love of man's applause, wherever it has obtained, has proved a bar to the introduction of light into their souls; so that either you could produce no conviction upon their minds, or, if you have silenced their objections, you could not prevail upon them to act agreeably to the light they had received?

I ask also, in reference to yourselves, Whether, if at any time you have allowed your minds to be influenced by that unworthy principle, it has not rendered your views of truth obscure, and your compliance with it difficult?

I will yet further ask, Whether a carnal and a spiritual mind be not opposed to each other, as darkness to light; and whether the prevalence of one must not, in proportion as it prevails, dispel the other? Yes, it is an acknowledged and unquestionable truth, "that we cannot serve God and Mammon." If, then, the intimation in our text be confirmed by all that we see in others, and all that we experience in ourselves, let it be treasured up in our minds as a rule of action, and be referred to continually for the regulation of our hearts and lives.

***~~2. A ground of exhortation—~~***

Look not for the honor that comes of man; for it is not to be obtained without sacrifices that are far too costly for so worthless an acquisition. Let your hearts be right with God. Let his revealed will be your sure directory: and regard nothing in opposition to it. Seek to please him at all events, though you would displease the whole world. I mean not by this, that you would not listen to good advice: for it is highly desirable that you would "walk wisely in a perfect way." But let that advice alone be followed, that is founded on the word of God. And be careful to keep a conscience void of offence: and so to walk before God, that you may be approved of him, and receive from him at last that testimony of his approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter you into the joy of your Lord!"

***~~#1634~~***

***~~Unbelief Rebuked~~***

***~~[John 5:45-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.45-46).~~***

"Do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me."

THERE is nothing more painful to a pious Minister, than to reflect, that, instead of having to present all his hearers to God as his children, saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me"—he will have to stand at the bar of judgment as an accuser of by far the greater part of them, and to appear as a swift witness against them. To the majority of them, the most successful minister must say, with our blessed Lord, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin." But, whether they be called as accusers or not, the inspired writers will undoubtedly execute that painful office; as our Lord here testifies to his unbelieving audience: "Do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

Let me now, in faithfulness to your souls,

***~~I. Set before you the charge which the whole inspired volume brings against us—~~***

***~~Strong was that charge which Moses exhibited against the Jews—~~***

Much "had he written respecting Christ." The whole ceremonial law was one typical adumbration of him. The moral law itself, as denouncing a curse against every one that would transgress it in the slightest instance, was, in fact, intended to show men their need of Christ, and to shut them up to that way of salvation which he would open for them, [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22) and [Galatians 3:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.22-24). The prophecies which he revealed were many and clear: he set forth Christ as "the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head;" and as "the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the world would be blessed;" and above all, as "that prophet who would in due time be raised up like unto himself; to whom all must take heed, at the peril of their souls."

Now to these writings our blessed Lord appealed continually, in confirmation of his divine mission. But the Jews, while they pretended the highest veneration for Moses, actually made their regard for him their plea for rejecting Christ. But this showed that they did not understand the writings of Moses, and that they did not, in fact, believe any one of those things which he had spoken: for if they had understood him, and believed his testimony, they would of necessity have believed in Christ, of whom he testified.

We may suppose Moses, then, as accusing these people before God the Father to this effect: "You see, O God, what a zeal they profess for me: but it is all hypocrisy, for, instead of receiving my testimony respecting their Messiah, they shut their eyes and ears against every word that I have spoken; and make no other use of my testimony, but to pervert it, and to found upon it their rejection of that very Savior whom I have revealed."

***~~But stronger far is that charge which the whole inspired volume brings against us—~~***

We profess to believe in the written word, both of the Old and New Testament: and if any man were to brand us with the name of infidels and deists, we would be filled with indignation against him, as uttering a gross calumny. But how do we manifest our faith?

The Scriptures tell us, that "*unless we repent, we must perish*." But who believes it? Who is stirred up by that declaration, to real penitence and contrition? The Scriptures tell us, that we must look to Christ for salvation, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent. But where do we find that intense earnestness to obtain relief, and that utter renunciation of every other hope but that revealed to us in the cross of Christ?

The Scriptures require us to *live by Christ*, exactly as the Israelites lived by the manna which they gathered, and the waters of the rock that followed them. But where do we find persons making this continual use of Christ, if I may so speak; and living altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them? The Scriptures tell us, that "having been bought with a price, we must glorify Christ with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." But where do we find persons employing every member of their body, and every faculty of their soul, for the glory of Christ?

Behold, then, what an accusation the whole inspired volume brings against us: "See, Lord, this people! You know how fully your holy will is revealed in every page of your word: yet who regards it? Who regards any word contained in this volume, provided he has any interest to serve, or any lust to gratify, by the violation of it? I accuse the whole Christian world, with the exception of a very few, as hypocrites: for, with all their professed regard for your revealed will, they violate it in all its most essential points; and with their boast of being Christians, they live altogether as if they were down-right heathens!"

Now then, having stated the charge, I will proceed to,

***~~II. Put you upon your trial in relation to it—~~***

Of the little flock who sincerely believe in Christ, I will say nothing. I will confine myself to the great mass of my hearers, who have never yet been renewed by the grace of God. And I ask,

***~~1. Is not the charge true of you?~~***

Look, I beg you, and examine the matters before proposed. See in what state you are, as it respects repentance for sin, and faith in Christ, and holy obedience to the commands of God. Compare yourselves with the Scriptures which you profess to believe: see whether you are "cast into them, as into a mold;" and whether you are really living as the Apostles did? I will not ask whether you have attained the eminence of Paul; for to that none of us can pretend: but are we followers of him, as he was of Christ? And if he were to see the daily habit of our minds, would he acknowledge us as imbued with the same spirit with him, and as treading in the same steps?

It is evident, then, that we are guilty before God; and that the accusations which Moses, and the Prophets, and the Apostles, are exhibiting against us, are true. See [John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.48), where all this is plainly asserted.

***~~2. Are you not then deeply criminal?~~***

We are in the habit of reprobating infidels as among the vilest of men. And far am I from intending, in any respect, to lessen the abhorrence with which they are viewed, and would be viewed. But it may well be doubted, whether the great mass of Christians are not in a worse state than they. *For infidels, however profane, are at least consistent*: they do not profess to believe the Scriptures: they regard them all, and everything contained in them, as "a cunningly-devised fable."

But the Christian world profess to receive the Bible as the word of God, and to expect that men shall be dealt with in judgment according to the plan proposed in it: yet *in their lives they give the lie to all that they profess*. If they really believed in that word, they would believe in Christ, and love him, and serve him, and glorify him. Could a man believe that his house was on fire, and ready to fall upon him, and not flee out of it? It is a delusion altogether: and *in pretending to believe at all, they only lie unto the Holy Spirit.*

***~~3. Are you not utterly inexcusable?~~***

What excuse can you offer in vindication of yourselves? Is not every part of the inspired volume brought before you in its season? You know that "we have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," but "have declared unto you the whole counsel of God." But, at all events, the inspired volume has been in your hands, and you might have drunk water at the fountain-head. It has been accessible to you at all times: and if it has been "a fountain sealed," whose fault is that? Has not God promised, by his Holy Spirit to open it? And has not Christ told you, that "if you would ask of him, he would give you living waters, which would be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life?"

What is there that has been lacking to you? Has there been any defect of evidence? No! the evidence has shone forth as bright as the sun. Has there been any lack of encouragement? No! there is not any species of encouragement that has not been poured upon you as a flood. Nothing has been lacking, but a humble and docile spirit. *It is your own pride, and worldliness, and unbelief, that has kept from you the blessings of salvation: and you have none but yourselves to blame.*

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

I say, then, confess your hypocrisy, and humble yourselves for it: And take the Holy Scriptures, and "search them with all diligence; and pray to the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth." But mark more especially what they speak of Christ; for "of Him they testify in every part, verse 39;" and, having found him, believe in him, and surrender up yourselves to him: and let your whole life attest the consistency of your character, and the integrity of your hearts before God.

***~~#1635~~***

***~~Christ's Messiahship Proved~~***

***~~[John 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.14).~~***

"After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say: Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

THE friends of infidelity wish it to be thought, that the Gospel which they reject is not supported by such a weight of evidence as would justify them in yielding to it an implicit and unqualified obedience. But they have, unperceived by themselves, a bias against the truth; and will suffer any slight difficulty, which they are not able to solve, to outweigh all the most decisive proofs that can be adduced in its support.

*Where the mind is candid, and open to conviction, it will be satisfied with that measure of evidence which the subject itself fairly admits of, without demanding such as it is unreasonable to expect*.

The persons of whom my text speaks, afford us a good example in this respect. They had seen a stupendous miracle wrought before them, even the feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two small fish: and they were convinced that no person could work such a miracle as this, unless God were with him; and therefore, without further hesitation, they said, We are expecting the Messiah; and this must be he: "Of a truth, this is that Prophet who would come into the world."

From this acknowledgment I will take occasion to consider,

***~~I. The proofs which Christ gave of his Messiahship—~~***

***~~Miracles may properly be regarded as proofs of a divine mission—~~***

I am not prepared to say that a miracle is of itself, independent of all its circumstances, a sufficient proof that the person performing it comes from God. For there may be circumstances so peculiar, as to account for God's permission of such an event, even while the persons through whose instrumentality it occurs, are no better than hypocrites and impostors. The magicians of Pharaoh were permitted to imitate some of the miracles of Moses, for the very purpose of demonstrating the more forcibly, that Moses alone was invested with any authority from him. They were permitted to turn their rods into serpents: but Moses' rod swallowed up all of theirs. They were permitted to inflict several plagues; but they could not remove one. Moses alone was empowered to do that. Nor could they follow Moses beyond a certain extent, or even avert from themselves the plagues that Moses inflicted: so that they themselves were made witnesses for Jehovah, and were constrained to say, "This is the finger of God!"

Again: God having done so many and great wonders for his people, may see fit to try their faith and love, in order that the *faithful*among his people may display their fidelity, and the *hypocritical*may display their hypocrisy. And for this end we may conceive him to allow some impostor to assume the character of a prophet, and, by the performance of some sign or wonder, and the prediction of some event that shall come to pass, to give occasion for his people to manifest what is in their hearts. Indeed, he warned his people that he would allow such occurrences, in order to try their fidelity to him, [Deuteronomy 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 13.1-3).

But we cannot conceive that he would allow such a trial to proceed so far as to impose on those who were truly upright. We can have no doubt, but that to a humble and prayerful soul there would appear, at the same time, very abundant evidences of the imposture: for otherwise the true prophets would be unable to prove the divine authority of their mission.

Admitting, however, that such occurrences may, for wise and gracious purposes, be permitted, we still must regard miracles, when wrought expressly in confirmation of the divine authority, as sufficient attestations to the mission of him who works them. These were the credentials whereby Moses was to authenticate his mission to the Israelites in Egypt, [Exodus 4:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 4.1-9). By this test the worshipers of Baal agreed to have the contest decided between Elijah and them: "The God that answers by fire, let him be God:" and, on seeing the testimony borne from Heaven to Elijah, they exclaimed, "The Lord, he is God! the Lord, he is God!" To this test he referred the disciples of John, who were sent to inquire whether he were the Christ, [Matthew 11:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.3-6). And to the same he continually referred, as beyond all possibility of contradiction decisive of his own mission, [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36); [John 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.24-25); [John 10:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.37-38); [John 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.10-11).

***~~And, beyond all doubt, the miracles which Jesus wrought were sufficient for this end—~~***

They were altogether innumerable; insomuch that the inspired historian says of them, that "if every one of them would be written (with all their attendant circumstances), the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." But we need not go further than the miracle before us.

The disciples, so far from being confederate with their Master to impose upon the multitude, acknowledged, with the utmost simplicity, the impossibility of providing for such a multitude in that wilderness. Our Lord had made the inquiry of them for the express purpose of calling their attention, and the attention of all around them, the more fully, to the miracle which he was about to work. The five thousand men were all placed in ranks, that everything might be done in their sight, and without a possibility of collusion. The food having been blessed by our Lord, was committed to the Apostles for distribution; and, as fast as they disposed of it, the remainder was multiplied in their hands, and all were supplied to the full: and after all had eaten and been satisfied, the fragments which were taken up far exceeded in quantity the original measure which they possessed.

All the people were themselves witnesses of what passed before their own eyes: and if there had been any deception, it could not but have been discovered. This miracle, therefore, gave them a very just ground for the conclusion which they instantly formed; namely, that Jesus must be the Messiah, who had been predicted, and was at that time expected to make his appearance in the world.

Concluding Jesus, then, to be the true Messiah, let us consider,

***~~II. Our duty to him under that character—~~***

The history before us will enable us to state this to advantage. Our duty to him is,

***~~1. To believe in him—~~***

At the time that Jesus abode on earth, it was generally expected that the Prophet spoken of by Moses would appear; "the Prophet like unto Moses," who would be a Lawgiver, a Mediator, a Prophet, a Ruler, a Deliverer, [Deuteronomy 18:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.15); [Deuteronomy 18:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18-19). Such a prophet Jesus professed to be, [Acts 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.22-23); and such a prophet he was. The people who saw this miracle had no doubt of it: they said, "This is of a truth that Prophet who would come into the world."

Let the same conviction be on your minds. View him as the true Messiah. Regard him in the full extent of his character, as resembling Moses: and give him, from your inmost souls, the honor due unto his name.

***~~2. To become his devoted followers—~~***

Hear from him all that he has come to reveal: for God has said, that "Whoever will not hear that Prophet, he will require it of him." How zealous the people were in his cause, you are told in the very words following my text: "They sought to take him by force, and to make him their King." In this they erred, because they thought of him only as a *temporal*Prince. And therefore he withdrew, and hid himself from them.

But if you will, in a spiritual view, make him your King, I will venture to assure you that he will not withdraw from you, or decline the honor that you would assign him. You may even come by force, the holy "violence" of faith and prayer with which "the kingdom of God is taken;" and he will yield to your importunity, and establish his throne in your hearts. O that we could see somewhat of this ardor in the minds of those who profess to acknowledge him as their Messiah! Let every rival be banished from your hearts: and let Jesus henceforth reign as the unrestrained governor of your souls.

***~~3. To look to him for all that your utmost necessities can require—~~***

Though he had withdrawn from them, they concluded that he would follow his disciples; and therefore they followed him, though with much difficulty, and to a great distance, in the confidence that he would supply their every need. Herein also they erred, because they sought only "the food which perishes:" but if you will seek of him the food that endures unto everlasting life, he assures you that he will give it to the utmost extent of your necessities; for "God the Father has sealed" him to this very office, verse 27.

You see how he supplied thousands of persons with food: and can he not equally supply your needs, though they would be ever so numerous? He can; he will. He has all fullness treasured up in him for that very end. "He is ascended up above all heavens, that he may fill all things, [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10)." Indeed, by the ministry of his word, he is working this miracle yet daily. How many does he nourish and strengthen by the bread of life that we dispense! Know, then, that he will not commit this ministration to us in vain, as it respects you: for God has said, He will "supply all your needs out of his riches in glory by Christ Jesus, [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19)."

***~~#1636~~***

***~~Laboring for Heaven~~***

***~~[John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27).~~***

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

OUR blessed Lord never failed to improve any occasion that was afforded him of doing good to the souls of men. His labors collected people from every quarter; and sometimes they must actually have fainted along the way, if he had not interposed by miracle to supply their necessities. But these very exertions of his, in administering to their temporal wants, were made an occasion of fostering in many their favorite sentiment, that he was come to accomplish for them a temporal deliverance.

He had just "fed five thousand men with five loaves and two small fish:" and we are told that, in order to prevent their "taking him by force to make him a king, he departed into a mountain himself alone, verse 14, 15." He sent his disciples over the sea, towards Capernaum: and multitudes, though they saw he was not with them, concluding that, by some means or other, he would follow them, went there to meet him: and when they had found him, they expressed their surprise, and asked him, how he had contrived to come there?

Our Lord, instead of gratifying their foolish curiosity, turned their attention to the state of their own souls, and pointed out to them the mistake under which they labored: they supposed that they were evincing a zeal for his glory; whereas they were not actuated by any conviction that he was the true Messiah, but by a blind hope that he would prove himself such a Messiah as they vainly expected: "You seek me, not because you saw the miracles," (and were convinced by them of my Messiahship), but because you ate of the loaves and were filled;" and conclude from thence, that I both can and will effect for you all which your carnal ambition can desire, verse 25, 26. Then he gives them the solemn admonition which I have just read to you; in unfolding which, I shall notice,

***~~I. The direction here given—~~***

We are not to understand the direction as containing a prohibition to attend to the concerns of the *body*, but only as intimating that they were not to be placed in competition with the concerns of the *soul*. It is in this way that we are to understand those memorable words, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, [Matthew 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.7)." God does not mean to prohibit sacrifices, which he had positively enjoined: but only to express, that if an act of mercy could not be performed without entrenching upon a ceremonial command, the latter would give way to the former; since that which was of a moral nature was of greater worth, in his sight, than anything which was merely ceremonial.

***~~To attend to temporal concerns is a positive duty—~~***

It is a duty we owe to ourselves: we are, by the very necessities of our nature, constrained to "obtain our bread by the sweat of our brow, [Genesis 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.19)."

We owe it to *our families*: for "if a man provide not for his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel, [1 Timothy 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.8).

We owe it to the *poor*: for if we have enough for ourselves—yet are we enjoined to work with our hands the thing that is good, that we may have to give to him that needs, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28)."

We owe it to the *Church*. No man is to be supported in idleness: "for God has ordained, that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat, 2 Thessalonians 3:10; [2 Thessalonians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.12)."

We owe it to our *God*: we are to be "not slothful in business, at the time that we are fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11)." In truth, "whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with all our might, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)."

It is of great importance that this matter would be well understood. *Religion does not supersede our civil or social duties: it regulates them*, and suggests the proper motives by which we are to be actuated in the performance of them: but it does not dispense with any: it subordinates them, indeed, to the duties which we owe immediately to God; but it inculcates and enjoins them, as necessary in their place, and as truly acceptable to God himself. We must "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's."

***~~But an attention to spiritual concerns is of greater and more indispensable importance—~~***

The labor which pertains to them is incomparably more worthy of an intelligent and immortal being, than that which relates to the things of this life. I would not undervalue the occupations of the student in the pursuit of science, or of the artisan in the execution of his work, or of the peasant in the labors of the field. All are good in their place; but all may be performed by a heathen, no less than by a child of God.

But the exercises of humiliation before God, of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, of an entire consecration of our souls to the service of the Deity; in a word, fellowship with God, and with his Son Jesus Christ, is a work in which an angel may engage, and in the performance of which the highest archangel would be honored: The fruit also of spiritual labor infinitely excels all that can be reaped in the field of nature.

The statesman, the philosopher, the merchant, the mechanic, have doubtless a rich reward of their labors: but it is a reward which an atheist may enjoy; and which, to whatever extent it is enjoyed, "perishes with the using:" it is all but as "the food that perishes."

But the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, the light of his reconciled countenance, a sense of his love shed abroad in the heart, the joy of the Holy Spirit, the pledges and foretastes of the heavenly bliss; what shall I say of these? what are earthly things in comparison with these? What, but a candle before the meridian sun? Besides, these endure for ever: they are "a food that endures unto eternal life;" and, to whatever extent they are enjoyed, they are but as the dawn of future blessedness, the first-fruits of an abundant harvest.

Can any labor be too great for these? *The mind may easily be too intensely fixed on the vanities of time and sense, and the exertions made for them be too great: but it is not possible to have the desire after spiritual blessings too ardent, or the pursuit of them too laborious.*

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. The encouragement here afforded—~~***

We may labor for the food which perishes, and be disappointed; as thousands are, who, after years of incessant toil, have either acquired little, or perhaps been reduced to the lowest ebb of want and misery.

But this shall never be experienced by those who labor for that better food which endures unto everlasting life. For, as a recompense of their labors,

***~~1. The Lord Jesus Christ will give it to them—~~***

The Lord Jesus constantly calls himself "the Son of Man;" because by that name, in particular, the Messiah was expected, and had been foretold, [Daniel 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13). "Him had God the Father sealed," and attested, by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, and by an audible voice from Heaven, [Matthew 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.16-17). By all his miracles, too, did God bear ample testimony to his Messiahship, [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36), and, above all, in his resurrection from the dead, and his visible ascension to the highest heavens. There he is invested with "all power both in Heaven and earth;" and from thence will he give to all his believing people, according to the full extent of their necessities.

The Lord Jesus Christ is of himself well disposed to give us all that we can desire: but, if it were possible to have any security beyond that which we possess in his own love and mercy, we have it in his ordination to that very office by the Father, and in his exaltation to Heaven for that very end, "that he may be Head over all things to his Church," and "that he may fill all things" "out of the fullness that is treasured up in him, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23)."

***~~2. He will give it to them all, without exception—~~***

There is no lack of power in him to give it to whoever he will. Nor will he be constrained to work a miracle to supply any number that call upon him. "In his Father's house there is bread enough, and to spare." Nor will he show any partiality to one above another. Every laborer, whether old or young, rich or poor, shall receive his proper recompense, every one in exact proportion to his own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8). There will not be with him a different standard whereby to estimate the labors of men; the time and zeal of one being regarded as nothing, in comparison with the exertions of others. "He will judge righteous judgment."

It may be that some do not begin to labor until they are incapable, according to human apprehension, of doing anything to good effect: but though they "come into the vineyard at the eleventh hour," they shall have a portion dealt out to them with a liberal hand. One thing only must be observed by all: whatever they receive, they must receive it as a gift, "a reward, not of debt, but of grace, [Romans 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.4)." This is indispensably necessary for them all.

Not one is to look upon the food as earned by him; because there is no proportion whatever between the work and the reward, so far as merit is concerned. The labor of ten thousand years would not merit the smallest portion in Heaven: the best of men are but "unprofitable servants:" but, if men will labor, "they shall never labor in vain, or run in vain, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~This subject affords just occasion for,~~***

***~~1. Reproof to the indolent—~~***

Truly, *when we see how anxiously and industriously men exert themselves for the things of time and sense, the very best among us may well be ashamed and confounded on account of his own listlessness and inactivity in the ways of God.*

Look at the worldling: see him "rising early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness," for weeks, and months, and years: see the satisfaction which he feels in prospects of success, and his pain in the apprehensions of failure: see how alive he is to everything which may help him forward in his favorite pursuit, and how everything is made to bear upon that.

When shall *we*engage with such ardor as that in the pursuit of Heaven? When shall we use the means of grace with the same zest and constancy as they do the means of temporal advancement? When will everything be swallowed up, as it were, in the concerns of the soul?

Alas! it must be confessed that we fall exceedingly short in all these exertions, and that "the men of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." For *one Mary*who sits habitually at the Savior's feet, there are *many Marthas*, who, in spite of their professed love for Christ, are careful and cumbered about many things.

But, if this be the case with the most spiritual among us; what shall I say to those who have never yet set themselves in earnest to obtain eternal life? The consciences of many must surely testify against them, that, instead of laboring with all their might for spiritual and eternal blessings, they have never spent so much as one hour in prayer for the salvation of their souls. They are content to leave their eternal interests to chance, if I may so speak; though, if God is true, they leave them to certain ruin.

The Lord Jesus Christ, as we have seen, will give to them that labor: but where is it said, that he will give to them that labor not? No such promise can be found in all the book of God. No, indeed: all is suspended on the use of means: "*Ask*, and you shall have: *seek*, and you shall find: *knock*, and it shall be opened unto you." He who improves his talents, whether they be more or less, shall be rewarded: but "the unprofitable servant, who hides his talent in a napkin, shall assuredly be cast into outer darkness." Consider this, my dearly beloved, and begin without delay the work that is assigned you; for "the day is fast passing away; and the night is quickly coming, when no man can work."

***~~2. For congratulation to the poor—~~***

It must be confessed, that, in relation to temporal concerns, your portion is far inferior to that of the more opulent. For you may often be willing to labor, and not be able to find employment: and when you do labor ever so hard, you may be scarcely able to earn sufficient to supply your necessities.

But, in relation to spiritual and everlasting happiness, the balance is altogether as much in your favor.

The richer part of the community are so engrossed with the cares or pleasures of this life, that they can scarcely find a moment to devote to the concerns of eternity. The very dispositions which are generated by carnal ease, render it "more difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." Hence you read, that "not many mighty, not many noble, are called, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26)." But what do you read concerning the poor? Hear, and be astonished! hear, and bless your God! "Has not God 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)."

Yes, he has, and experience proves it: and the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it is absolutely unanswerable. Be of good cheer then; and bless your God for the privileges which you enjoy.

True, indeed, no rich man shall perish because he is rich; nor shall any poor man be saved because he is poor. But if the rich neglect their Savior and their God, however full their tables may now be, they shall soon "lack a drop of water to cool their tongues." But the poor, though they be so destitute that they have not rags to cover their sores from the dogs that molest them, shall, if they truly seek after God, soon sit down with Abraham at the heavenly banquet, and rejoice in all the abundance of God's glory for ever and ever! [Luke 16:19-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.19-25).

Let not your poverty, then, be urged as an excuse for neglecting God; but be improved rather, as an incentive to secure the *true riches*, which shall never fade away!

***~~#1637~~***

***~~The Necessity of Faith in Christ~~***

***~~[John 6:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.28-29).~~***

Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

THE real scope of these words is more clearly seen in the original than in the translation. Our blessed Lord, knowing that many had followed him from carnal motives, and under an expectation that He who had fed thousands of persons with a few loaves and fish would establish a temporal kingdom among them, had given them this solemn caution: "Labor not for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him has God the Father sealed."

These words they had not fully understood. They supposed that some great advantages were to be derived from him; and that some particular works were to be done, in order to obtain them: but what works they were, they did not know. They asked therefore of our Lord, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? you speak of some works appointed to be done by us; and we want to know what they are, in order that we may commence the performance of them."

It must here be observed, that they use, throughout their reply, the very same word as Jesus had used when he bade them "labor" verse 27. Our blessed Lord, still using the same word, says, "This is the work of God," (that is, this is the thing which God enjoins you to do, in order to a participation of the blessings which I am come to bestow), that you believe on Him whom he has sent."

In opening these words, I will show,

***~~I. What is that work which God more particularly requires of us—~~***

It is, that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

***~~Let us, however, distinctly notice what kind of a work this is—~~***

It is *not a mere intellectual assent to the truth*of his Messiahship, but a humble affiance in him as the Savior of sinners.

We must feel our *need*of him.

We must see the *suitableness*and *sufficiency*of his salvation.

We must actually go to him as the appointed Savior, and seek acceptance with God through Him alone.

We must renounce every other hope, and make him "all our salvation and all our desire".

***~~And let us bear in mind, that this is "the work of God"—~~***

It is a work. True, indeed, it is often in the Scriptures opposed to works; as when it is said, "A man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16); still, however, it is a work, and a great work too, and such a work as none but God himself can enable us to perform. Only bear in mind the foregoing description of it, and you will see, that, in order to the exercise of it, there must be the deepest prostration of soul before God, and a going-forth of the whole soul to him in a way of humble and grateful affiance.

And who is sufficient for the performance of it? Truly, "it is the gift of God," and of God only, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8); it is his grace, and his grace alone, that can ever form it in the soul, [Acts 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.27), [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29).

It is his work also, not merely because *he alone can work it in us*, but because it is that which he requires of every living man. When he commanded his Gospel to be preached to the whole world, this was the declaration which was to be universally and invariably made; "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved; and he who believes not, shall be damned."

To justify what is here said of *faith*, I proceed to show,

***~~II. Why it has this great pre-eminence above all other works—~~***

In some respects, faith is inferior to other graces: as the Apostle says, "Now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love 1 Corinthians 13:3."

There are, however, some points of view in which *faith*rises above every other grace, and may, in a pre-eminent degree, be called, "The work of God."

***~~1. It is that for which Christ himself "was sent" into the world—~~***

He was sent, no doubt, to redeem the world by his own most precious blood. He was sent "to die for us—He, the just, for us the unjust, that he might bring us to God." But, in executing this office, he was to become the one object of faith and hope to the whole world. He was lifted up upon the cross, precisely in the way that the brazen serpent was erected on the pole in the wilderness. The serpent was to convey healing to those who looked to it as God's appointed instrument for that end: and the Lord Jesus must in like manner be looked to, in order to a participation of his benefits; as he says by the prophet, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)."

This our blessed Lord pointed out, with very extraordinary fullness, in his discourse with Nicodemus. He repeated it again, and again, and again: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him would 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.… He who believes on the Son has life: and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him [John 3:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36)."

If we believe not on him, we defeat, as far as respects ourselves, all the gracious purposes of God the Father, who has sent him; and all that Christ himself has done, in dying for us; and all that the Holy Spirit has done, in bearing testimony to him, and in revealing him to the world. There is no other grace, the lack of which does such dishonor to God, as this: for it sets aside all the wonders of his love, and pours contempt on all the riches of his grace. The whole mystery of godliness is made void, unless he who was "God manifest in the flesh" is also "believed on in the world [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)."

***~~2. Faith is that, without which all other graces will be of no avail—~~***

I will suppose a person to possess as many graces as Paul himself: of what use will they be to the salvation of his soul, if he believes not in the Lord Jesus Christ? If, indeed, we had never sinned at all, and were to continue sinless to our dying hour, we might hope for acceptance with God without the intervention of Christ. But, as we are sinners before God, how can we ever obtain forgiveness with him, except through the atonement which has been offered for us? But, if we obey perfectly, we do no more than our duty: there can be no overplus to merit the forgiveness of past sin.

And, if God were freely to forgive the past, what could we do to purchase Heaven? What act have we ever done which we could presume to carry to Almighty God, saying, 'This needs no forgiveness at your hands; on the contrary, it is so perfect and meritorious, that I can claim all the glory of Heaven as a just recompense for it?' Truly, if Job himself, the most perfect man upon earth, dared not urge such a plea in his own behalf, [Job 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 9.20), much less can we: and therefore we must renounce every such self-righteous thought, and, with the Apostle Paul, "desire to be found in Christ; not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is from God by faith in Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)."

Let me not be misunderstood, as though I would undervalue graces of any kind: they are all good and necessary in their place: but no one of them, nor all together, can justify the soul before God: that can be effected only by faith, which unites us unto Christ, and interests us in all that Christ has done and suffered for us.

***~~3. Faith is that which will secure, for everyone who possesses it, all the blessings both of grace and glory—~~***

It is impossible for one who believes in Christ to perish. Whatever he may have been, whatever he may have done, even though he may have been as wicked as Manasseh himself, we are warranted in affirming, that, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he may find acceptance with God: "though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be made white as snow." Our blessed Lord has expressly declared this, without any limitation or exception: "the one who comes unto me, I will never cast out."

Nor is there any limit to the benefits which the believing penitent shall obtain at his hands.

Does he desire pardon? The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, "All that believe, shall be justified from all things."

Does his troubled soul sigh for peace? "Being justified by faith, you shall have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, so as to rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Does he pant after holiness? Such shall be the transforming efficacy of his faith, that "his very heart shall be purified by it;" and in the exercise of it he shall "be changed into the Savior's image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Now there is no other grace, of which these things can be spoken; because *there is no other grace that can unite us to Christ, or derive from him those rich communications which alone can produce these great effects*.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Is there, then, an inquirer here?~~***

I suppose there are some who are ready to ask, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Let me, before I reply to this, ask in return, 'Are you sincere in making this inquiry? And will you, if I set before you the very truth of God, endeavor earnestly to comply with it? Can you, from your hearts, declare before God what Jeremiah's hearers engaged to him, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for which the Lord your God shall send you unto us: whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send you; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God [Jeremiah 42:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.3-6)."

If this is really the disposition of your minds, then do I confidently return to you the answer which Paul gave to the jailor's inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!" This is the work which must be done by all: and this work really and truly done, you shall as surely find acceptance with God, as if you were already in Heaven.

I do not say, that, when you have done this, there remains nothing more to be done: but I say, that if this is really done, all the rest will follow. Once find the sweetness of that truth, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," and you will soon attain the character inseparable from it: "You will walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

***~~2. But methinks I hear the voice of an objector—~~***

Someone, perhaps, is saying, 'A fine easy way to Heaven indeed! Only believe; and you may live in sin as you will, and be sure of Heaven at the last!' But this objection will never be urged by one who knows what faith really is. Were it a mere assent to any set of truths, we might well be alarmed at the virtue assigned to it. But *it is a grace, which contains in it the seed of all other graces.* We speak of a living, not a dead faith: and a living faith will as surely be productive of holiness, both of heart and life, as the light of the sun will dispel the shadows of the night.

But the objector will say that our whole statement is contrary to the Holy Scriptures; since our blessed Lord, in answer to one who had asked him, "Good Master, what shall I *do*that I may obtain eternal life?" replied, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments." The same answer I will give, if, like that inquirer, you are determined to save yourselves by your doings. But then, remember, you must keep them all, and perfectly too, and from the first to the last moment of your existence. But if, in one instance, even though it is in thought only, you fail, the law will curse you to all eternity; as it is written, "Cursed is every one who continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them."

And if you will not rest your hopes on such an obedience as this, then is there no other refuge for you but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor any other hope of acceptance for you than through faith in him. But if you still wish to adhere to the commandments, know that "this is God's commandment, that you believe in his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23);" and that there is no commandment in the Decalogue more peremptorily given than this; since it is expressly declared, that "if you obey it, you shall be saved: and if you obey it not, you shall be damned."

***~~3. Let me not close the subject without a few words to one, as an approver—~~***

It is truly delightful to think, that, however hostile the heart of man is to this doctrine, there are some who cordially approve it. Beloved brother, whoever you are, who embraces it from your heart, I congratulate you from my inmost soul. For, in relation to all other works, a self-righteous man can never tell whether he has a sufficiency of them to justify him before God. To his last hour he must be in fearful suspense about the state of his soul: but you have in your own bosom a ground of the fullest assurance.

The work of faith is such as will at once commend itself to your conscience as really done. You will feel a consciousness that you renounce every other hope, and relies on Christ alone. And in Christ there is such a sufficiency of all that you need, that you can not possibly entertain a doubt, whether he be able to save you to the uttermost. Go on, then, "strong in faith, and giving glory to God." And, as the world will look for the *fruits*of your faith, yes, and as God himself also will judge by them, see that you show your faith by your works, and that you "abound in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God."

***~~#1638~~***

***~~The Living Bread~~***

**[John 6:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.34).**

"Then they said unto him: Lord, evermore give us this bread."

AN *imagined*approbation of the Gospel will consist with rooted enmity against it. But such an approbation always arises from carnal, or partial views of the truth. Many love God under the idea "that He is such a one as themselves."

Thus the Samaritan woman desired the living water, that she might have no more occasion to go to the well, [John 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.15).

Thus also the people, whom our Lord was now addressing, seem to have misapprehended our Savior's meaning. They had desired him to confirm his Divine mission by some miracle equal to what Moses had wrought for their forefathers in the wilderness, verse 31. Our Lord assured them that He himself was the true bread, of which the manna was only a type and figure. They, little knowing what they asked for, desired him to give them the bread of which he spoke. The petition however, in itself, was good. That you may be led to offer it in a more intelligent manner, we shall set before you,

***~~I. The excellence of that bread—~~***

Our Lord enters very minutely into this subject. He institutes a comparison between the manna, and himself as the bread of life; and shows the superiority of the true bread,

***~~1. In its origin—~~***

They supposed that the manna had been given them from Heaven: whereas it came only from the clouds, verse 32; and was as earthly in its nature as if it had been formed like common bread. But Christ himself was the true bread, verse 48; and He came down from *Heaven*. His abode from all eternity had been in the bosom of his Father. And he was now come down from thence to be the food of his chosen people, verse 51.

***~~2. In its properties—~~***

The manna, like any other bread, was suited only to the body; nor could it *give life*to that, but only *maintain*its life; and after all, the bodies which it nourished would die at last, verse 49. But the true bread was intended for the soul. Nor would it merely support it when alive, but quicken it when dead, verse 33. Yes, the soul, once quickened by it, would never die, verse 50, 58. Christ himself being their life, they would live *by*him here, verse 57, and with *him*for ever, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4).

***~~3. In its uses—~~***

The manna was very confined as to its use. It was for one nation only; whereas the true bread is intended for the use of all mankind, verse 33.

It is more extensively **necessary**. The Israelites might as easily have been supported by other food. We can find many substitutes for bread. But without Christ, no man can live, verse 53. Neither earth nor Heaven can provide a substitute for him. That bread is equally needed by every child of man. It is also more extensively suitable. Persons may be so disordered as to be incapable of enjoying, or even digesting, common bread. But in whatever state we are, Christ is the proper food of the soul. He is a bread, which is suited both, as milk, to babes, and, as strong meat, to them that are of full age, verse 54-56.

Further, it is more extensively **satisfying**. The manna could supply but one want. Whatever abundance of bread we have, we may need a variety of other things, for lack of which we may even perish. But if we have Christ, we have all things. We can lack nothing which is good for the body, [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33); nor anything that relates to the soul, verse 35. Jesus is:  
food to the hungry,  
clothing to the naked,  
riches to the poor,  
health to the sick,  
life to the dead, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18). [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30).

He is all and in all! [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11).

Such a glorious account of this bread being given by Christ himself, it befits us to inquire into,

***~~II. The means by which it may be obtained—~~***

***~~Every provision for the body must be obtained by labor; but this provision for the soul must be accepted as a free gift—~~***

We are extremely averse to stand indebted to another for our spiritual sustenance. We would be much better pleased to earn it by our own industry. But all our exertions for this end are fruitless. If we were to obtain a saving interest in Christ by our own works, salvation would no longer be of grace, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6). We are therefore cautioned against every attempt to gain it in that way, [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-4). We are expressly told that the Israelites were left for ever destitute of this bread, because they would persist in these self-righteous methods of obtaining it, [Romans 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-32). We are exhorted to receive it freely, without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2).

***~~Nevertheless we are not to decline all kind of labor for it—~~***

We are to seek this bread in prayer The text, and in the use of all God's appointed ordinances. We are to exert ourselves as much in order to obtain it, as if the acquisition of it were the sole effect of our labor. But we are at the same time to depend as much upon God for it, as if we used no endeavors whatever to procure it. Nor is there any inconsistency in such a view of our duty. Our Lord himself says, "Labor for the food which the Son of man shall give you, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let us seek this bread by prayer and faith.

Let us be thankful that it is sent to us in such rich abundance.

Let us gather it fresh every day and hour, [Exodus 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.16).

Let us never never imagine that we can hoard it for future use, [Exodus 16:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 16.19-20).

*There is a fullness in Christ to satisfy our every need.* Nor shall we ever be refused if we plead with him as we ought to do [Matthew. 15:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt. 15.26-28).

Let us remember, that in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, [Luke 15:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.17-18).

Let us rest assured, that by feeding upon Christ, we shall find him to be food indeed and drink indeed, [John 6:55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.55).

***~~#1639~~***

***~~Christ's Willingness to Receive Sinners~~***

***~~[John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)~~***

"All whom the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

IT is a pleasing reflection that there is a people secured to Christ, who, having been given to him by the Father—shall, each in his appointed time, "be gathered unto Shiloh," to be the fruits of his travail, and the spoils of his victory. This pleasure however would be greatly damped, if we believed that there were any infallibly, and from eternity, given over to perdition, who would be sent into the world for no other purpose than to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to fit themselves for the place to which they had been doomed by an eternal and irreversible decree. We confess that we cannot so draw the line between election and reprobation, as to satisfy in all cases a caviling, or perhaps a scrupulous mind: but the same difficulties occur, if we attempt to mark the distinct boundaries of free will, and free grace; or to show how the existence of sin could ever consist with the holiness of God.

This however is not our province: *we must leave to God to reconcile the difficulties that occur; and receive the truths he declares, not because we can comprehend everything respecting them, but because they are revealed by an unerring God*. That some are secured to Christ appears from hence, that, if they were not, it might eventually happen, that none might come to him; and consequently, that he might shed his blood in vain. We are not however left to found this sentiment on any uncertain reasonings of our own; since our Lord himself, in the very words before the text, says, "All whom the Father gives me will come to me." But are all others therefore of necessity sealed up unto perdition? no; for he adds, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

To improve this blessed declaration, let us consider,

***~~I. What we would come to Christ for—~~***

In general, we answer, that *we must come to him for everything; since all fullness is treasured up in him, on purpose that we may receive out of it according to our necessities*.

But more particularly, we must come to him for *pardon*,

which we all need;

which we cannot otherwise obtain; and

which he is exalted to give, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31).

We must come for *peace*, since all peace derived from other quarters, is delusive, and he, as the Prince of peace, has promised to bestow it, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6). [John 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.27). [Ephesians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.17).

We must come for *strength*, since without him we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5), and by him, everything, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13); and Paul himself applied to him in prayer, and obtained from him, as we also shall do, grace sufficient for him, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

Lastly, we must come to him for *eternal life and glory*; since he frequently claims it as his prerogative to give it [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28), and will surely be the author of it to all them that obey him, [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.9).

***~~II. In what manner we would come to him—~~***

Of course, our Lord did not mean that we were to approach him with our bodies; since many thronged him, and pressed upon him, who nevertheless were cast out. It is therefore, not to the motion of our bodies, but to the frame of our minds, that we are to have respect, when we come unto him.

We must come unto him *empty*. If, like the Laodiceans, we think ourselves rich and increased with goods, [Revelation 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17), our application to Christ will be vain and fruitless, [Luke 1:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.53).

We must be deeply *convinced of our own guilt and helplessness*; and be thoroughly persuaded that we must perish if be receive us not. We must be like the Prodigal, when dying with hunger, or like the disciples in jeopardy, crying, Save, Lord, or we perish [Matthew 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.25).

Moreover we must come *believing*. This is more particularly intended by our Lord, the words "coming" and "believing," being perfectly synonymous. verse 35. To come filled with unbelief, would be to insult, rather than to honor him. We would be convinced of . . .  
his suitableness to our necessities,  
his sufficiency for our relief, and  
his willingness to receive us.

We must regard him as *the only way to eternal life*, the only door of hope, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); [John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9).

We must believe in him as appointed by God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30); and then we shall find by happy experience that he is "able to save us to the uttermost."

***~~III. The encouragement we have to come to him—~~***

Though our Lord sometimes delayed answering the requests of those who came to him in the days of his flesh, he never finally refused any. Thus, though he may not instantly manifest his acceptance of us, he will not reject any who thus come unto him. No past iniquities shall cause him to reject us. This is evident from many strong and express declarations of Prophets, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18), of Apostles [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43) and [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7), of Christ himself [Matthew 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.31).

If it be thought that the sin against the Holy Spirit is an exception, let it suffice to say, that no man, who desires to find acceptance through Christ, can possibly have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit; since he would in that case have been given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, and consequently, would have continued altogether regardless of his eternal welfare. The same may be proved from manifold instances, wherein the vilest of the human race have found acceptance with him. We need only look at *Manasseh*, [2 Kings 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 21.16) with [2 Chronicles 33:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.9); [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13); *David*[2 Samuel 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.9); 2 Samuel 12:13; and above all at the *Apostle Paul*, who was in this particular intended for a pattern [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16), and this blessed truth will be established beyond a possibility of doubt. Nor will any present infirmities cause our Lord to reject us. For his disciples, long after they had found acceptance with him, betrayed manifest symptoms of *pride,*[Mark 9:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.33-34), *revenge,*[Luke 9:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.54), and *cowardice,*[Matthew 26:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.56). And Peter, whose misconduct was by far the most glaring, received by far the most striking tokens of our Lord's regard, [Mark 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.7) and [John 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.15-17). We say not this to encourage sin, but to illustrate the tender mercies of him, who carries the lambs in his bosom, and who, instead of breaking the bruised reed, will bring forth from it the sweetest melody, [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11); [Isaiah 42:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.3).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are afar off from Christ—~~***

Can it be supposed, that, if we will not go to Christ, we can ever participate in his benefits? Doubtless we cannot: if we keep at a distance from him in this world, there will be an "impassable gulf between us" in the world to come. Let us remember then, that we must go to him, or perish. Let not any one object, I *can*not go: for the truth is, we *will*not, [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40). Yet, notwithstanding our past obstinacy, we may go to him, with a full assurance that he will never cast us out. Let us not then delay, lest death seize us, and the door of mercy be for ever closed.

***~~2. Those who are coming to him—~~***

We are told of one in the Gospel, whom, when coming to our Lord, the devil cast down, and tare, and left to all appearance, dead, [Mark 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.20); [Mark 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.26). Such enmity will Satan discover against us also as soon as ever we attempt to come to Christ. He will raise every obstacle in his power: he will assault us by "fightings without, and fears within." But the more earnest he is in his endeavors to draw us from Christ, the more determined let us be in going to Christ: so shall we most effectually defeat his malice, and secure beyond a doubt our own salvation.

***~~3. Those who have come to him—~~***

Whence is it that so great a difference has been put between you and others? Is it that you were of yourselves more inclined to good, and that you made yourselves to differ, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). No! you were once as far from God as any; nor had the smallest inclination to seek him until God gave you the will to do so, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13); nor could you then have come to Christ, except the Father had drawn you by his Almighty power, [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44). Be careful then to give all the glory of your salvation to God alone.

And remember that you are still to be coming to Christ every day you live, 1 Peter 2:4-5. "All your fresh springs are in him;" and "out of his fullness you must continually receive." Live then a life of faith in the Son of God; and the communion which you enjoy with him on earth, shall soon be perfected in the realms of glory!

***~~#1640~~***

***~~Man's Inability to Come to Christ~~***

***~~[John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44).~~***

"No man *can*come to me, unless the Father who has sent me draws him."

THERE are in the Holy Scriptures many doctrines which are an offence and a stumbling-block to the world: but the reason of their aversion must be looked for, not so much in the doctrines themselves, as in the depravity of the human heart. *To a humble and contrite spirit every truth in the Bible will appear reasonable and worthy of God: it is the pride of man that takes offence at the sacred records, and that renders him unable to receive the declarations of God*.

Our blessed Lord had told the Jews repeatedly that he came down from Heaven. They knowing his mother and his reputed father, could not endure that he would arrogate to himself such high honor: but he informed them that the ground of the offence was within themselves; they were blinded by their own prejudices, and fettered by their own lusts, so that *nothing but the almighty grace of God could ever draw them to him*in a saving manner.

This subject is *difficult*; we shall therefore explain it.

This subject is deemed *objectionable*; and therefore we shall assign the reasons of it.

This subject is liable to *abuse*; and therefore we shall guard it.

***~~I. The teaching of man's inability to come to Christ is difficult, and therefore we shall explain it—~~***

***~~To "come to Christ" is to believe on him for salvation—~~***

It cannot refer to a mere bodily approach; because in that sense the assertion would not be true. Our Lord himself explains his meaning, and informs us, that to *come*to him is of the same import with *believing*in him, verse 35.

Our coming to him has respect to the *offices*which he sustains:

Is he a *Prophet?* we must come to him for instruction.

Is he a *Priest?* we must come to him to make atonement for us.

Is he a *King?* we must come to him to deliver us from all our spiritual enemies. In whatever view he is represented in the Scriptures, whether as:  
a *sun*to enlighten,  
a *fountain*to cleanse,  
a *physician*to heal, or  
as *bread*to support our lives  
—we should come to him, feeling our need of him under that very character, and relying on him to supply our every need.

***~~In order to this, we must experience the drawings of the Father—~~***

When we speak of "the Father drawing us," we appear to some as if we ascribed to him an irresistible agency, and considered men as mere machines. But we entertain no such absurd unscriptural notions. It is not with the cords of a beast, or with force and violence, that God draws us, but, as the prophet well expresses it, "with the cords of a man—and with the bands of love, [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)," that is, by rational considerations—and *by the sweet attractions of his love*.

Perhaps this subject will be best understood by a familiar illustration.

How was it that *Jacob*was drawn into Egypt? He was made to feel the pressure of a very grievous famine: he was informed that there was plenty of grain in Egypt; and that his dearly-beloved of the good, was the master of all that land, and that he disposed of the good things thereof to whoever he desired.

He was told, moreover, that Joseph had expressly invited him; and had sent wagons for the conveyance of his family, together with abundance of provisions along the way.

Finally, he was assured that, at the end of his journey, all the good of the land of Egypt would be his. Did he need after this, to have a rope or chain fastened around him, and to be dragged into Egypt? No! all that he needed was faith to believe the glad tidings; and when once he was fully persuaded of the truth of these things, he was willing of himself to go into that good land.

It is thus that God draws his people: he causes us to feel our need of mercy; he informs us that our beloved Jesus has all Heaven at his disposal; that he was sent to invite us to him, assuring us of whatever is needful along the way, and promising us all the glory of Heaven at the end!

And finally, he gives us faith to believe his testimony.

Thus "he makes us willing in the day of his power [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3);" and a thorough belief of these truths will bend the most stubborn heart, and overcome the most reluctant mind.

***~~Without these effectual drawings we cannot come to Christ—~~***

We may give an assent to all the truths of the Gospel, and may profess an attachment to our Lord himself, without any such gracious influences. But we cannot savingly come to him in the manner above described, unless we are drawn by an almighty power. We can never apprehend him, until we are thus, as it were by a kind of magnetic influence, apprehended by him.

Such is the plain import of the subject before us; but,

***~~II. The teaching of man's inability to come to Christ is deemed objectionable, and therefore we shall assign the reasons of it—~~***

There is no doctrine of the Bible that is loaded with more opprobrium than this. It is represented as grossly enthusiastic, and almost bordering on blasphemy. But the truth of it will immediately appear, if only we consider the grounds and reasons of it. It is founded,

***~~1. On our indisposition to come to Christ—~~***

Consider what the coming to Christ implies:

First it implies a sense of our lost state without him—and do men like to feel themselves guilty and undone? Do they feel no backwardness to confess that they are justly exposed to everlasting misery?

Next, it implies a renunciation of all dependence on ourselves: and is this pleasing to corrupt nature? Are we willing to believe ourselves so utterly destitute of wisdom, righteousness, and strength, that we must be altogether dependent on Christ, as much as a new-born infant is on its mother?

Next, it implies a turning from everything that is displeasing to Christ: but have we no reluctance to mortify our besetting sins, and to forsake the habits, maxims, company, and interests of a polluted world?

Lastly, it implies that we give ourselves entirely up to Christ, to walk in a state of holy communion with him, and unreserved obedience to his will: but does man naturally affect such a life as this? Is there nothing irksome to him in such restraints? Is there nothing painful in such exertions?

Here then is one reason why we need the effectual drawings of the Father in order to come to Christ. *Our coming to Christ is altogether against the current of our corrupt nature*, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7). [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); and as a river flowing to the ocean cannot turn back again to its source without the attractive influence of the heavenly bodies, so *neither can we reverse all our natural habits and propensities, without the drawings of our heavenly Father*.

***~~2. On our spiritual impotence—~~***

The impotence of man to do what is good is certainly rather of a moral than a natural kind: his inability is not like that which incapacitates him to stop the sun in the firmament: it consists principally in a lack of inclination: yet, together with that, there is a positive weakness; there is even in a regenerate man "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." Paul himself complained, that "to will was present with him; but how to perform that which was good, he found not:" that "the good which he would, he did not; and that the evil which he would not, that he did: that when he would do good, evil was present with him, [Romans 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-19); [Romans 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.21)."

Who among us has not found the same? Who has not felt wanderings of mind, yes, and lamentable obduracy of heart, in those seasons when he has earnestly desired to maintain communion with his Lord and Savior? Who has not been made sensible that he is like a stationary vessel; and that he spreads the sails in vain, until the wind arises to bear him onward in his voyage?

We need not then to inquire after any other reasons for the doctrine in the text: our own experience, together with that of the saints in all ages, amounts to a demonstration of the point; more especially because it is confirmed by the strongest declarations of Holy Writ. God himself has told us:

that without Christ we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5);

that we cannot, of ourselves, even speak a good word, [Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.34) and 1 Corinthians 12:3;

nay, that we have not sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5);

that "God must give us both to will and to do, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)."

If then "our sufficiency even for these things must be of God," how much more *must a Divine influence be necessary in order to our coming fully and habitually to Christ, as the life and strength of our souls!*

We must not however be satisfied with establishing this doctrine; for,

***~~III. The teaching of man's inability to come to Christ is liable to abuse; and therefore we will guard it—~~***

It is abused as much as any doctrine whatever,

***~~1. By the ignorant and ungodly—~~***

When we tell them how they must come to Christ, and devote themselves to his service—they excuse themselves by saying that they cannot: and thus, in fact, they cast all the blame of their condemnation upon God, instead of taking it to themselves. But the impotence of which they complain is no excuse for them. Before they conclude themselves to be blameless, let them inquire whether they do all that they can; whether they read, and meditate, and pray, and watch, and strive as much as they can? If they do not improve aright the strength they have, what reason have they to complain that God has not given them more? They will not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto the Lord:" and therefore they are as deserving of punishment, as if they had had all the power in their own hands. If they be not faithful in the few things which they have, there is no reason to think that they would have been faithful in more, if more had been committed to them. With this accords our Lord's own interpretation of such excuses, and the sentence he will pronounce on those who offer them, [Matthew 25:24-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.24-30); instead of standing excused before God, they will be condemned as wicked and unprofitable servants.

But such excuses are indeed the greatest aggravation of their guilt: for they amount only to this; "I *love sin*so much, that I cannot renounce it! I *hate God*so much, that I cannot bring my mind to love and serve him!" And how would such an excuse sound in a court of judicature on behalf of a murderer? This man hates his fellow-creatures to such a degree, that he cannot help murdering them whenever he can get them within his reach? Would the people say, 'Poor man, he ought not to be punished, for he cannot help it?' Would they not rather think, that *the wickedness of his disposition was the greatest aggravation of his guilt*, and that it would be the height of injustice to let him pass unpunished? The cases are altogether parallel: the conduct of each proceeds from his own depravity: and in either case increases, rather than diminishes, their desert of condemnation.

***~~2. By many professors of religion—~~***

As strange as it may seem, we must confess that there are many professors of religion who abuse most shamefully the doctrine of the text. I allude to Antinomian professors, who, when warned of their state, will plead their weakness in extenuation of their guilt, and will cast the blame on God, just as the ungodly themselves are accustomed to do. But if there are any people under Heaven more offensive to God than others, surely these must be the ones. The ignorant and ungodly are quite innocent, when compared with these. Truly *the excuses of an Antinomian professor are little short of blasphemy*. O that all of that description might consider the fallacy and impiety of their pleas!

But we would hope that no such professor is in this place: if however there would be one, we must declare unto him, that whatever excuse he may make for his sinful practices or neglects, "he deceives his own soul, and his religion is vain." If God indeed were unwilling to help him, there might be some justice in his pleas. But who will dare to cast such a reflection upon God?

The fault is only in the depraved wills of men: "You *will*not come unto me, that you might have life." Let none then presume to charge God foolishly: if ever we would be right in his sight, we must trace all good to him, and all evil to ourselves.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To the self-confident—~~***

If you be not yet convinced of your need of Divine influences, go home, and try to perform some spiritual acts in your own strength:  
try to go to Christ with contrition;  
try to cast yourself upon him with humble confidence;  
try to devote yourself to him in unreserved obedience.

Do this, do it really, and with your whole heart, and we will retract all we have spoken, and confess either that the Bible is false, or that we have mistaken its true import. But we fear not the outcome of such a trial: we are persuaded it would tend, more than anything, to your conviction. Having within your own power the means of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of what you have heard, you will be utterly inexcusable if you neglect to do it.

***~~2. To the timid—~~***

Let it not be a source of discouragement to you that you feel your weakness: for "when you are weak, then are you strong."*Can you do nothing of yourselves? then live the more dependent upon God*: and "he will perfect his strength in your weakness." He has said, "Fear not, worm Jacob, you shall thresh the mountains!" What a labor is this to be performed by a worm! yet it shall be done. Trust then in him, and be of good courage: and He who "sent Christ to you," will draw you to him, and he who draws you to him, will accomplish in you all his good pleasure, until you are "raised at last" to a full enjoyment of his presence and glory.

***~~#1641~~***

***~~The Importance of Living by Faith in Christ~~***

**[John 6:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-55).**

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."

THE natural man neither does nor can understand spiritual truths, 1 Corinthians 2:14. This inspired declaration has been verified in all ages. The Samaritan woman showed how unapt we are to receive spiritual instruction, [John 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14-15). Even Nicodemus formed the most absurd conceptions of our Lord's meaning, [John 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3-4); such also was the blindness of the Jews to whom our Lord addressed this discourse, verse 41, 52. He, however, in compassion to them, proceeded to confirm his gracious declarations. May we experience the illuminating and constraining influences of divine grace, verse 44, 45, while we consider,

***~~I. What is meant by eating the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood—~~***

*Great caution is necessary in explaining the figurative expressions of Scripture.* We shall endeavor to exhibit the full scope of the metaphor, without pressing it too far. It is sufficiently obvious that the text is not to be understood in a literal sense; nor does it relate to the sacrament, that being not yet instituted; nor does it signify the giving a mere intellectual assent to our Lord's doctrines.

The doctrines of the Gospel are sometimes represented as bread and wine; and our Lord may be considered as speaking of his doctrines when he speaks of himself as *the bread of life*. But he could not intend a mere assent to those doctrines by the metaphor of eating. If this were all that he meant, Judas and Simon Magus were truly possessed of eternal life, [Acts 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.23). [Mark 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.21).

Our Lord explains the eating of him as synonymous with believing on him, verse 35; but to speak more particularly, the metaphor of eating the flesh of Christ, etc. implies,

***~~1. A union with his person—~~***

The doctrine of our union with Christ is set forth by a great variety of images in Scripture. It naturally arises from the metaphor in the text, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17). [Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27). It is particularly mentioned by our Lord in the two verses following. From hence it appears, that as our bodily life is upheld by the invisible operation of our food within us, and as the spiritual life of Jesus was maintained by the indwelling of the Deity within him; so the eating of him is, in fact, a union with him, and shall ever be accompanied by the invisible supports of his Spirit and grace.

***~~2. A trust in his sacrifice—~~***

Our Lord speaks of his flesh expressly in reference to his sacrifice, verse 51. The words which he used at the institution of his Last Supper confirm this idea. The eating of his flesh therefore can mean no less than a trust in that sacrifice.

***~~3. A dependence on his grace—~~***

*What physical food is to the body, that the grace of Christ is to the soul.* Unless we have recourse to Christ continually, we must fall and perish, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

According to this view of the metaphor, it is worthy of the deepest attention.

***~~II. The importance of the doctrine—~~***

This is abundantly manifest from the words before us. There is nothing so important as a life of faith in Christ: nothing,

***~~1. There is nothing so necessary—~~***

The greatest of all concerns is the salvation of the soul: but that cannot he effected by any other means. *The person who does not live on Christ, has no spiritual life.*He may have wealth, and honor, learning, and even morality (in some sense), but he has no spiritual life, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12); he may even "have a name to live, but he is really dead, [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1);" and his spiritual death will issue in death eternal, [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8). What then can be so necessary as to believe in Christ?

***~~2. There is nothing so beneficial—~~***

*The possession of the whole world is not to be compared with eternal life:* yet life eternal is secured by eating the flesh of Christ. As for past sins, they shall be no bar to our obtaining of this blessing, [Hebrews 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.12). Indeed, "the believer has already eternal life" in his soul. He has a title to it, confirmed by the promise and oath of Jehovah, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). He has also the pledge of it since this communion with Christ is Heaven begun on earth, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14); and the Savior in whom he trusts, will raise him up at the last day" to the complete and everlasting enjoyment of it.

***~~3. There is nothing so excellent—~~***

They may be said to "feed on ashes," who have no higher gratifications than those which are derived from carnal indulgences: but "the body and blood of Christ are food indeed, and drink indeed." Nothing affords such unspeakable delight as the exercise of faith in Christ, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8); nor has anything such a transforming efficacy on the soul [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). Surely, if the manna was "angels' food, [Psalm 78:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.25)," much more is the body and blood of Christ.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are disregarding this heavenly banquet—~~***

Would to God that you would consider Who it is that utters the declarations in the text! and that you would mark the energetic manner in which he utters them! Do you think that his words are false, or that they shall ever be reversed? Ah! cast away the *husks*on which you are feeding; and live, as the Apostle did, by faith in the Son of God, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20).

***~~2. Those who doubt whether they may partake of it—~~***

The whole of our Lord's discourse to the Jews shows that all were, not only at liberty, but bound, to feed on him; and we are commanded to invite, yes, to compel, you to come to this glorious feast, [Isaiah 25:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.6) with [Luke 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.23). Indeed, to whom else will you go? and on what else will you feed? Come then, and "eat and drink abundantly, O beloved! [Song of Solomon 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.1);" and rest assured, that those who come hungry, shall never be sent empty away.

***~~#1642~~***

***~~The Gospel, a Ground of Offence~~***

***~~[John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60).~~***

On hearing this, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

THE Gospel, to those who have obtained just views of it, is simplicity itself: but *to those who are not taught of God, it is utter foolishness*. When the prophets taught the people, their hearers, instead of "believing their report, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1)," were ready to exclaim, "Ah! Lord God, does he not speak parables, [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)." In like manner, when our blessed Lord, "who spoke as never any man spoke, [John 7:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.46)," addressed to his followers as rich and instructive a discourse as any that is contained in the sacred volume, they said among themselves, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

We shall find it not unprofitable to consider,

***~~I. What was the saying at which they were so greatly offended—~~***

***~~In substance it was, that his people must live by faith in him—~~***

This he had spoken plainly: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes in me shall never thirst." But he had also represented it under a figure which they did not understand. He had been challenged by his hearers to give any proof of his divine mission, equal to that which Moses had given to the Jewish people in the wilderness, by supplying them with manna from Heaven for forty years: and, in answer to that challenge, our Lord drew a parallel between the manna and himself, whom that manna typified Here the parallel may be drawn from the context; See Discourse on verse 53-55; and required that all would live by faith in him for the salvation of their souls, as their forefather did on the manna for the sustenance of their bodies.

***~~This filled them with extreme astonishment and disgust—~~***

That he would speak of himself as "coming down from Heaven," was unaccountable; since they knew, as they supposed, his earthly parentage, as well as they did that of any other man, verse 41, 42; That he would speak of "giving them his flesh to eat," was equally incomprehensible; since they could annex no idea to it but that which was too horrible to think of, verse 52. Then, as to the consequences that he spoke of, as infallibly arising to them from their eating, or declining to eat, his flesh, they could not endure to hear such assertions from his lips.

Hence they "murmured" among themselves; and declared it all to be utterly unintelligible, and unworthy to be received by any rational being. Their confidence, in relation to this view of it, is strongly expressed in that pointed interrogation, "Who can accept it?" And so strong was their disgust at it, that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him, verse 66." So general, too, was this feeling, that it seemed as if the Apostles themselves would follow the example of his other disciples, verse 67.

But that to which I would more especially call your attention is, to inquire,

***~~II. Whence it was that it proved so particularly offensive to them?~~***

It would seem that they were offended because of,

***~~1. The strangeness of the image—~~***

Never had they heard anything like it before. Had he spoken of himself as a sacrifice, they might have more readily received the idea of "eating his flesh;" because, under their own law, the offenders in many cases partook of their own sacrifices. But even then, as they knew nothing of human sacrifices, it would have proved sufficiently dark and unintelligible to them. But when he spoke of "drinking his blood," it was disgusting to them in the extreme: for not even the prohibitions relative to idolatry were stronger than those which related to the drinking of blood. If they viewed it literally, they could regard it in no other light than as a savage ordinance, too horrible to think of: and of a spiritual or mystical import, their minds could form no conception; since nothing that they had ever heard of could at all lead them to such a thought.

Hence it is not surprising that they would be stumbled at what they were so utterly unable to comprehend. If so learned and excellent a man as Nicodemus was confounded at the mention of a new birth, we cannot wonder that disciples of a more uneducated class would be offended at an image so gross, and remote from common apprehension, as that of eating human flesh, and drinking human blood.

***~~2. The sublimity of the sentiments contained in it—~~***

They saw that some deep mystery was contained in this image, though they were unable to unravel it. The food of which Jesus spoke was:  
not to nourish life, but to give it;  
not to the body, but to the soul;  
not of one people only, but of the whole world;  
not for a few years, but for ever and ever.

What could all this mean? The manna had never restored so much as one dead man to life; nor had it kept even Moses himself from dying: yet the flesh and blood of Christ were to do this, and infinitely more, for all who would partake of it, even to the very end of time. "What shall we say to such assertions as these? How can they be credited? How can any man listen to them for a moment?" Yes, such, I say, might well be the murmurings of those who understood not his sayings.

***~~3. The baseness of him who promulgated these sentiments—~~***

Had he been a mighty monarch, who, like the kings of the earth, had the command of life and death, his hearers might have annexed some idea to his words. But they were uttered by a poor man, who "had not for himself so much as a place where to lay his head," and was attended only by a few poor fishermen. What could such a person mean, by asserting things which would appear extravagant beyond all endurance, if uttered by the greatest monarch upon earth? Doubtless the unsuitableness of his pretensions to his present appearance must have tended exceedingly to increase the difficulty of apprehending the just import of his words.

***~~4. The contrariety of the sentiments to all the notions they had ever imbibed—~~***

In addition to all the difficulties arising from the figures that were used, an insurmountable objection to the reception of them arose from the sentiments which they seemed intended to convey. If they had any meaning at all, it must be, that, in some way or other, the souls of men were to live by him, and by him alone. But how could this be? What must become of all the ordinances of the Ceremonial Law, and all the precepts of the Moral Law? Must all these, without exception, be put aside; and nothing be of any avail, but the eating of this man's flesh, and the drinking of his blood?

That this was a particular stumbling-block in their way, is highly probable, from the very question which was put to our Lord, and from which the whole discourse originated. "They said unto him: What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them: This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent, verse 28, 29." What! Is this the great work that we have to do? Is faith in him the great duty, by means of which we are to find acceptance with God? What then becomes of Moses, and of all the precepts, whether ceremonial or moral, that he has enjoined?

Let us put ourselves into the place of the people whom our Lord addressed, and take into consideration these various difficulties which they had to contend with; and, though we cannot but severely blame, we shall be inclined, I think, to pity also, the fatal resolution which they adopted on this occasion.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have an insight into this mystery—~~***

"Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see." We have very little conception what great privileges we enjoy, even above those who attended the ministry of our Lord himself. We are enabled to compare one part of Scripture with another, and to see both the character of our Lord as God and man, and the accomplishment of the whole Mosaic economy in him.

The things, therefore, that were stumbling-blocks to his hearers, are not so to us: and the things which were veiled in impenetrable darkness to them, are as resplendent as the day to us.

Nor do we merely comprehend the Gospel as one harmonious whole, revealed at successive periods from the fall of man; but we are enabled to enjoy in our own souls, and to attest, from personal experience, that Christ's "flesh is food indeed, and his blood is drink indeed, verse 55." Be thankful then, beloved, for this inestimable benefit; and, as the Israelites in the wilderness subsisted altogether on the bread from Heaven, so you must live on "the true bread from Heaven," even "on the Son of God, who has loved you, and given himself for you."

***~~2. Those who are not yet able to receive it—~~***

Do not imagine, that because many things in the Gospel appear absurd to you, they are therefore of necessity absurd in themselves: for you cannot but know, that, in human sciences, there are many things which, if they were stated to you with the greatest clearness, you would not be able to comprehend: and therefore you may well expect the same in that deepest of all mysteries, the redemption of the world by the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God.

The truth is, that *this mystery cannot be understood, unless our eyes are opened by the Son of God, and a spiritual understanding be given to us, whereby to discern the things of the Spirit*,[1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20). Let me, then, guard you against precipitancy in judging of the things which you are not able to comprehend: but lift up your hearts to God in prayer, that his Spirit may be given you, and that by that Spirit you may be guided into all truth.

Perhaps the images of Scripture may offend you; or the declarations of it may appear too harsh. But remember, "It is the Spirit who quickens; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto you, says our Lord, are spirit and life." Though therefore, if taken in a carnal sense, they may be, as doubtless in many cases they are, foolishness itself, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14), yet, viewed according to their true import, they are "the power of God unto salvation, to every one who believes! [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

***~~#1643~~***

***~~Christ the One Source of Eternal Life~~***

***~~[John 6:67-69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.67-69).~~***

"Do you want to go away also?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

IT was said of our Lord by the aged patriarch who took him in his arms at his presentation in the temple, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed:" and this discovery of men's characters was universally produced by his ministrations. Nor was it occasioned by his doctrines only, but frequently by the manner in which they were promulgated. His discourses abounded much in parabolic and figurative representations, which cast a veil of obscurity over them and served as a touchstone to try the spirits of those who heard him. His statement of the new birth was for a time a stumbling-block to Nicodemus, who knew not what interpretation to put upon his words: and in like manner, his discourse respecting "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" offended many; insomuch that "they went back, and walked no more with him."

His own Apostles scarcely knew how to receive his word; so that it seemed as if they also would depart from him. But they were of a more humble and teachable spirit; and therefore, when our Lord asked, if they also intended to forsake him, they expressed their abhorrence of such an idea, and their determination to adhere to him at all events.

***~~I. The question which our Lord put to his disciples demands our first consideration—~~***

Though it related to one particular occasion, it is suited to convey much general instruction. It shows us,

***~~1. That the best of men are liable to depart from God—~~***

This is a truth of infinite importance, which yet many are very averse to hear. But who can doubt it in reference to himself? Who does not feel that he himself may fall, and that too into grievous sin, and into final condemnation? Advocates for human systems may say what they please on this subject; but there is not a humble Christian in the universe who does not feel this to be true in reference to himself: and if any choose to deny it, we shall oppose to him the example of the Apostle Paul, who "kept his body under control, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself would be a cast-away, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)." *In ourselves we are weak as new-born babes: it is God alone "who can keep us from falling;" and if ever we be saved at all, we must be "kept by the power of God unto salvation*, Jude verse 24. [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)."

But there is not that opposition between this doctrine and that of the perseverance of the saints that some imagine. A mother's care is a pledge for the security of her child: but that does not set aside the liability of the child to perish by hunger or cold, or a thousand other accidents; any of which things may at any time occur by the carelessness or death of its nurse. Thus *our security is not in ourselves, but in our God: if left to ourselves for one moment, we would perish; all our hope is in the tender care and mercy of our God*. The only difference between the child and us is, that its guardian is weak and mortal; whereas ours is the almighty and unchangeable Jehovah, in whose power and fidelity alone our advantage consists.

***~~2. That the defection of some, endangers the stability of others—~~***

We are easily wrought upon by the influence of bad example. "The mixed multitude in the wilderness fell a lusting," and soon drew after them the whole nation of Israel [Numbers 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.4). In the Gospels too we have many melancholy instances of the readiness even of good men to follow each other in what is evil. Peter, full of self-confidence, presumed to declare, that "though he would be called to die with his Lord, he would not deny him:" and then we are told, "Likewise also said all the disciples [Matthew 26:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.35);" so speedily were they led away by his example.

On another occasion, we find them all "murmuring and full of indignation" about the expense which had been incurred for the purpose of honoring their Lord: and, when we come to inquire whence it originated, we trace it all to Judas, who was a thief, and wanted to steal the money for his own use. One Evangelist mentions only in general terms that "some" were thus affected, [Mark 14:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.4-5). Another tells us who they were, even all "the disciples," [Matthew 26:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.8). And another tells us who was the first instigator, and by what principle he was actuated, [John 12:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.4-6).

The instance of Barnabas also, and other Jewish Christians, who were led away by Peter's dissimulation, is precisely in point.

Indeed, who that is at all conversant with the Christian world, has not seen, on many occasions, how rapidly a bad spirit in one, diffuses itself through a whole Church?*Good instruction and example operate very slowly and partially; but that which is evil spreads apace:*"a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump." It befits us then to be on our guard against the contagion of evil. Doubtless these apostates thought that they had reason enough to forsake our Lord: but if we were left, like Paul, unsupported and unacknowledged by the whole Christian world, [2 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16), it would befit us, like him, to maintain our steadfastness, and to "cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart."

***~~3. That we ought to watch the first motions and tendencies of our own hearts to evil—~~***

The twelve had evidently participated in the feelings of the other disciples, though not to the same extent. This our Lord saw; and therefore bade them come to a decision. Happy was it for them that the bias of their minds was the right way: and happy for them that they were called upon to decide, before the evil had got too deep a root in their minds. Had they been left to "go back, and walk no more with Jesus," how bitterly would they have lamented it to all eternity!

*Let us then be aware of the tendency of evil thoughts, and guard against their first introduction into the mind*. If we are tempted for a moment to account anything "a hard saying," or to turn aside in the smallest degree from the path of duty, let us remember, that those who draw back, "draw back unto perdition;" and that "if any man draw back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him! [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)."

Such was the instructive nature of our Lord's question: and,

***~~II. The answer of Peter was worthy of an inspired Apostle—~~***

Peter was forward on all occasions to speak his mind; and often spoke but unadvisedly at best. But on this occasion he returned, both for himself and all his brethren, an answer fraught with wisdom. Two grounds he states for the determination which all of them had formed to adhere to Christ:

***~~1. The insufficiency of the creature—~~***

The conviction of his mind on this subject was very strong; insomuch that he ventured even to appeal to Christ himself, and to defy, if I may so speak, Omniscience itself to tell him, where any other refuge could be found, or any other source of solid good: "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

'We are in pursuit of instruction: who can give it to us, if we turn our back on you?

We are in pursuit of happiness: where can we find it, but in you?

We are bent upon the attainment of Heaven: who can bring us thither, but yourself? If we go back to the world and cast off all care for these things, nothing but everlasting destruction awaits us. If we go to the Scribes and Pharisees, we have had evidence enough what kind of teachers they are, "blind leaders of the blind." To whom then can we go, with the smallest prospect of attaining what we are seeking after?

Now this part of Peter's answer furnishes us with a good reply to all who would turn us from the Lord. "To whom, or what, would you turn me?

To the world? I have found its emptiness.

To sin? I know its bitterness.

To formal religion? I have felt its incompetence to satisfy my mind and conscience.

My God tells me that "Christ is all:" and I am constrained from daily experience to say to him, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you!" Whatever advantages were proposed to us as an inducement to turn back from Christ, we would regard the proposal as absurd and impious as that which was made by the Israelites of old, [Numbers 14:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.3-4).

***~~2. The all-sufficiency of Christ—~~***

Our Lord had frequently asserted in the foregoing discourse, that "he would give eternal life to those who would eat his flesh and drink his blood." Peter, in his answer, refers to that; and professes confidently, in the name of all the other Apostles, that the words of Christ pointed out the only true way to life, and that Christ himself was that very Messiah, who was authorized and commissioned to bestow life: "You have the words of eternal life; and we believe, etc."

This was a glorious confession, and an ample reason for the determination they had formed to remain firm in his cause. Where would they go for water, when they had the fountain near them? "True it was, that at the present it was, in a measure, a fountain sealed;" yet not so sealed, but that it always afforded them an abundant supply for their present necessities; and in due time it would be opened to the whole world, and flow unto the ends of the earth. They were persuaded that he would impart to them living water; and that, "if only they drank of the water that he would give them, they would never die."

O that every Christian in this day felt the same confident persuasion! In vain would the world, and the flesh, and the devil combine their efforts to destroy him: he would determine with Joshua, that though the whole world would become servants to them, "he and his house would serve the Lord! [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~Who among you are disposed to walk with Jesus?~~***

This may be done now in the exercise of faith and prayer, precisely as Enoch and Noah "walked with God" in the days of old. It is every Christian's privilege to do so, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3). Be assured, that, however the world may be offended at Christ, he is:  
an able Instructor,  
a kind Master,  
a faithful Friend, and  
an all-sufficient Savior.

***~~Are there any among us that have turned back from him?~~***

Alas; there are apostates now, as well as in former times. But what has anyone gained by departing from Christ? Is he happier than he was when he sat at the Savior's feet and heard his words? There is but one testimony on this head from all the children of men: "In observing lying vanities, they have forsaken their own mercies! [Jonah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.8)." Think then from whence you are fallen, and say, "I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now, [Hosea 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.7)."

***~~To those who are walking steadily with him,~~***

We would address those words of the Apostle, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." If even the Apostles were ready to turn aside, who has not need to watch and pray lest he also enter into temptation? Solemn is that admonition of our Lord, "Remember Lot's wife!" If you would endure unto the end, you must be as teachable as little children; and be determined, through God's assistance, to "die with Christ, rather than forsake him."

***~~#1644~~***

***~~No Savior but the Lord Jesus~~***

***~~[John 6:67-69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.67-69).~~***

"Do you want to go away also?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

[This was written at the distance of many years from that which precedes it, and without the slightest recollection that the text had ever been treated before. But the two are so entirely different from each other, the one being more scientific, (if it may be so called) and the other altogether popular, that they are both inserted as specimens of two very different ways of treating the same text.]

NOTHING is more common than for persons to take offence at the word of God itself. Sometimes its *strictness*offends them; sometimes its *harshness*and *severity*; sometimes its *mysteriousness*and *sublimity*.

Nicodemus could not receive what was spoken to him about the new birth. The Samaritan woman could not comprehend the idea of living water. The hearers of our Lord were altogether indignant, when he discoursed to them about giving them his flesh to eat. Indeed, this saying appeared to them so hard, so strange, and so absurd, that a great number of them departed from him, and walked no more with him. Even the Apostles themselves were evidently stumbled at it; insomuch, that our Lord, with a mixture of surprise and pity, asked them, "Will you also go away?" The answer which Peter gave him, in the name of all the rest, will lead me to show you the grounds of a Christian's adherence to Christ. He determinately cleaves to Christ,

***~~I. Because there is salvation in no other—~~***

We may conceive the Apostle speaking to this effect: "Lord, to whom shall we go? We are seeking after salvation: we are desiring to obtain peace with God: we want to find rest for our souls. Where can we go for any of these things?"

Now, in like manner, may every Christian say, 'To whom shall I go, to remove the burden of my sins?

If I go to *the world*, it may dissipate my thoughts for a moment; but it can bring no solid peace to my soul. Its cares, its pleasures, its company, can do nothing towards healing the pangs, or silencing the accusations, of a guilty conscience: they may suspend, but can never remove, my sorrows: or rather, if they cause me to forget my sins for a little time, it is only that they may press upon me afterwards with an accumulated weight, and leave me a more awful prey to guilt and shame and misery.

If I go to *the Law*, and seek to pacify my mind by an obedience to its commands, I find no success. I feel a consciousness that I can never atone for the sins I have already committed: I am sensible, too, that, in spite of all my endeavors, I cannot fulfill its demands: I come short in everything I do: and I hear it thundering out its anathemas against me; saying, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." I perceive that I can never establish such a righteousness as shall avail for my acceptance before God. I am therefore shut up to that way of salvation which you, my Lord, have revealed. Nothing but fear or terror haunts me, whether I endeavor to forget my sins, or to make an atonement for them: and I can find none but Jesus that can afford me the desired relief.'

A further ground on which a Christian adheres to Christ is,

***~~II. Because he is both able and willing to save—~~***

"You have the words of eternal life," said this blessed Apostle. The preceding discourse alone abundantly warranted this assertion: for, in it, Jesus had declared, in the strongest terms, that "he would give eternal life, verse 27;" that "whoever would come to him, and believe in him, would never hunger, never thirst, verse 35;" that "of those who would come to him, he would never cast out one, verse 37;" that "all who would see him and believe in him would assuredly have everlasting life, verse 40;" yes, that they were at that very moment in actual possession of it, verse 47; that he had come down from Heaven on purpose to bestow it on all who would seek it through him, verse 51; that, as the Jews had subsisted upon manna in the wilderness, so all who would eat his flesh, and drink his blood, would exist by him, verse 54-56, and that not for a time only, but forever, verse 58. Now what could all this mean? Could any declaration be more full, more rich, more suitable to men sojourning in this dreary wilderness?

Thus, then, may every believer say: for the whole Scripture teems with invitations and promises from this adorable Savior, and especially to those who feel their need of mercy at his hands. "Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light, [Matthew 11:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28-30)." "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me, and drink: and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water, [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38). Here is no exception: the only requisite for acceptance with him is, that we feel our *need*of him, and *come*to him to quench our thirst.

What more can we want? Let our wants be ever so great, he has a fullness adequate to the supply of them. Let our unworthiness be ever so great, our sense of that unworthiness shall be our best recommendation to him: nor shall our incapacity to offer him anything in return for these benefits be any bar to our acceptance: since they are all offered freely, "without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." Shall we then decline going to him? or, having gone to him, shall we ever depart from him? God forbid!

But the Christian will yet more determinately adhere to him,

***~~III. Because he is expressly appointed to that very office—~~***

Of this the Apostles were assured: "We believe, and are sure, that you are that Christ, the Son of the Living God." It had been foretold that the Messiah would appear, on purpose "to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness" for his believing people, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24). This person was to be no other than "the Son of the Living God, [Psalm 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.7)." And that Jesus was this very person, the Apostles had no doubt. They had seen the miracles which Jesus had wrought in confirmation of his divine mission, those very miracles to which Jesus himself had appealed in proof of his Messiahship, [Matthew 11:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.2-5); and they could not doubt but that he was the very person to whom all the Law and the Prophets had borne witness, as the appointed Savior.

Now, if the Apostles at that time "were sure" of this truth, how much more may we be assured, who have seen his whole work completed, in:  
his *death*upon the cross,  
his *resurrection*from the dead according to his word,  
his *ascension*into Heaven, and  
his sending down of the *Holy Spirit*, to testify of him, and to establish his kingdom in the world?

Methinks we might as well doubt our own existence, as call in question his Messiahship, and his express ordination of God to be the Savior of the world.

Shall we, then, look out for any other? Or, having believed in him, shall we for a moment allow any other to stand in competition with him? No, Lord! We believe, and are sure, that you are sent of God to this very office; and we will know none but You, none but You.

***~~Here I would put a question or two, by way of bringing home the subject more fully to our souls.~~***

Having taken for granted that we all are following the Lord Jesus, I have forborne hitherto to inquire respecting it. Let me, however, entreat you to supply that defect, and to examine carefully whether you have ever come to Christ aright? Deceive not yourselves, I beg you, in relation to this matter; for the everlasting salvation of your souls depends upon it.

Have you seen that there is no hope for you in anything but in his atoning blood?

Have you renounced all dependence upon your own righteousness; and are you trusting altogether in his obedience unto death?

Unless this is clearly ascertained, you are not prepared to enter on the consideration of the questions which I would wish to propose to you. But, supposing that you are indeed believers in Christ, I ask,

***~~1. Will you depart from him?~~***

Whom or what will you place in competition with him? Perhaps you are not at present tempted in any particular way to depart from him. But be assured that you will be: for there is not any true follower of Christ who does not, sooner or later, meet with trials to prove his sincerity. You may not be called to "resist unto blood:" but you cannot fail to meet with smaller persecutions, such as contempt and ridicule, and the hatred of an ungodly world, perhaps too even of your nearest friends.

What, then, is the state of your minds in reference to these things? Are you enabled, through grace, to honor Christ, and to set at defiance all your enemies? If you see others turning back, (for what age is there which does not witness many apostasies?) are you the more determined, through grace, to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart?" Are you saying, as Ruth to Naomi, "Nothing but death (no, nor death itself) shall part between you and me." You must not indeed be making resolutions, and, in dependence on your own strength, be saying, "Though all men forsake you—yet I will not!" Your daily prayer must be, that you may be kept steadfast unto the end: for it is only by being "faithful unto death, that you can ever attain a crown of life."

***~~2. Will you not endeavor to bring all you can to him?~~***

Surely, if you are fully persuaded that "there is no other name under Heaven but his, whereby man can be saved," you will labor according to your ability to bring men to the knowledge of him. You cannot but pity the poor deceived world, who are going after lying vanities, while you have found a refuge for your souls. Go, look around you: go and see what empty cisterns men hew out to themselves, while your thirst is quenched at the fountain-head. *Go to the places of public resort, and see what a poor vain portion the worldlings have. Truly, their best pleasures are but as the crackling of thorns under a pot; a fire that blazes for a moment, and then expires in smoke and melancholy*. Have compassion on them, and tell them of the Savior you have found: and, while you labor to instruct the ignorant, exert yourselves to the utmost to confirm the wavering, and to bring back the sheep that have been driven away.

Extend your views, also, to the heathen world. Alas! to what refuges of lies have they recourse! Behold their idols of wood and stone that cannot so much as move themselves, much less assist their votaries! Behold the painful and cruel religious rites which they observe, in order to recommend themselves to the favor and approbation of their imaginary deities! Can you be acquainted with the Savior, and not wish to make him known to them? Can you be in possession of "the words of eternal life," and not endeavor to put into their hands that blessed volume in which they are contained?

Surely, next to a personal adherence to him, this must be your duty: and, if you are his disciples indeed, I feel no doubt but that you will engage in this blessed work with an affectionate solicitude for the welfare of your fellow-creatures, and an ardent zeal for the honor of your God.

***~~#1645~~***

***~~One of the Apostles a Devil~~***

**[John 6:70](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.70).**

"Jesus answered them" Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

OUR blessed Lord and Savior, in the whole of his deportment, was meek and gentle: yet, when occasion called to it, he exercised a holy fidelity even towards his beloved Apostles. They had now all confessed him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God;" and had declared their determination still to adhere to him, however others of his disciples might be offended at him, and induced to forsake him verse 66-69. On this account they might be led to value themselves on their steadfastness, or perhaps feel themselves offended, when they would find, at a future period, that one of their own body was a traitor. Our Lord, therefore, warned them both against self-confidence at the present time, and against that discouragement which they would hereafter feel, when they would behold him delivered up to death through the instrumentality of one of his own most highly-favored Apostles; saying, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

Now, if you doubt not the Savior's love in giving this solemn warning to his followers, let not me be thought harsh, if I call your attention to it,

**I.** As delivered to the Apostles—

God in every age has of his own sovereign will and pleasure, chosen, irrespective of any merit in themselves, the objects of his more especial favor—

Even in Heaven did he choose some of the angelic host in preference to others, whom, in his righteous judgment, he allowed to fall and perish: on which account those who "kept their first estate" are called his "elect angels 1 Timothy 5:21." And after man also had sinned, God chose our fallen race in preference to the fallen angels; providing a Savior for us, when he had made no such provision for them. To various offices also has he chosen men, as Moses, to bring his people out of Egypt; Aaron and his descendants, to officiate in the priesthood, while the descendants of Moses were only Levites; and Saul and David to exercise the royal functions in Jerusalem; and Cyrus, three hundred years before any such person existed in the world, to restore his people from Babylon. The whole Jewish people were "chosen by God to be to him a holy nation, and a peculiar treasure to him above all the people upon earth [Deuteronomy 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6)." In like manner our blessed Savior chose his twelve Apostles. "They did not choose him, but he them [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16);" calling one from his nets, and another from the receipt of custom; and afterwards another, in the midst of his most hostile purposes, and blood-thirsty pursuits [Acts 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.14). He appealed to them, "Have not I chosen you twelve?" Have I not distinguished you above others, to be my stated attendants, and to be instructed by me with all imaginable clearness in the things which to others are revealed only in parables [Luke 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.10).

But though, in external circumstances, there is a great resemblance between the elect, there is often a sad difference between them—

As, among the Jews, "all were not Israel who were of Israel [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6)," so all the elect are not "elect unto salvation [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13); as we clearly see among the chosen Apostles, one of whom was, and remained to the last, "a devil." In their call they were alike, as they were also in their endowments (the power of working miracles), their outward conduct, and their usefulness. On one occasion, Judas seemed to be the most excellent of all the Apostles: for, when a very precious box of ointment, which might have been sold for three hundred pence (almost ten pounds) and been given to the poor, was poured upon the head and feet of our blessed Lord, he was the first to complain of the waste; and he it was who inspired all the rest of the Apostles with "indignation against it," as an act of insufferable extravagance. True, indeed, his motives were not very pure (as we are told Compare [Matthew 26:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.7-9) with [John 12:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.3-6).); but of them the Apostles neither knew, nor suspected anything. On the contrary, when, at the close of our Savior's life, he told his disciples that one of them would betray him, every one of them suspected himself rather than Judas, so correct had been his outward deportment during the whole period of our Lord's ministry on earth. But during that whole time, Judas, who had been entrusted by our Lord as the purse-bearer for them all, had pilfered money in small quantities from the bag (had he stolen largely, the money would have been missed); and so hardened did he become through his dishonest practices, that at last he sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, and delivered him up into the hands of his enemies. This reigning lust of covetousness showed, that, in the midst of all his professions, he was at heart no better than a devil, and that he might be justly designated by that opprobrious name.

And may we not consider this warning,

**II.** As delivered to us—

Yes, we also are God's chosen people—

As Christians, we are chosen above all the rest of the world, not one-sixth part of which has ever heard of the name of Christ. As Protestants, too, we are favored of Almighty God to be delivered from the superstitions of Popery, and from the deplorable bondage in which the Popish community is held. And to whom do we owe it that we were not born of heathen, or Mohammedan, or Popish parents? To whom is it owing, that our lot is cast in this happy land of light and liberty? Can we trace these mercies to anything but the sovereign grace, and the electing love, of God? And may I not go further still, and say, that you, my dear brethren, are favored with a ministration of the Gospel as clear and as faithful as any around you? I trust I may, without vanity and without boasting, call God to record, that I have "never kept back anything which I conceived to be profitable for you [Acts 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.20)." Then, in these respects, I may say of all of you, that God has chosen you: and, inasmuch as you are all equally partakers of these mercies, you may account yourselves equally the children of God; yes, and so far as your outward conduct is correct, you may be accounted so by others.

But, after all, God may see, and most probably does see, an immense difference between you—

Only see what one reigning lust proved and demonstrated in Judas Iscariot: it proved him, in despite of all his specious appearances, to be "a devil." My dear brethren, the same evidence will demonstrate the same solemn truth, wherever it be found. Nor does it matter what that reigning lust is: it may be covetousness, or lewdness, or pride, or vindictiveness, or any other sin; but, whatever it may be, whether dear as a right eye, or apparently necessary as a right hand, it will decide our character, and determine our doom: if it continue unmortified and unsubdued, it will infallibly consign us over to the fire of Hell [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48). If one besetting sin marked Judas as "a son of perdition [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)," and transmitted him to that everlasting dread abode, so will it us, whose place it must be," as well as his [Acts 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.25). Our being of the seed of Abraham will not make us "God's children," any more than it made him [Romans 9:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.7-8). Our saying, Lord, Lord, however confidently we may repeat it, will not procure us a place in Heaven [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21); nor if we have "wrought miracles and cast out devils in the Savior's name," will it prevail to avert from us our merited condemnation [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). Perish we must, if sin of any kind be harbored in our hearts [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18). It is not necessary that we be perfect, in order to obtain mercy of the Lord in that day: for then who could ever be saved? The Apostles themselves were not perfect: but in purpose and endeavor we must be perfect: and they only will find acceptance before God, who are "Israelites indeed, and without deceit [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)." I say again, in aim and effort we must be perfect: "for 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 [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29)."

APPLICATION—

**1.** Rest not then, brethren, in outward privileges—

Be it so: you may have all the privileges that Paul himself possessed when in his unconverted state: yet would they not profit you, if you were not brought to the knowledge of Christ Jesus [Philippians 3:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.4-9), and to a real conformity to his image [Philippians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10-11) and [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). Who can think of one of our Lord's chosen Apostles perishing in his sins, and not tremble for himself, lest his very mercies, instead of rescuing him from eternal misery, would only aggravate and increase it?

Beware, then, lest, having been exalted to Heaven, like Capernaum, in your privileges, you be cast down to Hell for your abuse of them; and lest, having remained impenitent under blessings which Tyre and Sidon would have improved, your final condemnation become at last proportionably heavier than theirs [Matthew 11:20-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.20-24).

**2.** Examine yourselves as to your inward dispositions—

God sees the heart: and by the dispositions of the heart will he judge us in the last day. Now, suppose that our blessed Lord, who in his tender mercy has chosen this whole assembly to enjoy all the means of salvation, would, on inspecting our hearts, pronounce that there was, in the midst of us, one who, notwithstanding all his fair pretenses and specious appearances, was a devil; and suppose that unhappy being were pointed out to us; with what pity would we look upon him, and how compassionately would we weep over him! And can we venture to hope, that in such an assembly there is not one who is under the dominion of some secret lust? If in such a family as our blessed Lord's, where they had such rich instructions, such a bright example, and such motives to serve their God aright, there was, even among the small number of twelve, one that was a devil; is there not reason rather to fear, that, instead of one only being found in the midst of this whole assembly, there may be as many in proportion as among our Lord's Apostles; namely, one in every twelve? O! what a fearful thought is this! And is this an. uncharitable thought? Are we all so like to the holy Apostles, that one in twelve may not be supposed to differ from them, if not in outward conduct—yet in the integrity of his heart, and in the entire devotion of his life? And what if, after all, this proportion would be inverted, and not above one in twelve be found truly dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness, as the holy Apostles were, and ready to lay down their lives for the Lord Jesus; would not this come nearer to the truth?

Alas! alas! I would not be uncharitable: but when I compare the mind, the spirit, the entire conduct of you all, with that of the Apostles, I cannot dissemble my fears respecting the testimony which the Lord Jesus, the Judge of living and dead, shall bear respecting you at the last day. Judge then yourselves, brethren, that you be not judged of the Lord. Judge whether there be not some price for which you have already sold your Savior, and for which you are betraying him to an ungodly world. I must tell you, that if there be any thing, even life itself, which you are not ready to part with for his sake, that is the price for which you have sold him; and that, though you may continue to deceive both yourselves and others, the hour is coming when your true character will be declared, and your proper doom awarded to you [Matthew 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.39). May God, in his infinite mercy, impress this solemn subject on all your minds, and lead every one of you to look for this unhappy character, (supposing there to be one among you,) not to your neighbor, but to yourselves; and to inquire, every one for himself, "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?" so that at last the number of this unhappy people may be diminished; and if it were possible, that not one of you would remain, who shall not at last have an approving testimony from the heart-searching God! Amen, and Amen.

***~~#1646~~***

***~~Connection Between Piety and Knowledge~~***

***~~[John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17).~~***

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

THE very enemies of our Lord were constrained to say, "Never has any man spoke like this man." Yet did many of them persist in representing him as a deceiver: and, because he had not been educated after the manner of the Scribes and Pharisees, they considered him as incapable of instructing them, verse 12, 15.

But to what was it owing that they could not receive his word? Was there anything in his mode of conveying his instructions, which involved them in unnecessary obscurity? The parabolic form in which he taught the people was common in his day; and, if it cast somewhat of a veil over his instructions, it tended to remove the offence which too explicit a statement would occasion, and to convey knowledge to persons precisely in such a measure as they were able to receive it.

The real obstacle which his discourses met with, arose from the inveterate prejudices with which the minds of his hearers were prepossessed. Hence they rejected his word, and denied that he was divinely authorized to promulgate the doctrines he maintained. To remove this obstacle, he told them what it was which they needed, and what alone it was which would render his word profitable to their souls. They needed an integrity of mind to obey the truth, as far as it would be revealed to them: and therefore he said, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

These words will naturally lead me to show,

***~~I. The disposition of mind necessary for a profitable investigation of the Holy Scriptures—~~***

Truth, which is merely practical, requires little besides a strong intellectual power to be exercised upon it.

But *divine truth is intimately connected with the dispositions of the mind*, and requires,

***~~1. A desire to know God's will—~~***

We should bear in mind that there is a superior Being, to whom we are all accountable for our actions. This may be known even from the works of creation: and the knowledge of it would make us anxious to be informed what His will is, and how we may find acceptance with him. When, therefore, a book is put into our hands, purporting to come from him, we should read it, not with mere transient curiosity, nor as a book whereon to exercise our critical skill, but with *a real desire to know all that he shall have seen fit to reveal, especially respecting the duties which we owe to him, and the way that he has appointed for the conciliating of his favor*. The state of our minds should be precisely like that of Cornelius and his family, when Peter was sent as a divine messenger to instruct them: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you by God, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33)."

***~~2. A readiness to obey it—~~***

We must not sit in judgment on God's word, complaining of this as too strict, and that as too difficult and self-denying. The only point for us to ascertain is whether it is the word of God or not*.*

*If we are convinced that it is his word, then must we receive it with the most child-like simplicity, and obey it without either hesitation or reserve*. Nothing is to appear to us as "a hard saying."

If it is beyond our comprehension, we should be content to say, in relation to it, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

If we see not exactly the reason of God's commands, we are not therefore to decline obeying them: for, if an earthly parent expects obedience, though the reasons of his commands are hidden from his child, much more may God expect at our hands a ready acquiescence in all that he commands, even when the reasons of his injunctions are far out of sight. Paul's prayer, at the time of his conversion, should be ours at all times: "Lord, what will you have me to do? [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)."

To recommend to you this disposition in perusing the Holy Scriptures, I will proceed to mark,

***~~II. Its conduciveness to a clear understanding of them—~~***

It will most materially aid us,

***~~1. In a discovery of its origin—~~***

When this holy disposition is lacking, almost every truth of Scripture will prove a stumbling-block to us. But when it regulates our researches, we shall find all the deepest and most offensive declarations of God's word to accord with our real state before him.

Does he declare that "the carnal mind is enmity against him?" We shall be ready, from our own actual experience, to admit it: for we shall be constrained to confess, that, whatever others may have been, we have had no delight in him, or in anything that could lead us to him.

When he asserts that there can be no salvation for us but through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall see how exactly that agrees with our own necessities at least; since we are wholly devoid of any righteousness of our own, and incapable of working out a righteousness wherein we can stand before him.

When he requires an entire devotedness of heart and life to his service, our own feelings attest that *such a surrender of ourselves to him is the duty and happiness of all his creatures*.

In fact, the whole revelation of God will then appear to us both *worthy of God*and *suited to man*: and, though other evidences of the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures have doubtless their weight and importance, and indeed are absolutely necessary for the conviction of others, this will prove the most satisfactory of all to a man's own mind. The very excellency of the truths of Scripture will mark, to his perfect satisfaction, their divine origin: for none but God could have conceived things so remote from human apprehension—yet so glorious in themselves, and so harmonious in all their parts; *harmonious with the perfections of the Deity, and with the necessities of fallen man.*

***~~2. In an apprehension of its import—~~***

In "an honest and good heart," such as alone is fit for the reception of the heavenly seed, there is such a correspondence with divine truth as makes the reception of it easy. To such a one *sin*appears hateful, and therefore he acquiesces at once in all that is said in condemnation of it: and *holiness*appears delightful, and therefore he feels no inclination to lower the requirements of the Gospel. He would gladly, if he could, "be as holy as God is holy," and "as perfect as God is perfect."

Hence the things which are stumbling-blocks and rocks of offence to a carnal mind, are most acceptable to him, inasmuch as they accord with the convictions of his own mind, and with the desires of his own soul.

In a word, the whole plan of salvation, in all its parts and in all its bearings, is such as fills him with delight. He would not but be humbled in the dust. He would not wish to rob Almighty God of his glory in any one particular: "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto your name, be the praise!" is the very language of his soul: and all that is spoken in Scripture respecting God's free and sovereign disposals of his grace and mercy, so far from being offensive to him, finds a complete counterpart in the dispositions of his mind. He is then most pleased, when God is most glorified.

***~~Hence, then, we may see,~~***

***~~1. Why it is that the word of God produces so little effect in the world—~~***

Because it is not regarded as the word of God. Men sit in judgment upon it; and, instead of taking it with meek submission as a rule of their faith and practice, satisfy themselves with making it a theater for the display of their own ingenuity and learning. At best, the generality of men give but a feigned assent to it as the inspired volume: they will, perhaps, even contend for it as a whole, and yet dispute against it in relation to all its most important parts. Thus men contrive to evade its force. But when it comes fully upon the heart and conscience, "it is like fire, or like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces!" Let it once reach the heart of man, and it will prove "sharper than any two-edged sword, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)," and "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)."

***~~2. How we may derive from it all the benefit it is destined to impart—~~***

We must receive it as the word of the living God, the word of God to us. We must yield ourselves "with meekness" altogether to its influence, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21). What is there that it will not then do for us? Truly, "it will do good to him who walks uprightly, [Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.7)." Yes, all kinds of good: it will quicken, comfort, support, sanctify, and save the soul.

Let your souls, then, be turned as the wax to the seal, or as the melted ore to the mold, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17). Then, through the teachings of the Holy Spirit, shall it perform its whole work upon you, and transform you "into the divine image in righteousness, and true holiness!"

***~~#1647~~***

***~~Christ May Be Sought Too Late~~***

***~~[John 7:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.36).~~***

"What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?"

FROM the character of our blessed Lord we might well expect, that, in whatever circumstances he would be placed, his words and actions would be such as befit an incarnate God. Accordingly we find that he was never discomposed, never disheartened; but that, as well in the prospect of a cruel death as on all other occasions, he preserved an unruffled temper, and a perfect patience.

"The Pharisees had sent officers to take him;" and though the precise hour for his being delivered up into their hands was not yet arrived, it was very near: yet, instead of manifesting the smallest apprehension of his approaching sufferings, he spoke of his death as though he had been going on a journey; and showed, that his chief concern was about the judgments that would fall upon his enemies: "Yet a little while am I with you; and then I go unto Him that sent me. You shall seek me, but shall not find me; and where I go, thither you cannot come."

This assertion of his appeared quite inexplicable to them. "They said among themselves, Where will he go, that we shall not find him?" and then, after some unsatisfactory conjectures about his going to preach among the Gentiles, or destroying his own life, they were constrained to acknowledge that they could not at all comprehend it; "What manner of saying is this that he said?" Indeed, even his own disciples were as much at a loss about his meaning as his very enemies. Compare verse 35 and 8:22 with 16:16-18.

It is not our intention to justify their unbelief: for it is evident that they were actuated by a proud captious spirit, and not by a sincere desire after instruction. Yet their words will afford us a fit occasion to show,

***~~I. The importance of inquiring into Divine truth in general—~~***

***~~It is certain that there are many expressions in the Scriptures that are dark and hard to be understood—~~***

This arises in part from *the mysterious nature of Divine truth*, which relates to subjects remote from the apprehensions of fallen man: It is owing also in part to the metaphorical language in which the doctrines of Revelation are often expressed; for, however certain figures may serve to illustrate the particular doctrine contained in them, they cast a veil over the doctrine, until the truth contained in them is understood. But most of all, it is *owing to the disinclination of man to receive the things which are revealed*. The mind of fallen man is blinded by pride, and passion, and self-interest. It has a corrupt bias. It is averse to the things which the Spirit of God requires and reveals. "It hates the light, and will not come to the light, lest its vile propensities should be reproved!" Therefore it accounts "the things of the Spirit foolishness," because it is not able to discern their excellency.

***~~Nevertheless the things contained in the Scriptures are of infinite importance to us all—~~***

They relate to the everlasting salvation of the soul.

They declare the only way in which a sinner can find acceptance with God.

They set forth the person, work, and offices of the Messiah, together with the distinct offices of the Holy Trinity in the work of redemption.

They make known the characters of those who are saved and of those who perish, together with the states to which both the one and the other will be sentenced.

In short, "the word that Christ has spoken to us, the same shall judge us in the last day."

Now *in comparison with these things, the concerns of time and sense are lighter than the dust upon the balance*. Earthly things indeed appear of greater magnitude, because they are nearer to us: but if spiritual truths are brought near by faith, they eclipse every other object, as the meridian sun hides by its splendor the feebler radiance of the stars.

***~~They should therefore be inquired into with all diligence—~~***

We should not be satisfied with a general acknowledgment of their truth, but should examine into the precise import of them, with a view to ascertain what is the state of our own souls before God.

When we hear our Lord affirm so solemnly and so repeatedly, that "unless we be born again we cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven;" should we not pause, and consider, and inquire what is meant by the new birth, and whether we have ever experienced the change implied in it?

When we read, that "except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, there is no life in us," should we not use all possible means to understand it, and to learn whether we are in a state of life or of death?

Can we suppose, that, because these assertions are conveyed under metaphorical expressions, they mean nothing; or, that we have no concern with them? Will our ignorance of their import make them void? Will our contempt of them prevent the execution of the Divine judgments agreeably to them? We ought, then, as our Lord enjoins us, to "search the Scriptures," to weigh every expression contained in them, and to seek a conformity to them in the whole of our principles and conduct.

But not to dwell any longer on *general*truths, let us consider,

***~~II. The importance of ascertaining the meaning of "this saying" in particular—~~***

Scarcely any expression so frequently occurs towards the close of our Savior's ministry as this; from whence we may be assured, that it deserved the special attention of his followers. Let us then examine its meaning,

***~~1. In reference to them—~~***

Our Lord was speedily to be put to death. His death indeed was voluntary on his part; "No man could take his life from him, but he laid it down of himself:" and therefore he said, "I go to Him who sent me." But on their part, it was the effect of murderous rage: for this their iniquity the whole nation were to be abandoned to utter ruin, [Luke 19:42-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.42-44). "Then," says our Lord, "you will seek me, and shall not find me." He does not mean, that they would cry to him, and humble themselves before him; but that they would seek for their Messiah, and long for him to deliver them: and the fact was, that, when those calamities did come upon them, they were so desirous of the Messiah's advent, as willingly to receive any impostor that chose to assume that character. But they had slain the true Messiah, and would look for any other in vain, [Luke 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.22).

Besides, the great mass of individuals among them were to be given over to final impenitence; and, when they would come before Christ at the last day, they would desire to find mercy with him: but, as "Esau, having sold his birth-right, desired afterwards to inherit the blessing, and was rejected, and could find no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears, [Hebrews 12:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.16-17);" so these wicked men would repent too late, and spend eternity in unavailing sorrows.

While our Lord warned them of their impending danger, he taught them to consider their punishment as necessarily connected with their wickedness: "Where I am, thither you cannot come." He does not say, "you *shall*not;" but, you "cannot" come: for they would be excluded from Heaven no less by their utter incapacity to enjoy it, than by the unalterable decree of God. Heaven, if they were admitted to it, would be no Heaven to them, while they retained their malignant passions, and rejected the salvation offered them in the Gospel.

***~~2. In reference to ourselves—~~***

Jesus is yet present with us by the preaching of the Gospel; and he will be withdrawn from us as soon as ever death shall separate us from the means of grace. When "the door of Heaven shall be shut, we may stand without, and knock, saying: Lord, open to us:" we may even plead with him, and say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you have taught in our streets:" but it will be too late: he will say to us, "Depart from me, I never knew you!" You sought me not, nor believed in me, when you were yet on mercy's ground; and now you must have "judgment without mercy."

But this may be the case while yet we are in this lower world. There is an "accepted time, a day of salvation," which we may irretrievably lose. We may "grieve" and "resist the Holy Spirit," until we "quench" his gracious motions, and provoke God to say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone." He may be so offended by our wickedness as to "give us up to a reprobate mind," and to "swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest." He has warned us, that he will do so; that "if we refuse when he calls, he will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear comes: that we may even seek him early, and shall not find him; because we hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, [Proverbs 1:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-29) with [2 Corinthians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.2) and [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28)."

Indeed, as long as we continue in an unconverted state, that word is true, "Where I am, thither you cannot come:" for it is impossible for any one to enjoy Heaven, without having attained a fitness for it; or to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Heaven, without that wedding garment in which every acceptable guest is clothed.

***~~We may see then, What manner of saying this is—~~***

***~~1. It is an instructive saying—~~***

Many are the valuable lessons which it inculcates. It teaches us:

That on the present moment, eternity depends.

That our great concern in life is to obtain the knowledge of Christ, and a saving interest in his favor.

That a willful abuse of our present privileges may provoke God to give us up to final impenitence.

That, if we die before we are "renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," we can no more enjoy Heaven, than "light can have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial!"

Would to God that we might learn these things so deeply, as to be continually influenced by them! Happy will it be for us, if we "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near."

***~~2. It is a comforting saying—~~***

The words of our text are elsewhere addressed to his own more-favored disciples, [John 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.33). They are, in fact, like the pillar and cloud by which Israel were conducted out of Egypt: they have a luminous aspect towards the people of God, while they present a dark side towards his enemies. His own dearest children cannot follow him now; but they shall follow him soon, [John 13:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.36). He has merely "gone to prepare a place for them; and will come soon to take them to himself, that where he is they may be also, [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3)." Moreover, his separation from them at present is only corporeal: for he is still with them, and "they see him," and enjoy the sweetest "fellowship with him, [John 14:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19-22) with [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3);" and in a little while they shall enter into his immediate presence, and "be for ever with the Lord! [1 Thessalonians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.17-18)." Well might the Apostle say, "Comfort one another with these words!"

But this saying is peculiarly comforting in another view; for what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews—the *Christian*may say respecting all his spiritual enemies: 'Yet a little while I am with you, and you may make your assaults upon me. But soon I shall go to my Father, and be out of your reach. Then you shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither you cannot come.

No, *Satan*, you can no more molest me there*.*

*Temptation*shall harass me no more*.*

*Sin*shall no more defile me*.*

*Sorrow*shall no more cloud my mind or oppress my spirits.

There shall enter nothing that *defiles*.

I may be exposed to you all a little while longer; but soon I shall embrace uninterrupted joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

Blessed reflection! Who must not long for death, that he may enjoy such happiness as this? Who must not add his *Amen*to that petition of our Lord, "Father, I will that those who you have given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me!" Yes; let all our hearts say, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"

***~~3. It is a terrifying saying—~~***

While we see so many living at their ease disregarding all the invitations of the Gospel, and dreaming of happiness without a saving interest in Christ, how distressing is it to think, that in a little time their day of grace will be passed, and that God may either give them up to judicial blindness, or say: "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you!" When we tell them of these things, they are ready to reply, "What kind of saying is this? It is a wild enthusiastic dream that shall never be realized." Ah! would to God it might not be realized! But it will, in spite of all that you can say, or do, to the contrary.

If you continue saying to Christ, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways;" he will soon take you at your word, and say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Trifle then no more with the opportunities afforded to you; but "redeem the time;" and, "while the light is yet with you, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you, [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)," and "an impassable gulf be fixed" between you and our ever-adorable Emmanuel.

***~~#1648~~***

***~~Christ's Offer of the Spirit~~***

***~~[John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38).~~***

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

OUR blessed Lord incessantly labored for the salvation of men; nor could their ungrateful returns at all divert him from his purpose. His life was sought, and he knew that persons were sent to apprehend him: yet, instead of rejecting them with abhorrence, he sought to win them by love, and importuned them to accept his richest blessings. Let us consider his invitation,

***~~I. As addressed to them—~~***

***~~The time and manner of his invitation are worthy of notice—~~***

This was a day of peculiar sanctity, and of uncommon festivity It was the eighth and last day of the feast of tabernacles, [Leviticus 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.34); [Leviticus 23:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.36); and it seems that some customs, not required in the original institutions of the law, obtained among the Jews at that time. It is said that on this day they went annually to the pool of Siloam, and drawing water from thence returned with it in procession to the temple, where they poured it out with all possible demonstrations of joy.

At what *time*this custom arose, it is not easy to determine; but probably it commenced after the Babylonish captivity; and was adopted in reference to that prediction, [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.3).

Nor is the *design*of this custom precisely known: but it seems most likely that they then commemorated the giving of water out of the rock in the wilderness; and called upon God for rain, which was so necessary to them at that season. Perhaps the more spiritual among them, might pray also for those spiritual blessings, which their promised Messiah was appointed to bestow.

These circumstances served as the foundation of our Lord's address, and reflect much light upon it. Happy to improve the opportunity, Jesus stood in the most conspicuous place, and, with an exalted voice, claimed the attention of the people; and, despising equally the censures of the uncharitable, and the persecutions of the proud, he made them fresh overtures of mercy. *While they only panted for his blood, he longed for their salvation*. He pointed himself out to them as "the only fountain of living waters," and assured them of his readiness to impart whatever they stood in need of. He excepted none from his offers, provided they did but "thirst" for his blessings.

***~~Lest, however, his invitation would be slighted, he enforced it with a promise—~~***

He first explained what he meant by "coming to him." (It was not a mere outward, but an inward and spiritual application, that he wished them to make to him.) They were to "believe in him," as possessing all fullness in himself, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); and as the person appointed of the Father to convey blessings to them, [Psalm 72:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.17). In a full persuasion of this truth they were to come to him by faith. For their encouragement he promised them a rich effusion of his Spirit. By "living water" our Lord meant the gift of his Spirit, verse 39. When he said, that "rivers of this living water would flow out of his belly," he intimated that the believer would have *a constant spring of consolation within him*, which would refresh all who came within the sphere of his influence. Of this blessed truth the Scriptures had abundantly testified, and our Lord now confirmed it to them by a most solemn promise. He assured them, as he had before told the Samaritan woman, that his communications to them would prove a source of unutterable and endless joy, [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14).

***~~In this promise he clearly showed them that he was the promised Messiah—~~***

The gift of his Spirit in such an abundant measure was that "new thing" which the Messiah was to accomplish, [Isaiah 43:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.18-20); [Isaiah 44:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3); And in thus freely offering it to all, he fulfilled the office more especially assigned him, [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3) and [Joel 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.28-29); [Joel 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.32).

But it is time that we consider *the invitation*,

***~~II. As addressed to us—~~***

In the very name of Christ, and as his authorized ambassador, I now repeat the invitation to you: "I stand and cry to you," even as he did to them, and with the very same confidence and assurance.

Christ is "the fountain of living waters, [Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.13);" it has pleased the Father that in him would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); and that all we would receive out of it according to our necessities, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19). In fact, he has received the Holy Spirit on purpose that he may impart it unto us, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8). And now I say in the presence of you all, that if you will but "believe in him you shall receive this heavenly gift in the richest abundance."

Whatever you may have been, or whatever you may have done, even though, like his auditors, you may have thirsted for his blood—the offer is to you. If only you thirst for salvation, you shall never be disappointed of your hope: "The Holy Spirit shall be in you as a well of water springing up unto eternal life." The Spirit shall accomplish in you all the good pleasure of your God, and shall enable you to diffuse blessings all around you. In truth, this is your distinctive privilege.

A man may possess ever so large a measure of earthly wisdom or power, and never be able to benefit or comfort one soul: but if you are endued with the Holy Spirit, your conversation shall be edifying to all around you; and you shall be the means of imparting to others in rich abundance the consolation and refreshment which you yourself have received. If Christ be as the rock in the wilderness to you, you in your measure shall be the same to many a thirsting soul.

***~~Let me then invite you all, as it were, separately and by name—~~***

You who, like our Savior's auditors, have no desire after spiritual blessings, what have you ever found that can be compared with the blessings here offered to you? What have all those things for which you have labored proved, but "broken cisterns that can hold no water?" And do you think that you contract no guilt while *you prefer such vanities before the living God?*Hear how God himself complains of you, [Jeremiah 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.12-13). And assure yourselves, that, if you continue to treat him thus, the day will come when you will "want a drop of water to cool your tongue."

If there be any who doubt whether they shall ever obtain such mercy at their Savior's hands, "only believe, and according to your faith it shall be done unto you." See how exactly the Lord has stated your very case, and accommodated to your mind his gracious promises, [Isaiah 41:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.17-18). Dismiss your fears then, and wait patiently upon him in prayer: and in due season the Rock shall be stricken to quench your thirst; and "your soul shall before long be as a watered garden, and as a spring of water, whose waters fail not, [Isaiah 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.11)."

But doubtless there are some who have already drunk of the living waters which Christ has given them. It is no wonder that you thirst: for if you had received as much as ever Paul himself had, you would only thirst the more, "forgetting what you had received, and panting still for more." But remember this; if you have ever drunk of these waters, "you will never thirst for anything else" even to your dying hour, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14). Even though you have no earthly comfort whatever, you will be "as one that possesses all things, 2 Corinthians 6:10."

Remember too, that you must daily make your profiting to appear. Being watered as the garden of the Lord, you must "abound in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

Remember lastly, that you are to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves have received. From you are to flow rivers of living water for the refreshing of others; and "as you have received freely, you must freely give" to all around you. As "the righteous are a tree of life, [Proverbs 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.30)," that all may eat of their life-giving fruits, so are you to be wells of salvation in your respective spheres, that all who can gain access to you may have the cup of salvation put into their hands, and drink and live for ever. Such is the honor which our blessed Savior has conferred on you; and such is the improvement of it which he expects at your hands.

***~~#1649~~***

***~~The Woman Taken in Adultery Dismissed~~***

***~~[John 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.10-11).~~***

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

IT is surprising to see in what a variety of ways the wickedness of the human heart will betray itself: sometimes in the commission of gross iniquity, and sometimes in apparent indignation against it: sometimes in open hostility against Christ, and sometimes in hypocritical professions of regard for him. Who that had seen the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees against an adulterous woman, would not have thought them the purest of the human race? Who that had heard their citations of Moses' law, and their respectful application to Christ as an authorized expositor of that law, would not have supposed that they truly feared God, and desired to perform his holy will? Who would have imagined that the whole was only a murderous plot against the life of Christ? Yet so it was.

These accusers had no indignation against the sin of adultery, nor any love to the law of Moses, nor any zeal for the honor of God: they were actuated solely by an inveterate hatred of Christ, and a determination to find, if possible, some occasion against him, that they might accuse him. Their professed object was to punish the woman; but their real object was, to lay a snare for Jesus' life.

That which we wish you particularly to observe, is,

***~~I. In what manner Christ extricated himself—~~***

***~~The snare laid for him was well contrived—~~***

The Scribes and Pharisees brought him a woman, who had been taken in the very act of adultery, and was therefore incapable of uttering a word in her own defense. The law of Moses had prescribed that all who were guilty of that crime would be put to death. If the woman were not absolutely married, but only espoused, she was still to be put to death, and that by stoning, [Leviticus 20:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 20.10). [Deuteronomy 22:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 22.22-24). Hence, it would seem that the particular death to which adulterers in general were condemned, was that of stoning, [Ezekiel 16:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.38); [Ezekiel 16:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.40).

But the point which they referred to our Lord's decision, was whether they would execute the law, or not. Now there were but four things which our Lord could do: either he might acquit the woman, or condemn her, or dismiss the matter without any attention to it, or refer them to another tribunal; but whichever of these he would do, they would make it a ground of accusation against him.

If he would *acquit*her, they would represent him as an enemy to Moses, and a patron of iniquity.

If he would *condemn*her, they would accuse him to the Romans as resisting the government of Caesar, and encouraging sedition.

If he would *dismiss*the matter, they would say he showed no zeal for the honor of God, whom he pretended to call his Father, and had no pretensions to the office of the Messiah, whose first object would be to "make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness."

If he would *refer*them to any other tribunal, to whoever he referred them, whether to the Roman or Jewish authorities, they would equally find matter of accusation against him; either of sanctioning the usurpation of the Romans on the one hand, or of setting himself against it, on the other. So that whatever he would say or do, they would lower him in the estimation of the people, and open a way for his destruction.

***~~And how did he escape the snare—~~***

At first he declined giving any answer at all; but stooped down, and wrote upon the ground. What he wrote, we know not: nor are we told precisely what he meant by that significant action. By this action he might intend to intimate, that they would take heed to what was written: or perhaps he wrote the very sentence which he afterwards pronounced. But his enemies, conceiving that they had gained their point, became more and more urgent for a decisive answer: he therefore addressed himself to their consciences; and as, in the case of idolatry, the law required that the witnesses would be the first in stoning the offender to death, so he bade the person that was without sin among them begin to inflict the punishment of death upon her.

He did not by this intend, that under the Gospel dispensation human laws would not be executed by any who were not themselves without sin; but he determined to confound these vile hypocrites, who, under a mask of zeal against sin, were perpetrating the greatest of all sins.

To give time for his word to operate on their consciences, he stooped down and wrote again: and behold, these accusers, self-condemned in their own minds, and fearful lest their own secret abominations would be exposed to public view, withdrew as privately as they could; the elder part among them, as being most fearful of exposure, retiring first, and gradually the younger also following their example; so that in a little time not a single accuser was left.

What an evidence was here of the *power of conscience*, when awakened by the Spirit of God, and armed against the sinner by a Divine power! Truly, the blindest must see, the most obdurate must feel, the most impudent must blush, and the most confident be confounded, when once the voice of conscience is distinctly heard. We cannot but think it*a good way of silencing a contentious and subtle adversary, to make a direct attack upon his conscience, and to fix his attention upon what has passed within his own bosom*.

It is not necessary to suppose that all the accusers had been guilty of the precise sin which they laid to the charge of this woman: there was now enough of their past iniquities presented to their view to produce the desired effect, of constraining them to proclaim their own shame, and to suspend the persecution which they had so wickedly commenced. Thus was our Lord relieved from every difficulty; and *his enemies "fell into the pit which they had dug" for him*.

It remains for us now to notice,

***~~II. In what manner he dismissed the woman—~~***

We hear of no triumph that he expressed over his disconcerted adversaries. He merely asks where they were; and finding that they had withdrawn, and no longer chose to appear in the quality of accusers, he dismisses the woman,

***~~1. With condescending kindness—~~***

"Woman, has no man condemned you? neither do I condemn you: go your way:" It is not my office to exercise the power of the civil magistrate; nor is it my wish to denounce the judgments of God against you. "I came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through me might be saved, [John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.17)." Go, improve the time that is now unexpectedly allotted you: be thankful that you are not now sent into the presence of your God with all your sins upon you: let the "space which is given you for repentance," be well employed: lose not an hour in seeking forgiveness with your God. Go to your chamber, and pour out your soul before him: and remember, that the mercy which you are experiencing at my hands in relation to your body, is an emblem of what I am ready to bestow upon your soul. "I came into the world to seek and to save the lost:" nor shall the vilest of the human race be condemned before me in the great and awful day, provided he penitently confess his sins, and humbly seek acceptance through me: "Though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18) and [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13)."

***~~2. With an authoritative admonition—~~***

Greatly as our Lord delighted in mercy, he would not so exercise it as to give the least countenance to sin. While therefore he dismisses her, he adds a solemn admonition, "Go, and sin no more." Think not lightly of your sins, because I have expressed such tenderness towards you; neither imagine that they will not be punished hereafter, if you continue in the commission of them. The "goodness and long-suffering and forbearance which you have experienced, would lead you to repentance," and, if they do not, they will aggravate your condemnation to all eternity.

Go therefore, and sin no more.

Let a sense of your past dangers deter you.

Let a consideration of the mercies given to you stimulate your exertions.

Let the hope of future mercies encourage you.

Let the prospect of a future judgment fix your purpose, and strengthen your resolution.

Above all, commit yourself to God, who alone is "able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The self-satisfied and self-applauding Christian—~~***

*Many who are vehement against flagrant transgressors, and many too who profess an outward reverence for Christ, are yet exceeding vile in the sight of the heart-searching God.* Before men, perhaps, they appear in a favorable light: but if all that they have thought and done in secret were written on their foreheads, they could not endure the sight of their fellow-creatures, but would retire from society, as these Scribes and Pharisees retired, filled with shame and confusion.

Let each one of us examine the records of his own conscience; and recollect all the transactions which have passed from his youth up to the present hour. Ah! who among us would venture, after such a survey, to justify himself? Know brethren, that God sees all that has passed, whether you see it or not. You may have forgotten it; but it is all recorded in the book of his remembrance, and will be exposed by him to the view of the whole assembled universe.

*Learn then to view yourselves as he views you, and to esteem yourselves as he esteems you.*Know, that you never have a just estimate of your own character until you see yourselves to be the chief of sinners. Cast away, I say, your high thoughts of yourselves, and learn to loath and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes.

***~~2. The sorrowful and self-condemning Christian—~~***

You see in the history before us how tender and compassionate the Savior is. If then conscience has arrested you, and brought you into his presence, remember that he is rich in mercy, and ready to forgive; and that he will never condemn any but the impenitent and unbelieving, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7). [1 Timothy 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15-16).

At the same time, I would affectionately caution you against mistaking the nature of true repentance. Perhaps conscience has condemned you, and you have felt ashamed and confounded on account of your great iniquities. But if you have gone no further, you are no true penitent. The Scribes and Pharisees advanced thus far; but they sought not mercy at the Savior's hands: they went away from him, fearing more the decrease of their reputation, than the loss of their souls. Had they been truly penitent, they would have blessed him who had thus flashed conviction on their minds, and have implored his more effectual power to change and renew their souls.

Be not contented then to resemble them; but *seek to know all the hidden abominations of your hearts, and to have them washed away in the Redeemer's blood*. Be assured that true repentance will lead you to Christ: and, if you do not find this effect from your convictions, you may know infallibly that your sorrow is not of "a godly sort," and that your very repentance needs yet to be repented of.

It is of great importance for you to make these distinctions; because many continue all their days guilty, but not humbled; condemned, but not forgiven.

***~~3. The Christian who professes to have obtained mercy of the Lord—~~***

The admonition given to the woman is equally addressed to every true believer. And here must I suggest a caution against a common, but fatal error. If persons abstain from some particular sins which they have before committed, they are ready to think that they have done all that is required of them. But*to turn from gross iniquities is a small matter; and to perform some particular duties is a small matter*. Pride and self-delight may carry us thus far: but the grace of God must carry us much farther. We must lay the axe to the root: we must put away "our besetting sin:" and must become "new creatures," and "be renewed in the spirit of our minds."

Mark this expression: it conveys a more complete idea of sound conversion than almost any other expression in the whole sacred volume: contemplate it: enter into it: beg of God to reveal to you its true import.

The bent of your minds was earthly: a directly opposite bent must now be given it; just as a river which recently flowed with rapidity towards the ocean, now flows with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head: the tide has turned, and completely changed its course.

Thus must it be with you: heavenly things must now have the place in your affections that earthly things once held; and the delight of your soul must be in them, as that of a licentious man is in his pleasures, or an avaricious man in his wealth. *To surrender up all your faculties and powers as a living sacrifice to God, is the proper fruit of his mercies, and the proper evidence of his grace*. Never think then that you have yet attained, but press forward for higher degrees of grace and holiness; and make it your endeavor to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

***~~#1650~~***

***~~Christ the Light of the World~~***

***~~[John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12).~~***

Then Jesus spoke again unto them, saying, "I am the light of the world: he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

*IT was customary with our blessed Lord to take occasion from things that were immediately before him to instill divine knowledge into his hearers.*

When he was at a *well*, he spoke of himself as a fountain of living water*.*

When mention had been made of the *manna*which was given to the Israelites in the wilderness, he represented himself as the bread that came down from Heaven, that men might eat of it and live for ever.

When he was passing through a *vineyard*, he set himself forth as the true and living vine, by a union with which all the branches were to bring forth fruit.

Thus, it would seem, in the passage before us, being early in the temple, verse 2, and beholding the sun shining bright upon him, he resumed his discourse which had been interrupted, and spoke to all the people, saying, "I am the light of the world."

We cannot but notice in this impressive declaration,

***~~I. The excellency of Christ—~~***

Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most splendid and majestic: and hence it is the most frequently selected to characterize our blessed Lord. The sun has in itself a fullness of light, and is the one source of light to our earthly world. In Christ also are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and from him alone is derived all spiritual light. It is he who enlightens all,

***~~1. By his instructions—~~***

To form a correct judgment of this subject, we would survey the state of the world before the coming of Christ. The darkness that prevailed is justly styled by the prophet, "gross darkness." The most learned philosophers could not absolutely determine whether there was a God; or, if there were, whether there were one or many.

They conceived that there were some beings superior to themselves; and them they called gods: but the characters they assigned to them, were such as would disgrace the lowest of the human race.

They felt themselves to be sinners; but the methods which they devised for expiating their crimes were beyond measure absurd.

They could not account for the sin and misery which they both saw and felt, nor could they prescribe any remedy for these disorders. "They were vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they showed themselves to be very fools, [Romans 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.21-22)."

But "the Dayspring from on high," the Lord Jesus Christ, "has visited us, to give light to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death [Luke 1:78-79](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.78-79)." He has declared to us:  
the nature and perfections of God,  
the means of reconciliation with him,  
the duties we owe to him and to each other,  
and whatever else can conduce to the regulating of our lives or the furthering of our happiness.

***~~2. By his example—~~***

Had *precepts*alone been given us, we would have been ready to construe them in such a way, as would best suit with our carnal prejudices and sensual inclinations. But by exhibiting in his own life a perfect pattern of holiness, he has cut off all occasion for doubt respecting the nature or extent of our duty.*We need only to walk as he walked, and we cannot err.*

Do we desire to ascertain what that service is, which we owe to*God?* we see in him, that we would have the whole law of God written in our hearts; and that it would be "our food and our drink to do his will."

Do we wish to know how we would conduct ourselves towards *our fellow-creatures?*We have an unerring rule set before us, in his unruffled meekness, his unexhausted patience, his unbounded love. In laying down his life for his enemies, he has shown us what we are to do, at least for the brethren, if not also even for our bitterest persecutors.

In short, we can be in no situation whatever, wherein his example will not serve as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths. If it does not show us the precise act we are to perform, it will show us infallibly the spirit we are to exercise.

***~~3. By his influence—~~***

The sun is of use to those only who have eyes to see it. But Jesus, at the same time that he imparts light, bestows upon us also the organs of vision whereby we may behold it. He "opens the eyes of our understanding;" and "shines into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." He not only causes "the day to dawn," but is also "the Day-star arising in our hearts, [2 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19)." He gives the spiritual discernment whereby alone we can discern the things of the Spirit, however clearly they were before revealed. Indeed, our reason is nothing more than a taper which He has lighted up in our minds: and much more is the faculty of comprehending the deep things of God, derived from him: so that that inspired testimony concerning him is strictly true, "He is the true light which lights every man that comes into the world [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9)."

From hence we are naturally led to consider,

***~~II. The blessedness of his followers—~~***

We regard with pity the inhabitants of the polar regions, who for half the year are statedly secluded from the cheering rays of the sun. We consider our quicker returns of light and darkness as incomparably more conducive to comfort and prosperity. But infinitely happier is he on whom the Sun of Righteousness has once arisen! For,

***~~1. He shall not walk in darkness—~~***

Once he was *guided altogether by erroneous principles.*So blind was he, that he "put evil for good, and good for evil; darkness for light, and light for darkness." Nor is this the case only with the ignorant and profane: it is equally true of those whose minds are cultivated, and whose lives are moral. Even Paul before his conversion, fraught as he was with the knowledge of the Scriptures, and zealous in the pursuit of righteousness, perpetrated the most horrible acts of wickedness under the idea of doing God service: "he truly thought with himself that he ought to do the things which he did."

But the follower of Christ, the true believer, Compare [John 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.46) with the text; is not allowed to live under the influence of such delusions: his views are rectified: *he beholds things in the light in which they are represented in the Scriptures*; he has learned from them what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and has his mind cast, as it were, into the very mold of the Gospel.

Once too *he indulged himself in corrupt habits*: whether more or less addicted to gross sin, he loved the ways of the world, and conformed himself to them: all his delight was in the things of time and sense. He lived as if he had nothing else to do, but to consult his reputation, ease, and interests in the world. But, having obtained mercy of the Lord, he now discerns the evil of such a life: he begins to see, that "to be thus carnally-minded is death:" and that there are objects infinitely nobler than those he has regarded, and more deserving his attention. Convinced of this, he "will not live any longer for the lusts of men, but to obey the will of God." Instead of "fulfilling any longer the desires of the flesh and of the mind," he strives henceforth to *mortify*them, and labors to "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

We must add yet again, that *he once walked in the darkness of distressing apprehensions*. God has said, and experience proves, that "there is no peace to the wicked." Every man in his unregenerate state is in bondage to the fear of death, and more or less under the terrors of a guilty conscience. The thoughts of death and judgment are painful to him; and he puts them far from him: he flees to business, to pleasure, to company, in order to dissipate those reflections which he cannot wholly avoid. He has an inward consciousness that he has not sought the Divine favor, and, in consequence of that, a secret fear that he shall not obtain it.

From such feelings as these, the believer in Christ is happily delivered. "He knows in whom he has believed, and that his adorable Savior is able to keep that which he has committed to him." He has learned to reckon *death*among the number of his friends, and to regard it as the door of entrance into his Father's presence. Instead of being harassed with a "fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation," he enjoys "that peace of God which surpasses all understanding."

***~~2. He shall have the light of life—~~***

There is a light which proceeds from life, and leads to life; and that light is his blessed portion. A dead man has no light at all: but a living man has senses given him, on purpose to guard him from destructive things, and to lead him to things conducive to his welfare. The sight, the hearing, the smell, the taste, the touch, have all their appropriate uses; and each has its peculiar office, in circumstances where the others can find no scope for exercise. They are so many sentinels, that guard every avenue of ill, and that give warning on the first approach of evil.

Thus protected is the follower of Christ: he has spiritual senses, which, being of quick perception to discern good and evil, give early notice of the things which might prove fatal to the soul. They serve as "a light to his feet, and a lantern to his paths." Solomon justly observes, that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the heart, [Proverbs 20:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 20.27)." This candle being duly trimmed, his way is made plain before his face; and he is enabled to walk without stumbling: "He walks in the light, as God is in the light;" and thus maintains sweet fellowship with God, and a sense of his pardoning love in Christ Jesus, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7).

If at any-time, through temptation or distress, this light burns dim, he cries to his Lord and Savior, who has promised to send him fresh supplies of his Spirit; and speedily does "light arise to him in his obscurity, and his darkness becomes as the noon-day, [Isaiah 58:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10)."

Thus guided through his whole life, he arrives at last at those blessed regions, "whereof the Lamb is the light, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)," and where "his Lord shall be an everlasting light, and his God his glory! [Isaiah 60:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

You can easily conceive the difference both in the *feeling*and the *safety*of one that walks in midnight darkness, and of one that travels in the light of the noon-day sun. O that all would make a just application of this thought to their own case, and resolve without delay to become followers of Christ! [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36). [Jeremiah 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16).

***~~#1651~~***

***~~Fitness for Heaven Necessary~~***

***~~[John 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.21).~~***

"Where I am going, you cannot come."

*THE generality of men conceive that there is no difficulty in securing Heaven, and hence they use no efforts to obtain an entrance there.*If told, that, in their present state, they could not by any means obtain admission to the Savior's presence, they would account it a very uncharitable and unwarrantable assertion; and would be as unable to account for it as our Savior's hearers were when they asked, "Will he kill himself? because he says, Where I am going, you cannot come." But they consider not what kind of a place Heaven is, or what state of mind is necessary for the enjoyment of it.

It is certain, however, that what our Lord again and again said to his hearers, [John 7:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.33-34); [John 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.33) with the text, is applicable to us at this day. They indeed expected a Messiah, while they rejected him whom God had sent; and therefore our Lord says so repeatedly, "You shall seek me, and shall not find me:" and so far his address to them is not applicable to us, who all acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. But what he adds, is as applicable to us as ever it was to them; since *in an unregenerate and unconverted state it is impossible for us ever to behold the face of God in peace.*

I am aware that this is an observation that must occasion painful apprehensions: but, if such persons still exist as those to whom the declaration was made, it is surely the office of love and charity to apprise them of it. You will therefore receive my friendly suggestions in the spirit with which they are offered to you, while I show,

***~~I. To whom this declaration was made—~~***

They are here clearly described by our Lord himself:

***~~1. The worldly-minded—~~***

"You are of this world; I am not of this world." Now the worldly are not only put in a state of contrast with the Savior himself, as in this and other places, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16), but with the children of God also: they are represented as being "wiser in their generation than the children of light, [Luke 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.8);" and as hating them on account of their stricter course of life: "If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19)."

Now it is really not difficult to discover to which of these opposite parties we belong. Let us only ask:

Which one do we more esteem?

Which one do we more desire?

Which one do we more delight in: the things of time and sense—or the things which are invisible and eternal?

I ask not, Which of the two engages more of our time? for our social and civil duties require a great deal of our time: and God himself permits us to labor six days, and to only reserve the seventh for him.

But the question is: On which of the two is our heart fixed? On which of the two do we mainly live and strive for: the things of this—or of the future world? If only we mark, which of the two chiefly engages our thoughts, when our minds are free to fix upon the things which are most interesting to us, we shall then see the real bias of our minds, and our true character as before God.

God has expressly warned us, that "if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16);" and therefore we are assured beyond all doubt that the lovers of this present world are justly placed among those to whom the declaration in our text pre-eminently pertains.

***~~2. The unbelieving—~~***

"If you do not believe that I am the One I claim to be, you shall indeed die in your sins." Now there is as great a difference between the believer and the unbeliever, as between those who are of this world, and those who are of God. Only see the conduct of believers, and the matter will be as clear as the light itself.

The *true believer*is humbled for his sins, and, under a consciousness of his utter inability ever to reconcile himself to God, he flees to Christ, and lays hold on him, and relies wholly upon his meritorious blood and righteousness, and glories in him as all his salvation and all his desire.

The *unbeliever*, on the contrary, neglects him, and seeks for himself some other ground of hope, if not openly and professedly—yet in the real feelings and dispositions of his soul.

Now it is easy to ascertain, whether from day to day we are bewailing our sinfulness and fleeing to Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before us; or whether we are resting satisfied with some attainments of our own, and only complimenting Jesus with the name of Savior, without laboring to obtain a saving interest in him, and cleaving to him with our whole hearts.

The exercises of our soul this very day will suffice to show us, in a great measure, to which of these classes we belong: and whether we are not of those who shall "die in their sins, and never be with Christ where he is." Beyond all doubt, the unbelieving soul will be excluded from his presence, and never be allowed to taste of his saving benefits.

Does this appear uncharitable? Then let me remind you, that it is the declaration, not of a fallible man, but of our Lord himself; and let me set before you,

***~~II. The grounds and reasons of it—~~***

It were quite sufficient that our Lord has declared it, even though we were not able to account for that which he has spoken: but we may well and satisfactorily account for the exclusion of such persons from the presence of God, and from the felicity of Heaven. For,

***~~1. There is nothing in Heaven suited to their taste—~~***

What do those persons desire as their supreme happiness on earth? Do they say with the Psalmist, "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us! [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)." No! they desire nothing beyond the things of time and sense. Some indeed desire only carnal pleasures, while others delight themselves chiefly in intellectual, pursuits. But still the objects of their desire belong to this world only; and there is no scope for the enjoyment or pursuit of them in Heaven. Here a man may have sensual gratifications of various kinds. But feasting, and dancing, and music, and all the other things which are here considered as sources of happiness, terminate with this life. The man who derives all his satisfaction from them, will find nothing in Heaven to please his appetite. And on this very account Heaven would be no Heaven to him, but only like a prison, where nothing palatable, nothing desirable was afforded to the unhappy tenant. He would be altogether out of his element: and what would be happiness to others, would be misery to him.

***~~2. They have an utter incapacity to enjoy Heaven, even if they were admitted there—~~***

Supposing for a moment, as our Lord says, that, "instead of coming into that sheepfold through the door, they have climbed up some other way," and obtained by some artifice, admission into the assembly of the just; what pleasure could they find either in the company or the employments of Heaven?

Could they delight themselves in a *Holy God*, whose purity would appal them, and who could not look upon them but with the utmost abhorrence, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13).

Could they find pleasure in the sight of that *Savior*, whom they have all their life long despised, and whose very "blood they have trodden under foot" by continuing in sin?

Would the presence of the *glorified saints and angels*be any source of comfort to their minds? With no one of them would they have the slightest possible communion: nor would so much as one of those holy beings admit them into their society.

Methinks that such persons getting into Heaven, would resemble King Uzziah, who went into the temple of God to offer incense: the priests, filled with disgust at his leprous state, "thrust him out thence; yes, he himself also hastened to go out! [2 Chronicles 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.20);" so little did the sanctuary of the Most High God befit him, and so little would their intrusion prove a source of happiness to them.

But neither would they find any comfort in the *employments*of Heaven. Never having obtained favor with God, or a saving interest in the Savior's merits, they could never join in the songs of praise which are offered there continually by the whole assembly of the redeemed. Nay, as in a concert here on earth, a man unskilled in music, with an inharmonious voice, and an instrument untuned, would, by his efforts to join the orchestra, only disturb the harmony of the whole, so it would be with them in Heaven, where their every note would produce the most hateful discord, and their odious deformity create one universal feeling of disgust.

***~~3. They are excluded from Heaven by an absolute and irreversible decree—~~***

God had appointed that those who would not obey the word, would find it a stumbling-block to them; and that those who would not make it "a savor of life, would find it to be a savor unto death, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)."

God has ordained that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9);" and that into Heaven "nothing shall enter that defiles, [Revelation 21:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.27)." In particular he has declared, that even the friendship of the world is incompatible with love to him, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4), and that he who believes not in Christ, shall perish everlastingly, verse 24 with [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36).

Now I ask: Will God reverse these decrees for us? Will he act contrary to his word for us? "Is he a man, that he would lie, or the Son of man, that he would 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)." Know then, that "if you live after the flesh, you shall die, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13);" and *to hope for Heaven in a carnal and unconverted state, is only to deceive your own souls*.

***~~Let me then request of you two things:~~***

***~~1. Inquire what measure of preparation you have for the enjoyment of Heaven?~~***

There is "a fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12)." There is a preparation of heart for it, without which Heaven would be no Heaven to you.

An ignorant fool would find no pleasure in the conversation of men of science, or in the polished society of courtiers. He would soon wish to leave such scenes, and to return to the company that was better suited to his habits and intelligence.

Just so, in Heaven there is one continued effusion of praise from every soul around the throne. Saints and angels join in one general chorus of praise and thanksgiving to God and to the Lamb.

Inquire then whether you have learned that song? Inquire whether you have yet tuned your harps, that you may bear your part in that concert? If you have not yet learned to play the higher parts of praise and thanksgiving, can you at least sound the lower notes of humiliation and contrition?

Do not think it hard to be put on this inquiry. It is not your minister, but an inspired Apostle, that calls for it at your hands: "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you—except you be reprobate, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)."

Examine carefully whether the things of this world or the felicity of Heaven is the higher in your esteem, and the object of your more diligent pursuit?

You can easily ascertain your proficiency in earthly things: search then and see whether you be growing daily in grace, and in a conformity to the Divine image? This inquiry will be made at last by the heart-searching God; and his sentence will be passed upon you in perfect accordance with your real state. I entreat you therefore to "judge yourselves" now, while "space is given you for repentance," that you may not be judged of the Lord, when your state will be irremediable and final.

***~~2. Let the testimony of your conscience produce in you its appropriate effects—~~***

If conscience bears witness that you have lived to yourselves and to the world instead of living for God and for eternity, begin without delay to implore mercy at the hands of God, and to seek that renovation of heart and life, without which you cannot be saved. Withdraw yourselves from "the world which lies in wickedness," and give up yourselves to Christ as his redeemed people. Let it henceforth be your daily labor to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.

But if you can call God to record, that notwithstanding your many defects, you do indeed set your affections on things above, rather than on the things of time and sense, then, rejoice and bless God for the work which he has wrought in your hearts; and look to him to "perfect in you the good work he has begun."

To you, beloved, I will reverse the text, and say, "Where Christ is, there shall you be also." In fact, he has promised, that "where he is, there shall also his servants be." He has actually "gone before, in order to prepare a place for you; and he will shortly come and take you to himself, that you may be with him forever! [John 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.22)."

In his intercessory prayer, he declared this to be his fixed purpose: "Father, I will, that those who you have given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me! [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24)." Look forward then to that blessed period, when you will be no longer at a distance from him, but enjoy his presence, and inherit his glory, for evermore!

***~~#1652~~***

***~~Danger of Rejecting Christ~~***

***~~[John 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.24).~~***

"If you do not believe that I am He, you shall indeed die in your sins!"

THE necessity of faith in Christ, in order to salvation, is not to be considered as a mere arbitrary appointment: it arises out of the very state into which mankind are fallen—a state in which it would be impossible for them to enjoy God, even if they were admitted into his immediate presence. They are at present laden and defiled with sin; and could derive no comfort from the sight of a holy God. *Their iniquities would for ever render them odious in his eyes, and him terrible in theirs*. They must be cleansed from their sins, before they can hold any communion with him as a Father and a Friend. But they can never wash away their own sins; nor find any other means of expiation besides that which God has ordained, even the blood of his only dear Son. Nor is there any way in which they can be saved by Christ, but by believing in him.

Here then we see, that, independent of any particular command respecting it, there is a necessity for faith in Christ, if ever we would be saved at all.

For we cannot go to Heaven with our sins upon us;  
and they cannot be removed, but by an atonement;  
and there is no atonement capable of removing them, but that of Christ;  
nor any means of being savingly interested in his atonement but by faith.

That we may see this truth in its just light, we will go back to the preceding chapter. Our Lord had told his unbelieving hearers, that he would soon be withdrawn from them; and that, in consequence of their rejecting the light, "they would never be able to come where he was, [John 7:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.33-34)." They, not able to comprehend his meaning, supposed that he intended "to go among the Gentiles:" where they, on account of their religion, could not follow him, [John 7:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.35-36). The next day he renewed to them the same solemn warning; saying, "I go my way; and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come, verse 21." On this, instead of humbly inquiring into his meaning, they scoffingly and impiously asked, "Will he kill himself? because he says, Where I go, you cannot come, [John 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.22)." 'No,' says our Lord, 'your sins will be a very sufficient barrier to keep you from me. You are altogether, in every disposition of your hearts, directly contrary to me: and in this state you will be left until death: and so dying, it will be impossible you would ever come where I am going, that is, into the beatific presence of my Father: "You are from beneath; I am from above: you are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins, verse 23, 24.' "

Now, this solemn warning is as applicable to us as to those to whom it was more immediately delivered: and, that we may not slight it as they did, I will proceed to show,

***~~I. What is comprehended in the faith here spoken of—~~***

At first sight, it appears as if nothing more were required than to acknowledge Jesus as the promised Messiah; and that, consequently, all who bear his name may be considered as possessed of the faith here spoken of. But if we go back to the time of our blessed Lord, we shall see that the faith of which he spoke, comprehended,

***~~1. A full persuasion of Jesus' Messiahship—~~***

This was necessary then—and it is no less necessary now. We greatly mistake if we think this a common attainment among those who call themselves Christians. The generality have no better reasons for believing Jesus to be the Messiah, than the Mahommedans have for their faith in that arch-impostor. I mean not however to say, that every Christian must have studied this point so accurately as to be able to answer all the objections of infidels: but, so far as to be able to "give a reason of the hope that is in him," and to justify the reliance which he places on the Savior, every true believer would have studied the point, and made up his mind upon it.

Circumstances, I grant, may have been so unfavorable to the attainment of this knowledge that a person's views may be very indistinct: but, where these have not been such as to preclude a reasonable hope of his acquiring this necessary information, a lack of it may well cause him to doubt whether he has ever possessed any true faith at all.

***~~2. A cordial acceptance of Jesus under that character—~~***

A speculative assent to the mere abstract truth of his Messiahship was never such a faith as he approved. Many there were who could not resist the evidence of his miracles, who yet were regarded by him as no better than aliens, in whom he could place no confidence, [John 2:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.23-25).

To exercise faith aright, we must receive him in all his offices. We must view him Jesus . . . .

as that *Prophet*, whom God has sent by his word and Spirit to enlighten us;

and as that *Great High-Priest*, who has made atonement for us, and now intercedes for us within the veil;

and as that *King*also, who is to reign over us, and to have "every thought of our hearts brought into captivity" to his holy will.

Here, then, the subject before us opens to our view. Faith is not a speculative assent, but a practical affiance that leads us to the Savior for everything that we stand in need of—for "wisdom, for righteousness, for sanctification, and for complete redemption." Then only do we truly believe, when we can say with the Apostle Paul, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~3. An entire devotion to Jesus, as his disciples—~~***

This our Lord expressly required of all his followers: "If any man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Nay, he required that this would be done in defiance of the whole world. He declared, that if any man hated not his father and mother, yes, and his own life also, in comparison with him—he could not be his Disciple.

Now, all this is essential to true faith. Whatever was requisite in those days, is requisite still. A man must be wholly given up to Christ; having no will but his; and no object, but to advance his glory. If we have true faith, we shall "henceforth live no more to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again."

Nothing less than this will constitute a living faith. Our Lord's assertion in relation to it clearly marks,

***~~II. The importance of it to our eternal welfare—~~***

***~~To "die in our sins" is a most fearful doom—~~***

The man, so dying, goes into the presence of his God with all his sins upon him; with those of early childhood, and those of inconsiderate youth, and those of maturer manhood, yes, and those committed even to the very hour of his departure hence.

Alas! what a catalogue is here! a mass numerous and heavy as the sands upon the sea-shore! And *for every distinct offence must the soul receive an appropriate recompense at the hands of God*. O! who can conceive the anguish of the soul at the instant of its appearance at the tribunal of its Judge! With what horror must it shrink back, to hide itself, if it were possible, under rocks and mountains!

And now, when challenged by his God, how mute is he, who once would vindicate himself with such assured confidence! Not for one action of his whole life can he now offer any excuse, nor urge any reason why he should not be consigned to the bottomless abyss in Hell. Thither, therefore, is he cast, with all his sins upon him; nor carries he with him so much as a ray of hope to cheer those regions of darkness and despair. Now he knows, what once he was so averse to believe, what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the Living God." Such is the doom that awaits the whole unbelieving world: "They drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and they are tormented with fire and brimstone, in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41); [Matthew 25:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.46). [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11)."

***~~This must be the doom of all who believe not in Christ—~~***

Our Lord has assured us of it: yes, he has repeated it again and again. And why has he so solemnly affirmed it? Was he disposed to create unnecessary alarm? or did he feel any pleasure in denouncing woes? No! it was from love he spoke: he desired the salvation of his hearers; and, therefore, while he encouraged them with words of grace, speaking to them with a wisdom and a tenderness that "never any man spoke," he warned them of the consequences of rejecting his gracious invitations.

Let it not, then, be thought unkind in us, if we also, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuade men! [2 Corinthians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.11)." It is not to excite unnecessary fears that we thus speak, but to avert the judgments that are impending over your heads. We would not willingly grieve you; but we dare not "prophesy unto you smooth things; we dare not prophesy deceits." Our God has told us, that "if we forbear to sound the trumpet of alarm, our own souls must perish." Nor will you be at all benefitted: for "you will die in your iniquities; and your blood will be required at our hands! [Ezekiel 33:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.8-9)."

If you doubt the truth of what we affirm, look at the frequent appeals which God makes to yourselves: look at the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man believed not in Christ, nor gave himself up to him: and when he died, "he died in his sins." The next that you hear of him is that he was "in Hell, lifting up his eyes in torments." His five brethren, who inherited his wealth, were following his steps; never dreaming where he was gone, or where they themselves were hastening. The man in torments earnestly entreated that one might be sent from the dead, to warn his surviving brethren of the certain outcome of their course. But that favor could not be granted. They had Moses and the prophets: and, if they would not receive their testimony, no other would be given to them.

So then you may see the certain consequence of unbelief: and, if you will not credit the testimony of the Lord Jesus, nothing remains for you, but to *feel*to all eternity what you cannot now be prevailed upon to believe and shun! [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3); [Hebrews 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.25); [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29).

***~~Permit me now to recommend to you,~~***

***~~1. An inquiry into your state, in relation to this matter—~~***

Do not take it for granted that you are true believers in Christ. The Jews thought that they believed Moses, while they were acting in direct opposition to his words. And, as they deceived themselves, so do you, while you imagine that you can be saved in any way but that of a total surrender of yourselves to Christ. You must be Christ's now, if you would be his hereafter: and if you will not give yourselves up to him, then you must "die in your sins."

I know how averse we are to believe this. Of the thousands that die around us daily, we never entertain a thought whether they died in their sins or not! It seems to us a matter of course, that a person dying goes to a state of happiness: and if a doubt were expressed in relation to the happiness of any one connected with us, we would resent it as the grossest insult.

But, I beg you, brethren, whatever charity you exercise towards others, be careful not to deceive yourselves. Others you may well "leave to their own Master:" but respecting yourselves let no doubt be allowed to remain. Call to mind the description we have before given of a saving faith, and examine yourselves by it. This is the advice of the Apostle Paul: "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)."*Let your state be ever so good, you can suffer no loss by self-examination*. The gold sustains no injury by being tried by the touchstone: nor can you, if you are true believers, sustains any injury by the strictest scrutiny. I entreat you, therefore, to "prove your own selves: so shall you have rejoicing in yourselves alone, and not in the delusive testimony of others, [Galatians 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.4)."

***~~2. A consideration of the doom that awaits the unbelieving soul—~~***

Doubtless, such a consideration must be painful. But yet, how much better were it to reflect on that doom, while by timely penitence it may be averted, than to sustain it through the endless ages of eternity. Reflect, I beg you, what it is to die in your sins? Think what your state would have been at this very hour, if you, by disease or accident, had been taken unprepared into the presence of your God? Ask yourselves, Whether at this moment you have any scriptural ground to believe that your sins have been blotted out; and that, if you died this very night, your transition would be from a world of vanity to a world of bliss? Think of the unhappy souls that are now gone beyond the reach of mercy; the hearers of our Lord, for instance, who would not regard his warnings, but turned them into ridicule. Would they, do you think, make light of such warnings now, if for a few short hours they could be restored to your state? Ah! think how soon their state may become yours! Methinks the very possibility of such an event is enough to make you tremble. "Today, then, while it is called today, harden not your hearts, lest you provoke God to swear, in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest."

***~~3. An attention to the blessed truth which our text implies—~~***

When our Lord says, "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins," who does not see what a glorious promise is implied in it; that, if we do believe in him, we shall not die in our sins?

Yes, this blessed truth is declared throughout the whole Scriptures. Hear what the Apostle said to the jailor. Under a dread of God's wrath, the convinced sinner cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and the answer which the Apostle gave was clear and full: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and you shall be saved! [Acts 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.31)." The same say I to you: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through the Lord Jesus Christ is preached unto you the remission of sins: and by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses, [Acts 13:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-39)." O! it is a blessed truth, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)." Their iniquities are blotted out, as "a morning cloud, [Isaiah 44:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.22);" they stand before God "without spot or blemish [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27);" "nor does God himself behold any iniquity in them, [Numbers 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.21)." Believe, then, in Christ, and "live unto him; so, whether living or dying, you shall be the Lord's [Romans 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.8)."

***~~#1653~~***

***~~The Liberty Which Christ Gives His People~~***

**[John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36).**

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

*WE are exceedingly backward to acknowledge our true state and condition.*In consequence of this we disregard the remedy provided for us, and deprive ourselves of all the blessings of salvation. Nevertheless our gracious Savior endures us with much long-suffering, and repeats to us the overtures of love and mercy.

Thus he acted towards those who denied their need of freedom. He might have shown that their assertions were false: for their ancestors had been in bondage both in Egypt and in Babylon; and at that very time the whole nation was under the Roman yoke. But our Lord waved the subject of civil liberty, and fixed their attention on a freedom of a very different kind: he showed them that, though they were the natural descendants of Abraham, they were the servants of sin, and would on that account, like Ishmael, be cast out: while those only, who were the sons of promise, would, like Isaac, abide in the house for ever. (Compare verse 35 with [Galatians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.28); [Galatians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.30).)

Then, speaking of himself as in a more peculiar manner "the Son," and as the seed in whom all nations would be blessed, he again repeated his offer, and encouraged them to accept it; thus also he addresses himself to us at this time.

It will be profitable for us to consider—

***~~I. In what respects we are in bondage—~~***

We of this nation may justly boast of our civil freedom; but we are, like all the rest of our species, under spiritual bondage.

***~~1. Under the curse of the law—~~***

The law of God requires perfect and perpetual obedience. It denounces also a curse against us for every transgression, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10). Its precepts have been violated by us in ten thousand instances, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19); [Romans 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.23). We all therefore, without exception, are obnoxious to its curse. This may well be considered as a state of wretched bondage, [Galatians 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.23).

***~~2. Under the power of sin—~~***

Sin has infected all the members of our body, and the faculties of our soul, [Psalm 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 53.3). What can be conceived to argue a state of slavery so much as this, [John 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.34). This construction is so obvious, that no Christian can doubt respecting it, [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16). The church of old confessed her iniquities to have been a sore bondage, [Isaiah 26:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.13), and Paul himself could find no better image whereby to express the evil and bitterness of his indwelling corruptions, [Romans 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14); [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23).

***~~3. Under the tyranny of Satan—~~***

The influence of Satan over us is often denied and ridiculed; but the wickedness of men is ascribed in Scripture to his agency, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2), and every impenitent sinner is expressly said to be in bondage to him, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

***~~4. Under the fear of death—~~***

Many will show a contempt for death on a field of battle, but all fear it in its more gradual approaches. Hence even the bravest are averse to meditate on death and judgment. This is declared to be a state of wretched bondage, [Hebrews 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.15).

Surely the Egyptian or Chaldean yoke was light in comparison with this; yet all may obtain a release from this yoke.

***~~II. How we may be delivered from it—~~***

***~~Vain are all attempts to liberate ourselves by our own strength—~~***

We cannot make satisfaction to God for one single breach of the *law*. To do this were beyond the power of the highest archangel. Nothing but the blood of Christ can ever atone for sin, [Hebrews 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4); [Hebrews 10:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.11-12); [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14).

We cannot by any means renew and sanctify *our own hearts*. There is not in us a sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). Our inclination and ability to do good can come from God alone, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13).

It is not in the power of fallen man to resist the assaults of *Satan*. There is provided for us armor of a heavenly temper, and in that alone can any man hope to obtain the victory, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11); [Ephesians 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.13).

We are no less unable of ourselves to disarm *death*of its sting. In spite of all our efforts its terrors will appal the stoutest heart.

***~~But "the Son" of God is both able and willing to deliver us—~~***

Christ, as "the Son," is heir and Lord of all things, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2). The very intent for which he came into the world was to give us liberty, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1). He has paid down his own life as the price of our redemption, [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19), and therefore may claim us as "his purchased possession." He is also commissioned to liberate us by his power, [Luke 11:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.20-22). All fullness resides in him for this very purpose, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18); nor will he withhold this blessing from any believing soul, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12).

Unspeakably blessed are they to whom this blessing is given—

***~~III. What glorious liberty we may obtain—~~***

The liberty which sinners enjoy is merely a shadow; but that which Christ will give, is real and substantial.

***~~1. He will free us from all our bondage—~~***

The *law*shall never be allowed to execute its curse upon us: [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1). Christ gave himself up as our surety, on purpose to redeem us from it, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13); it shall have no more power over us than a dead man over the wife that survives him, [Romans 7:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.1-4).

*Sin*also shall be cast down from the throne which it has erected within us; nor, though it may renew its assaults, shall it ever regain its dominion, [Romans 6:6-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.6-14). Christ will never allow this great end of his death to be frustrated [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14).

*Satan*himself too shall yield to the all-conquering arm of Jesus, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20), and flee from the face of the very basest of his saints. Contrast 2 Timothy 2:26 with [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7).

Nor shall *death*appear any longer formidable as an enemy, 1 Corinthians 15:55; it shall be accounted our gain, and numbered among our treasures, [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23). [1 Corinthians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22).

***~~2. He will introduce us to a state of perfect freedom—~~***

There is "a glorious liberty into which God's children shall be brought." Christ will pour into their hearts a spirit of adoption, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15), and admit them to the most intimate fellowship with himself, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20). The most difficult duties also he will render pleasant to their souls, [Psalm 119:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.32); nor will he confine his blessings to this present life. To all eternity shall his redeemed delight themselves in him: their capacity of enjoyment shall be inconceivably enlarged; and every power be freely exercised in its proper functions.

***~~Inferences—~~***

***~~1. How glorious a Savior is Jesus Christ!~~***

There is no bond-slave whom he will not liberate. He offers too this liberty "without money, and without price." He even esteems himself glorified in conferring it upon us. Let us all admire and adore his goodness, and by faith apply to him for this perfect freedom.

***~~2. How just will be the condemnation of those who perish!~~***

None ever perish but through their own fault; their condemnation is the consequence of their obstinate attachment to the bonds in which they are held, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19). O that men would reflect how they will one day condemn themselves!

Let it be remembered that such offers of mercy will never be made to us in the eternal world. This is a day of grace; but there will come a day of vengeance, [Isaiah 61:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.2). Let every one then lay the blame where it is justly due, and follow without delay the beneficial advice of David, [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12).

***~~#1654~~***

***~~The True Children of Abraham~~***

***~~[John 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.39).~~***

"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham."

*THERE is in men an extreme readiness to deceive themselves in reference to their state before God. Any delusion, however absurd, shall serve them for a ground of hope; and they will cling to it with as much confidence as if it were an express declaration of God himself*.

The Jews conceived that the mere circumstance of their descent from Abraham was sufficient to justify their expectation of the Divine favor, at the very time that they were living in all manner of iniquity. John the Baptist expostulated with them upon this head: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham as our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

Paul also warned them, that "all were not Israel who were of Israel; neither, because they were all the seed of Abraham, were they therefore, in a higher and more refined sense, his children [Romans 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6-7)." No! "if they were Abraham's children, in this sense," they, as our blessed Lord here told his persecutors, would do the works of Abraham. Here we have a test whereby our spiritual relation to Abraham may be ascertained: and we shall do well to consider it,

***~~I. For the informing of our judgment—~~***

The more we enter into the true import of this declaration, the more shall we be convinced that it contains,

***~~1. A reasonable test—~~***

There are enthusiasts in the world who will persuade themselves that they are the Lord's people, because they have had a *dream*whereby it has been made known to them; or, because they have had some portion of the Holy Scriptures applied to their souls in so forcible a manner as to convince them that the testimony came to them from God himself. But all this is a mere delusion.

I say not that God may not reveal to any man whatever he pleases: but I do say, that we have no reason whatever to expect that God will make known to us, by revelation, anything which, without such a miraculous intervention, may be easily and safely deduced from his blessed word. He has told us, that "a tree is to be known by its fruits;" and that the same means whereby we ascertain the quality of what is natural, must be used for the discovering of what is spiritual; or, in other words, that men are to be known and judged by the fruits which display themselves in their lives. This we all acknowledge to be reasonable, in forming our estimate of a tree; and it is no less so as a test for discovering the state and quality of our souls.

***~~2. An impartial test—~~***

There is no man whatever who may not here find a looking-glass in which to behold his own face. The old, the young, the rich, the poor, the learned, the unlearned, may all judge themselves by this test. Of course, some allowance must be made for the different capacities of men, and the different opportunities which they have enjoyed of serving God. We do not expect the same degree of improvement from one who has possessed but two talents, which we look for from him who has had ten talents committed to his care. "From him to whom God has committed much, he will expect the more." But, making due allowance for these circumstances, every child of man may apply to himself this test, and may form, by means of it, a just estimate of his real character.

***~~3. A certain test—~~***

We are assured, by our Lord himself, that "a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit, nor can a bad tree bring forth good fruit." There is but one principle in the world that will sanctify the soul, and that is faith. And *faith, if genuine, cannot but be productive of universal holiness*. Hence we may lay it down as an infallible rule: "By this, the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: he who does not righteousness, is not of God, [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10)."

Now, then, let us adopt this test,

***~~II. For the trying of our state—~~***

Of course, our first endeavor must be to learn what were Abraham's works; for, until we have ascertained that point, we cannot institute a comparison between him and us, or learn with any accuracy how far we resemble him. Now, our Lord complained of his hearers, that, instead of believing his word and obeying his voice, they sought to kill him: "Now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth which I have heard of God. This Abraham did not do." No!

***~~Abraham believed all that God revealed to him, and obeyed all that God commanded him—~~***

God revealed to him, that he would have, by Sarah, a son, from whom would proceed a progeny as numerous as the stars of Heaven and as the sands upon the sea-shore; and, finally, a seed, in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. But no less than twenty-five years did he wait for this promised seed; even until, according to the course of nature, he could not have a child; he being one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety. But did his faith fail him? No! "he never once staggered at the promise through unbelief;" but against hope, he believed in hope; "being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able also to perform, [Romans 4:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16-21)."

At the same time that this revelation was given him, a command was also issued, that he should "leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house; and go to a land which should in due season be pointed out to him, [Genesis 12:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.1-4);" and without hesitation did he yield obedience to this strange mandate, [Hebrews 11:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8).

Another more remarkable command was given him afterward, even to take this very child of promise, and offer him up for a burnt-offering on a mountain that would be pointed out to him. Instantly, without so much as communicating with his wife upon the subject, he took the lad and prosecuted his journey with him, for the space of three days, to the place appointed; and there proceeded to offer him up, in the way that had been enjoined. Here was another act of obedience that never had its parallel since the foundation of the world, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19).

***~~Now, then, see whether you do these works of Abraham—~~***

Of course, we have not ourselves received either the same revelations or the same commands. But we may see whether we have the *same principle of faith*as he, and whether it operates to produce the like obedience. To us is that Promised Seed revealed; and we are told to look for all blessings from him. Yes, Christ is that Promised Seed, in whom alone can any man obtain the blessings of salvation.

Are we then going to him, and relying on him, and receiving from him all that we need for the salvation of our souls?

Are we looking to him daily, and to him alone, for "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption?"

O! inquire whether you are thus living a life of faith in the Son of God, as having loved you, and given himself for you.

Then see, whether, in compliance with God's command, you have come out from the ungodly world, and set out upon a journey towards that land, that good land flowing with milk and honey, which, however, you never have seen, nor can see until your pilgrimage shall have come to a close.

And are you, in your way thither, sacrificing to God your dearest interests and most darling lusts? Say, do you take your very Isaac, and sacrifice him with your own hand? This will show you whose children you are: for *none but a child of Abraham can ever so resemble that father of the faithful*: while it is equally certain that "every child of his, will thus walk in his steps [Romans 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.12)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Make use then, I beg you, of this test, for the ascertaining of your state—~~***

You are not Christians because you were born of Christian parents, and have been educated in the Christian faith. *True Christianity is seated in the heart, and displays itself in the life*, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29).

Remember, there is no medium between children of God and children of the wicked one: so that, if it cannot be said with truth that God is your Father, then it must be said, "You are of your father the devil verse 44;" and with him must you take your portion, even "with him, whose you are, and whom you serve."

I beg you, then, "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; and prove your own selves" with the utmost diligence; lest, while you call yourselves Abraham's children, and hope to "sit down with him for ever in the kingdom of your God," you be disclaimed by him at the last, and be "thrust out of the mansion, [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28)." where he dwells, and where no unclean thing can ever enter.

***~~2. And use also this example as a stimulus to your exertions—~~***

See the heights to which your father Abraham attained; and strive, to the utmost of your power, not to come short of them.

***~~#1655~~***

***~~Love to Christ a Test of Our Relation to God~~***

***~~[John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42).~~***

Jesus said unto them, "If God were your Father, you would love me."

IF experience did not convince us, we could scarcely believe that *presumption*would be so rooted in the heart of man as we find it is. That it would exist, not only without any grounds, but in opposition to the strongest possible evidence, and be held fast with a pertinacity which nothing can shake, is truly surprising!

Yet so it is: *men believe that God is their Father, though not one feature of his image is found upon them, and their resemblance to Satan is complete*. The Jews accounted themselves children of God merely because of their physical descent from Abraham, his friend: and when our Lord endeavored to show them, from their works, that they could have no spiritual relation either to Abraham or to God, they could not so much as understand his words; so strange and incomprehensible did his distinctions appear. But, as he had just before shown them that their works disproved their relation to Abraham, so now *he appeals to their works as undeniable evidences that they were not children of God*, "If God were your Father, you would love me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

***~~I. Consider the test here proposed—~~***

Our Lord is proving that his obstinate opponents neither were, nor could be, children of God: and he gives them a test whereby they may try themselves. Now this test was the most easy, and most certain, that could be imagined: for if they were children of God,

***~~1. They would have in themselves a disposition to love—~~***

God is love; and all his children bear his image, especially in this particular. However vile they may have been in their unregenerate state, "living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another," by regeneration their evil dispositions are mortified, and a spirit of humility and love becomes the governing principle of their souls.

This change is *universal*: it is the leading feature by which every child of God is known. The lack of it, whatever else we may possess, infallibly proves us children of the wicked one. "Though we would know all the mysteries of our holy religion, and have a faith that can remove mountains, and give all our goods to feed the poor, and even give our bodies to be burnt for Christ, if we had not the principle of love in our hearts, we would be only as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."

***~~2. They would find in Christ whatever was suited to conciliate their regard—~~***

This our Lord particularly specifies. He had "proceeded and come forth from God," in a way in which no creature ever had. He was the Messenger of the Lord Almighty: he had not come of his own mind, like the false prophets, but was sent from God; as his credentials abundantly testified. Nor was he doing his own will, but the will of Him that sent him. Nor did he seek his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent him.

Seeing then that he was the Father's Messenger to them; that he was come not only to reveal the way of salvation to them, but to obtain salvation for them, by bearing their sins in his own body on the tree.

Seeing that in the prosecution of this work he had displayed such unerring wisdom, such indefatigable diligence, such invincible patience, such almighty power, and such unbounded love—could they do otherwise than love him, if they were children of God? Could they be blind to so much excellence, and insensible of so much kindness, if God were their Father? Impossible. It could not be that God would leave his own children so much under the power of the devil, as to reject the mercy he had prepared for them, and murder the Messenger whom he had sent to redeem them.

That we may see more clearly the suitableness of this test, we will,

***~~II. Compare it with other tests which men devise for themselves—~~***

*Every man has some ground on which he builds his hopes, and some test whereby he tries his title to Heaven.* This test varies according to the attainments which each person has made, or thinks he has made, in religion; every one fixing his own standard, and so drawing the line as to include himself within the number of God's elect. They are children of God, because,

***~~1. They have committed no gross sin—~~***

Be it so—they have kept within the bounds which the world prescribes for our moral and religious conduct. But is this sufficient to prove them children of God? Yes, rather, does not the delight which they feel in consequence of this partial obedience prove them indisputably to be children of the devil? What is, in fact, the language of their hearts? Is it not this? 'It is needless to love and serve God: to obey his law is quite superfluous: all that we need to do, is, to abstain from gross sin: if we do that, we need not alarm ourselves about the displeasure of God: we are in no danger of perishing: we need not trouble ourselves about a Savior: we have all the righteousness that God requires, and may look forward with confidence to our final acceptance with him.'

Yes, this, I say, is the language of their hearts: and I leave you to judge how far such a state of mind can be an evidence of their being children of God.

In truth, all the gross sins that they could possibly commit would not more clearly prove them children of the devil, than this impiety: the weight and number of their sins indeed might be increased; but, as a test, nothing can be more decisive of their state, than such vain confidence as this.

***~~2. They approve of the doctrines of the Gospel—~~***

It matters little what doctrines we embrace, unless they operate to the renovation of our souls. Our Lord intimates that many will express a considerable degree of zeal in his cause, preaching his Gospel, and casting out devils in his name, who yet *will be rejected by him at last, because they did not experience any sanctifying efficacy from his Gospel*; "their saying, Lord, Lord, will not avail them anything, because they did not the will of his heavenly Father."

Indeed a knowledge of the Gospel tends rather to aggravate the guilt of those who do not *practically*embrace it; because they sin against greater light, and against the convictions of their own conscience.

The Jews were filled with zeal for the law of Moses, and were ready to put our Lord to death for supposed violations of it: but were they therefore children of God? No! though they pretended such high respect for the law, they did not themselves keep the law, as our Lord told them; and that very law would condemn them in the last day.

***~~It is plain therefore that an assent to any system of divine truth can never be an adequate test of our relation to God.~~***

***~~3. They have experienced a change both in their views and conduct—~~***

This comes to nearly the same point as the two preceding: for the circumstance of our having formerly been more erroneous in our views, or more wicked in our conduct, can never make us right, if we stop short of that *supernatural change*which God requires. It is true that a *reformation of our life*seems to manifest the operation of divine grace, and in that view to sanction a confidence that we are children of God. But Herod still continued a child of the devil, notwithstanding, in compliance with John's admonitions, "he did many things." The stony-ground hearers are represented as experiencing a great and joyful change; and the thorny-ground hearers even bring forth fruit, and continue to do so to their dying hour; yet neither the one nor the other are acknowledged by God as his children, because they "bring forth no fruit unto perfection."

***~~4. But view, in opposition to all these tests, the one which our Lord proposed to the Jews—~~***

That is perfect and complete; and will decide the point beyond all possibility of mistake. Let it only be clearly ascertained that we love Christ, and our relation to God will be unquestionable: for though it may be said, that the love of Christ is not of itself a performance of all our duty; yet it must be said, on the other hand, that it is a principle which will yield universal obedience: nor is it possible to have a true love to Christ in our hearts without loving, and longing to fulfill, the whole will of God.

While therefore the tests which men adopt for themselves are universally defective and fallacious, this is perfectly adequate to the end proposed: for no man can be a child of God who cannot abide that test; nor can any man be a child of Satan, if the love of Christ is found in his heart.

Let us then proceed to,

***~~III. Try ourselves by it—~~***

The inquiry is simple:

**1.** **Do we love his person?**

"To them that believe, he is precious;" "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." Is he so to us? Have "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father?" Have we seen him to be "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" Have we seen concentered in him all divine and human excellence, so as to be constrained to say, "Who is like unto You?" And do we "account all things but rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of him?"

If we love him aright, our love to him must infinitely exceed all creature-attachment: life itself must have lost its value, in comparison with his will and his glory.

To say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!" must be the summit of our ambition, more in our estimation than ten thousand worlds. Inquire then whether this be indeed the habit of your minds? The splendor of the sun eclipses the feebler radiance of the stars: and in like manner will the glory of the Sun of Righteousness, if he is indeed beheld by us, cause all sublunary glory to vanish from before our eyes.

***~~2. Do we love his precepts and ways?~~***

"He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me," says our Lord himself. We know how strongly even creature-affection will operate to make us consult the wishes, and perform the will, of the object beloved. The love of Christ will assuredly operate in the same manner: it will "constrain us to live, not to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again." His commandments, whatever self-denial they may require, will never appear grievous; but we shall account his service to be perfect freedom. In proportion as "God enlarges our hearts," it will be our delight to "run the way of his commandments."

How is it then with us in this respect? Are we panting after higher degrees of holiness, and laboring with augmented diligence to do whatever will be pleasing in his sight? Are we "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before," accounting nothing attained while anything remains to be attained, and longing to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?" This, this is the fruit of love. If we say that we love Christ while we are strangers to this frame, "we are liars, and the truth is not in us [1 John 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.4)."

***~~3. Do we love his salvation?~~***

It cannot fail but that, if we love Christ, we must love that glorious plan of salvation which he has revealed to us, "and glory above all things in the cross of Christ." There will appear a suitableness in it, a perfect correspondence with all our wants and necessities. *The atonement which Christ has offered for us will be regarded with wonder and admiration, as the most mysterious fruit of divine wisdom, and the most stupendous effort of divine love!*The opening made by it for the harmonious exercise and united display of all the divine perfections will fill the soul with rapture, and constrain it to vie with all the hosts of Heaven in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who 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 upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!"

***~~4. Do we love his glory?~~***

We shall not be indifferent to this, if we love him in truth: we shall wish that his *name*may be known, his *salvation*enjoyed, and his *glory*be exalted, throughout all the earth. As those who preceded his advent longed for his appearance upon earth, so shall we long for his fuller manifestation to the world, that Heaven itself may be brought down to earth, and all the kingdoms of the world be his undivided empire. It will grieve us to see that any of the human race are ignorant of him, and that he is dishonored by so many of those who enjoy the light of his Gospel. We shall be praying from our inmost souls, "Your kingdom come; your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." If we can do anything for the conversion of others, we shall gladly exert ourselves to the utmost; if by any means we may be the honored instruments of extending his dominion, even though it would be only over the soul of one single individual.

What now does conscience say to these things? Have we indeed the love of Christ in us; and does it extend thus to everything relating to him, his *person*, his *ways*, his *salvation*, his *glory*?

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who can stand this test—~~***

Happy indeed are you, who, when Christ puts the question to you, "Do you love me?" can answer, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." You assuredly are children of God; and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!" Yet remember, that your evidence of this relation exists only in proportion as the love of Christ reigns in your souls. If any sin whatever has *dominion*over you, your evidence is destroyed, or rather, it is evident you are not the Lord's. This is so strongly asserted by God himself, that we would wish you never for one moment to lose sight of it, lest your presumption be like that of the Jews, and issue, like theirs, in everlasting ruin! [1 John 3:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.6-10).

***~~2. To those who are condemned by it—~~***

These, alas! are the great majority of the professing Christian world. *If the love of self, or the love of the world, had been the test of our relation to God, then would he have had many children among us, whose evidence would be clear, and their claim indisputable.* But we must stand or fall by another test, even by that proposed by our Lord himself. Compare [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22).

See then what you have to do. You have not to fulfill the whole law in order to become children of God; (that were indeed a hopeless case,) but to get the love of Christ in your hearts. And can you feel any backwardness to that? Methinks, the difficulty would be to refrain from loving him. Only think *who*he is; and what he has *done*and suffered for you. Only think what excellencies unite in him, and how great will be the comfort of loving him. Only think how willing he is to reconcile you to God, and to bring you into the family of Heaven. Only believe in him, love him, and give yourselves to him—and all shall yet be well with you, both in time and eternity!

***~~#1656~~***

***~~Unbelief Traced to its Source~~***

***~~[John 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.46).~~***

"If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?"

ONE would reasonably suppose, that if Almighty God were to become a man, and to labor for the instruction of his creatures in a way of daily and familiar fellowship, and were to confirm his testimony by miracles without number—it would be impossible for men to withstand the influence of his word. But the experiment has been made; and men have shown a degree of perverseness, of which one could scarcely have conceived them capable.

Sometimes they would endeavor to justify their opposition, by accusing our Lord Jesus of violating the law of Moses. But they were invariably put to shame; the falsehood and malignity of their charges being exposed by him with unanswerable force and demonstration. It was to opponents of this description that he addressed the words before us: "Which of you convinces me of sin? And, if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?"

From these words, I will take occasion to mark,

***~~I. The prevalence of unbelief—~~***

***~~Men did not believe even our Lord himself—~~***

He spoke to more advantage than any other person ever did.

He spoke with more *wisdom*: his very enemies were constrained to say, "Never has any man spoke like this man, [John 7:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.46)."

He spoke with more *authority*: in this respect he differed widely from the Scribes and Pharisees, [Matthew 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.29), yes, and from Prophets and Apostles too: "Truly, truly, *I say*unto you," was with him a common mode of uttering his instructions.

He spoke with more *grace*, so that his adversaries themselves wondered at the gracious words that proceeded from his lips, [Luke 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.22).

He confirmed his word with more *miracles*: for he alone, in the short space of three years, wrought more miracles than ever were wrought, either before or since, from the foundation of the world to the present moment.

Moreover, in confirmation of all that he said, *he appealed to Moses*, whom the Jews themselves professed to venerate, and of whose inspiration they had no doubt. Yet the people would not believe him: though they could not controvert one word that he uttered—yet would they not receive his declarations.

The *tidings*which he brought to them were such as one might have supposed they would receive with all readiness of mind: yet would they not believe him.

He declared himself *sent from God*to be their deliverer from sin and Satan: and he assured them, that if they would believe in him, he would make them "free indeed, verse 36;" free from the guilt of all their sins; free from the condemnation due to them; free also from the power and dominion of sin; and free to serve their God in newness of heart and life. But still it was all in vain: for they would not believe his testimony in any respect.

***~~Nor are his servants believed at this day—~~***

Every faithful servant of Christ bears the same testimony that Christ himself did; and his one object is to commend Christ to men as the Redeemer of the world. We declare:  
that men are in a state of bondage;  
that no man can deliver himself;  
that Christ is sent of God to be the Savior of the world; and  
that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."

We cannot work miracles in confirmation of this doctrine: but we can appeal to the miracles by which it was confirmed in the days of Christ and his Apostles.

And not only to the Scriptures do we refer, in proof of our declarations, but to the authorized standard of truth contained in the Articles and Homilies of the Established Church. We bring also the very prayers which every member of the Established Church uses from time to time; and we do not hesitate to say, that every doctrine not contained in those formularies is undeserving of any serious regard.

Yet men will not believe us, any more than they believed our blessed Lord. They will cry out against us, as introducing new doctrines, though they are so fully maintained by our own Church, and by all the Apostles and Prophets from the foundation of the world. Let a minister preach any self-righteous doctrines subversive of the Gospel, and he will be credited by all: but where the Gospel comes, a division immediately ensues; and, if some receive the word, vast multitudes will be found to reject it.

To account for this unbelief, I will point out,

***~~II. The source from whence it flows—~~***

Men can give no satisfactory reason for it: for they have in their own minds somewhat of a conviction that what they oppose is true. Hence our Lord said, and we also may adopt his words, "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" The true reason of men's unbelief is, that they have within them "an evil heart," from whence it proceeds, [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12). In answer to our Lord's question, then, I will tell you why you do not believe.

***~~1. You will not inquire into what you hear—~~***

Men hear us, as they heard our blessed Lord: but they will not examine whether what they hear agrees with the voice of inspiration, or whether it corresponds with their own experience.

We tell them of their guilt;  
we declare to them their danger;  
we make known to them the way of salvation.

But whether they assent to what they hear, or dissent from it, they alike are sunk in unbelief; because they will not take the pains necessary for investigating the subject, or ascertaining the agreement of our statements with the truth of God.

In this the inhabitants of Thessalonica showed themselves peculiarly defective, while the Bereans prosecuted a wiser and better plan: "The *Bereans*were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, to see if these things were so: and therefore many of them, it is said, believed, [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12)." *If men will leave truth unexplored, it is no wonder if they doubt its excellence, or deny its very existence.*

***~~2. You are averse to the truth, as far as it comes before you—~~***

Our Lord's hearers "believed him not, because he told them the truth, verse 45." And so it is now.

If we declare to you your undone state, you do not like to hear of it.

If we affirm the impossibility of saving yourselves by anything that you can do, and the indispensable necessity of looking for salvation through Christ alone—you are offended, and represent us as depreciating good works, and encouraging licentiousness.

If we call you to renounce the world, and to give up yourselves to the service of your God, you are displeased, because we would tear you from your idols, and call you to a life which you do not desire.

Our Lord tells us, that "the world hated him, because he testified of it that its works were evil, [John 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.7)." And this constitutes the peculiar guilt of unbelief; as our Lord has said: "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world; and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that does evil, hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds would be reproved: but he who does the truth, comes to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God, [John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-21)."

We have a striking example of this in the chief priests and elders, who demanded by what authority our Lord drove the buyers and sellers from the temple. He, instead of giving them a direct answer, put a question to them concerning John, desiring them to say, "whether his baptism was from Heaven, or of men." They saw that if they acknowledged it to be from Heaven, he would ask, "Why then did you not believe him?" and, not choosing to confess the truth, declined answering his question at al,l [Matthew 21:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.23-27).

Thus the same *dishonesty*prevails among us: and, even when convinced in our minds respecting the truth of a statement, *we refuse to admit its truth, because it militates against our principles or habits.*

***~~3. You are determined to hold fast your lusts, which are condemned by it—~~***

Men love the world, and will hear of nothing that requires them to renounce it. They desire to stand high in the estimation of men, and will not conform to sentiments or habits which will endanger the loss of it. They are often persuaded in their minds that what they hear is true and good; but then they consider how far their adoption of it will interfere with their worldly interests.

Among the chief rulers, we are told, many believed on Christ: but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they would be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, [John 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42)." And hence our Lord said to his hearers, "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only, [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44)." This is at the root of unbelief, in all instances where much instruction has been given; "Men hate to be reformed; and therefore cast God's word behind them, [Psalm 50:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.17)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who persuade themselves that they already believe—~~***

If a *mere intellectual assent*to the truths of Christianity were real faith, there would be no further room for that complaint which, all the Prophets and Apostles made, "Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1)." But it is not faith; or, at least, it is only "the faith of devils, [James 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19)." Saving faith would bring you to a cordial reception of the Lord Jesus Christ in his proper character, as the Redeemer of men, and the Savior of the world.

The Jews denied that they were in bondage, verse 33; and so do the generality of men among ourselves: and hence they disregarded the offer of a Deliverer, as we also do. But this proved them to be in unbelief: and it proves the same respecting us.

I beg you, brethren, deceive not yourselves with the idea that you are believers, while your faith is inoperative and unproductive. If your faith does not bring you to Jesus as your only hope; if it does not bring you to him to be made free indeed—free from sin, as well as free from guilt; I declare unto you, that you are yet in unbelief, "you are yet in your sins, verse 24."

While you imagine that an unproductive assent to the Gospel is saving faith, you deceive your own souls. You may call us Antinomians, for exalting the exclusive efficacy of faith to save the soul: but *you are the Antinomians, who maintain your faith to be saving while it produces no sanctifying effects upon you*.

***~~2. Those who think that they have no need of faith—~~***

It has been said, that his faith cannot be wrong, whose life is in the right. But no man's life can be right, until he is united unto Christ by faith. He lacks that principle which alone can sanctify the soul. But, let our sanctification be ever so perfect, will any man presume to put that in the place of Christ's atoning sacrifice? Will any man rely on his own merits, rather than on Christ's obedience unto death? Ah! fatal error! Not even Paul himself could be saved by the works of the law; and therefore he "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)."

In this way must every one of you be saved. You must renounce all dependence on yourselves, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ as your only hope. If you will not believe this, go and try the experiment: go and try by your own righteousness to satisfy the justice of Almighty God; and by your own arm to vanquish all your spiritual enemies. But both the one and the other of these things are impossible to mortal man. Therefore go with all humility to the Son of God; and know, that "if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

***~~#1657~~***

***~~Abraham's Views of Christ~~***

***~~[John 8:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.56).~~***

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it, and was glad."

ONE cannot read any of our Lord's discourses without seeing the need of a spiritual discernment. For lack of it, his hearers could not understand his plainest assertions. It being his object to convey spiritual instruction, he used such expressions as were suited to that end: but his hearers annexed only a carnal sense to them, and therefore conceived of him as talking like a maniac; "You have a devil, and are mad!" One expression in particular gave them the highest offence: he had said, "If any man keeps my words, he shall never taste of death." This they interpreted as relating to the death of the body; and, well knowing that Abraham and the prophets had all died, they could not endure such arrogance as that assertion implied; since it, in fact, exalted him above Abraham himself. Though they misconstrued his meaning, our Lord would not deny the inference which they drew from his words; but, on the contrary, confirmed it; and told them, that contemptible as they thought him, Abraham himself had "eagerly desired to see his day" and, on being favored with a sight of it, "had greatly rejoiced." At this they stumbled still more: and, on being further assured by him that he existed before Abraham was born, they took up stones to stone him.

In the assertion before us, however ridiculous it appeared to their carnal apprehensions, is contained a most important truth: to illustrate which, we shall show,

***~~I. What were Abraham's views of Christ—~~***

To mark this with precision is no easy matter. If we suppose that Abraham understood the types as we do, his views of Christ were complete indeed: for, from the appearance of Jehovah to him in human shape, [Genesis 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.2); [Genesis 18:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.22); [Genesis 18:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.25); [Genesis 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.27); [Genesis 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.30), he would behold the *incarnation*of Christ. And from Melchizedek, to whom Abraham himself offered tithes of all that he possessed, and from whom also he received a blessing, [Genesis 14:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 14.17-20), he would know the everlasting *priesthood*of Christ, and the necessity of depending on him for all spiritual blessings.

Moreover, from his being ordered to offer Isaac upon an altar on Mount Moriah (the very place where Christ was afterwards crucified;) and from Isaac being restored to him, when in Abraham's purpose he was already dead; he would learn the *sacrifice of Christ by the hand, as it were, of his own Father*, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10), and his resurrection from the dead. And as he is said to have made this offering "by faith," and to have "received his son from the dead in a figure," we are by no means certain that he did not see the mystery contained in that remarkable transaction. See [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19).

But we wish always to lean to the safe side in our interpretations of Holy Writ, and rather to assert too little than too much: we therefore content ourselves with ascribing to Abraham such views only as the New Testament writers have clearly assigned to him. He saw then,

***~~1. The person and work of Christ as a Savior—~~***

He saw that there was some particular *person*who would spring from him, distinct from, and superior to, all his other descendants, [Galatians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.16). He saw that the *covenant*which God had condescended to make with him was confirmed and ratified in that particular individual, [Galatians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.17). He saw that that person was to be a source of blessings to mankind; and that, not to one nation only, but to all the nations of the earth. He saw, that though the land of Canaan was promised to him and his posterity, this was not the only, or the chief, blessing which they were to inherit: on the contrary, he regarded Canaan only as a type of a better inheritance, [Hebrews 11:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.9-10); [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16); and saw distinctly, that grace and glory were the special benefits which the promised Seed would obtain for them [Luke 1:68-75](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.68-75). Compare with [Galatians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.14); [Galatians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.18). Whether he knew precisely in what manner Christ was to obtain these things for us, we do not undertake to determine; but that Christ was to be the one fountain of these blessings to the world, he knew assuredly: for on that very truth he grounded all his hopes of salvation.

***~~2. The method of a sinner's justification through him—~~***

We are continually told, "that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness." But was it the act of faith that constituted his justifying righteousness before God? If so "he has whereof to glory;" (in direct opposition to Paul's assertion); and he was saved by works, and not by faith alone, [Romans 4:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.1-5). (for faith, as an act of our own, is a work, as much as love, or any other act).

No! it was by the *object*of faith that he was justified, even by that promised Seed, who died for him upon the cross: and it was to that promised Seed that he looked for a justifying righteousness before God, [Romans 3:21-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-26); [Romans 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18).

It may be said, in opposition to this, that James says he was justified by works, and particularly by offering up his son Isaac upon the altar, [James 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.21-23). But a very little consideration will suffice to show, that he does not contradict the assertions of Paul. *When*was Abraham justified? I answer, the very moment he believed the declaration of God with respect to the promised Seed, [Genesis 12:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.1-3); [Genesis 15:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.5-6). But this was long before any of those acts of obedience for which we might suppose him to have been justified: it was no less than twenty-four years before he was circumcised, (compare [Genesis 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.4) with 17:1, 24 and [Romans 4:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.9-12);) and consequently, forty, if not fifty, years, before that act of obedience which James refers to, [Genesis 22:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.1-2).

This indisputably proves, that the offering up of Isaac was not the *ground*of his justification before God; but that it was only an *evidence of the truth and sincerity of that faith*whereby he was justified. The righteousness of Christ was that by which he was justified. *His faith was only the means of his justification; and his works were the evidence of his justification*. By faith he apprehended Christ; and by offering up his son (from whom Christ was to spring), he showed the reality and strength of his faith.

This great truth, that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one grand point in which the whole Gospel centers: and this point Abraham saw, not only in reference to himself, but in reference also to the whole world; as well those who would not derive their natural descent from him, as those who would, [Galatians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8-9). Other things he might see more or less distinctly; but this he saw as clearly as we ourselves can do; yes, happy would it be for many, if they saw it half so clearly as he did, [Romans 4:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-22).

From knowing what his views of Christ were, we shall be at no loss to say,

***~~II. Why he so exulted in them—~~***

Though we would estimate his *knowledge*by the lowest standard, the *event*which he foresaw could not fail of being a source of much joy to him,

***~~1. Because of the mystery contained in it—~~***

Frequently does Paul characterize the Gospel as a "mystery that from eternity was hid in the bosom of God," and as containing "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3)." Another Apostle represents the very "angels in Heaven as desiring to look into it," and to search out, if possible, its immeasurable extent, [1 Peter 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-12).

Do we wonder then that Abraham rejoiced in the manifestation of this to his soul? To see such a display of the divine perfections, all exhibited in the person of one who would spring from his loins; to see a descendant of his own effecting what all the angels in Heaven would in vain have endeavored to effect; to see him, by his own obedience unto death, bringing more honor to God than all the obedience of angels ever brought, and more good to man than he would have enjoyed if he had never sinned at all; I say, to see such "a day" as this, might well fill him with all the rapture that feeble mortality could sustain.

When this mystery began to be more fully manifested in the incarnation of Christ, a multitude of the heavenly host, astonished, as it were, at the display of the Divine glory, commenced a new song, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!" And from that period it has been the one theme of praise and adoration among saints on earth and saints in Heaven. *Yes, so glorious, so inexhaustible is the subject, that after millions of years it will be as new and interesting as ever: and to all eternity, notwithstanding it will be progressively unfolded to the admiring universe, it will be found to have a length and breadth, a depth and height, that can never be explored.*

***~~2. Because of the benefits conveyed by it—~~***

If he had only his own personal benefit in view, he could not but rejoice: for, what an amazing benefit is it for a guilty creature to say, "Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation, [Isaiah 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.2)." It is not possible for anyone to have this sweet assurance, and not adopt the language of exultation actually used by the Church of old, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God: 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)."

Indeed it is said of every believer, that "though he has not personally seen Christ—yet he cannot but rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8-9)."

But doubtless he looked to the salvation of a ruined world: and what joy must not that excite! See in what raptures David was, at the prospect which was opened to him, Psalm 98. See how, at the period of our Savior's advent, every heart rejoiced! How Mary exclaimed, "My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior!" How the embryo infant, of six months existence only in the womb of Elizabeth, leaped for joy at the approach of the blessed Virgin, in whom the Savior was but just formed [Luke 1:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.44). Hear, at the time of his nativity, with what ecstatic joy the angels proclaimed his advent, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord! [Luke 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.10-11)." Hear how every person, to whose ears it was at all welcome, exulted in it! how Zachariah "blessed God;" and Simeon desired his dismissal from the body, accounting that he had attained all that was valuable in life, now that he had seen and embraced the infant Savior, [Luke 2:27-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.27-32).

Behold, when salvation by Christ was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, how all the converts forgot every personal concern, and spent all their time in blessing and praising God! [Acts 2:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-47).

So it was, wherever the glad tidings were proclaimed, [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8); [Acts 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.39). No wonder then it was so with Abraham, when he heard, as it were, a universal jubilee proclaimed: his heart at least, if not his lips, gave vent to its feelings, in the expressive language of the prophet, "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it: shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel! [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23)."

We cannot conclude without inquiring: **What effect has the arrival of this day on you?**

How many who live under the meridian light of the Gospel have never yet attained the knowledge nor the joy that Abraham possessed, though he lived two thousand years before the Lord Jesus came into the world!

The greater part of those who bear the Christian name, even when commemorating the Savior's advent, celebrate it only in a way of carnal feasting; thus making his being "manifested to take away our sins" an occasion of multiplying their transgressions against him! But woe be to those who so mock and insult the Savior of the world: truly their mirth will have a very different outcome from what they expect.

I call upon you then to examine what effect the contemplation of this mystery has produced on you? Has it filled you with admiration, and gratitude, and joy? Does this effect of it remain upon your mind from day to day? Tell me, if Abraham so exulted in it when he saw it only prospectively, and at the distance of two thousand years, would you view it with indifference, who are privileged to behold it in its meridian splendor? Methinks the frame predicted by the Prophet Isaiah, would be that of every soul among you: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us! This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation! [Isaiah 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.9)."

My dear brethren, be not satisfied if this is not your experience: be assured, you know nothing of the Savior's love, nothing, at least, as you ought to know it, if it has not produced this effect upon you. If you are Abraham's children, you will "walk in the steps of your father Abraham," believing in Christ, and rejoicing in him; not indeed in the prospect of his advent in the flesh, but in the prospect of that day which is now fast approaching, when all, both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, shall be gathered to him, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. You will also look forward to that day, when he will come again in the glory of his Father, and of all his holy angels, to judge the world—for ever to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."

***~~#1658~~***

***~~The Need of Working While it Is Day~~***

***~~[John 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.4).~~***

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

IN the circumstances of mankind we behold an inequality, which, at first sight, appears strange and unaccountable. One is born possessed of all the faculties that can conduce to his welfare: another is brought into the world deformed in body, defective in intellect, and, on the whole, in a state scarcely superior to the brute creation. This must certainly, in the first instance, be traced to the sovereignty of God; who has a right to give to his creatures, or withhold from them, whatever he shall see fit. He has not injured us by making us inferior to the angels; nor does he injure anyone, if he makes him inferior to the beasts. But, in these sovereign exercises of his will, he often has a special view to his own glory.

Perhaps, at no period of the world did he ever give Satan liberty to exert his power over the bodies of men to so great an extent as during the time of our Lord's ministry upon earth. In this dispensation, he gave to the Lord an opportunity of displaying, to a greater degree than he could otherwise have done, his power over Satan and all his hosts. We know from authority, that this was the reason of our Lord's not interposing to heal Lazarus, as soon as the application was made to him. In staying two whole days after he was informed of the dying state of Lazarus, he appeared regardless of the requests which had been sent to him by his much-loved friends, Mary and Martha. But he assigned as the reason of that delay, that, from the state of Lazarus, it was intended to bring glory both to God the Father, and to himself, as his Father's agent, [John 11:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.3-4); [John 11:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.14-15).

In like manner we are informed, that, for a similar end, a man was born into the world blind. A *notion*having obtained among the Jews, that there was a state of existence previous to that which men now have on earth, and that they were either rewarded or punished in this world, according as they had conducted themselves in that from whence they had come; and that God also recompensed in men the good or evil that had been done by their parents. The disciples asked our Lord, which of these two things had occasioned to the poor man this great calamity. Our Lord told them, that the calamity was not to be traced either to any evil that the man had committed in a preexistent state, or to any that had been committed by his parents; but that it had been sent by God, for the furtherance of his own glory, in giving sight to the blind. It had been ordained of God, that the Messiah would evince the truth of his mission by opening the eyes of the blind: and the opening of this man's eyes was a work especially assigned to the Lord Jesus for that very end.

Hence, instead of entering into a distinct consideration of the questions proposed to him, he contents himself with negating both alternatives, and with intimating, that he must address himself without delay to the work before him; the work of giving sight to this blind man.

But though the words of our text have a particular reference to our blessed Lord, they must not be confined to him; since they are equally applicable to every child of man, and declare to all of us,

***~~I. Our duty—~~***

***~~We all have a great work to do—~~***

As far as our blessed Lord acted as a Mediator between God and man, his work was peculiar to himself: but, as far as he was engaged in "fulfilling all righteousness, [Matthew 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.15)," he was a pattern to us. He acted as his Father's servant to perform a work. We, in like manner, are servants of the Living God: only, being sinners, we have the duty of sinners; which Jesus, by reason of his innocence, could not have.

As having offended Almighty God, our first duty is to humble ourselves before him, and to seek for mercy at his hands. Our next duty is, to implore help from him, that we may be able to fulfill his will in future, and, by a holy life and conduct to advance to the uttermost the glory of his name: for "herein is our Father glorified, when we bring forth much fruit, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)." This is the duty of every man, without exception.

Men's duties, in reference to society, differ according to the rank and station which they hold: the prince and the peasant, the parent and the child, have different offices to perform: but towards God we all stand in the same relation; and all have to render the same services.

***~~For the performance of this work, we are "sent" into the world—~~***

*We are not sent here to eat, and to drink, and to pass our time in pleasure; but to do the work assigned to us.*Every moment of our time is given us for that purpose, and would be employed for that end. When we rise in the morning, we would inquire: What duties have I to perform this day? And, when we lie down again at night, we would inquire: how far we have executed the will of our heavenly Master. The performance of our work would supersede everything else. Nothing would occupy our mind in comparison with it. To every one who would call us from our duty, we would reply with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you? [Nehemiah 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.3)."

The conduct of Abraham's servant, when ordered to seek out from among the family of Abraham a wife for his son Isaac, will admirably illustrate our duty towards God. Having received his instructions relative to the conduct he should pursue, he implored of God his unerring guidance, so that he might be led to a successful outcome. And when, by Divine Providence, he seemed to have attained his end, having been led to the very house of Abraham's own nephew, Bethuel, he was desired to refresh himself after his long journey.

But what was his reply? It was truly memorable; and showed how much he had at heart the execution of the trust committed to him: "There was set food before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told my errand, [Genesis 24:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.33)." Here, we see, he preferred his duty "before his necessary food, [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12)." This is exactly what we should do. Our blessed Lord has set us the example: and, like him, we would be able to say, "My food is to do the will of Him that sent me, [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34)."

With our duty, our blessed Lord sets forth also,

***~~II. The urgency of it—~~***

***~~We have but a "day" to do it in—~~***

A day is given us; and that is little enough for so great a work: yet it is time enough, if duly and diligently improved. It is, however, of very uncertain continuance. The sun of many goes down at noon; and often without the slightest warning. Yes, scarcely is the sun risen with many, before it sets. This is a truth known to all; but considered by few: else, how earnest would we be in doing the work assigned to us. We would not be putting it off until "a more convenient season;" but would improve the present hour, "not knowing what a day or an hour may bring forth." We should "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, [Ephesians 5:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.15-16)."

***~~Our day being closed, our work is closed with it—~~***

"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, [Ecclesiastes 9:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.10)." "When the night is once come, we can work no more." Our good purposes, if not carried into effect before, will then fail, and our best resolutions prove abortive. If we have lived impenitent to that hour, or have only felt remorse, without carrying our sins to Jesus, and washing them in the fountain of his blood—then we shall continue impenitent and unforgiven to all eternity. "As the tree falls, so it will lie, [Ecclesiastes 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 11.3)."

We may then weep for our sins; but our tears will be unavailing: we may even "wail and gnash our teeth for anguish:" but the door of mercy will be closed. We may cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" but God will be deaf to our entreaties. We may even call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon us, and to hide us from the wrath of the Lamb: but they cannot perform for us that friendly office; nor can so much as a drop of water be obtained, to soothe the anguish of our bodies and our souls, [Luke 16:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.24-25). We may then wish, 'O, that I had another day, or even another hour! How would I work then!' But our day is for ever closed; and nothing but everlasting "night" remains; even "the blackness of darkness for ever Jude, verse 13."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are more advanced in years—~~***

Much of your *day*is obviously gone: and little, according to the course of nature, remains. Your hour-glass is well near run down. Is it not then time for you to awake, and to begin the work which God has sent you to perform? Would you not be engaged in penitential sorrow for your past sins; in crying earnestly to Almighty God for mercy; in fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ as the hope set before you? Should you not be seeking the renovation of your souls after the Divine image? Should you not be daily "preparing to meet your God" in judgment? Yes, indeed: but it is a sad and melancholy truth, that few who have advanced beyond the middle term of life impenitent, are brought to repentance afterwards. Their habits are fixed; their conceit of their own safety is become inveterate; and their very consciences, as far as it respects everything but gross sin, are seared.

I thank God, however, that there are instances of persons entering into the service of their God even at the tenth or eleventh hour! Let me entreat you, beloved brethren, to be of that happy number; that, when you come to die, you may be able to adopt the words of our blessed Lord, and say, "Father, I have glorified you on earth; I have finished the work which you have given me to do, [John 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4)."

***~~2. Those who are yet in early life—~~***

It can never be too early for you to begin this necessary work. The lambs which were appointed to be offered unto God in sacrifice, every morning and evening throughout the year, were to be "of the first year, [Exodus 29:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.38);" and it is in the earliest period of your lives that you should "offer yourselves living sacrifices to the Lord, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." You will remember that the first fruits of everything were to be offered to God: and of the corn, they were to be of "full ears" indeed; for God must have every thing of the most perfect kind; but they were to be "green ears," green ears "dried by fire," and beaten out, [Leviticus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.14). What can this import, but that, before you have attained that measure of maturity which is required for the service of man, you may, and must, be rendering service to your God?

You have examples of this in Samuel, Obadiah, Timothy; and, above all, in our blessed Lord himself, who, at the age of twelve years, willingly devoted himself to his God and Father, in his temple, [Luke 2:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.42); [Luke 2:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.49).

Let me prevail on you to follow these examples; and now, before sin has hardened your hearts, and Satan has drawn you fully into his snares, to devote yourselves to God. And know, for your encouragement, that a special promise is given you by the Lord, "They that seek me early, shall find me, [Proverbs 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.17)."

***~~3. All of you without exception—~~***

Through the mercy of our God the day is yet continued to you; that day, which, within the last year, has closed on thousands, who, humanly speaking, were as likely to live as you. And, to multitudes of them, how dreary a night has commenced! and how thankful would they be, if they were permitted once more to hear the tidings of salvation which yet sound in your ears! Be thankful, I beg you, for this distinguishing grace which has been given to you: and increase not your guilt by a further continuance in sin. What a fearful reflection will it be at a future period, that you lived but to "add sin to sin," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!" If you live to repent of it, what anguish of mind will you suffer, before you obtain forgiveness! And, if you live not to repent of it, what infinitely sorer anguish will you sustain to all eternity! And why would you defer the work to which God is calling you? You suppose that it is a state of melancholy that shall embitter the whole remainder of your days? No! "The work of righteousness is peace: and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever, [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17)." Indeed you all know, in your hearts, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:" and that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward, [Psalm 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.11)."

***~~#1659~~***

***~~The Blind Man Healed at the Pool of Siloam~~***

***~~[John 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.6-7).~~***

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

THERE is reason to think that *all the miracles of our Lord were intended as emblems of the spiritual blessings which he came to bestow*. But *in interpreting Scripture it is better to assign to every passage a sense which is clear and determinate, than to wander into the regions of conjecture*. In some places however the mystical meaning is pointed out by the inspired writers themselves; and then we may follow them without doubt or fear. Such is the case with respect to the miracle before us; in considering which it will be proper to notice,

***~~I. The historical fact—~~***

The disciples seeing a man that had been blind from his birth, inquired of our Lord whether it was caused by the sins of his parents, or any sins of his own in a former state of existence. It would seem that the Pythagorean notion of the transmigration of souls, prevailed among the Jews of that day, had been the occasion of that calamity being inflicted on him? Our Lord informed them, that it was owing to a far different cause: that it had been ordained of God on purpose "that the works of God might be made manifest in him," and that in him the Messiah might be glorified.

What a consoling thought is this to those who have endured long and heavy afflictions, that God perhaps has sent those afflictions on purpose to glorify the riches of his grace and love by means of them! Who would not submit to be reduced to the state of this blind beggar, in order to be made the honored instrument of glorifying God, and the happy monument of his power and grace?

Our blessed Lord, determining to heal him, made clay with his own spittle, and put it on his eyes, and bade him wash in the pool of Siloam. How strange a remedy was this! In itself, it was more calculated to put out the eyes of one that could see, than to give sight to one that was blind. Whether the Lord Jesus intended by this act to show that men who are born blind are, as it were, still farther blinded by their fellowship with this present world, and that no power but his could remove this double veil from their eyes, I cannot say. But this is clear, that he did it to show that he can work by any means, however inadequate; that we must submit to use the means which he prescribes; and that in the use of his instituted ordinances, of whatever kind they may be, we may expect his blessings.

The man complied with the injunctions given him, and found the desired blessing. One would suppose that the sight of this stupendous miracle must have convinced all that Jesus was the Messiah: but a determined infidel nothing will convince. The Pharisees were determined not to believe in Jesus: they therefore endeavored at first to disprove the miracle. When that was established beyond a possibility of doubt, they made the performing of the miracle on the Sabbath-day a ground of accusation against Jesus, and cried out against it as a scandalous violation of the Sabbath.

When they saw the conviction that was fastened on the minds of the more sincere, they enacted a law, that every one who would confess Jesus to be the Messiah, would be excommunicated. Such are the weapons with which ungodly men have ever combated the truth of God: when they fail in argument, they have recourse to authority, and establish that by pains and penalties, which they have in vain labored to maintain by an appeal to reason or Scripture.

The parents of the man were intimidated and silenced; but the man that had received the benefit, boldly vindicated the character of his benefactor. His arguments were irresistible: but they served only to incense the haughty Pharisees, and to bring upon himself the sentence of excommunication. Thus will every truly enlightened man confess his Savior; and, when called to suffer for him, will take up his cross with cheerful resignation, yes, and rejoice that he is counted worthy to bear it.

Our blessed Lord soon found his faithful confessor, and amply rewarded his fidelity by a fuller manifestation of himself, and a more abundant communication of grace to his soul. And thus will he recompense all who suffer for his sake: they shall have a hundredfold now in this present life, and "in the world to come life everlasting! [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30)."

Forbearing to notice the more minute incidents, we pass on to,

***~~II. The typical interpretation—~~***

We cannot conceive why the Evangelist would give the typical import of the word *Siloam*, unless to intimate, that the whole miracle had a typical reference. The word Siloam means, Sent; and was intended to prefigure the true "Shiloh, [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.10)," "the messenger of the covenant, [Malachi 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.1)," the sent of God, [John 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.36), the Messiah that would come into the world; and the miracle wrought there typically represents,

***~~1. The state of mankind by nature—~~***

*The man by the special providence of God was born blind, in order that he might more fitly characterize the state and condition of unregenerate men.*They are universally blind by nature, and as blind with respect to spiritual things as this poor man was with respect to all the objects around him. He could form some crude notions about them by means of feeling; but he could discern no one thing aright: so the men of this world may, by reading, obtain some faint idea of spiritual things; but they have no just apprehension of them at all.

To prove that all natural men are blind, we need not descend to particulars, or show that they cannot discern this and that particular truth; there is one question that may determine the point at once: Do all, or *do any of those who are in the broad road, see where they are going?*Do they not universally think, or hope at least, that notwithstanding all which God has spoken, [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14), they shall go to Heaven when they die? If further proof be wanted, let an appeal be made to Scripture, and God himself will put the matter beyond dispute, [Revelation 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16-17). [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). Nothing can more justly represent our state than the man on whom this miracle was wrought.

***~~2. The end for which Christ came into the world—~~***

Our Lord himself gave this exposition to the miracle, at the very time he wrought it, verse 5; and enforced it afterwards by more express declarations. He was not only to be a light to lighten the world, [Luke 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.32), but was to open the eyes of the blind, [Isaiah 42:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.6-7). He was not only to set before men truths which they were unacquainted with before, but to open their hearts, that they might give attention to them, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14), and their understandings, that they might understand them, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45).

The very manner in which he imparts his blessings, is also not obscurely intimated in the miracle before us. As the means he used were very inadequate to the end proposed, so, for the advancement of his own glory, he uses the ministry of weak and sinful men, and by their word he turns men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.17-18).

Even supposing that we were able of ourselves to convince the judgments of men, we can no more give them spiritual discernment, than the clay and water could give organs of vision to the blind beggar. But, as an ordinance appointed by Jesus, and accompanied with his Spirit, our preaching is made instrumental to the enlightening and saving of many souls. And the weakness of the instruments used by him, is rendered subservient to his more abundant honor, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7).

Our blessed Lord has given us a yet further insight into the miracle, by suggesting to us,

***~~III. The spiritual improvement—~~***

There was to be a judicial discrimination in the ministry of our Lord for the purpose of encouraging the humble, and confounding the proud, verse 39. The great line of distinction between men is this; some are sensible of their blindness, and desire to be divinely enlightened; and others imagine that they already see, and therefore disregard all offers of spiritual illumination.

With respect to the former, Christ came to give them sight: and, if they will apply to him in the use of his appointed ordinances, he will assuredly grant to them the benefit they desire. He declares that this was the very intent of his coming into the world, [Luke 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18); and he counsels all to apply to him for the eye-salve that shall effectually remedy their wants, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18). If they do this, their lack of education, or even weakness of intellect, shall be no obstacle in their way; he will "reveal to babes and sucklings the things which are hid from the wise and prudent, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)."

With respect to the latter, he will leave them to the operation of their own minds, and give them up to their own delusions. He will not actively mislead them; nor is there any need that he would in order to produce the increase of blindness in them: for if left to themselves, they will bewilder themselves in their own reasonings, and confirm themselves more and more in their own errors. Their prejudices, their passions, and their interests, will concur to lead them astray, and their great adversary the devil, will obstruct the entrance of light into their minds, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4); and thus they will eventually be "taken in their own craftiness, [1 Corinthians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.19)," and "utterly perish in their own corruptions, [2 Peter 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.12)."

The improvement then which our Lord himself teaches us to make of this miracle is, to *cultivate a sense of our own blindness, and to "become fools in order that we may be wise*[1 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.18)." If we be "wise in our own conceits, there is more hope of a fool [Proverbs 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 26.12)," or of any other character in the universe, than of us. On the contrary, if we be deeply humbled before God as destitute of all spiritual discernment, the "scales shall soon be made to fall from our eyes," and the "Spirit of the living God will guide us into all truth."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

All of us must of necessity resemble the man while his blindness continued, or after it had been removed.

Let us then inquire whether we can say with him, "This I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see, verse 25." If we cannot, let us remember, that the Savior is near at hand, and that the means used for our illumination, weak as they are, are quite sufficient, if accompanied with his power.

Let us take encouragement to ask the influences of his good Spirit, and to pray with David, "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law! [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18)." On the other hand, if our eyes have been opened, let us boldly confess our benefactor, and willingly bear whatever infidel rulers or persecuting bigots may inflict upon us for his sake.

Let us, like Christ himself, endure the cross, and despise the shame. Let us "be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life!"

***~~#1660~~***

***~~Disposition to Be Exercised Towards the Gospel~~***

***~~[John 9:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.35-38).~~***

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

NO man that ever suffered for righteousness' sake found, in the outcome, that he had any reason to complain: for, sooner or later, God has recompensed his sufferings into his bosom a hundred-fold, even in this present life: and assuredly a most glorious recompense awaits him in the world to come, [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30).

A remarkable instance of God's special favor to his suffering people is recorded in the passage before us. A man, who had been born blind, had been restored to sight. The Pharisees, being averse to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, would not believe that the miracle had been wrought: but, being compelled at last to acknowledge that, they persisted that Jesus, in working this miracle on the Sabbath-day, had violated the Sabbath, and unequivocally proved himself to be a sinner.

But the man on whom the miracle had been wrought, very justly observed to them, that God would never have set his seal, in so public and wonderful a manner, to the pretensions of an impostor; and that, consequently, the miracle must be considered as a decisive proof that Jesus was both sent of God, and approved of God.

The Pharisees, unable to withstand the force of his reasoning, had recourse to persecution, and "cast him out of the synagogue." But his fidelity did not long remain unnoticed or unrewarded: for our blessed Lord soon found him, and poured into his soul all the blessings of salvation.

In considering the case of this blind man, I propose to notice,

***~~I. The disposition exercised by him—~~***

We cannot but observe, that, to the question put to him by our Lord, there was something very remarkable in his reply: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" Now,

***~~In this he manifested a singular degree of candor—~~***

The question, as applied to him, might appear almost unreasonable: for he had been blind from his birth; and therefore had been cut off, in a measure, from many sources of information which were open to persons of his own age and rank in society. It is true, that the Messiah was generally expected among his countrymen, and that he was expected as "the Son of God:" but, from the obstacles which had obstructed his enjoyment of social converse, it could scarcely be hoped that he had collected much information on the subject: and, as for the benefit arising from ocular testimony, he was altogether, by his blindness, precluded from it. Yet, no complaint was made by him on these grounds, nor any excuse offered for his own ignorance; but a desire was expressed to obtain information, and a willingness was declared to act upon it. The excellence of this disposition will best appear, by *contrasting*it with other dispositions which are generally exercised on similar occasions.

Contrast it with the **prejudice**of which the Pharisees exhibited a striking example on this occasion. They could not deny that the miracle had been wrought: yet they were not at all the more disposed to receive the testimony of Jesus. As those, who saw that *devils were cast out*by him, would rather account for it by a supposed confederacy with the prince of the devils, than confess the Messiahship of Jesus, [Matthew 9:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.34); and, as those who saw *Lazarus*after his restoration to life plotted to kill him, lest the sight of him would fasten conviction on the minds of any, and induce them to believe in Jesus; so, in the passage before us, the Pharisees determined to resist all evidence, however strong, and to reject the Savior, whatever proofs he might give of his Divine mission, [John 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.10-11). But against such perverseness, the man of whom my text speaks, bore, both in word and deed, a most decisive testimony.

Contrast it with **indifference**; of which we have a deplorable instance in Pilate. Our Lord had told him plainly, "For this cause I came into the world, that I would bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, hears my voice." On hearing this, Pilate asked, "What is truth? [John 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.38)." But he waited not for an answer; and thereby manifested that he had no desire to be informed. Not so the man before us: he really wished to be informed, that he might conduct himself as it befit him towards the person after whom he inquired.

Contrast it with **skepticism**. Of the great mass of the Jews who had followed Jesus, it is said, that, "though he had done so many miracles before them—yet they believed not on him, [John 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.37)." Not contented with such miracles as he saw fit to work, and which left no room for doubt, they would have miraculous signs of their own choosing, [Matthew 12:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.38-39).

Even *Thomas*, one of his own disciples, (when he had the fullest testimony of all the other Apostles, who had themselves been by no means forward to believe, and had yielded only to evidence that was irresistible,) declared, that, unless he would put his fingers into the very print of the nails in his Savior's hands, and thrust his hand into his side, he would not believe, [John 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.25).

This was decidedly wrong. We are bound to yield to evidence, provided that evidence be sufficient to convince us on ordinary occasions: and a readiness to act upon the testimony of him who had opened his eyes was a very commendable trait in the character before us.

Contrast it, lastly, with **credulity**. This is an error on the contrary side; but extremely common, when falsehood is proposed for our belief. In every age, the Jews were prone to it. Whatever impostor arose, professing himself to be the Christ, he was sure enough to find many followers. He needed only to "come in his own name," and very little would suffice to satisfy the minds of the deluded multitude, [John 5:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.43). Against this we would be on our guard, no less than against excessive incredulity: for John says, "Believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they are of God, [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1)."

But of this there was no trace in the spirit of this man: for, though he expressed a readiness to believe, he had abundant reason to rely on the testimony of Him who had so miraculously opened his eyes: in him, therefore, this readiness was not credulity, but **piety**.

***~~This is the precise disposition which befits us all—~~***

In a matter purely speculative, the mind would have no bias at all; no leaning towards one side of the question, any more than towards the other. But the Gospel is not a speculative doctrine; nor are we in a condition to speculate upon it. We have an interest in believing it: and we act most irrationally if we do not feel a wish that the evidences for it may be found true. We are sinners; and, as sinners, we are under the displeasure of Almighty God. The Gospel purports to be a revelation from Heaven, declaring a way for our reconciliation with God. It announces to us a Savior, even the only-begotten Son of God, as becoming incarnate, and dying upon the cross for our sins; that, through Him, all that believe may be justified from all the sins that ever they have committed.

Will anyone then say, that we ought not to wish this revelation to be true? or is it a subject on which we ought to speculate, as if we had no interest whatever in it?

If a number of rebels, under sentence of death, were informed that the king had sent a free pardon to them, would it befit them to receive the tidings with perfect indifference, and to amuse themselves with abstract speculations about the nature and degrees of evidence, without any concern about the offered benefit? No man would for a moment approve of such apathy; no man would blame a wish to ascertain the truth of such a report, or a readiness to credit it on sufficient evidence. And precisely in that situation do we stand; and such would be the disposition of our minds towards the Gospel of Christ.

To this we are greatly encouraged by,

***~~II. The benefit he derived from it—~~***

Two things we behold, as immediately resulting from it:

***~~1. Christ's manifestation of himself to him—~~***

To no one, except the Samaritan woman, did our Lord so frankly and so fully declare his own Messiahship, as to this man. To her, upon her saying, "I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ; when He has come, he will tell us all things;" he plainly replied, "I who speak unto you am He, [John 4:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.25-26)."

So, to this persecuted man he also, with the same frankness, proclaimed his divine mission: "Do you ask who the Son of God is? You have both seen him; and he it is that talks with you."

I say not but that, on some occasions, both to his disciples and to Pilate, he acknowledged himself to be the Messiah: but to no person did he give so direct, and full, and positive an assurance, as to these two most favored people: to the woman, in order to show, to all future generations, that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound, [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20);" and to the man, that he might encourage all to take up their cross boldly, and follow him.

But does this instance encourage any hope in us? Yes, assuredly it does: for, if we really desire to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, and to cleave unto him, "he will come to us, and manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world." And to those who questioned his doctrines, he said, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of myself, [John 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.17);" so, to those who would approve themselves to him, he says, "If any man loves me, my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." *A docility of mind, and a readiness to follow the dictates of an enlightened conscience*, are the distinguishing features of "an Israelite indeed," and shall never fail of being honored with testimonies of his special approbation, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47).

***~~2. His dedication of himself to Christ—~~***

No sooner did the Lord Jesus profess himself to be the Messiah, than this man acknowledged him under that character, and paid him that "worship" which was due to him as God's only dear Son.

Now, whence had he power to do this? Was not this faith the gift of God? [Acts 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.27). [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). And was not this act of adoration the fruit of the Spirit, even of the Holy Spirit "working mightily in him" as "a Spirit of grace and of supplication, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10) with [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44)." Yes, the Lord Jesus, who had restored the organs of vision to his body, "gave light also to his soul," and enabled him to exercise these sublime graces: for we know, assuredly, that "without Christ he could have done nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)."

And will He not do as much for us, if we manifest the same child-like spirit? He will. He will remove all doubts from our minds, and enable us to exclaim, with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

And here let me observe, that our Lord did not decline these expressions of his adoring love. When such were offered by Cornelius to Peter, [Acts 10:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.25-26), and by John to an angel, [Revelation 22:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.9), they were rejected instantly, as an invasion of the divine prerogative: but to Jesus they were properly offered, because he was the Son of God; and therefore he accepted them; and has thereby taught us, that all men are to "honor the Son, even as they honor the Father; and that he who honors not the Son, honors not the Father who has sent him, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23)."

Behold then, I say, the rewards conferred upon the disposition that was exercised. In an instant, as it were, this man was brought "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

***~~Let me, in conclusion,~~***

***~~1. Propose to you the inquiry—~~***

To every individual among you would I propose the question, "Do you believe on the Son of God?" let no one imagine, that it is an unnecessary inquiry. This man had argued well on the subject of evidences, and yet needed to have the question put to him. And many among ourselves may be able to defend the outworks of Christianity, while yet they have no personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. If we would determine this point aright, let us see how this man acted: the very instant that he was enabled to say with truth, "Lord, I believe," he fell down and "worshiped" his heavenly Benefactor.

And will not true faith produce the same effect on us? Shall not we feel delight in prostrating ourselves at the Savior's feet, and in acknowledging our obligations to him? Beyond a doubt, this effect must and will follow.

Ask then yourselves, whether this be the habit of your minds from day to day? Has it been so this very day? Has it been so during the past week? Is there in your souls such an overwhelming sense of *gratitude*to him, as constrains you to revert to him, and fix your thoughts on him, as soon as ever the occasions which have caused a momentary diversion have passed away? Are you touched, as it were, with a magnetic power that draws you to him, as the needle to the pole? This, I say again, is the invariable effect of true faith; and the resolution of this question will furnish you with the true answer to the inquiry in the text.

***~~2. Commend to you the example—~~***

In reference to every part of God's word would the same disposition be exercised. I say not, that an attentive examination of evidences is not good: for we are bound to "prove all things, and then to hold fast that only which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)." But a *critical*spirit, a *disputatious*spirit, a *skeptical*spirit—are not favorable to the reception of divine truth. They may be proper enough in reference to things which are purely intellectual; but not so in reference to things which are altogether spiritual.

For a just discernment of these things we need the teachings of God's Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); and with childlike simplicity of mind we would ever pray with Job, "What I see not, teach me, [Job 34:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.32);" and with David, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law, [Psalm 119:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.18)." Were such a spirit exercised by us, we would find, in ten thousand instances, that the difficulties of Scripture would vanish; what was "crooked becoming straight, and what was rough, being smoothed to a plain."*An obediential spirit would make the whole book of God both luminous and easy to be received*.

Let me then recommend, that you regard the sacred volume as "a mold into which your soul is to be poured" and by which its every feature must be formed. Be ready to "obey it from the heart;" and it shall be as effectual to create your souls anew, as the command of Heaven was to bring forth the universe into existence, and to reduce the chaos to that order and beauty which entitled it to the commendation of Jehovah, as "very good, [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.3) with [Genesis 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.3); [Genesis 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 1.31)."

In a word, cultivate the spirit which displayed itself so eminently in this man; and, with a readiness to receive instruction and embrace the truth, let there be in you a determination of heart to follow your convictions, without hesitation and without reserve.

***~~#1661~~***

***~~Discriminating Effects of the Gospel~~***

***~~[John 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.39).~~***

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

THE miracles of our blessed Lord were, as is well known, testimonies from God to his divine mission. But they were also intended as emblems of that spiritual work which he was sent to accomplish.

In the *former*view, he appealed to them for the conviction of John the Baptist, and of those who had been sent by John to inquire respecting his Messiahship: "Go, and show John those things which 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 blessed is he who shall not be offended in me, [Matthew 11:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.4-6)."

In the *latter*view, he refers to them in the passage before us. He had healed a man who was born blind. This having been done on the Sabbath-day, his obstinate and unbelieving enemies imputed it to him as a crime, rather than as any proof of his Messiahship: but the man who was healed, knowing that "no man could do such miracles unless God were with him," believed in Jesus, and confessed him openly as the Savior of the world.

From the division thus caused, our Lord took occasion to declare, in reference to the souls of men, the intent, and certain effect, of his advent: "For judgment am I come into this world; that those who see not, might see; and that those who see, might be made blind."

The true import of this passage will not be seen by a superficial observer. It needs much consideration: but it will amply repay all the labor which we can bestow in the investigation of it.

To assist you in apprehending it aright, I will show,

***~~I. The need there was of Christ for the developing and disclosing the characters of men—~~***

***~~The judgment which was universally formed of men's characters was extremely erroneous—~~***

Men had no other test whereby to try the human character, than that of moral virtue. If a person had such a respect for the Supreme Being as to be observant of external duties towards him, and such a disposition towards his fellow-creatures as prompted him to acts of benevolence towards them—he was approved, and regarded as a pattern of all that was good. Hence it was that the Scribes and Pharisees were held in such high esteem.

HUMILITY, as a grace, was not inquired after; nor indeed was it at all necessary to the discharge of those offices which alone were deemed obligatory in the service of God. On the contrary, *the fulfillment of religious duties was considered as a just ground for self-admiration and self-applause*. Such men, indeed, as David, who were inspired by God, had the same ideas of it as we have: but, as among the Greeks and Romans, so also among the Jews themselves, it was rather reckoned as a mean and base feeling, than as the summit of human excellence. Nor, if it had entered into the composition of virtue in their minds, were there any means of discovering its existence.

The submission of human wisdom to that which is divine was not called for to any great extent: nor was a renunciation of a man's own righteousness demanded, in order to his acceptance through a righteousness provided for him by God. *General obedience to acknowledged laws constituted the chief excellence of every man*; and beyond that nothing was looked for, in order to secure the approbation of God. But all this was erroneous: yes, in relation to it all, it may be said, that "that which was highly esteemed among men was an abomination in the sight of God! [Luke 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.15)."

***~~Hence arose a necessity for our blessed Lord to come into the world—~~***

Doubtless, the first ground of his advent was to make reconciliation for the sins of men, and to work out a righteousness for them by his own obedience unto death. But subordinate to this was the purpose specified in our text: "For judgment I came into this world." To understand this expression aright, we must call to mind the office of a Judge. He inquires into the particular facts which are brought before him, and determines the characters of men according to those facts.

Now, *what an earthly judge does in reference to overt acts, that the Lord Jesus Christ does in reference to secret dispositions*. He brings with him a revelation calculated to elicit the dispositions of the heart, and to show what men really are in the sight of God.

Hence, at the time when his parents brought him to the temple, to do for him after the custom of the law, it was said concerning him, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35)."

But I will proceed to mark more distinctly,

***~~II. The suitableness of his appearance to produce that discovery—~~***

***~~The whole of his appearance, from the first to the last hour of his existence upon earth, was calculated to offend the pride of man—~~***

See him at his **birth**. Behold him born in the family of a poor carpenter; and laid in a manger, because there was no better accommodation for his mother, under circumstances which, it might have been supposed, would have called forth sympathy and liberality from ten thousand bosoms.

Is this the Son of God? Impossible: it can never be, that Almighty God would allow him to come into the world under circumstances of such unparalleled degradation.

See him, too, in his **life**. Behold him still so poor, as not to have a place where to lay his head: a few poor fishermen for his followers; and an object of scorn and derision to all the higher parts of the community. Were I to give a just description of him, I could not do it in more appropriate terms than in those of prophecy itself: "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. [Isaiah 53:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1-3)." Yet this is the person who offers himself to me as the Savior of the world!

See him, finally, in his **death**. This completes the scene. He is sentenced to death, both by the men of his own nation and by the Roman governor; and, by universal consent, is executed as a malefactor; a murderer being preferred before him, as a fitter object of mercy than he.

And is *he*to save me, when he did not save himself? Is He to deliver me from the wrath of God, who himself fell under the wrath of man? I wonder not that such an idea was a ground of offence; for throughout the whole there was an apparent inconsistency with all his own professions, and an absolute contrariety to all the expectations that were formed concerning the messiah. Is this the person that came from God, and "made himself equal with God," and through whom alone any child of man can come to God, or find acceptance with him?

Unenlightened reason discards at once such pretensions as these, and rejects them utterly as irrational and absurd. And this is exactly what the prophet has foretold: "He, the Lord Jesus, will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured, [Isaiah 8:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14-15)."

***~~On the other hand, he gave sufficient evidence of his Messiahship to convince any humble inquirer—~~***

The testimony borne to him by angels at his birth,  
the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him at his baptism,  
the numberless miracles wrought by him in his life,  
the wonders attendant on his death,  
his resurrection from the dead,  
his ascension to Heaven,  
his sending of the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and  
all the miracles wrought by them in his name,  
these were evidences which a humble mind could not withstand.

Besides, to those who felt their need of a Savior, there was everything which was suited to their necessities. A mere man would not have sufficed for them: they needed a Savior who was God as well as man: they needed an atonement of infinite value; a righteousness fully adequate to all the demands of God's holy law, and capable of being imputed to them for their acceptance before God. They needed not only the sacrifice of Christ on earth, but also his intercession in Heaven. They needed his all-powerful agency, too, as the Head of vital influence to his Church and people. In a word, they needed precisely such a Savior as he had represented himself to be: and, though the whole relating to him was involved in mystery which they could not comprehend, they saw in it nothing but what was honorable to the character of God, and nothing but what was conducive to the happiness of man. Hence they were content to receive the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and to found all their hopes of happiness on him alone.

Thus in him was found precisely such a test as the world needed.

The use of this test was seen in,

***~~III. The actual effect of his advent—~~***

Mark the effect of his advent:

***~~1. While he himself was on earth—~~***

This discrimination of character was seen from the first moment that he entered on his ministry. Never did more gracious words proceed from the lips of man, than those which were uttered by him in his first public discourse at Nazareth; insomuch, that "all who heard them bore him witness, and wondered, [Luke 4:18-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-22);" yet, upon his reminding them of two events in their history, the sending of the Prophet Elijah to be supported by a Sidonian (a heathen), and not an Israelitish widow; and the healing of a leprosy, by the Prophet Elisha, in the person of Naaman, a Syrian, and not of any of the lepers that were in Israel; they were instantly fired with such indignation and wrath, that "they thrust him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong," and destroy him! [Luke 4:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.25-29).

Now, what was there in his discourse to produce so instantaneous a change? *The Jews considered themselves as exclusively the objects of God's regard; and they could not endure the thought that he would have mercy in reserve for the Gentiles*: and the suggestion of this was in their minds an evil worthy of death.

Again: when our blessed Lord wrought *miracles*in confirmation of his word, many, instead of yielding to conviction, took occasion, from the very works which they could not but acknowledge to be miraculous, to accuse him of a confederacy with the devil: and, in the very passage before us, they made his restoring a man to sight on the Sabbath-day a ground rather of accusation against him, as a sinner—than of acknowledging him to be, what he really was, the true Messiah.

To his last hour they evinced the same spirit, calling out for a sentence of death against him; when his very Judge declared him innocent, and not a person upon earth could be found to convict him of the slightest sin. Nor was it the mere populace who thus persecuted him: they were only instruments in the hands of their superiors: it was the act of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of all who presided in their nation, whether in the Ecclesiastical or Civil department: and this showed how, by his ministry, their hypocrisy was detected: and that, in the midst of all their pretended piety, they were decided enemies to God in their hearts.

***~~2. In the whole of the apostolic age—~~***

The preaching of his name was productive of the very same effect as his personal ministry had produced. It was universally "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23)." If we except the instance of the Savior himself, there never existed, from the foundation of the world, such a contest as that which was maintained by the Apostle Paul; *he*doing everything that man could do, and suffering everything that man could suffer, for the salvation of a perishing world; and *they*, whether Jews or Gentiles, uniformly and universally seeking his destruction. The same treatment was shown to all the Apostles, and to all the followers of Christ, in proportion as they, by their activity and zeal, drew the attention of those to whom they ministered; insomuch that, with the exception of John, not one of the Apostles was allowed to die a natural death.

On the other hand, there were many to whom the mystery of the **Gospel**was "the wisdom of God and the power of God, [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)." In all its provisions they beheld an excellency and glory: and they found, by experience, that it was "the power of God to the salvation of their souls, [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)." And who were they that thus displayed its energy? Were they the great, the wise, the moral? No says Paul, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29;" so fully did the Gospel answer the end predicted by the prophet; "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed. [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10)."

***~~3. At the present hour—~~***

No where is Christ faithfully preached, but "a division" is made among the people: and in all the families where his truth prevails, "a sword" is introduced, even among the nearest and dearest relatives, [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36) and [Luke 12:51-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.51-53). *No caution in the preacher will suffice to abate the enmity of the heart against God.*Only let Christ be exalted, and some will call the preacher an enthusiast and deceiver, while others will "regard him as an angel of God, [Galatians 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.14-15)." The very same word is still, as in the days of old, "a savor of life to the salvation of some, and a savor of death to the condemnation of others, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." And so far are the admired characters of the world from being most favorable to the truth, that even "tax collectors and harlots enter into Heaven before them:" so true is it still, as in the days of old, that "the last are first, and the first last."

***~~And now let me address myself,~~***

***~~1. To those who are unconscious of their own blindness—~~***

This was the state of the Pharisees, to whom our Lord addressed the words of my text. Perceiving that he had in his mind a reference to them, they confidently and indignantly asked, "Are *we*blind also?" But our blessed Lord told them that their conceit only tended to enhance and aggravate their guilt. If they had, indeed, never been favored with means of instruction, they would have had the less to answer for: but, in proportion as they supposed themselves already informed, they showed their impiety in rejecting him, verse 40, 41.

Now this is the very caution which I would give to you: The more confident you are that you are already in possession of the truth, the more you make it manifest that "Satan has blinded your eyes," for to make you reject Christ, is the work in which that subtle adversary is incessantly engaged, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4); [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6). O! learn this humiliating truth, that you "are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and you will then have no difficulty in discovering the excellency of Christ, who offers to you "gold tried in the fire that you may be rich; and eye-salve that you may see; and clothing that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18)." Only resemble the man who was willing and desirous to believe, and Christ will soon make himself known to you, in all his excellency, and in all his glory! verse 35-38.

***~~To those who are willing to be taught of God—~~***

The docility of a little child is one of the choicest gifts that can possibly be bestowed upon you. It is a certain prelude to divine instruction, and the best preparative for all the blessings of the Gospel. You need not be discouraged at the thought of your own weakness: for "what God has hid from the wise and prudent, it is his delight to reveal to babes, [Matthew 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25-26)." "The wise he will leave to be taken in their own craftiness, [Isaiah 29:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.14) with 1 Corinthians 19, 20;" but the more you are "a fool" in your own estimation, the more certainly and effectually shall you be made truly wise, [1 Corinthians 3:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.18-20). The Holy Spirit is promised to you, as "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18);" and though the Gospel must ever remain to you an unfathomable mystery, you shall have such an insight into it as no unenlightened man can have, [Matthew 13:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.11), and by means of it be "guided safely into the way of peace."

***~~#1662~~***

***~~The Good Shepherd~~***

***~~[John 10:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.9).~~***

"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

*THE importance of sound doctrine cannot be too strongly insisted on. Error, especially in the fundamentals of religion, is as destructive as vice. In innumerable instances, it brings both those who propagate, and those who receive it, into eternal ruin*. Hence Paul denounced anathemas against any one, even though he would be an angel from Heaven, who would blend Judaism with Christianity. Our Lord himself also spoke of false teachers with indignation. The Pharisees, while they rejected him, taught the people to look for salvation to their own ritual or superstitious observances; Jesus therefore declared them to be only as "thieves and robbers," who, instead of belonging to the flock of God, sought eventually their destruction, and, in opposition to their false doctrines, affirmed himself to be the only door of admission into the fold of God.

We shall consider,

***~~I. The metaphor by which Jesus represents his own character—~~***

He had been delivering "the parable" of "the Good Shepherd verse 6, 11;" in elucidating which, he speaks of himself as "the *door*of the sheepfold."

***~~The Church of God is here compared to a sheepfold—~~***

All men in their natural state are wandering at a distance from God, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); they neither acknowledge him as their Shepherd, nor feed in his pastures; they are strangers to that flock which is under his immediate care, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12). But in every age God has had "a chosen and peculiar people:" in the days of Moses he brought them into a visible fold; until the time of Christ all his sheep were kept within the pale of the Jewish Church. But our Lord announced his purpose to introduce the Gentiles also into his fold verse 16. Now all who name the name of Christ are called his sheep. All however who are *nominally*his, are not really so, [Romans 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28); [Romans 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.6). It is to be feared that his sincere followers still form but "a little flock;" but the truly upright, of whatever denomination they be, belong to him: they are indeed often ready to cast out each other as aliens; nevertheless they are equally the objects of his superintending care.

***~~Of this fold Christ is "the door"—~~***

Parts of Judea were probably still infested with wolves: the sheepfolds therefore were better secured than ours: perhaps the entrance into them was guarded by a door. Now, what that door was to the fold, that is Christ to the Church: every sheep must enter into it by faith in him, [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26). We are expressly said to have access unto God through him, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18); nor indeed has there ever been any other way into the fold, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). It was the blood of the sacrifice which procured admission for the high-priest within the veil, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7); [Hebrews 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.25). Through that, all believers, from the very beginning, were brought near to God, [Revelation 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 13.8) with [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13); and, through that, we also have boldness to enter into the holiest [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-20).

Some, it is true, have "climbed up into the fold some other way, verse 1;" they profess to be his without having ever genuinely believed in him; but they are regarded by him only as thieves and robbers; nor will they ever be admitted into the fold above.

This description of Christ is of great importance.

***~~II. The benefit of receiving him under that character—~~***

There is no benefit which can accrue to a well-attended flock, which does not arise to those who believe in Christ—

***~~1. Security, "He shall be saved"—~~***

Protection is of unspeakable benefit to a defenseless sheep: but who can estimate the value of salvation to an immortal soul? Yet, such is the portion of those who enter into the fold aright: they shall be rescued out of the jaws of the devouring lion, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26). [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8); they shall be freed from the curse and condemnation of the law, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1); death itself, disarmed of its sting, shall have no power to hurt them, [1 Corinthians 15:55-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.55-57); every kind and degree of penal evil shall be averted from them. He who is empowered, is also engaged, to "save them to the uttermost," and this benefit he bestows, because they "come unto God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

***~~2. Liberty, "He shall go in and out"—~~***

A sheep left to wander on the mountains infested with wolves, might boast of its freedom from restraint; but it would soon find what little reason there was to glory in such a privilege: its truest liberty is to submit itself to the direction of the shepherd. Thus they, who live without God in the world, may boast of their liberty; but their very freedom is, in fact, the sorest bondage, [2 Peter 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.19), and every moment they are in danger of everlasting destruction, [Psalm 7:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 7.12-13). [Deuteronomy 32:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.35).

It is far otherwise with those who have entered into the fold by Christ. Whether at large by day, or enclosed by night, they feel no restraint. Through Christ they have all the liberty which their souls can desire, [John 8:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.36). Secure of God's favor, "they go in and out" before him in perfect peace, [Psalm 25:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.13).

***~~3. Provision, "He shall find pasture"—~~***

Good pasture comprises all the wants of a highly favored flock: and how rich, how abundant is that, which the sheep of Christ partake of! There are "exceeding great and precious promises," on which they feed. It is utterly their own fault if ever they experience a dearth, [Psalm 23:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.2). David from his personal knowledge attests this truth, [Psalm 22:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.26); and God confirms it by an express promise to all his people, [Ezekiel 34:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.14). This privilege too, no less than the others, is the consequence of entering into the fold by the appointed door, [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are wandering at a distance from the fold—~~***

Perhaps, like the silly sheep, you are insensible of your danger; but the more confident you are of safety, the more certain is your ruin. If they only, who enter in by the door, are saved, what can you expect? O consider that the loss of bodily life is not to be compared with the doom that awaits you; nor do you know how soon that doom may be inflicted upon you. Blessed be God, however, the door is yet open to all who come, and the Savior's declaration is yet sounding in your ears, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37).

He is even now desirous to bring you home on his shoulders rejoicing, [Luke 15:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.4-6). Stay not then until the door is for ever closed upon you. Let the caution given by our Lord stir you up to improve the present moment, [Luke 13:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.25).

***~~2. Those who are desirous of returning to God—~~***

It has been already shown, that they only are saved who enter in at the door. Now our proud hearts are extremely averse to be saved in this way. We would rather come into the fold by some less humiliating means. But our self-righteous attempts will be of no avail. We must come unto God by Christ, or not at all: salvation never was, nor can be, obtained through any other name than his, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12). Seek then, and that with earnestness, to enter in at the strait gate, [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24), and then you shall have that promise fulfilled to you, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17).

***~~3. Those who are dwelling in the fold of God—~~***

What debtors are you to the grace which brought you to the knowledge of Christ! What inestimable blessings are you now made to enjoy! Yet these are only a pledge of the blessings that await you hereafter. Rich as your present pastures are, they are not to be compared with those above. Let nothing tempt you then to wander from the fold to which you are brought. Follow not those who are but "goats," or "wolves in sheep's clothing." Let it be your delight to hear your Shepherd's voice, and to follow his steps: then shall you be separated from the goats in the day of judgment, [Matthew 25:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.33), and receive from the Chief Shepherd the portion reserved for you! [1 Peter 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.4).

***~~#1663~~***

***~~Life Abundantly by Christ~~***

***~~[John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10).~~***

"I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly!"

THE parables of our blessed Lord, though exceedingly clear and striking, lose much of their force by reason of the difference of our habits from those which obtained among the Jews. For instance, the office of a shepherd, though simple in itself, was widely different in Canaan from that which men are called to discharge in our land. In Canaan, where there were beasts of prey, it was attended with danger; and a man was often called to expose his own life for the protection of his flock.

Such was the office which Christ undertook for us: only, instead of endangering his own life for the preservation of ours, he actually laid down his life, in order that we might obtain eternal life. He was "the Good Shepherd, who gave his own life for the sheep verse 11;" and who "came, not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly."

To elucidate these words, I will show,

***~~I. The gracious purpose of our Lord's advent—~~***

"He came that we might have life."

***~~We could not, by any means, obtain it for ourselves—~~***

We were in the state of the fallen angels, so far as respects both *guilt*and *condemnation*; and were as incapable of removing these, and of restoring ourselves to the Divine favor, as they.

***~~But Christ came in order that we might be restored to the possession of it—~~***

He came in order to purchase life for us, and to impart it to us; to purchase it by his blood, and to impart it to us by his Spirit. And this he has effected, so far, that every one who believes in him has actually a title to life, and the very beginning of it in his soul.

But the text leads us further to consider,

***~~II. The extent to which he has accomplished it—~~***

"He has come that we might have life more abundantly." And, the very instant we believe in him, we have life,

***~~1. With more abundant evidence than was enjoyed under the Mosaic dispensation—~~***

The promises given to the Jews were mostly temporal. It is surprising how little is spoken of eternal life in the Old Testament, and especially of the resurrection of the body to a participation of it. And the access which men had to God was very distant. No one could offer sacrifice, except through the instrumentality of the priest; nor could anyone but the High Priest go into the holy of holies; and he only on one day in the year; nor could even he go then, without the blood of his sacrifice. But the Lord Jesus Christ has "opened a way for us—a new and living way, into the holiest of all," with his own blood; and, the veil, having been rent in twain from the top to the bottom, the way is made quite plain, and all his people, as "a royal priesthood," may go, every one for himself, into the very presence of his God.

Moreover, "a spirit of adoption" is now given by Christ to his believing people; and every one of his true followers is authorized to claim God as his Father, and to consider himself as possessed of an inheritance which, in body as well as in his soul, he shall enjoy to all eternity. Yes, in this sense are "life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel:" nor has any believer now any more doubt respecting either the present acceptance of a saint, or of his future reign with Christ in glory, than he has of the existence of God. All this, though very partially and indistinctly known under the Mosaic dispensation, is now so clearly revealed, that a little child may see it, and "he who runs may read it".

***~~2. In a more abundant measure than it would ever have been enjoyed, if man had never fallen—~~***

By the Prophet Zechariah, God says, "Turn to the stronghold, O prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto you, [Zechariah 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.12);" so Christ here offers to us a double measure of life. Man, if he had never fallen, would have possessed but a creature-righteousness; whereas, through faith in Christ, he becomes possessed of a divine righteousness, and is entitled to address the Savior himself as "Jehovah, our Righteousness".

Moreover, *if man had never fallen, he would have had very narrow and contracted views of God, in comparison with those which are revealed to him in and through the Lord Jesus Christ*. As a creature, he would have beheld the goodness of God—but he could have formed no conception of the justice, and holiness, and mercy, and truth of God; and much less of the union and harmony of all these attributes, as simultaneously exhibited in the person of a crucified Redeemer.

I add, too, that had he never fallen, his happiness would have been only the gift of grace; whereas, through the coming of Christ, every blessing that he shall enjoy in the eternal world, will bear upon it a stamp of the price it cost, and will be enjoyed by the soul as the fruit and purchase of the Redeemer's blood. Take this view of the blessedness which Christ has obtained for us; and I hesitate not to say, that it as far exceeds all that man would otherwise have enjoyed, as the noon-day sun exceeds in radiance the the feeble glimmering of the glow-worm.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let not any of you, then, be satisfied without this life—~~***

Shall the Son of the living God have left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our nature, and died upon the cross for us—and we be indifferent about the life that he has purchased for us? Would not "the very stones cry out against us?" Tell me, would the apostate spirits, if they were favored with one such message of mercy as is given to you, make light of it as you do? I charge you, then, be in earnest; and, while the invitations of the Gospel are yet sounding in your ears, go to this good Shepherd, and seek from him the life which he has come from Heaven to bestow.

***~~2. Let not any be satisfied with a small measure of life—~~***

Christ came, "that you might have it more abundantly." O brethren! you should not be content merely to live; but should seek to live in the richest possible enjoyment of the Divine favor, and in the most perfect fitness for glory. Paul, after all his attainments, "forgot what was behind, and reached forward to that which was ahead." And that would be the habit of your minds. This is the way to answer the ends of Christ's first advent; and it will be your best preparation for his future advent, when he shall come to judge the world in righteousness, and to bestow, in all its fullness, the life which he has purchased for you!

***~~#1664~~***

***~~Voluntariness of Christ's Undertaking~~***

**[John 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.17-18).**

"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

THE subject here insisted on, while, at first sight, it appears merely speculative, is really of great importance. For, if the Lord Jesus Christ did not act voluntarily in every part of his mediatorial work, there could be no justice in laying our sins upon him, nor any efficacy in the atonement which he offered for them. It was this willingness of his to endure all which was necessary for our redemption, that put an essential difference between him and all other shepherds. Other shepherds, in countries where their flocks are open to the assaults of wild beasts, have exposed, and even sacrificed, their lives for their flocks: but *no one ever undertook the office of a shepherd on purpose that he might die for his sheep*.

This, however, our blessed Savior did. He foresaw, from all eternity, that, if he would redeem our souls, he must die in our stead: and of his own mind and will, without any necessity or constraint, except what arose from his own love to us and to his heavenly Father—he undertook our cause, and executed all that was necessary for the accomplishment of that stupendous task.

The earnestness with which this fact is asserted in my text, together with the acceptableness of it to his heavenly Father, in whose estimation it so greatly raised him, show that the whole subject deserves our most attentive consideration. In fact, we cannot have just conceptions of our Savior's mediatorial work, unless we distinctly mark,

***~~I. Its voluntariness on his part—~~***

It is said, indeed, in my text, "This command I received from my Father." Now, it must be remembered, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as *man*, and as Mediator, was the Father's servant: as says the prophet; "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1)." And hence he is spoken of continually as "sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world, 1 [John 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.9-10)." But, as *God*, he was equal with the Father, and voluntarily concurred with the Father in executing the plan that was agreed upon between them. This appears,

***~~1. At his first undertaking of the work—~~***

"The counsel of peace was between the Father and the Son, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13);" the *Son*agreeing to "make his soul an offering for sin," and the *Father*engaging to give him "a seed who would prolong their days" in happiness for ever and ever, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10). This mysterious transaction is declared by the Psalmist in the plainest terms; and his words are cited by Paul in confirmation of it. "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire: my ears have you opened (boring them, as it were, to the door-post, after the manner of a servant, who voluntarily refused his liberty, and consecrated himself for ever to the service of his master, [Exodus 21:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.5-6).). Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do your will, O my God: yes, your law is within my heart, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Hebrews 10:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.4-10)." And this accords with what our blessed Lord also says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth, [John 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.19)."

***~~2. In all the progressive steps of its advancement—~~***

Our blessed Lord foresaw all that would come upon him in the performance of his work. "He knew from the beginning, who would betray him, [John 6:64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.64)." In the prospect of his sufferings, he was quite "straitened until they would be accomplished, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50)." He distinctly and repeatedly foretold all that he was appointed to endure; and, when the time was come for his enduring them, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," for the express purpose that he might endure them, [Luke 9:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.51); and, on Peter's endeavoring to dissuade him from submitting to them, he rebuked him with a severity never manifested on any other occasion, and declared him to be on that occasion an agent and confederate of the devil, [Matthew 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.23).

On the night previous to his crucifixion, he instituted his last Supper; delivering to every one of his disciples the bread and the wine, as representing his body broken, and his blood shed, for the remission of their sins, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26." When Judas, with an armed band, came to apprehend him, he, by a word, beat them all backward to the ground, to show that, in his subsequent surrender of himself to them, he acted voluntarily, and not from necessity, [John 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.6).

Thus in these, as in a variety of other incidents, he showed, that neither by fraud nor violence could any man prevail against him; but that, in every part of his work, he freely consented to sustain all that would come upon him.

***~~3. At the closing scene of his life—~~***

"He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to those who plucked off the hair, and went altogether like a lamb to the slaughter." If it had pleased him, "he could have called to his aid more than twelve legions of angels;" any one of whom would have been able to defeat his adversaries, even if they had been a thousand times more numerous than they were, [Matthew 26:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.53).

"But how, then, would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" He had undertaken to save us; and therefore he would not, though he could easily have done it, save himself. And at the very moment that he surrendered up his life, "he cried with a loud voice," in order to show that his nature was not exhausted, but that of himself "he had power to lay down his life," and did lay it down voluntarily, and not by constraint. And this very thing so struck the Centurion who superintended the execution, as to convince him that Jesus "was indeed the Son of God, [Luke 23:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.46-47) with [Mark 15:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.39)."

That Jesus raised up himself is also true. He had, in the very beginning of his ministry, declared, that "when the Jews would have destroyed the temple of his body, he would raise it up again in three days, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); and accordingly he did rise, as he had said. At the appointed time, also, he ascended up to Heaven, and sent down his Holy Spirit to carry on the work on earth, while he himself would be carrying it on in Heaven. Thus he has proved, that, in every part of his work, he has acted voluntarily, "having loved us, and given himself for us! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

Let us now proceed to notice,

***~~II. Its acceptableness on the Father's part—~~***

In my text, it is said, "Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again." Here again we must observe, that Christ speaks of himself, *not personally*, as the second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, but *officially*, as man and as Mediator. Personally he needed nothing, nor could do anything, to augment the Father's love, for "He and the Father are one," in glory equal, and in majesty co-eternal. But in his office he greatly commended himself to the Father's love:

***~~1. In undertaking it so willingly—~~***

The first intimation of the Father's wish for the redemption of the world was, as we have seen, assented to by the Son, without the slightest hesitation, notwithstanding the means by which it was to be accomplished, were so difficult and self-denying. To divest himself of all his glory, to assume the nature that had sinned, to bear in his own person the wrath due to our sins, and to "become a curse for us, in order to redeem us from the curse of God's broken law, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)"—all this he willingly undertook; because he saw, that, while by this mysterious act of condescension he would save our ruined race, he would glorify his God and Father, in a way, and to an extent, in which he never otherwise could be glorified.

God had shown forth his *wisdom*and *power*and *goodness*in the works of creation: and he had manifested his justice and holiness in the condemnation of the fallen angels: but never had he exhibited any trace of *mercy*, any more than if it had not been an attribute of his nature, or a perfection which it was possible for a holy and just Being to display. But, *by undertaking to die in our place and stead, he has satisfied the demands of justice; and, by working out a righteousness for us, he has rendered our acceptance with God compatible with the rights of holiness; and has thus opened a way for the exercise of mercy, not only in perfect consistency with all the other attributes of the Deity, but to the more glorious display of all; thus glorifying justice in a way of mercy, and mercy in a way of justice*; or, as the Psalmist expresses it, causing "mercy and truth to meet together, and righteousness and peace to kiss each other, [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." This could not but be pleasing to the Father; and, consequently, well might "the Father love him on account of it."

***~~2. In executing it so completely—~~***

Never did the Lord Jesus Christ draw back, until he could say "It is finished!" By what he did and suffered for us, all the eternal counsels of the Father were fulfilled, and everything was effected that could conduce either to the honor of God or the good of man. There was nothing left for either God or man to desire. *His atonement fully satisfied Divine justice: his righteousness is fully adequate to our necessities*: and now that he has again resumed his life, and has all power committed to him in Heaven and in earth, he will complete the work he has begun; and God shall, to all eternity, be glorified in him.

In the very prospect of this, when Noah offered up a sacrifice that only shadowed it forth, "God smelled a sweet savor, [Genesis 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.21);" and much more, when the Lord Jesus Christ offered up himself the true Sacrifice, was the Father well pleased with it! so true is that declaration of Paul, that "Christ loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savor, [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)."

***~~We see, then, from hence,~~***

***~~1. How to commend ourselves to the Father's love—~~***

If "the Father loved his own Son because of his voluntary services," he will love us also on the same account. Some would be ready to cry out against this, as a legal sentiment: but I affirm that it is truly evangelical. Hear our blessed Lord's assertions to this effect: "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he who loves me shall be loved by my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him .…If any man loves me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)."

True, God has given us commandments: but it is not as servants, but as sons, that we are to obey them; delighting to do his will, even as our Savior himself did. We are "to esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right; and to abhor every false way, [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128)." *It is this readiness, this delight in God's commandments, that constitutes the very summit of evangelical obedience*: and in proportion as we abound in it, we hesitate not to say, that God will love us, both in this world and in the world to come. According as with self-denying zeal and diligence we improve our talents for him, he will exalt and magnify us to all eternity, [Matthew 25:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.20-21).

***~~2. What love we owe to the Son of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

Did the Father, who could receive no benefit from his Son's work, love him because he laid down his life for us? What, then, would we do, whose happiness, both in time and in eternity, results from that alone? Paul says, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema! Maranatha, [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22)." And who, among us, will hesitate to add his Amen to that? Who does not feel the justice of it? Who does not wonder that it has not long since been executed on himself, for his base ingratitude to the Savior? And who, if Hell were at this moment to open and swallow him up quick, must not justify God, and say, "Righteous are you, O Lord; and true and just are your judgments! [Revelation 19:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.2)."

Sure I am, that however we may attempt to palliate our ingratitude to him now, the time is coming, when "our mouths will be shut, [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12)," and we shall be constrained to acknowledge that "we have received the just reward of our deeds, [Luke 23:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.41)." But, brethren, "I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, [Hebrews 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9);" and most gladly close my subject with that benevolent petition of the Apostle, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Amen and Amen! [Ephesians 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.24)."

***~~#1665~~***

***~~Security of Christ's Sheep~~***

***~~[John 10:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.27-28).~~***

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

WHILE we acknowledge with gratitude the powers of *reason*in investigations of a speculative or temporal nature, we must be very jealous of its conclusions in matters that are purely spiritual or practical. In whatever relates to God and to the soul, its decisions are apt to be biased by prejudice, or self-interest, or passion; and it yields, or withholds, assent, not so much according to the weight of evidence adduced, as according to the dispositions which are called forth into exercise.

This was peculiarly manifest among the persons who attended on the ministry of our Lord: some were so wrought upon by the greatness of his miracles, and the impressive wisdom of his discourses, that they could not but receive him as the Messiah; while others were always complaining of lack of evidence, and always caviling at his words. In the preceding context we are told, that "the Jews came round about him, and said, How long do you make us to doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you; and you believed not." He then informs them what the *source*was of their unbelief, "You believe not, because you are not of my sheep!" You are destitute of those gracious qualities which would have fitted you for receiving my word: had you been given to me by the Father, and possessed the dispositions which characterize my sheep, you would have both believed in me, and reaped all the benefits of that faith: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand!"

In these words our Lord refers to a conversation which he had recently had with them respecting his sheep; and goes on to declare,

***~~I. Their character—~~***

This is delineated with great simplicity:

***~~1. Christ's sheep hear his voice—~~***

Sheep that are well attended, are always observant of the shepherd's voice: so is the Christian also observant of the voice of Christ. Christ speaks to *us*in his word as truly as ever he spoke to his disciples in the days of his flesh—and *it is the delight of all his people to hear and obey his word*. The inspired volume is to them a source, an inexhaustible source, of comfort: they read it, they meditate upon it, they pray over it, they "esteem it more than their necessary food." When they open it, they look up to their Divine Master, and say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of your law." Directions, warnings, precepts, promises—are all alike acceptable to them. Everything that conveys to them the mind and will of their good Shepherd, is received with implicit faith, and unreserved obedience.

***~~2. Christ's sheep follow his steps—~~***

In the written word they behold the path their Savior trod. Wherever they see the traces of his feet, they endeavor to follow. They inquire not whether the way be arduous and self-denying, or perilous and beset with enemies. All that they desire is, to ascertain precisely the path of duty; and then to walk in it with steadiness and perseverance. They plainly see that their Shepherd is gone before them towards Zion, regardless of all dangers, indifferent to all the things of this world, and intent only on executing the will of his heavenly Father; and thither they direct their steps, cultivating in everything "the mind that was in him," and endeavoring "to walk as he walked."

In proportion as they pursue this path, they augment,

***~~II. Their happiness—~~***

***~~The Lord Jesus Christ regards them with approbation—~~***

It is true that he "knows them" all by name; nay more, he knows everything relating to them, their wants, their weaknesses, their fears, their trials, their exertions, their desires. But the word in our text is intended to express the approbation with which their Shepherd notices their well-meant endeavors. See [Psalm 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.6) and [1 Corinthians 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.3). And what can afford them greater happiness than the enjoyment of his favor? "In his favor is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself." Is it asked, How he conveys to them a sense of his favor? I answer, by "the witness of his Spirit," by "the testimony of their own conscience," by "shedding abroad his love in their hearts through the Holy Spirit." It is a certain truth, that "he will manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world:" and he "will give them the white stone, wherein is a new name written, which no man knows, except he who receives it, [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.17)." In this sense of his love, they have a "peace that passes all understanding," and "a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not."

***~~He loads them with his richest benefits—~~***

Whatever he bestows upon them in this world, it is but . . .  
a *taste*before the banquet,  
a *drop*before the shower,  
a *pledge*of infinitely richer blessings in the world to come.

"He gives unto them eternal life!" He has prepared other pastures for them in Heaven, where all his sheep from the commencement to the end of time shall be collected, and form "one fold under one Shepherd."

If their "joys" even here are sometimes "unspeakable," who shall declare the happiness reserved for them against that day? Never for a moment will they lose sight of their Beloved: they will hear his voice day and night: they will follow him incessantly without any weariness or difficulty: the richest images that can be borrowed from earthly things are incapable of conveying the smallest idea of the felicity that awaits them. And all this is given them; it is given them freely; it is given them now: it is said in our text, not, "I *will*give them," but, "I *give*them!" The very moment that they are brought home to his fold, he bestows it on them: they have instantly a right and title to it; and when they go hence, they go and take possession of it, not as a new gift which shall then be conferred, but as an inheritance, which by the surest of all titles, they have before been enabled to call their own.

Their ultimate possession of these benefits is insured to them in such a manner, as warrants us to affirm and to rejoice in,

***~~III. Their security—~~***

***~~Nothing shall be permitted to rob them of their inheritance—~~***

Sheep may perish either from internal disorders, or from outward enemies: and it would seem that the sheep of Christ also may fail of attaining eternal blessedness either through the corruptions of their own hearts, or through the assaults of their spiritual enemies. But against both these dangers their Shepherd has engaged to protect them: "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand!"

It is here taken for granted, that they are exposed to things, which, without the intervention of Omnipotence to prevent it, might terminate in their destruction: and every one of them feels that this is really the case. But Jesus guarantees, if I may so say, their safety. He has himself begun the good work in them, and he undertakes to perfect it. He "has laid the foundation in their hearts, and he will finish it, and bring forth the top-stone," He has reserved Heaven for them; and he will keep them for it, [1 Peter 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4-5).

***~~For this Jesus pledges his own veracity, and his Father's power—~~***

It is not asserted here, that they shall never be tempted: nor is it asserted that they shall never fall: but it is asserted that they shall never perish, nor be plucked out of their Redeemer's hand.

What shall we say then? That they are at liberty to live in sin? No; there is no such licence allowed to them. The way in which they shall be kept from perishing, is, by giving them "grace sufficient for them," by enabling them to "mortify the deeds of the body," and by sanctifying them throughout "in body, soul, and spirit," and by "bruising Satan under their feet." In this way they shall be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved them!"

Because Jesus was about to leave his disciples, and to commit the keeping of them to his heavenly Father, he pledges himself, that his Father also, who was infinitely above all created powers, yes, and greater than he himself also, as man, and as Mediator, would effectually preserve them; and that no enemy would prevail against them, unless he would first overcome Jehovah himself! This then being secured to them by a *promise*that cannot fail, and by a *power*that cannot he overcome, we may congratulate the sheep of Christ in the words of their good Shepherd, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

***~~Now because of the singular importance of this subject, we shall,~~***

***~~1. Guard it against abuse—~~***

By referring the final outcome of our warfare to the veracity and power of God, rather than to the faithfulness and diligence of man, it may be thought that we open a door for licentiousness of life, or at least for carelessness and indifference in our spiritual concerns. But if it be recollected what has been stated as the character of Christ's sheep, (that "they *hear*his voice" and "*follow*his steps;") and what has been declared as to the manner of perfecting in them the good work, (that God enables them to mortify sin, and to vanquish Satan)—what room can there be for the objection of its tending to licentiousness? If however there be any man disposed to say, 'God will not suffer me to perish, therefore I will be careless about my walk and conduct,' he needs nothing more to prove that he is not one of Christ's sheep; he has not the smallest resemblance to his sheep; he is altogether deaf to the voice of Christ; he walks in a way directly opposite to his; and, instead of vanquishing sin and Satan, he is overcome by them.

Whatever therefore he may call himself, he is no other than a wolf in sheep's clothing. To imagine that he can attain the end without the means, is absurd; for God has ordained not only the end, but the means, and the end *by*the means. See how clearly this is stated by Paul: "God," says he, "has from, the beginning chosen you to salvation *through*sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14)." To what has God chosen us? To possess Heaven, if we can earn it by our good works? No! He has chosen us to salvation, even "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But has he left it to our choice in what way this end shall be attained? No! he has appointed "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth," as the way to it: and if we are not proceeding in that way, it is in vain to think of ever attaining that end. If we choose to walk in sin, we may; but it will infallibly lead us to perdition. *Holiness is the appointed path to Heaven; and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."*

To those, therefore, who would take the comfort arising from this subject, we recommend that they *judge of their state by their character and conduct*. If they resemble Christ, and are walking truly in his ways, let them confidently trust in Him who "is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy:" but let them never entertain the thought of reaching Heaven in any other than the appointed way: for, *if they resemble "the goats," it is in vain to hope that they shall have their portion with "the sheep."*

***~~2. Defend it against objections—~~***

Many are the objections confidently urged against the doctrines here maintained: and I most willingly acknowledge that these mysterious truths are to be stated with extreme caution, and that they would occupy only such a space in our general ministrations as they appear to occupy in the Holy Scriptures. Yet we must not keep back any part of divine truth; but, when occasion offers, we must "declare the whole counsel of God." It is true, that many pious men cannot receive these doctrines; and therefore we would, as much as possible, avoid such a statement of them as may wound their minds. Still, however, we are not called to suppress the mention of them, but only to concede to others what we claim for ourselves, the right of forming our own judgment, and of being treated with respect and candor by those who differ from us.

It is said that the doctrines before stated are contrary to Scripture, to facts, and to the interests of morality.

The Scripture, it is said, abounds with warnings and exhortations to obedience; in many of which our final enjoyment of God's favor is actually suspended on our perseverance in his ways. All this is true; and we are grieved, when any, from *an undue attachment to human systems*, attempt to deny it: but is it not also true that the Scriptures abound with passages of like import with the text, [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9). [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17). [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40).

The great fault of those who adopt *human systems*is that they will be wise above what is written, and, instead of receiving God's word as little children, *will presume to reject everything which they cannot reconcile with their own favorite opinions*.

Who could ever reconcile God's fore-knowledge with the free-agency of man? but who will venture to deny either concept?

Just so, we may not see how to reconcile God's determination to keep his people, with his cautions against the danger of apostasy; and yet God's determinations may exist, without superseding the need of fear and caution on our part; nay, I am persuaded, that they are carried into effect by means of that very fear which his warnings inspire. And this is, I apprehend, the true solution of the difficulty, as far as it can be solved by man.

God's *precepts*teach us what we ought to do;  
his *exhortations*put us upon making every exertion in our power;  
his *threatenings*humble us for our short-comings and defects;  
his *promises*incline us to look to him for strength;  
and his covenanted *engagements*encourage us to "hope even against hope," and to renew our exertions in an assured expectation of ultimate success.

View the different portions of Scripture in this way, and, whatever the heat of controversy may lead men to urge against each other, there will be found no real opposition between them, but a perfect harmony in every part.

But, it may be said, it is contrary to fact that the Lord's people are so preserved; for the inspired records inform us of many who "make shipwreck of their faith," and "whose end," in consequence of their apostasy, was "worse than their beginning." This also is true, but it disproves not one atom of what is asserted in our text.

Hear what John says to this very point. He acknowledges that some had apostatized from the truth: but, says he, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us, [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19). See this also confirmed by facts, [Luke 22:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31-32). [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)."

To this it may be replied, that, if apostates are disclaimed as having ever really belonged to Christ, it is impossible to tell who do really belong to him. I readily acknowledge, that no man can know either that he himself belongs to Christ, or that any other person does, except by his works, or in any degree further than he is warranted by his life and conduct. If a man has the mark and character of Christ's sheep, he may have a good hope that he belongs to Christ; but the very moment that he declines from that character, his evidences of relation to Christ decay, and, together with them, his hope of ultimate acceptance with him. "The foundation of God stands sure; the Lord knows those who are his: but let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

As to the objection that these doctrines are contrary to the interests of morality, it has been already answered, when we were guarding this subject from abuse.

The doctrine that asserts that we shall be kept in the way of holiness, can never be inimical to the interests of holiness. But we would further ask, What must be the effect of denying these doctrines? Will not men be tempted to trust in an arm of flesh? and will not that issue in disappointment? and will not repeated disappointments tend to create despondency?

People are apt to dread the idea of despondency as connected with the doctrines of grace. But we will venture to affirm, that, for one instance of despondency arising from a view of the sovereignty of God, and of our entire dependence upon his power and grace—a hundred instances arise from lack of just views of this subject.

What is the answer which we uniformly receive when we exhort men to walk in the steps of Christ? Is it not this! 'We cannot: You require more of us, than we are able to perform?' Of course, in these persons exertion is discouraged; and they remain bond-slaves of Satan, because they conceive it impossible that they would be delivered from his power. Whereas, the person who believes that God is all-sufficient and faithful to his promises, is encouraged to renew his application to him from day to day, and, even under the most distressing circumstances, to expect a happy termination of his conflicts.

A view of God, as "able to keep us from falling," and as engaged to "perfect that which concerns us," will be a cordial to the drooping soul: and will enable us to adopt the triumphant language of Christ himself; "He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up! [Isaiah 50:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.8-9)." And what the effect will be of such a cheering hope as this, I leave you to judge. Only see it realized in the Apostle Paul, and we have no fear about any conclusions that shall be drawn from it, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39).

***~~3. Improve it for your encouragement—~~***

What unspeakable encouragement is here afforded to those who are yet ignorant of Christ! Who can hear this saying, and not wish to be numbered among his sheep? Methinks the hope of obtaining such security would induce every one to return from his wanderings, and to put himself under his guidance and protection. Where shall we find any such promise made to those who are at a distance from the fold of Christ? Where has God said to them, "You shall never perish?" To them belongs rather that tremendous threatening, "Except you repent, you shall all perish!" O that all who are going astray might consider this, and "return immediately to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls!"

To you who have fled to him for refuge, here is indeed strong consolation. You are sensible of manifold corruptions, any one of which is sufficient to destroy your souls. You feel your weakness too, and your utter inability to withstand that roaring lion that seeks to devour you. What then would you do, if you were left to preserve yourselves by the unassisted efforts of your own strength and resolution? To you it is no little joy to be assured that *you are in the hands of an Omnipotent Being, against whom neither earth nor Hell shall ever be able to prevail, and who engages in your behalf, that you shall never perish!*[1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4). Learn then to "cast your care on Him," and to commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19)."

***~~#1666~~***

***~~Christ One with the Father~~***

***~~[John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30).~~***

"I and my Father are one."

IT might well be expected, that, if God would reveal his will to man, there would be many things disclosed by him which exceed the narrow limits of human reason. This might more particularly be expected in whatever related to his own person and character: for, as we can know nothing of him any farther than he is pleased to reveal himself to us; and as we cannot even comprehend our own nature, or discover how the soul is united to the body; it would be strange indeed if we could comprehend the mode of God's existence, and explain how there would be a union of Three Persons in the God-head. In relation to such a mysterious subject, *our wisdom is to ascertain what God has revealed concerning himself, and to receive it on the testimony of his word*. This is the office of reason, as well as of faith: for reason requires that we submit our understanding to the dictates of His wisdom, no less than our wills to the influence of His authority.

That a *Trinity of Persons in the Godhead*is revealed, cannot reasonably be doubted, as long as the baptismal rite shall continue to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;" for to imagine, that a creature is here associated with Almighty God in the highest possible act of divine worship, were the height of absurdity and impiety. The subject before us relates only to the union subsisting between Christ and his Father: to that therefore we shall confine our attention. We begin with considering,

***~~I. The truth of our Lord's assertion.~~***

Here mark,

***~~1. The assertion itself—~~***

Our Lord says, "I and my Father are one." Now it must be remembered, that the same expressions are used, as in human compositions, so also in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in a metaphorical and figurative sense, and sometimes in a plain and literal sense; and their true import must always be judged of by the context. This is particularly the case with respect to the expression before us; which is elsewhere used in reference to the saints, to mark the exalted state to which they are raised by their connection with Christ, and the mutual interest which they would feel in each other's concerns: "I pray for them, that they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory which you gave me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one, [John 17:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.20-23)."

Here the sense is obvious: no one could conceive for a moment that the union here spoken of is personal, as though the saints could be one person with God, or one person in their collective capacity: it simply means, that the saints are to enjoy a union with God and with each other, as nearly resembling that which exists between Christ and his Father, as their situation and circumstances will admit of—namely, a union of sentiment, of affection, of will, and of operation. But, in the passage under our consideration, more is evidently intended: in that is implied, not merely a figurative, but*a real and personal union, a union of nature and of essence*.

In proof of this, we must refer you to the whole scope of the passage. Our Lord is speaking of the security which his sheep enjoyed; that "He gives unto them eternal life, and that they shall never perish, nor shall any one ever pluck them out of his hand." But, because he was speedily to be taken from them, and might therefore be supposed incapable of fulfilling this promise, he says, that "his Father was confessedly greater than all" created powers, yes, greater than he himself was in his human or Mediatorial capacity; and "that none would ever be able to pluck them out of his Father's hand." Yet, that they might know that he would not, on account of his removal from them, remit his care of them, he added, "I and my Father are one;" 'we are one, as in will, so in power; as in operation, so in nature and in essence: and consequently my sheep have a double pledge of their security.'

This is the plain meaning of the passage; and that it is so, may be clearly seen from the construction which the Jews put upon his words. They took up stones immediately, to stone him: and when he inquired for which of all his good works they were about to stone him, they replied, that it was "not for any good work, but for blasphemy; because that He, who was only a man like themselves, made himself God, verse 32, 33." Now this shows incontestably what meaning they affixed to his words: it was not an ignorant individual, or persons ill acquainted with the received import of the words, that so interpreted them; but the whole audience, who perfectly understood what meaning his expressions were suited to convey.

The Jews were taught by God himself to be particularly jealous on the subject of idolatry; and to put to death any person who would, whether openly or in secret, attempt to seduce them to it. When therefore they heard our Lord arrogate to himself divine honors, they resented it, as they had done repeatedly before, by taking up stones to stone him as a blasphemer, [John 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.17-18); [John 8:58-59](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.58-59). We do not say that they were right in expressing their abhorrence of idolatry in this way; because they would have had the matter examined before a magistrate, and have acted according to evidence, and not according to the impulse of their blind passions: but we do say that *Jesus was justly accused of blasphemy, if he was not God*; and that there was just cause for the indignation which his audience expressed.

But perhaps they were mistaken in their construction of his words: in which case we may be assured that Jesus would carefully rectify their error. But do we find that he did disclaim the assertion which they called blasphemy? No!

In his answers to them we find only,

***~~2. His confirmation of it—~~***

They had just complained that he kept them in suspense; and had desired that he would tell them plainly, who, and what, he was. He, in reply, declares that he had told them, and that they would not believe, verse 25. Had he told them that he was a mere man like themselves, they would readily enough have believed that: but when he tells them again that he was "one with his Father," they go about to stone him for blasphemy. Nevertheless, instead of revoking his word, he vindicates his claim; and establishes the justice of it by an appeal to the sacred writings.

Magistrates, he tells them, were in the inspired volume frequently dignified with the name of gods, [Exodus 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.1); [Exodus 22:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 22.28); and he refers them to one passage in particular, well known to them all, "I have said, You are gods, [Psalm 82:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 82.6)," Now these were called gods partly, because *they were Jehovah's representatives and vice-regents upon earth*; and partly, because they were types of the Messiah, who was to be really and truly God, even "Emmanuel, God with us, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14). [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23),"

'Now,' says our Lord, 'if these persons, in order to prepare you for the reception of your incarnate God, were honored with the name and title of gods, and you readily acquiesced in it, with what reason can you, when your incarnate God appears, accuse him of blasphemy, because he assumes that title, or calls himself by a name which you justly consider as equivalent to it? You are looking for your Messiah; and that Messiah is expressly foretold under the character of "Jehovah's fellow, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)," who is "David's Lord, as well as David's Son, [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1) with [Matthew 22:42-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.42-45);" such therefore the Messiah must be; for "the Scripture cannot be broken:" why then do you not acknowledge the justice of my claim?

If indeed I do not give evidence enough that I am the Messiah, you may justly dispute my title to be regarded as God; but if I do, then you are the blasphemers, who rob me of my proper honor. Know then, that I am the Person "whom the Father has sanctified" and set apart from all eternity to the office, "and now has sent into the world" to execute it: know also, that, instead of retracting anything I have said, I repeat my assertions, and demand your acknowledgment of me in my true character.'

Thus our Lord confirms his assertion by an appeal to *Scripture*. He next proceeds to confirm it by an appeal to his own *works*. 'I do not desire to be credited in such an assertion upon my bare unsupported word, without any corroborating evidence;' says our Lord. "If I do not do the works of my Father, believe me not: but, if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works; that you may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him, verse 37, 38."

Consider my works, both the matter, and the manner of them, and see if they do not justify every assertion I have made. Did ever any man perform such miracles as I have done, so many, so great, so benevolent, so demonstrative of a divine agency? Moses indeed and the prophets wrought some few miracles: but how? they wrought them uniformly by application to Jehovah for the intervention of his power. But look at my miracles: on some occasions indeed, I also, acting in my mediatorial capacity, have acknowledged my dependence on him, and have acted "in his name," as his servant, [Luke 11:41-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.41-43); (for as Mediator, I am his servant,) but, as being One with the Father, I have wrought in instances without number by that power and authority which I possess in common with the Father. Whence had I the power to still the elements as I have done, [Mark 4:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.39); or to expel Satan, [Mark 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.25), or to raise the dead, [Mark 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.41). [Luke 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.14). When the leper justly acknowledged my power to effect whatever I would; to whom was I indebted for power to heal him, when I said, "I will, be clean [Matthew 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.3)."

Such an appeal as this was sufficient to convince the most incredulous: and it receives much additional light from the manner in which the Apostles wrought their miracles: they wrought them invariably in the name of Jesus, [Acts 9:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.34); [Acts 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.18); and disclaimed all idea of any inherent power in themselves, or even of any goodness on account of which God had wrought by them; so fearful were they, lest by any means they should rob the Lord Jesus of the honor due unto his name, [Acts 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6); [Acts 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.12); [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16) with 4:9, 10, 12.

Shall it be said that our Lord did not mean in this appeal to assert his true and proper Godhead? Then see both his words, and the sense in which his enraged adversaries continued to understand them: "Though you do not believe me, believe the works; that you may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him." Here are two things demonstrated; first, that his enemies understood him to affect equality with God: and next, that He, knowing that they did so understand him, renewed and confirmed the assertions which they had so interpreted. A clearer explanation of what he affirmed, or a stronger proof of what he is, we cannot reasonably desire.

We are the more earnest in establishing the Divinity of our blessed Lord, because it is intimately connected with every fundamental truth of our holy religion.

To illustrate more fully the truth asserted, I proceed to mark,

***~~II. The incalculable importance of it—~~***

This truth established, we behold in the clearest light:

***~~1. The dignity of his person—~~***

Because God condescended to take our nature upon him, we requite his love by denying him to be God. But know that Jesus Christ is indeed:  
"the true God, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20),"  
"the mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6),"  
"the great God and our Savior, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13),"  
"God over all, blessed for evermore, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5),"  
"the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)."

Yes, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)."

Hear what he himself says unto Philip: Philip, having heard him speaking of the Father, as actually known to his disciples, and already seen by them, says, "Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us." To this Jesus replies, "Have I been so long with you, and have you not known me, Philip? He who has seen me, has seen the Father; and how say you then, Show us the Father? Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake, [John 14:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.7-11)."

Now, I ask, if Jesus had not been really "one with the Father, would he have dared to use such language as this? And, if his disciples were guilty of idolatry in worshiping him, was not the fault altogether his? Were not his words and his arguments expressly calculated to mislead and deceive them? But there is no room for doubt on this head. We never can entertain too high thoughts of him; nor can we ever honor him as we ought, unless we "honor him, even as we honor the Father, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23)."

***~~2. The virtue of his sacrifice—~~***

*On the dignity of his person depends the whole value of his atonement.*The Apostle justly observes, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin:" and the same observation may with justice be applied to every creature, however exalted. But when we are assured that it was "God who was manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)," that it was "the Lord of glory that was crucified, [1 Corinthians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.8)," and that it was "God who purchased the Church with his own blood, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)," we no longer hesitate to declare that his death was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2)."

He was, it is true, "in the form of a servant; but he was also in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8);" and therefore we may be assured that "his blood will cleanse us from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)." The ransom he has paid for us, is fully equal to the redemption of a ruined world: and the righteousness which he has wrought out for us by his obedience unto death, is all that is needed for the justification of those who trust in it. The very name given him by the prophet declares this; for we are taught to "call him, Jehovah our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 33.16)." Here then "the weary and heavy-laden may find rest unto their souls".

***~~3. The sufficiency of his grace—~~***

If Jesus were only a creature, those who trust in him might be addressed like the worshipers of Baal, "Cry aloud, for he is a God: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey; or perhaps he sleeps, and must be awaked, 1 Kings 18:27." He could not attend to the concerns of the whole universe at once; and therefore could not be a suitable object of our trust and confidence. But he is infinitely above all creatures, being "King of kings, and Lord of lords, [Revelation 19:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.16)." He could truly say to Paul, and to every suppliant in the universe, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Let not anyone then despond, as though his corruptions were irremediable, or his enemies invincible; for "God has laid help for us upon One who is mighty, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19);" and the weakest of the human race that relies on him, may confidently say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)." "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation, [Isaiah 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.2);" "The Lord is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing, [Psalm 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.1)."

***~~4. The excellency of his salvation—~~***

If we consider the price that has been paid, we may judge of the value of that redemption which has been purchased for us. Even in relation to the present life, we are told that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God has prepared for those who love him, [Isaiah 64:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.4). [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10)." Under whatever figure they are spoken of, they are represented as exceeding all human apprehension: "the gift of them is unspeakable, [2 Corinthians 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.15);" "the *riches*of them unsearchable, [Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8);" the *peace*that is enjoyed by means of them, passes understanding, [Philippians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.7);" and "the *joy*which they produce, is unspeakable and and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8);" the *love*that bestowed them has "a height and depth, and length and breadth" that can never be explored, [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18).

Respecting the future life, we are still further from being able to appreciate the glories of it. The description of Heaven, as a city paved with gold, and enriched with everything magnificent or good, affords but a faint idea of that glorious place, [Revelation 21:10-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.10-23); as the songs and music of its inhabitants very inadequately represent their blessedness and joy, [Revelation 5:8-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8-14); [Revelation 14:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.1-3). But this we know, that, both on earth and in Heaven, *the felicity of the saints shall be worthy of the sacrifice that was made to obtain it.*Let not any one then seek it in a listless and lukewarm manner, as though it were of little value: for it is a "great salvation, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)," which the tongues of men and angels can never worthily describe, nor can the ages of eternity suffice to enumerate its blessings.

***~~#1667~~***

***~~Christ the Resurrection and the Life~~***

***~~[John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26).~~***

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

IN great and long continued afflictions, we are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. But, whatever be his intention with respect to the ungodly, we are sure that he designs nothing but good to his own peculiar people, even when he appears most regardless of their supplications. There are *two ends*which he invariably proposes to himself in his dispensations towards them; namely:  
the brighter revelation of his own glory,  
and the fuller manifestation of it to their souls.

In the history before us we have an account of a heavy affliction that had befallen a family, through the death of one to whom Jesus had shown a very peculiar attachment. He had been solicited to come and help them; but he had delayed his visit until the sick person had been dead four days. This however, though liable to misconstruction, he had done intentionally, in order that he might manifest more fully to the disconsolate sisters his own power and glory.

Accordingly, when they intimated their persuasion, that, if he would pray to God for the restoration of their brother to life, God would grant his request, he told them that he needed not beseech God to effect it; for that he himself was the resurrection and the life; and was able to impart either bodily or spiritual life to whoever he would.

In considering this most remarkable declaration, we shall notice,

***~~I. That part which relates to himself—~~***

Martha having, in conformity with the prevailing opinion of the Jews, expressed her expectation of a general resurrection at the last day, Jesus says to her,

***~~"I am the resurrection"—~~***

Our Lord, in his divine nature, possessed omnipotence necessarily, and of himself. In his mediatorial capacity he was invested with it by his Father, agreeably to the plan concerted in the divine counsels. To him who had undertaken to procure salvation for a fallen world, was delegated all power requisite for the full discharge of that office. The restoring of his people to a new and heavenly life after death, was essential to their complete salvation: this therefore was committed to him, [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21); [John 5:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.25-29); and he both declared he would execute this great work, [John 6:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.39-40), and gave a pledge of its accomplishment in raising himself from the dead, [John 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.18). [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20).

***~~"I am the life"—~~***

In this term our Lord proceeds further than in the former, and asserts, that as he is the author and first-fruits of the resurrection, so is he the very principle of life whereby his people live. This might indeed be collected from many figurative expressions of Scripture, which represent him as the fountain of life to all his people, [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1). [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16). But we are not left to gather such an important truth from mere parables; it is asserted frequently in the plainest terms: he is a quickening spirit, [1 Corinthians 15:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.45), that lives in us, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); [John 6:57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.57) and [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20), and is our very life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4).

He is to the soul, what the soul is to the body; he pervades, animates, and invigorates all our spiritual faculties: by his secret energy our understanding is enabled to apprehend divine truth, and our will inclined to obey it: and, without him, the soul would be as dead as the body without the soul.

Let us now prosecute our inquiries into,

***~~II. That part which respects his people—~~***

There is a remarkable correspondence between the two latter, and the two former clauses of the text; the latter declaring the operation of the powers expressed in the former.

***~~1. As being "the resurrection," he will raise the bodies of his people—~~***

Judging of things according to our weak reason, we are ready to think that the restoration of bodies, which may have undergone so many changes, is impossible. But *cannot He who formed the universe out of nothing, collect the atoms that constitute our identity, and reunite them to their kindred souls?*He can, and will; yes, that very Jesus, who died upon the cross, has the keys of death and of Hell, [Revelation 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.18), and will effect this by his own almighty power, [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21).

This clause might further intimate, that by the first act of faith in him our souls would be made partakers of spiritual life. And this would accord with other passages of Scripture, [John 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.33); [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35); [John 7:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.38); [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10), and prepare us for the next clause, which, rising in a climax, declares *the benefits that shall result from a continued life of faith upon him*.

***~~2. As being "life," he will preserve the souls of his people unto everlasting life—~~***

The bodies of the saints must undergo the sentence denounced against sin, [Romans 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.10); (though death to them is scarcely worthy the name of death; it is rather a sleep, from which they shall be awakened at the morning of the resurrection, verse 11. [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60). [1 Thessalonians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.14),) but their souls shall never die: none shall prevail against them, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17); none shall pluck them out of Christ's hands, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28); their life is hid in him beyond the reach of men or devils, [Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3); the vital principle within them is an ever-living seed, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23), an over-flowing fountain, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14); as long as Christ lives, they shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19).

The separation that will take place between their souls and bodies will only introduce them to a higher state of existence, which they shall enjoy until the day that their bodies shall be awakened from their slumbers, to participate in and enhance their bliss.

We must not however fail to notice the description given of those to whom these promises are made—

Twice, in these few words, are these blessings limited to *believers*: not because our Lord disregards good works, or because they shall not be rewarded; but because we cannot do any good work unless we first receive strength from Christ by faith, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); and because, if we obtained life by working, we would have whereof to glory before God: and God has decreed that no flesh shall glory in his presence, and that we shall glory only in the Lord, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27). [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-9). [1 Corinthians 1:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.29-31).

It must never be forgotten that God has caused all fullness to dwell in his Son, Jesus Christ, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); and that we must, by a continued exercise of faith, receive out of that fullness grace upon grace, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). It is by faith that,  
we live [Galatians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.11),  
we stand, [2 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.24),  
we walk, [2 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.7),  
we are saved, [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16);  
in a word, "God has given us eternal life; but this life is in his Son: he therefore 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)."

The pointed interrogation with which our Lord closed this address to Martha, directs us how to improve this subject: it suggests to us,

***~~1. That all persons, however eminent in their profession, or decided in their character, ought to "examine themselves whether they be in the faith"—~~***

It was to one whom he knew to be a humble and faithful Disciple, that Jesus put this question: well therefore may we who are of more doubtful character, consider it as addressed to us; "Do you believe this?" Do you believe that Christ is the only fountain of life; and that there is no way of receiving life from him but by faith? And do you believe these things, not in a mere speculative manner (for that many do whose souls are dead before God) but in such a way as to reduce them to practice? The believing of this record forms the one line of distinction between those that shall be saved, and those that shall perish. If we truly receive it, we have already passed from death unto life, [John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.24); if we do not receive it, we are yet dead in trespasses and sins: we have not life now; we cannot have life hereafter. A resurrection indeed we shall partake of; but it is a resurrection to damnation, and not a resurrection to life, [John 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.29); we shall live; but it will be a life justly denominated death, the second death, [Revelation 20:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.14). Let us not then defer our inquiries into a subject which is of such infinite importance.

***~~2. That the believing of this record is the most effectual antidote against the troubles of life or the fears of death—~~***

If Martha had felt the full influence of these truths, she would have moderated her sorrows, under the persuasion that her loss was her brother's gain; and that, if her brother were not restored to life, she would soon meet him in the eternal world. Thus in every state the consideration of these truths will afford to us also unspeakable consolation: for if we believe in Christ, and have through him the possession of spiritual life, and the prospect of eternal life—then what cause can we have to complain; what cause to fear? The world will be divested of its allurements, and death of its terrors. *Satisfied that all events are under the control of our best Friend, we shall commit them cheerfully to his wise disposal; and looking forward to the day in which he will call us from our graves, we shall expect his summons with, composure at least, if not also with a holy impatience*. Let us then live by faith in our divine Savior, assured that he will keep us unto eternal life, and exalt us, both in body and soul, unto the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory.

In considering this most remarkable declaration, we shall notice,

***~~III. The affirmation—~~***

This relates,

***~~1. Partly to our Lord himself—~~***

"I am the Resurrection and the Life." These expressions doubtless refer in a measure to that power which our Lord possesses, and which at a future period he will surely exercise, to raise the dead. But it must principally be understood as declaring his power to restore the souls of men to spiritual and eternal life. This power he possesses essentially as God; and in his mediatorial office he has received it from the Father to be exercised for his chosen people. In them he will not only act, but live; himself being the very life of their souls, and performing in their souls every office which the soul itself performs in the body.

***~~2. Partly to his believing people—~~***

There is a remarkable correspondence between the two latter, and the two former clauses of the text; the latter declaring the operation of the power expressed in the former.

The souls that are dead, he will restore to life. Only let a person who has hitherto been dead in trespasses and sins, believe in him, and immediately he shall "pass from death to life," and be enabled to perform all the functions of a child of God.

And one who by faith has been restored to life, shall, by the exercise of the same faith, be preserved even to the end: no enemy shall prevail against him, or separate him from the Redeemer's love: His body may die even as others: but his soul shall live for ever; and his body too be raised again to be partaker of its bliss.

***~~IV. The interrogation founded upon it—~~***

This may be understood as put to Martha,

***~~1. In a way of inquiry—~~***

Even she might profitably examine whether her faith in him was genuine. And much more does a similar inquiry befit us. Let it not be supposed that all who are called Christians possess this faith: in truth, but few possess it: Yet is it that alone which will ensure to us eternal life.

***~~2. In a way of reproof—~~***

Her grief on this occasion, though natural, was, on the whole, carried to excess: and the question, thus put to her, might intimate, that her principles were not operative to a just extent. The proper office of faith was to compose her mind under all trials, and to elevate her above all the things of time and sense. Are any of you then greatly agitated, and sinking under the weight of your trials? Remember how unsuitable this is to your high calling: and beg of God that your faith and patience may have their proper work.

***~~3. In a way of encouragement—~~***

What can any person want, who has such a Savior to go unto, and such privileges to enjoy? Surely in him there is all fullness for a supply of all our wants: and in our prospects of eternal life all other things would, as it were, be lost, like the stars before the rising sun.

Brethren, behold your Savior possessed of "all power in Heaven and in earth!" Behold him engaged for you, and exercising all his powers for you. He is "the Resurrection," that you may rise. He is "the Life," that you may live. Through him you do live: through him you shall live. Nor need you be afraid of death: for to you it shall be the gate of Heaven, the commencement of a glorious and everlasting life.

***~~#1668~~***

***~~SYMPATHY~~***

***~~[John 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.35).~~***

"Jesus wept."

*THE Holy Scriptures are, beyond all comparison, superior to any other book; in that they reveal to us truths which human reason could never have explored, and administer consolations which no human composition could ever have imparted*. But it is not merely on these accounts that they are to be valued. Taking them as records only, they are deeply interesting, because of the incidents which they bring to our view, and the simplicity which pervades the narration of them.

The history of Joseph, for instance, stands unrivaled in this view in the Old Testament, as does the account of Lazarus in the New. By what is related concerning him, we are introduced into the bosom of a pious family, the happiness of which is interrupted for a time by the disease and death of its chief member; and is afterwards exalted a hundred-fold, by the restoration of that person to life. We forbear to enter into the particulars of that history, as they may be read by every one at home: but we would call your attention to that particular incident mentioned in our text, "Jesus wept."

In these words we have,

***~~I. A memorable occurrence—~~***

Only reflect on the person of whom this is spoken. He was no other than our incarnate God; who, being absolutely perfect in every respect, was far above the reach of those passions with which we are apt to be transported, and had all his feelings in perfect subjection: yet of him it is said, that, at the grave of Lazarus, "he wept."

But from whence proceeded these tender emotions? They arose,

***~~1. From sympathy with his afflicted friends—~~***

Such was his regard for Lazarus and his sisters, that his friendship for them was a matter of public notoriety, verse 3, 5. And now that death had made an inroad on their happiness, and reduced the surviving sisters to deep distress, he could not but feel for them, and participate in their sorrows. In truth, *sympathy is a necessary fruit of love, and altogether inseparable from it.*When, therefore, our Lord saw these friends weeping so bitterly, and their friends and attendants weeping also, he could no longer refrain, but had his own cheeks also suffused with tears, verse 33. To this principle the spectators ascribed his tears: they all exclaimed, "Behold, how he *loved*him! verse 36."

***~~2. From compassion for their remaining infirmities—~~***

After all that they had seen and known of him, they would have assigned no limits either to his power or grace. Yet behold, though they did believe that he could have preserved their brother from death, they had no conception that he was able to restore him from the grave. Though he had intimated to them his intention to do so, they could not believe him: and when he actually prepared to do so, they imagined that the period which had elapsed since his death, and which, according to the common course of things, would have caused the body to decay, was an insurmountable obstacle to his purpose verse 39.

Well might this give pain to his holy soul. And that it did so, we see from the reproof which he administered: "Did I not say unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" With his own disciples, also, he was frequently grieved on the same account, [Matthew 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.26). [Mark 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.14).

***~~3. From grief for the obduracy of those, who, he knew, would be yet further hardened by this miracle—~~***

This, I doubt not, entered deeply into his feelings at this time. It was for their conviction that he had refrained from healing Lazarus at first, and had afterwards delayed coming to his friends until he had been four days dead, verse 6, 15. It was for the very same end that, instead of exerting his own Almighty power in the way that he usually did, he prayed to his heavenly Father to effect the miracle; showing thereby the Father's union with him in all that he did, and thus placing beyond all reasonable doubt the truth of his own Messiahship, verse 41-43.

But "he knew what was in man:" he knew that this stupendous miracle would only enrage some of them the more, in proportion as it carried conviction to the minds of others; and that, instead of converting their souls, it would only precipitate them into more heinous guilt and wickedness. All this it eventually did, verse 46-50, 53, 57 with 12:10, 11; and all this he foresaw.

We wonder not, then, that he wept; seeing that the very means he was using for the salvation of men, would issue, with respect to many of them, in their more aggravated condemnation. Nor were these things of rare occurrence. They prevailed among the great mass of his hearers, and proved a source of continual sorrow to his soul, [Mark 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.5) and [John 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.21).

But in these words we have, also,

***~~II. An instructive lesson—~~***

Were we to trace this occurrence in all its bearings, we would scarcely know where to begin, or where to end. We shall content ourselves, therefore, with noticing only two or three things which naturally arise out of it.

We see then from it,

***~~1. That there is no condition in this life, in which men are exempt from sorrow—~~***

Had there been any exception from the common lot of all men, we would have looked for it in such a family as that of Lazarus, where there was such ardent love between all the members of it, and so peculiar an interest in the favor of the Lord Jesus; or, at all events, we would expect to find it in our incarnate God. But death invaded their peaceful home; and filled the surviving sisters with distress, in which also the Savior himself participated.

Who then, among us, can hope for freedom from the general lot? Truly, this poor world is a "*Bochim*, [Judges 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 2.5)," a valley of tears, to every child of man. However prosperous our condition may be, no one "knows what a day or an hour may bring forth." Either in our own persons, or in our families and connections, it will be strange indeed if something does not frequently occur to damp our joys, and to remind us that "this is not our rest:" for "man is born to trouble," as naturally and as certainly, "as the sparks fly upward."

***~~2. What is of necessity the operation of divine grace in the soul—~~***

The sum and substance of all practical religion is *love*: and wherever love exists, there will be *sympathy*: for it is impossible but that the members of the same body would have a community of feeling with each other, 1 Corinthians 12:25. To "rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep," is the necessary fruit and consequence of grace in the soul, [Romans 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.15). See instances in [Hebrews 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.31). [Philippians 2:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.26-28)." The man that is devoid of these holy feelings is destitute of piety altogether, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). In truth, for our griefs and sorrows we have the very same occasions as at this time presented themselves to our blessed Lord. There are troubles and calamities all around us: and if we have our souls duly impressed with them, we shall be able to say, with holy Job, "Did not I weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? [Job 30:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 30.25)."

But if there are no particular troubles that come under our cognizance, who can open his eyes and not see to what an extent sin reigns in all the world? And would not that move us? Would not "rivers of waters run down our eyes, because men keep not God's law! [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136)." Would we not say with the Prophet Jeremiah, "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the sins and miseries of my people, [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.1).

Nor would the defects of those who profess godliness escape our notice. When Paul marked the conduct of some at Philippi, he was quite distressed in his soul because of the delusions by which they were blinded: "Many walk," says he, "of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and that their end is destruction! [Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)." And so tenderly did he enter into the concerns of all, that he could say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? 2 Corinthians 11:29." This is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus;" and in this every true disciple will resemble him, [Philippians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4-5).

***~~3. What a Friend we have, before whom to spread all the sins and sorrows with which we are oppressed—~~***

Has any *temporal calamity*befallen you? He who wept at the grave of Lazarus invites you to call upon him: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will hear you; and you shall glorify me, [Psalm 50:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 50.15)."

Are you *loaded with a sense of guilt?* The same Almighty Friend says to you, "Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy-laden; and I will give you rest, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28)." Very remarkable is that expression of his pity for Ephraim of old: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus .…Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? For, since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still: yes, my affections are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord, [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20)."

And do you think that he will exercise less compassion towards you? O, know for a certainty, that you "have not a High-Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as you are—yet without sin, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15)."

Be it so, that your sins appear to be of more than ordinary enormity, because of the circumstances under which they have been committed: shall you therefore despond? Be assured, that He who wept over the murderous Jerusalem, [Luke 19:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41-42), has lost none of his compassion, but is alike willing to exercise his mercy towards you. He is justly called "the Consolation of Israel:" and, if you seek him, he will be found of you, though you were dead—yet would you live: and if you will truly believe in him, you shall assuredly behold the glory of God! verse 25, 40."

***~~#1669~~***

***~~LAZARUS RAISED~~***

***~~[John 11:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.40).~~***

"Did not I say unto you, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?"

SUCH is the state of God's people upon earth, that they can scarcely ever come into trying circumstances without discovering the frailty of their nature, and laying themselves open to reproof from their Divine Master. But in all the rebukes which our Lord gave his disciples, we may notice a peculiar tenderness, like that of a parent towards his beloved child, [Matthew 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.31). [Mark 9:33-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.33-37). In the passage before us he had occasion to reprove the unbelief of Martha: but he could not possibly have done it in milder terms.

In considering this *reproof*, let us notice,

***~~I. What it spoke to her—~~***

***~~She, in her extremity, sent to Jesus, to entreat him to restore her brother Lazarus to health—~~***

Bethabara beyond Jordan, where Jesus was, was a long day's journey from Bethany. Martha and Mary had not informed Jesus of their distress, until they despaired of obtaining help for their brother except from his miraculous interposition. In answer to their petition, he sent them word, that "the sickness of their brother would not be unto death; but that the Son of God would be glorified thereby, verse 4."

But instead of attending to the request immediately, he stayed where he was two days, and then went to Bethany, and found, that Lazarus, who had died soon after the departure of the messenger, "had been dead and buried four days, verse 17." Martha, hearing of his arrival, went forth to meet him, and expressed her regret that Jesus had not been there while her brother was yet alive, since she was confident, that he would have exerted his almighty power to restore him to health.

Our Lord now repeated what he had declared to the messenger, and told her that "her brother would rise again, verse 21-23." She however, supposing him to speak of what would take place "at the last day," took no notice of his words as a ground of present consolation. Jesus therefore proceeded to speak more plainly, that "He himself was the resurrection and the life: and that one who believed in him, though he were dead—yet would live, yes, and never die, verse 25, 26."

But still she did not see in this, that he who could restore dead souls to life, could also with equal ease restore a body that was dead. When therefore he ordered the stone to be removed from his grave, she intimated that the state of his body, now putrid, placed it beyond a possibility of restoration to life.

Upon this our blessed Lord administered the reproof which we are now considering: "Did I not say, that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" Then, not being "extreme to mark what was done amiss," he spoke the word, "Lazarus, come forth:" and immediately he who was dead came forth, with all the solemn appendages of death adhering to him; and was again restored to the society of his beloved sisters and friends.

***~~By the mercy given to her on this occasion "God was greatly glorified"—~~***

How wonderful must the condescension and grace of God appear to Martha, when she saw the request of such unworthy creatures as herself and her sister prevailing to such an extent as this! And what a confirmation had she now before her eyes of that truth which she had already confessed, that "Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world, verse 27." What an enjoyment too would they henceforth have of their brother's society, whose presence could not fail of bringing all these things to their remembrance, and of calling forth on all occasions their devoutest praises and thanksgivings to their God and Savior! Thus then did she indeed see the glory of God, notwithstanding her faith, though true, fell very far short of that perfect standard to which it ought to have attained.

But, not to confine the reproof to her, let us consider,

***~~II. What it speaks to us—~~***

To us does the Lord Jesus speak in his word, as truly as he ever spoke to Martha, or to his own disciples. To ourselves then we may apply that question, "Did I not say thus and thus unto you? and that, if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" Yes: and in this reproof we see,

***~~1. That whatever the Lord Jesus has spoken to us, would be treasured up in our minds—~~***

In his word are "exceeding great and precious promises:" and every one of them is made to us: and it is no less our duty, than our privilege, to rely upon them, and to expect their accomplishment to our souls. For instance, He has told us that "those who come to God by him God will never cast out" — that "all manner of sin and wickedness shall be forgiven unto them — and that "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." These, and ten thousand other promises we should treasure up in our minds, and plead them before God in prayer.

Nor should we ever be discouraged by any difficulties or any delays. The difficulties may be designed of God for the fuller manifestation of his own glory: and the delays be permitted to endear to us the more the mercies that he will grant unto us.

***~~2. That the more we exercise faith in God the more will he manifest to us his glory—~~***

God will honor faith.

See it in the case of Abraham and in the case of Moses. How much more visible were his power and grace in the birth of Isaac when he was given to Abraham after all hope of any progeny had ceased, and when restored to him afterwards, as it were, from the dead!

And how did every difficulty that interposed between the first message delivered to Pharaoh and the final establishment of the Hebrews in the promised land, display and magnify the grace of God in that stupendous dispensation!

So shall we find in all God's dealings with us, the more we are tried, the more will his glory appear to us, if only we stagger not at his promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to him! Only let us never limit his power, or doubt his veracity. If our case appears as desperate as that of Lazarus, let us not therefore doubt, and much less despond: for sooner shall Heaven and earth pass away, that one jot or tittle of his word shall fail".

***~~#1670~~***

***~~The Prophetic Counsel of Caiaphas~~***

**[John 11:50-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.50-52).**

"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one."

*IT is often found that the people who are not humbled and converted by the Gospel, are irritated and incensed by it*; and that, to justify their rejection of its truths, they become persecutors of those who preach it. When their prejudices are once excited, nothing will allay them. However exemplary a minister may be in his conduct, however benevolent in his purposes, however wise and discreet in his exertions, he cannot escape their censure, or ward off their hatred. Rather than he would pass without censure, the very best actions of his life shall be brought against him as grounds of accusation. The abundance of his labors and the success of his endeavors shall be reported as matters worthy of blame, and shall be made the grounds of inveterate persecution.

It was thus when our blessed Lord himself ministered on earth. His wisdom or benevolence none can doubt: yet was he "a butt of contradiction" to all around him. He had just wrought a stupendous miracle in raising from the grave a man who had been dead four days, and who must have begun to putrefy. Would any one suppose that this would give offence? Yet behold, some who were present, went and made the miracle an occasion of grievous complaint; insomuch that the high-priest instantly convened a council, in order to concert measures for preventing a repetition of such *offences*in future. After some of the chief-priests had offered their opinions, the high-priest himself, in a very contemptuous and dictatorial tone, decided the point at once; and determined, that private, would give way to public, good: this, he said, common policy required; and therefore it was expedient to destroy the author of this benevolent act, lest the popularity which he had acquired by means of it, would excite the jealousy of the Roman government, and call down their vengeance on the whole nation. This advice was immediately, though not unanimously, [Luke 23:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.51), agreed to; (for *any argument will suffice, when prejudice is the judge*;) and means were instantly adopted for executing the decree.

But the text informs us, that this advice, pronounced as it was with oracular authority, was indeed an oracle; though it was dictated by God in a very different sense from that in which it was intended by Caiaphas. We shall therefore illustrate it in both points of view:

***~~I. As intended by Caiaphas—~~***

Caiaphas meant only, that, as the Jewish state would be (in his apprehension) endangered by the popularity of Jesus, common policy required that they would destroy him at once. But what wicked advice was this to come from a minister of religion, yes, from God's high-priest!

***~~1. How unjust!~~***

There was nothing criminal laid to the charge of our blessed Lord; yet was he to be treated as a criminal, and to be put to death as a malefactor. On what principle could this be justified. We do not hesitate to say, that nothing can warrant such a procedure. If a man thinks that he can benefit the state by exposing his own life, he is at liberty to do it; yes, every true Christian ought to be willing to "lay down his life for the brethren:" he would even account the sacrificing of his life in such a cause, to be rather a source of exultation and triumph, than of dread and sorrow, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16). [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17). But no tribunal under Heaven can take away the life of an innocent man: nor ought that which is radically unjust, ever to be sanctioned by legal authority.

***~~2. How impious!~~***

It was acknowledged by Caiaphas himself, that Jesus had wrought "miracles," "many" miracles; and miracles of such a nature as to carry conviction with them to every beholder, verse 47, 48. Now these miracles proved to demonstration, that Jesus was sent by God himself: they were the broad seal of Heaven attesting his Divine commission. What then was the advice, but a direct opposition to God himself? There was not so much as an attempt to cover the impiety: a fear of man's displeasure was the avowed and only reason for the commission of it. To what a height of wickedness must that man have attained, who could offer such wicked advice; and that council who could adopt it!

***~~3. How absurd!~~***

The Jewish history might have shown the council, that the Romans could not prevail against them any further than God authorized and empowered them to do so. Consequently, if they looked no further than to their temporal happiness, it was their wisdom rather to conciliate the favor of God by doing what was right, than to provoke him to anger by murdering his dear Son. Yet, so infatuated were they, as to fear "the axe, rather than him that hews therewith;" and to draw down the certain displeasure of the Almighty, rather than incur the danger of displeasing a worm like themselves. The outcome proved the folly of their choice: for the very means they used to avoid destruction, brought down destruction upon them, and that too from the very persons whose favor they had so impiously courted. In the space of forty years, God executed upon them the most signal vengeance: he inflicted upon them the judgment he had warned them of: and made use of the Roman armies "miserably to destroy those murderers, and to burn up their city! [Matthew 21:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.38-41); [Matthew 22:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.7)."

But we are told that Caiaphas "spoke this not of himself." He meant indeed what he said; but his words bear a very different construction,

***~~II. As dictated by God—~~***

Since the Jews had been brought under the Roman yoke, the high priesthood, instead of being continued to the end of life, was changed as often as the interests of the Roman government appeared to require it. It now happened, that, notwithstanding Annas, the predecessor of Caiaphas, was yet alive, Caiaphas was high-priest. And, as God in former times had enabled the high-priests, by means of the Urim and Thummim, to declare his will, *it pleased him now so to overrule the mind of Caiaphas, that he would utter a prophecy, when of himself he designed nothing more than to give the most impious advice*. And though this was certainly a remarkable instance of God's interposition, it was by no means singular: for *none of the prophets fully understood the import of their own words*,Compare [Psalm 22:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.16-18) with [1 Peter 1:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-12); some prophesied without any direct intention on their part, [1 Samuel 10:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 10.10-12); and others, in words most opposite to their own wishes, [Numbers 22:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.38) with 24:10.

In this prophecy he unwittingly declared,

***~~1. The end of Christ's death—~~***

Be astonished, O heavens! this inveterate enemy of Christ, at the very moment when he proposed that he would be put to death, proclaimed, that it was not for his own sins, but for the good of others! How careful was God to clear the innocence of his Son, when, in addition to this wretched pontiff, he stirred up Judas who betrayed him, and Pilate who condemned him, and one of the malefactors that suffered with him, and the centurion who superintended his execution, to unite their testimony to this effect! With this prophecy of Caiaphas agree those of Daniel and Isaiah, that "the Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26);" that he was to be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5)." Yes, "he died, the just for the unjust, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18);" he was an atoning sacrifice for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2)."

***~~2. The efficacy of it—~~***

Caiaphas intimated, that if this Jesus were put to death, all cause of fear would cease, and the whole nation would enjoy both peace and safety. Blessed truth! Provided only we believe in Jesus, we then indeed have nothing to fear from those who have enslaved us, or from those who seek our ruin—sin, Satan, death, and Hell shall all be disarmed of their power.

The whole Israel of God, wherever "scattered," are the nation of whom Caiaphas unwittingly spoke: they are "a holy nation:" they are savingly interested in all that Christ has done or suffered: they "are gathered into the one" great community; partakers of one heavenly nature; members of one mystical body; and heirs of one eternal glory, [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9). Caiaphas, your words are true; "they are tried to the uttermost;" that Jesus, whom you persecute, "has by death destroyed death, and delivered those who were all their life-time subject to bondage! [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How mysterious is the Providence of God!~~***

*That act which was in itself the most atrocious that ever was committed, was in its effects the best!* How deep a mystery! the life of the world secured by the death of God's only Son! But so it is still: "God's ways are in the great deep:" and the very efforts which are made by men and devils for the destruction of his people, are instrumental to their establishment and growth in grace. The time shall come when all the saints shall see as much reason to bless God for the malice exercised towards themselves in particular, as now they see to adore him for the accomplishment of his word in and by the Lord Jesus.

***~~2. How rich is his grace!~~***

For whom was it that Jesus died? It was "for that nation;" that nation that abused so many mercies, and persecuted so many prophets, and imbrued their hands in the blood of God's only Son! Even Caiaphas himself, with all that were concerned in that unparalleled transaction, were free to accept of mercy, and, by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their souls, to be cleansed from the guilt of shedding it.

Nor are *we*excluded from the benefit. Whatever guilt we may have contracted, the way is open for us, if we desire reconciliation with our offended God: "Not one who comes to him shall ever be cast out." Let this grace, this "exceedingly rich grace," fill us with astonishment, and be now, as it certainly will be in the eternal world, the subject of our incessant praise.

***~~#1671~~***

***~~Our Lord's Views of His Own Death~~***

***~~[John 12:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.23-24).~~***

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

THE nearer our Lord's death approached, the more he delighted to speak of it. So far from regarding it as an object of terror, he was longing for its accomplishment. To his disciples he had frequently declared the precise manner of it, together with all its antecedent indignities; and now he declares it to some strangers, whom curiosity had led to visit him.

Whether those strangers were Jews or heathens, is not agreed: but from the general use of the term which we translate "Greeks," and from the difficulty which the disciples felt about introducing them to Jesus, we apprehend that they were heathen, who had been proselyted to the worship of the true God, but had not become Jews by circumcision. Jesus had forbidden his disciples to enter into any cities of the Gentiles when he sent them out to preach his Gospel; and therefore they might well doubt the propriety of introducing Gentiles to him; which Philip did not venture to do, until he had conferred with Andrew, and consulted Jesus himself also on the point. When, however, they were brought to him, he told them of his approaching death, which he represented as a source of honor to himself, and of benefit to man. In these two views we shall consider it,

***~~I. As a source of honor to himself—~~***

He speaks not of being crucified, but glorified; for his death was indeed a glory to him:

***~~1. As atoning for the sins of the world—~~***

This is the true light wherein to view his death: it was a sacrifice for the sins of mankind: and it perfectly satisfied all the demands of law and justice, so that "God may be just and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus." View the death of Christ in this light, and say whether *his crown of thorns were not his brightest diadem; and the cross on which he expired, his most glorious throne!*Men indeed saw nothing but shame in his crucifixion; but God and angels beheld it replete with glory, [John 13:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31).

***~~2. As opening a way for the salvation of all mankind—~~***

Being "lifted up, he was to draw all men unto him, verse 32." He was the true "Shiloh, unto whom the gathering of the people would be." Had he been the Savior of Jews only, it would have been comparatively a light matter; but being God's salvation to the ends of the earth, he was most glorious in the eyes of God himself, [Isaiah 49:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.5-6).

Behold, now already was he reaping the first-fruits of that harvest which was soon to be gathered in: the solicitude of these Greeks to be made acquainted with him was a pledge of that more extended dominion which he was speedily to possess. Indeed this gathering of the people to him is represented by the prophets as constituting the summit of his glory, [Isaiah 55:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.5); [Isaiah 60:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.8-9); and he himself is "satisfied with all the travail of his soul, when he reaps this as its appointed fruit." But the songs of the redeemed in Heaven are the best evidence of this unquestionable truth, [Revelation 7:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-14).

Our Lord next speaks of his death,

***~~II. As a source of benefit to man—~~***

The illustration here used is familiar to all: every one knows that a grain of wheat, if left exposed upon a rock will be unproductive; but that if buried in the earth, it will corrupt, and vegetate, and bring forth fruit. Now to this our Lord compares his death.

***~~If he had not died, he would not have been a Savior to any—~~***

If he had not died, there would have been no atonement made, no sin forgiven, no soul of man delivered. *There was no other way in which God could have been reconciled to his sinful creatures, consistently with his justice, holiness, and truth.*In vain would Christ himself have become incarnate, if he had not died: in vain would he have fulfilled the law himself, and set a perfect example of obedience for us. If he had not completed the work by his death, the demands of law and justice had been still unsatisfied, and every child of Adam must have perished. As for any attempt on our part to supply the deficiency, either by repentance or amendment, it would have answered no purpose; it would have left us under the curses of the broken law.

***~~But by his death millions obtain life—~~***

It is not thirty, or sixty, or a hundredfold, that that grain of corn produces, but millions, innumerable as the sands upon the seashore! "The fruit of it shall shake like Lebanon, and they that spring up from it in the city, shall be as the piles of grass upon the earth, [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16). Think of the fruit produced by it in the apostolic age, and that which is yet growing from it in every quarter of the globe, and that which will arise in the Millennium, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Truly it will at last be a multitude, which no man can number, out of every kindred, and nation, and tongue, and people; all growing upon his root, all deriving life from his stem, all assimilated to his image, and all treasured up at last in the same garner!

Is one single soul of such value, that the whole world is as nothing in comparison with it? What then is the benefit arising to mankind from the death of Christ! how vast! How extensive! How incalculable!

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are inquiring after Jesus—~~***

If any are saying, like these Greeks, "Sir, we would see Jesus," we bless God who has put that desire into their hearts: and we shall be glad to be instrumental in any respect in introducing them to him. Of one thing we can confidently assure them, that there no longer exists any barrier to their admission to his presence, provided they desire in sincerity of heart to devote themselves to his service: whatever be their nation, their profession, their character, they are alike welcome, if they come with penitence and faith; and may be assured, that "he will never cast them out."

Would they know what he would principally commend to their attention? We answer, he would direct them to consider *his death as the most stupendous display of his love, and an inexhaustible source of blessings to their souls.*Reflect then, you inquiring people, on the Savior's love, and give him the glory due unto his name.

***~~2. Those who profess themselves to be his followers—~~***

As Jesus had frequently told his own disciples that they must be ready to lay down their lives for him, so he now declared to these strangers, that these were the only terms on which he would accept them as his people. The wheat must resemble that from which it sprang, and the disciples be conformed to the image of their Lord. Nor must they only be willing to suffer like him, but must account those sufferings to be their glory. This was the practice of the Apostles; and must be the practice of all who would adorn the Gospel, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). We would feel no difficulty in pronouncing him honored and glorified, who would be irradiated with a glory, like Moses, or have the Holy Spirit lighting visibly on him, as once he did on the Apostles: with equal confidence then may we pronounce him glorified, who bears his cross after Jesus; for "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon him, [1 Peter 4:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-14)." Remember then, brethren, that these are the terms on which Christ acknowledges you as his; and "arm yourselves with the mind that was in him." Be content to "suffer with him; and then you shall also be glorified together."

***~~#1672~~***

***~~The Benefit of Following Christ~~***

***~~[John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26)~~***

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

THE Christian's life is certainly a life of difficulty and self-denial, not only as being contrary to our natural inclinations, but as exposing us to the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world. From the very days of Cain to this present moment, the wicked have hated, reviled, and persecuted the just. The *prophets*were all, without exception, treated with great malignity. The *Apostles*were deemed as "the very filth of the world, and as the off-scouring of all things," both by their own people the Jews, and by the Gentiles in every place. Our blessed *Lord*himself, in whom no fault whatever could be found, was an object of "abhorrence to his whole nation," and was put to death by them as the vilest and most odious of malefactors.

We are taught to expect similar treatment at the hands of those among whom we live. Nor are we at liberty to shun the cross by any relaxation of our principles, or by any deviation from the path of duty. Our Lord tells us plainly, that "he who loves his life shall lose it; and that he alone who hates his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal, verse 25." But if this appears hard, the encouragement which our Lord affords us is amply sufficient for the support of our minds. His injunction is, "If any man serves me, let him follow me," even unto death. And for his encouragement I assure him, that where I am there shall also my servant be: yes, if any man serves me, him will my Father honor.

Here we have, on the most unquestionable authority,

**I.** Our duty set before us.

**II.** Our encouragement to perform it.

**I. Our duty is to "serve" the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose we are and whom therefore we are bound to serve."**But how must we serve him? Our Lord says, "If any man serves me, let him follow me:" Let him follow me,

As his *Teacher*, to instruct him.

As his *Master*, to rule him.

As his *Savior*, to save him.

As his *Example*, whereby to regulate the whole of his conduct.

**We must follow Christ as our *Teacher*, to instruct us.** "Christ is a Teacher come from God." He has "left the bosom of his Father, and come down to earth to declare him to us," and to make known to us his mind and will. In particular, He has come to inform us what plan his heavenly Father has devised for the restoration of a guilty world to his favor; and in what way they must walk so as to please and honor him. And he expects that we come to him with the docility of little children, and receive instruction from his lips: "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly in heart, [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29);" that is, 'Learn of me, for I can bear with your infirmities, and will carefully convey instruction to you as you are able to receive it.' It was in this way that *Mary*sat at his feet, while her more earthly-minded sister *Martha*was cumbered about providing for the guests whom she was about to entertain: and this was "the good part" which Mary chose, and which, our Lord assured her, would never be taken from her.

To inculcate this lesson, and to induce this habit, was the real scope of our Lord's address to the Rich Youth, who desired to know what he must do in order to obtain eternal life. Our Lord told him to "keep the commandments." And, when the Young Man, ignorant of their spiritual import, affirmed that he had kept them all from his youth up, our Lord said to him, "Go and sell all you have, and come and follow me; and you shall have treasure in Heaven, [Matthew 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.21);" by which he meant, not that the sacrifice of earthly treasures would purchase those which are eternal; but that by disencumbering his mind of earthly cares, and attending diligently on the instructions that would be given him, he would gradually be guided into all truth, and finally attain that eternal life about which he had professed so much concern.

This is what our Lord requires at our hands also; and not at the commencement of our career only, but throughout our whole lives. After he had taught his disciples during the whole of his ministerial life, even after he was risen again from the dead, he both "expounded to them out of the prophets all that related to himself," and "opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures, [Luke 24:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.44-45);" and in like manner must we, to the last hour of our lives, come to him for the illumination of our minds by his word and Spirit. We shall still need the same teaching as at the first, and must come to him for that spiritual "eye-salve which he alone can give, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18)."

**Next we must follow him as our *Master*, to rule us.**"We call him Lord and Master; and we say well; for so he is." But "to what purpose shall we call him *'Lord, Lord,'*if we do not the things which he says?" His word must be a law unto us at all times, and under all circumstances. There is no authority whatever that is to be regarded in comparison with his. When the disciples were forbidden to preach in his name, they made this appeal to their Rulers, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge, [Acts 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.19); [Acts 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.29)."

So whatever menaces be used to intimidate us, and to deter us from the path of duty, we must say with Paul, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13)," so that I may but discharge the duty I owe unto my Lord, and approve myself to him as his faithful servant.

**Further, we must follow him as our *Savior*, to save us.** There is no other Savior, no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we, or any human being, can be saved. It is he who has by the sacrifice of himself effected our reconciliation with our offended God: and he says, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." "As the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness that the wounded Israelites might look unto it and be healed, so," says our Lord, "have I been lifted up, that whoever shall believe in me may not perish, but may have eternal life, [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15)."

But our eyes must be to him alone. We must not blend anything with his all-sufficient merits. We must not look partly to ourselves and partly to him; for he will not endure any rival, or "give any part of his glory to another." If Paul "desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)," much more must we renounce all dependence on our own works, and seek to be justified by Christ alone. As in Heaven there is but one song, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)," so on earth must there be an entire and exclusive affiance in him for all the blessings of salvation.

**Once more, we must follow him as our *Example*, to regulate the whole of our life and conduct.**When he washed his disciples' feet, he declared that he intended in this symbolic act to show, how they were to demean themselves towards each other; and, by the example he then set for them, to inculcate the necessity of their performing towards the basest of their brethren every possible act of condescension and love, [John 13:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.12-14).

So by Peter we are informed, that under still more trying circumstances the Lord Jesus Christ "has set us an example that we should follow his steps," and more especially in those duties which are most difficult and self-denying. As "he did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth, and when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judges righteously, [1 Peter 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21-23); so we, under all the heaviest trials that can come upon us, are to allow them with all meekness, "blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who despitefully use us, and persecute us, [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44);" our determination, through grace, must be not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21). In a word, "the whole mind must be in us that was in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5); and under all imaginable circumstances we must approve ourselves as followers of Christ, walking as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6), and doing only those things which will please and honor our Father which is in Heaven. It must at all times be "our very food to do his holy will, [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34)."

Now this, I apprehend, is the import of those words, "If any man serves me, let him follow me:" 'let him follow me for all the ends and purposes for which I came into the world, that he may honor me before men, and become fully fit for all the blessedness which I will award unto him.'

To enforce this precept, our Lord adds the richest possible encouragement:" Where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serves me, him will my Father honor."

Now I would ask, Where was our Lord when he spoke these words? In his human nature he was on earth; but in his divine nature he was in Heaven. For thus he said to Nicodemus; "No man has ascended up to Heaven, but he who came down from Heaven, even the Son of man who is in Heaven, [John 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.13)."

After our blessed Lord had completed on earth the work which his Father had given him to do, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers, and was invested with a throne and a kingdom as the just recompense of his obedience unto death. 'Now' says our blessed Lord, 'such is the felicity that awaits all my obedient servants, and such the glory that shall be accorded to them.'

While he was yet on earth, he told them, that "he was going to Heaven to prepare mansions for his obedient followers, and that in due time he would come again and receive them to himself that they might be with him, in a full enjoyment of his presence and glory, [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3)."

He also made it a part of his intercessory prayer just before his death, "Father, I will that they whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24)." And Paul has told us, that at the last day the Lord Jesus will come again in power and great glory, and gather together his obedient people to "meet him in the air; so that they may be ever with the Lord, [1 Thessalonians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.17)."

At the instant of death shall this felicity be conferred on our souls, as on the dying thief in paradise; and at the day of judgment shall our bodies also be restored to life, that in union with our souls they may have a full and everlasting participation of this glory.

Well, therefore, does the Apostle add, "Comfort one another with these words." And are there any circumstances under which these words must not administer comfort? The Lord Jesus glorified his Father when on earth: and now he is glorified with him, [John 17:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4-5)." And, if we glorify God by following his dear Son, will he not glorify us also? Yes, he will honor us even as he has honored the Lord Jesus. He will acknowledge us as his beloved children before the whole assembled universe. He will exalt us to the kingdom which he has prepared for us before the foundation of the world. He will place us on the very same throne on which he has placed his Son, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21); he will assign to us the office of judging the world, yes and of judging angels too, as assessors in judgment with him, [1 Corinthians 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.2-3). He will "give to us the very same glory which he has given to him, [John 17:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22-23)."

Doubtless in all this the Lord Jesus will have the pre-eminence, even as the sun, which is the fountain of light, has above the twinkling star, which emits only a borrowed radiance: but as far as what is finite can be compared with what is infinite, we shall enjoy in our measure the same blessedness and the same glory which Christ himself possesses; being "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

Behold then what encouragement is here afforded us! Did Christ himself "for the joy that was set before him endure the cross and despise the shame, until he was called to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God? [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." Methinks we should do the same: we should account no commandment hard, nor any suffering grievous. We would consider ourselves as altogether devoted to the Lord Jesus, and "yield up both our bodies and our souls as living sacrifices to him, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)," to be consumed, as it were, if he sees fit, on his altar by the flames of martyrdom, but especially and above all by the fire of his love.

But who can conceive aright of this glory? We can form no idea of what it was to behold the Lord Jesus on Mount Tabor, when his glory shined above the brightness of the meridian sun: how much less can we conceive what it must be to "see him as he is" in glory!

There he shines, not only in all the brightness of the Godhead, but in the tempered effulgence of the "Lamb that has been slain, [Revelation 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.6)."

There we shall see, not merely the glories of his nature, but all of them exhibiting in the brightest possible array the wonders of his love.

There we shall behold him not merely as God, but as a Redeeming God, yes, as our Redeemer, and our God, and our portion for ever.

Tell me, does not this afford us encouragement to serve him, and to "follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.12-13)." Surely not life itself would be of any value, but to honor him with it. See what men will do for earthly advancement" what *cares*, what *labors*, what *privations*will they endure; if by any means they may obtain the favored objects of their ambition! And shall we account much of any labors or sufferings which we may be called to endure in order to the attainment of this glory? I blush to think how stupid and brutish we all are: Methinks, that acknowledgment of Agur was but the just expression of his feelings, and well befits every one of us, "I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. [Proverbs 30:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.2)."

**And now, my brethren, let us *improve*this subject**, first in reference to ourselves, and next in reference to the mournful occasion before us.

**In respect to ourselves, we are here of necessity called to inquire what our habits are, and what our prospects are?** Whose servants are we, and whom do we follow? The Apostle appeals to us, that "To whoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness, [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16)."

Let me ask you then: Whose sentiments have you adopted, and whose precepts have you followed? Do you not find, on a retrospect of your past lives, that you have adopted for the most part the maxims of a corrupt world, instead of receiving explicitly, and following exclusively, the commandments of your God?

Let me further ask respecting your views of salvation: Have you seen and felt your utter incapacity to save yourselves, and "fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before you," renouncing every other ground of dependence, and relying altogether upon his blood and righteousness for your acceptance before God?

Have you *consecrated yourselves*to God as his redeemed people, that, "having been bought with a price, you may glorify him with your body and in your spirit which are his?"

Do those who are around you, behold in you such a resemblance to Christ, as constrains them to acknowledge you as his peculiar people, who have been brought by him out of darkness into marvelous light, and are showing forth his virtues in the whole of your life and conduct? [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). If you are really Christ's, you are "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men, [2 Corinthians 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2-3)."

Now inquire whether it be so with you? for on this depends all the consolation which is here afforded us. I appeal to you, whether you can reasonably hope to be with Christ hereafter, if you do not serve him here; or, that God will honor you as his redeemed people in Heaven, if you do not honor him in this world as his faithful servants. He has told you expressly, "Those who honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed, 1 Samuel 2:30." Yes indeed, if the obedient shall come forth to everlasting life, the disobedient "will awake only to shame and everlasting contempt, [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2)." Of this there can be no doubt.

I will appeal even to the most confident among you, Do you yourselves believe, that God will put no "difference between those who serve him and those who serve him not? [Malachi 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.18)." You cannot but know that he will act as a righteous Judge, though you are unwilling to regard this truth in reference to yourselves with all the solemnity that it deserves.

Behold then, you servants of the world, you stand altogether self-condemned. You know, and must know, that God will recompense men according to their works; and that "those only who seek for glory and honor, and immortality, can ever have eternal life."

Allow me then to ask, If in the eternal world you be not with Christ in Heaven, where, and with whom will you be? Oh! this is a solemn question. I beg you to answer it to your own souls. To the Jews who rejected him, our Lord said, "Where I go you cannot come:" so must I say to you who make it not the one end of your lives to serve and honor him: "You shall die in your sins; and where Christ is, you cannot come! [John 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.21)." I beg you, lay this to heart, and give up yourselves to him without delay, as his willing and devoted servants.

***~~#1673~~***

***~~Christ's Resignation~~***

***~~[John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28).~~***

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from Heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

THE sight of one in affliction necessarily produces some emotion of pity in our bosoms, if we are not dead to all the feelings of humanity. But if there is *majesty*in distress, and that majesty is accompanied with consummate goodness, we take a deeper interest in all the circumstances exhibited to our view.*Behold then a spectacle, such as the world never saw before, and never will see again! A sufferer, infinitely superior to the highest archangel in dignity and worth! Behold a suffering God!*Let us draw near with reverence, and learn from his own lips,

***~~I. The depth of his troubles—~~***

Man had not yet touched his body; nor, whatever weight we may give to his apprehension of bodily sufferings, can we suppose that it was that alone, or that chiefly, which drew forth these bitter complaints.

***~~His soul was now enduring the severest agonies—~~***

He particularly says, "Now is my *soul*troubled." If it be asked, What was the source of his troubles? We answer, *he was now sustaining the wrath of God*, and conflicting with all the powers of darkness.

It had been foretold that the Father would bruise his Son, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10), and smite him with the sword, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7) of his inexorable justice. And now the season was come for the accomplishment of these prophecies. The wrath of God was the punishment due to sin: and that wrath Jesus was now enduring: yes; in order that he might redeem us from the curse of the law, he himself was become a curse, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13).

But it had also been foretold that the "Serpent would bruise his heel, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." And he himself had just before said, that the prince of this world was coming to assault him, [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30); [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31). Satan, when first our Lord entered on his ministry, had made repeated efforts to destroy him, [Luke 4:2-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.2-12); and, though foiled and vanquished, he retreated only for a season, [Luke 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.13), determining to renew his assaults with increased vigor. This therefore seeming an opportunity peculiarly favorable to his designs, he failed not to improve it. He summoned all his principalities and powers to unite their efforts, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15); and O, how desperate was their attack! Our blessed Lord himself, though victorious in the conflict, had almost fainted, if angels had not been sent from Heaven to support and support him, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11).

***~~Under these agonies he was reduced to the greatest embarrassment—~~***

Never was he embarrassed through the persecutions or cruelties of man: but when he endured the wrath of God, and the assaults of Satan, he could not but complain of his accumulated troubles: yes, he was so distressed, that he was at a loss what to say, or what to do. His nature dictated a prayer, which however he afterwards saw occasion to revoke. He begged that the cup might pass from him, and that he might be saved from that tremendous hour.

Nor was this petition in the least degree inconsistent with his fortitude or resignation. It showed him to be a man; and it was such a petition as he might offer with perfect innocence; seeing that *to dread and deprecate the wrath of God is not only lawful but our bounden duty*.

Recovering himself, however, he welcomes his afflictions, and states,

***~~II. The grounds of his submission to them—~~***

***~~1. It was with a view to those very sufferings, that he had come to that hour—~~***

These sufferings had been foreseen, when he first engaged to redeem a fallen world, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10); and he had then stipulated to bear them for our sakes, [Psalm 40:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.7-8)." It was with a view to them that he had assumed our nature, without which he would have been incapable of bearing them, [Hebrews 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.9); [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15). And throughout the whole of his ministry he had frequently adverted to them as what he would undergo, as soon as his hour was fully come, [Luke 18:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.32-33). Yes, he had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from his purpose, [Matthew 16:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-23): and had expressed his eager "desire to be baptized with that bloody baptism," being greatly "straitened until it would be accomplished, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50)." And would he now recede? would he shrink from the trial now that it was come upon him? would he rescind his own voluntary engagements, and abandon the work he had undertaken? No! As difficult as it was to submit to these sufferings, he determined to endure them, since the purposes of his grace could in no other way be accomplished.

***~~2. They were necessary for the promoting of his Father's glory—~~***

This is strongly intimated in the latter petition. The Father's *justice*could not have been so much glorified even in the destruction of the whole human race, as in the sufferings of his co-equal co-eternal Son: in these it appeared altogether inflexible.

And how glorious would be the display of the Father's *love*, when it was seen that he had adopted such a method of restoring man to his favor!

Yes, how would every divine perfection shine forth in this stupendous mystery!

Would Jesus then sacrifice the Father's glory to his present feelings? When the Father had already glorified him by repeated attestations from Heaven, and by so many miracles, would Jesus now draw back, and rob the Father of all the glory that was to accrue to him from this dark and painful dispensation? No, by no means! and therefore he not only acquiesces in the appointment, but even prays, that, whatever he himself might endure, God would glorify his own name.

***~~This subject is capable of most useful improvement—~~***

***~~1. For the awakening of our fears—~~***

Jesus' sorrows were the just payment for our sins. Every one on whom sin shall be found must sustain them. Go then, you who make a mock at sin, go follow at your ease the imaginations of your own hearts. You who think it unnecessary to repent of sin, go on in your impenitence; but consider, and learn, "if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? [Luke 23:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31)." If the curse due to sin so overwhelmed the Lord of glory himself in the space of one hour, what effect shall it produce on you to all eternity? Then no supplication can remove, nor any submission mitigate, our anguish. Now, now alone, is the time for salvation. If then we would escape the wrath of Almighty God, let us flee instantly to this very Savior, whose blood can cleanse us from the guilt of sin, and whose grace can rescue us from its dominion.

***~~2. For the encouraging of our hopes—~~***

What do we owe to the adorable Savior, for that, in the hour of his extremity, he did not recede? But he saved not himself, that he might save us: "He gave up his own life, that he might ransom us;" and drank, even to the dregs, the cup of bitterness, that he might take it out of our hands for evermore. Let all then rest assured, that the debt once discharged by our great Surety, shall never be required at our hands, provided we believe in him.

***~~3. For the regulating of our conduct—~~***

There is no sin in praying for the removal of afflictions, provided we are willing, on the whole, that God's will would be done in preference to our own. But, when we see what the Lord's will is, we must say, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" *We must desire above all things the glory of God: and cheerfully acquiesce in any dispensation, provided God may be honored by it.*

***~~#1674~~***

***~~The Effects of Christ's Death~~***

***~~[John 12:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31-32).~~***

"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

INCONCEIVABLY arduous was the work which Christ had undertaken: yet amidst his heaviest trials his confidence never for a moment forsook him. He had just bemoaned of the insupportable weight of his mental agonies; yet not so complained, but that he had desired his heavenly Father to glorify his own name, whatever sufferings he might have to endure for that end.

For the satisfaction of those who would otherwise have drawn wrong conclusions from those sufferings, the Father answered him by a voice like thunder, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again:" and immediately Jesus, with his usual calmness, resumed his discourse respecting *the nature and necessity of his approaching death*, and confidently predicted,

***~~I. The outcome of his conflicts—~~***

The world and Satan were his great adversaries: and though by his death they would appear victorious over him—yet he declared that by his death,

***~~1. The world would be judged—~~***

What we are to understand by "the judgment of this world," we cannot absolutely determine: but we apprehend the import of that expression to be, that his death would be the means of exhibiting in the clearest view, first, the *wickedness*, and next, the *desert*of the ungodly world.

Who would have conceived the **wickedness**of the world to be so great as it really is?

Who would have conceived, that, if God himself would become incarnate, and sojourn in a familiar manner upon earth, and cause the light of his perfections to shine around him, and diffuse innumerable blessings by the unbounded exercise of omnipotence and love—his creatures would rise up against him, and put him to death!

Who would conceive too, that this would be done, not by ignorant savages, but by the people who had enjoyed the light of scripture revelation, heard his gracious instructions, beheld his bright example, and received the benefit of his miraculous exertions! Yes, that it would be done too, not by vulgar barbarians, but by the rulers themselves, and by the priests and ministers of God's sanctuary!

This shows what human nature itself is, even under the greatest possible advantages; and humiliating is the picture which it exhibits to us!

But the **desert**also of the world is manifested to us in the death of Christ: for Christ suffered the penalty due to sin: "to redeem us from the curse of the law, he became a curse;" *and all the misery that he endured both in body and soul as our surety and substitute, was our deserved portion*. He indeed, by reason of his office, could endure it but for a time—but the soul that perishes in sin, must endure it to all eternity. Death, which to him was the time of his release, will be to the condemned soul the commencement of its sorrows, of sorrows that shall endure to all eternity. The hidings of God's face and the outpouring of his wrath will be co-existent with the soul itself.

***~~2. The prince thereof would be cast out—~~***

Satan is called the prince, and the god, of this world, because he exercises an universal government over men who are his willing subjects, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2). 2 Corinthians 4:4. [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26). That which has given him this power is sin: on account of sin, God has delivered men into his hands as their jailor and their executioner. But Jesus Christ has "finished transgression and made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness;" and has thus rescued from the hands of Satan a countless multitude, who shall be *eternal monuments of his electing love and his redeeming power*.

While yet he hanged on the cross, the Lord Jesus "bruised the serpent's head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15);" yes, "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly upon the cross, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." At that moment did "Satan fall from Heaven as lightning:" and though he still retains a sway over the children of disobedience—yet he is forced continually to give up his vassals to the Lord Jesus, and is made to flee from those, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7), whom he lately "led captive at his will." Moreover, the time is shortly coming, (yes, in the Divine purpose it was, as it were, then present,) when he shall be bound in chains of everlasting darkness, and be cast into that "lake of fire" which has from the beginning been "prepared for him and for his angels."

Next, our Lord predicts,

***~~II. The triumphs of his grace—~~***

By being "lifted up from the earth" was meant, his crucifixion. The expression refers to the lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which was a type and emblem of the death of Christ. Compare [Numbers 21:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.8-9) with [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15). The Evangelist himself tells us, that our Lord intended to intimate the peculiar kind of death which he was to suffer: and the people themselves understood him as speaking of his removal from them by death, verse 33, 34.

***~~Here then are two things to be noted:~~***

***~~1. The event predicted—~~***

Christ will "draw all men to himself." He is that "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people would be;" and we see on the day of Pentecost the commencement of this great and glorious work. Would we understand precisely the import of the expression, there we behold it exemplified in the clearest view. We must not indeed imagine that *every*individual of mankind will be drawn to Christ; for in every age many have rejected him. But *some*of all nations, professions, and characters, shall be drawn to him; and at last they shall be found a multitude that no man can number, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14).

***~~2. The manner in which it shall be accomplished—~~***

Men are not drawn to him like stocks and stones, but in a way consistent with the perfect exercise of their own free agency. The power indeed is Christ's; and it is exerted with effect, but it is made effectual,

First, **he draws men by showing men their need of him**. The eyes of all the *wounded Israelites*were drawn to the brazen serpent in the wilderness: they felt that they were dying of their wounds; they knew that no human efforts could heal them; and they were assured that a sight of that brazen serpent would effect their cure. This attraction was sufficient: they looked and were healed.

Thus the jailersaw his own perishing condition, and asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" and was glad to embrace the Savior proposed to him, [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31). This is universally the first operation of Christ's victorious grace.

Next, **he draws men by the attractive influences of his grace**. Because men know not how the Holy Spirit works upon the souls of men, they are ready to doubt, or even deny, his operations. But who doubts the agency of the wind? Yet no man knows whence it comes, or whence it goes. It is visible in its effects, and therefore its operation is acknowledged, notwithstanding it is involved in the deepest mystery. Why then should the operation of the Holy Spirit be doubted, merely because the mode of his agency is not understood [John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8).

Were it possible to question the evidence of our senses, we would deny the virtue of the magnet, and represent any one as weak or wicked who would profess to believe it. But we behold its effects; and our incredulity is vanquished. So then must we confess the agency of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, though we cannot comprehend everything respecting it. Our Lord has told us, that "no man can come unto him, unless the Father draws him, [John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44);" and the Psalmist affirms, that God makes us "willing in the day of his power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)." It is sufficient for us to know, that he draws us rationally, "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love."

Lastly, he**draws men by revealing to them the wonders of his love**. Let but a glimpse of his incomprehensible love be seen, and everything in the whole creation will be darkened: just as a view of the meridian sun renders the light of every candle invisible. Paul tells us, that "the love of Christ constrained him:" it carried him away like a mighty torrent: nor will the soul of any man who feels it, be either able or desirous to withstand its influence. As well might the angels in Heaven be averse to serve their God, as the man that has tasted of redeeming love.

In this way then does the grace of Christ prevail; and in this way shall it triumph to the ends of the earth.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Seek to experience the attractions of his grace—~~***

Nothing under Heaven is so desirable as this, Say then, with the Church of old, "Draw me, and I will run after you! [Song of Solomon 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.4)."

***~~2. Fear not the counteracting influence of men or devils—~~***

Men may oppose you, and vaunt themselves against you: but they are already "judged" by the word of God; and, if they repent not, they shall be judged by the same at the tribunal of their God. If they do not themselves become such despised creatures as they esteem you to be—they will before long "awake to shame and everlasting contempt!"

Satan too may harass you: but he is a vanquished enemy. Yes, he too "is judged, [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11);" and though, "as a roaring lion, he seeks to devour you," you are provided with armor, whereby you may withstand him, [Ephesians 6:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11-13); and you have the promise of God, that "he shall be shortly bruised under your feet! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

***~~#1675~~***

***~~The Duty of Walking in the Light~~***

***~~[John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36).~~***

Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." [John 12:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35-36)

THE perverseness of men in resisting the means of conviction, is apt to beget an asperity in the minds of their instructors, and to make them cease from their labors of love. But we are required "in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves." And our blessed Lord affords us in this respect an admirable example. He had plainly told the Jews, that he must be crucified: and their very answer shows, that they understood his meaning. But, instead of receiving the information aright, they caviled at it, and concluded from thence, that he could not be the Messiah, verse 32-34.

Our Lord did not judge it proper at that time to afford them any farther means of conviction, when they had so abused those that were already afforded them: but he most affectionately warned them to improve their present advantages, before they would be finally withdrawn from them.

The words being equally applicable to us, we shall consider,

***~~I. The duty enjoined—~~***

***~~Christ is here spoken of as "the light"—~~***

We might consider the term "light" in general, as referring to the Gospel: but here it undoubtedly relates to Christ himself, [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9); [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12); [John 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.46). He is justly characterized by this name, not only as being the eternal fountain of light, but as *enlightening the world by his doctrines and life*.

***~~"In him," under this character, we are to "believe"—~~***

All that he has spoken respecting his person, work, and offices, together with all his promissory, or threatening declarations, would be received by us without gainsaying, and be relied upon without hesitation.

***~~"In him" also we ought to "walk"—~~***

We view earthly things in the light of the material sun; and avail ourselves of its light, every step we take. Precisely thus would we act with respect to Christ, "the Sun of Righteousness." *We should view sin and holiness, time and eternity, yes, everything without exception, in the light that he, by his word and conduct, reflects upon it. Nor would we take any one step in life, without a direct reference to his word as our rule, and his life as our example*, 1 [John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.6).

To render this injunction more impressive, let us consider,

***~~II. The arguments with which it is enforced—~~***

There are three topics mentioned in the text, from whence we may urge this important duty:

***~~1. From the shortness of the time that we shall enjoy the light—~~***

The Jews now had the light; but it was to be extinguished within the space of four days. Hence our Lord repeatedly urges this consideration, "Walk, while you have the light." And how strongly does this argument apply to us! You have the light at present, yes, even greater light than the Jews enjoyed under the ministry of Christ. For there were many subjects, which he did not fully open; and the things he did utter could not be perfectly understood, until the day of Pentecost. Whereas *you*have Christ exhibited to you in all his glory; and the fullness, the freeness, the suitableness of his salvation constantly set before you. But how soon may it be removed from you, or you from it, [Revelation 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.5). [Amos 8:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 8.11-12). O then, "while you have the light, believe and walk in the light."

***~~2. From the danger we incur by disregarding the light—~~***

If we will not attend to the voice of Christ, a "darkness will come upon us," even "darkness that may be felt." They who never have had Christ preached unto them, are indeed in an awful condition; but by no means so awful as that of those who have despised the Gospel, verse 39, 40. The darkness of which the text speaks, is *judicial*, sent them by God as the punishment of their iniquity; and the very light that shines around them, serves only to increase their blindness, and to aggravate their guilt, [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16). 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. In this state, "they stumble at noon-day," and wander, "not knowing where they go;" until at last they fall into that pit of destruction, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for evermore!

Would not then the dread of such a state lead us to a just improvement of our present privileges?

***~~3. From the benefit arising to those who rightly improve the light—~~***

By "children of light," we may understand either children of God (who is light) or, truly enlightened persons. In either sense the general import is the same, namely, that, by believing in Christ, we shall attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God. Compare this state with that of those who are in darkness; and how great will this benefit appear!

Shall not then this blessed prospect allure us to embrace the Gospel? Or shall we still prefer sin and misery to holiness and glory?

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let us no longer withstand the solemn warnings and affectionate exhortations of the Lord Jesus; but improve to the utmost this accepted time, this day of salvation.

***~~#1676~~***

***~~The Danger of Loving the Praise of Men~~***

***~~[John 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42-43).~~***

"Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God."

IT seems astonishing to those who have ever considered the evidences of Christianity, that any one would hesitate to embrace it, or to acknowledge any one of its fundamental truths. But *reason is by no means a certain guide*, even in the things which come within its proper and legitimate sphere: it is too frequently biased in its decisions, even when the person himself is unconscious of any undue influence upon his mind.

*Evidence does not carry the same conviction to all:*one is persuaded, while another doubts. The prejudices and passions of mankind operate to a great extent, and often leave common reason itself almost without effect. Hence we find, that all the credentials with which our Lord confirmed his divine mission, were insufficient to produce conviction on the minds of many: as it is said, "Though he had done so many miracles before them—yet they believed not on him, verse 37." But by this the Scriptures themselves were fulfilled: for "Isaiah had said, Who has believed our report; and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Yes, he had also declared, that on account of the perverseness and obstinacy with which many resisted the evidence set before them, they would be given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, so as to be incapable of estimating truth aright, or of embracing it when proposed to them, verse 38-40.

Even when *reason*is convinced, it does not always carry the *affections*along with it; but is often constrained to yield to the superior influence of some predominant lust. Thus it was with those spoken of in our text; who believed indeed that Jesus was the true Messiah—yet could not find in their hearts to acknowledge him in that character.

We propose to consider,

***~~I. The conduct they pursued—~~***

They had seen the miracles of our Lord, and were persuaded that he was the person spoken of in the prophets: yet, because the Pharisees had agreed to excommunicate any who would receive him as the Messiah, they dared not to confess him openly. Now this conduct was exceeding sinful. Of its constituent evils we may notice,

***~~1. The insincerity—~~***

***~~The use of knowledge is to direct our ways, for the sake of our practice therefore we should be careful to acquire just sentiments.~~***

If our opinions are doubtful, we should try them*.*

If our opinions are erroneous, we should renounce them*.*

If our opinions are true, we should regulate our lives according to them.

To act contrary to the convictions of our mind is unworthy of a rational being. We all know in what a contemptible light that man appears, who *for the sake of human applause pretends to religion, while the world and sin are predominant in his heart*. Equally contemptible is he, who, *with the knowledge of the truth in his head, is deterred by the fear of man from yielding to its influence*. Indeed the latter species of dissimulation seems the worse of the two, inasmuch as to disclaim what is good, is worse than to express an approbation of it. At all events, it is marked with a decisive testimony of God's abhorrence, "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin, [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17)."

***~~2. The ingratitude—~~***

The gift of God's only dear Son to die for us is the greatest gift that God himself could bestow upon us: for from that the Apostle infers the unquestionable willingness of God to give us all other things, seeing that all other things together are not to be compared with that, [Romans 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.32). Now to know that God has bestowed that gift upon us, and yet not dare to confess it, is the basest ingratitude that can be imagined! And if it be ingratitude towards the Father, so is it also towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who voluntarily undertook the great work of our redemption. Reflect a moment on this: think of his pitying our undone condition, and leaving the bosom of his Father, in order that he might assume our nature, and die in our stead! What incomprehensible love was this! What a base wretch must he be, who, believing that Christ has so loved him as to give himself for him, is afraid to confess it openly! To all such persons, well may that indignant expostulation be applied, "Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise people, [Deuteronomy 32:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.6)."

***~~3. The impiety—~~***

Wherein can any man be guilty of more flagrant rebellion against God, than in knowingly and deliberately denying his dear Son? The command of God respecting the submitting to his Son is positive, and enforced with a very awful threatening, [Deuteronomy 18:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.18-19) with [Acts 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.22-23). What an act of defiance then is he guilty of, who against the convictions of his own conscience, denies him! What cruelty also is he guilty of towards his fellow-creatures!

Men are influenced greatly by example, especially by the example of those in higher life: the lower classes are ready to suppose that the rich and learned must know better than they, and with a blind confidence to embrace or reject sentiments solely on the authority of their opinions. Hence the timid dissembler is the means of deceiving many souls; and involves himself in the double guilt of destroying others together with himself. The man who rejects Christ for lack of conviction, will "be beaten with few stripes;" but the man who rejects him contrary to his convictions, will "be beaten with many stripes, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48)." The one "dashes himself against a rock that will break his bones;" the other will have "that rock fall upon him, which will grind him to powder! [Luke 20:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.17-18)."

That we may be able to account for such strange conduct, let us consider,

***~~II. The principle by which they were actuated—~~***

They acted from *a regard for the good opinion of men.*But the praise of men runs not in the same channel with the praise of God, [Romans 2:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.29); and they unhappily gave the applause of man the preference. Now this love of man's applause is,

***~~1. A common principle—~~***

The moment that we begin to be impressed with a sense of eternal things, we begin to consider what men will say, if we manifest our new feelings to the world. Though we would have never paid much attention to the sentiments of others before, we shall now feel the emotions of fear and shame: we shall contrive how we may reconcile the performance of our duties with a conformity to the customs and habits of the world; and shall often strain our conscience to make compliances with the world, in order to escape reproach on account of our singularity.

It may be thought that persons who move in a higher sphere would have learned to divest themselves of this principle; but the higher any men are in society, the more they are influenced by the opinions of the world: they set a higher value on man's applause, and feel conscious that their actions are more open to remark.

They of whom our text speaks, were "chief rulers:" they conceived that they had much to lose; and they well knew that their rank would not screen them from the assaults of religious intolerance. They might have indulged vices with impunity; those would have been connived at, even by Pharisees themselves; but Christian piety in them would have been an unpardonable offence, which the very refuse of the people would have been forward to resent. But, though this principle is peculiarly operative on the great, it is not confined to them: we all feel it working in our own bosoms, and have need to be on our guard against its malignant influence.

***~~2. A foolish principle—~~***

What can the applause of man do for us? it is a mere breath of air, that vanishes in a moment: but the approbation of God is of incalculable importance, since according to that, will our eternal state be fixed. To many, the *choice of Moses*would appear unwise: to refuse the first honors of the Egyptian court, and participate rather in the afflictions of the oppressed Israelites! to "esteem the reproach of Christ as riches, yes as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)." This might be regarded as folly by the ignorant Egyptians; but to us who know how to appreciate such conduct, it is an act of consummate wisdom.

Look at the rulers of whom we are speaking: suppose that all the consequences which they dreaded had come upon them; what would the anathemas of men have been, in comparison with God's displeasure? and what an expulsion from the synagogue, in comparison with a rejection from Heaven? *If the whole world cannot compensate for the loss of a soul, surely they must be fools indeed who barter away their souls for the breath of man's applause!*

***~~3. A fatal principle—~~***

God himself has told us, that it is absolutely incompatible with saving faith; "How can you believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God alone, [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44). [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)." And we may appeal to all, whether it does not chill every devout affection, and impede the exercise of every Christian grace? What its ultimate effect will be, our blessed Lord has warned us; "If we confess him, he will confess us. But if we are ashamed of him and deny him, he also will be ashamed of us, and deny us, when he comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels! [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The secret and timid disciples—~~***

We do not put you all upon a level; for even where the outward conduct is the same, the inward principle may be widely different. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were not so open in their acknowledgment of Christ as they should have been, [John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.2); [John 19:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.38); but, when a necessity occurred for making known their sentiments, they rose to the occasion, and avowed their attachment to him more boldly than the Apostles themselves. We do not mean to express any approbation of their previous timidity; but to intimate that an essential difference may be found, where none externally appears; and that God may have his "hidden ones" even among those who are as yet too much entangled by prudential considerations. It is not however by such examples that we are to regulate our conduct.

Our duty is clear: the heart and the mouth are to be alike consecrated unto God; the one, to exercise faith in Christ, the other, to confess him to the world: and as the mouth without the heart will be an unacceptable offering to the Lord, so also will be the heart without the mouth, [Romans 10:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.8-10).

***~~2. Those who are suffering for confessing him—~~***

We are far from despising the approbation of men; but we account it of no value, any longer than it can be enjoyed with a good conscience. That in which alone we are materially interested is the plaudit of our God: and if only he says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants," we need not be concerned, whatever may have been the judgment of men concerning us. Are any of you reproached for the sake of Christ; be not grieved, but rather rejoice, [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14); for "it turns unto you for a testimony, [Luke 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.13)." Great is the encouragement which God himself affords you in his word, [Isaiah 51:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.7-8); and glorious is the prospect that awaits you at your departure hence, [Isaiah 66:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.5).

Be strong then, and of good courage; knowing, that if your faith is subjected to heavy trials at the present, "it shall be to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ! [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7)."

***~~#1677~~***

***~~Men Judged by the Gospel~~***

***~~[John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.48).~~***

"There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

THE judgment of the last day is a period to which we must all look forward with the deepest interest, and for which we would be preparing from day to day: for then "we shall receive at the Lord's hands according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." True it is, our Lord says, in the verse before my text, "If any man hears my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." But we are not to understand this absolutely: for we are told expressly, that "God has committed all judgment to the Son;" and that "he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained." The meaning is, that "to save the world" was the great and primary object of his mission; and that, though he will also judge the world, he will not do it arbitrarily, according to any secret will of his own, but according to his revealed will, even with that word which, from day to day, he declared unto them. Of their reception of this word they would give account; and in strict accordance with it would his judgment be passed upon them.

In confirmation of this truth, I will show,

***~~I. The responsibility of those who hear the Gospel—~~***

Man is responsible to God for every talent that has been committed to him, and for every advantage he enjoys. In proportion to the opportunities which men have of knowing their Lord's will, must be their accountableness for the performance of it: and more or fewer stripes will be awarded to the negligent servant, according to the degree of information which had been given him and the knowledge he possessed, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48). "The times of men's ignorance God winked at; but, when his fuller revelation was made known to them, he called upon them more authoritatively to repent, [Acts 17:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.30)."

The uninstructed "*heathen*will be judged by the law written on their hearts, [Romans 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.14-15)."

The *Jews* will be judged by the law of the Ten Commandments, [Romans 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.12).

Those in *Christendom*will be judged by the Gospel, [2 Thessalonians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8). And a far more severe account will be required of us than of the others, on account of the superior light we have enjoyed. Our Lord told his hearers, that "if he had not come and spoken unto them, they had not (comparatively) had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22)." And he warned them, that not only Tyre and Sidon, but even Sodom and Gomorrah, with all their wickedness, would have a lighter condemnation in the day of judgment, than those who neglected to improve the advantages afforded them by his instructions, [Matthew 10:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.14-15). This he plainly declared in the words of my text: "He who rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

Here also we see,

***~~II. The rule by which they shall be judged—~~***

"The word that Christ spoke, the same shall judge," both those who heard, and us who read it. We shall be judged by,

***~~1. Its declarations—~~***

Nothing can be plainer than his declarations respecting the necessity of a new and heavenly birth, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3), or the necessity of faith in him, [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). Now, in the last day these will appear against us: we cannot plead ignorance: the terms in which these requirements were made known, were clear, peremptory, decisive; and if we have not obeyed them, we must take the bitter consequences of our neglect.

***~~2. Its invitations—~~***

These have been as free as our hearts could wish.

Do we need to obtain rest in Christ? He says, "Come unto me, and I will give it you, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28)."

Do we need a new nature? He bids us to "take from him the water of life freely, [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17)."

Have we any apprehension that he will not grant to us these blessings on account of our own unworthiness? He bids us receive them at his hands, "without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

Now these also will appear against us in judgment. And what excuse can we offer for not accepting them? Truly, we must confess in that day, that "our ruin was of ourselves alone, [Hosea 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.9);" and that we perished only because "we would not come to Christ for life [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40)."

***~~3. Its promises—~~***

How "exceeding great and precious" are these! They are enlarged to the full extent of our necessities. What can we desire more than this, "Whoever comes unto me, I will never cast him out! [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)." Here is no exception, either of character or condition. Whoever the person be, "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse him from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" yes, "though his sins have been red as crimson, they shall be made as white as snow, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18)." And what shall we say, when these appear in array against us on account of the contempt we poured upon them? Truly, our mouths will be shut, and not so much as a word of excuse can ever be offered by us.

***~~4. Its threatenings—~~***

These are no less plain than any of the former, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16). [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17); so that we can never plead ignorance, or a lack of faithful admonition. And I appeal to you, whether all of these, the more awful as well as the more encouraging parts of Scripture, have not, in their season, been set before you with all fidelity? These, therefore, shall also be your judges in the last day. No arbitrary appointment of God shall determine your fate; but these very words which you have so neglected and despised.

***~~And now, I beg you,~~***

**1.** Examine how you have treated all these portions of Holy Writ. There is no medium between "a rejecting of Christ, and a cordial reception of his words."

**2.** Bear in mind your responsibility for the warning now given you.

***~~#1678~~***

***~~Christ's Condescension~~***

***~~[John 13:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.12-15).~~***

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. If you *know*these things, happy are you if you *do*them." [John 13:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.13-15)

THERE are some fanciful interpreters of Scripture, who find mysteries in everything; while others, who affect a supereminent regard for man's reasoning powers, banish mysteries altogether, and say, "Where mystery begins religion ends." These are equally distant from the true method of interpreting the sacred oracles; and are almost equally adverse to the interests of religion: the *former*bring the truth into contempt; the *latter*utterly discard it. The proper medium evidently is, to follow the direction which the Scripture itself gives us.

The fundamental doctrines of the Gospel are professedly mysterious, even "the wisdom of God in a mystery." There are many of the historical parts also, to which a figurative interpretation is given by the inspired writers: and, of the actions of our Lord there are some, into which a deeper insight is given us than into others; to which therefore we may safely assign a more mysterious import. The action referred to in the text was very significant, and may, with the greatest propriety, be considered,

***~~I. As illustrative of Jesus' character—~~***

No one can behold Jesus washing his disciples' feet, without feeling a reverence for his august character: and the more we contrast his dignity with their baseness, the more are we constrained to admire his condescension and love.

But we shall have a very partial and inadequate view of this action, if we regard it merely as a single and detached instance of humility. To understand it aright, we must see it as exhibiting in a very lively manner his general character.

What a beautiful illustration does it give us of his incarnation! Behold him laying aside his robes of majesty, and clothing himself in our flesh, and coming, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" to our guilty race, [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8). [Matthew 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.28). [Mark 10:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.45).

How aptly does it represent to us the whole tenor of his life! From the cradle to the grave his humility was uniformly conspicuous. Born in a stable, and of poor parents, he wrought at the trade of a carpenter until the age of thirty: then, submitting to baptism, as though he had been a sinner, he entered on his ministry, and prosecuted it in the midst of temptations, of poverty, and ignominy, until his obedience was consummated in the accursed death of the cross. And to all this he condescended for our benefit, for our salvation.

Nor does this action less fitly characterize him in his present exalted state. "Though he is high—yet has he respect unto the lowly, [Psalm 138:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.6);" though "he is that high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy—yet he will dwell with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15)." There is no one upon earth so mean and vile, but this exalted Savior is ready to visit him, to dwell with him, and to minister unto him, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23); nor is there any office which he will not gladly execute for the good of our souls.

Even the character he will sustain among the glorified saints in Heaven is also represented in this significant action: for though he will ever be the head of his people—yet he will gird himself as their servant, and minister unto them in the most humble and affectionate manner, while they are partaking of the feast which his heavenly Father has provided for them, [Luke 12:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.37).

How admirable does this action appear when considered in this extensive view! and in what endearing light does it exhibit our blessed Lord!

But this action is further to be considered,

***~~II. As emblematic of his work—~~***

Our blessed Lord himself shows us that there was a figurative signification in what he did to his disciples: for, when he had washed them, he asked them, "Do you know what I have done unto you?" for which question there could have been no room if there had been nothing mysterious in the transaction. He also said to them, "You are clean; but not all;" because the traitor, though washed equally with the rest, was yet under the power and guilt of all his sins, verse 11.

So particularly were the circumstances of this event ordered and overruled, that they marked in the most striking manner the nature, the necessity, and the excellency of that work which Christ came to accomplish.

Its *nature*is declared: for he came to wash men from the guilt of sin by his blood, and from the pollution of it by his Spirit. In this very view the prophet spoke of him long before as a fountain that would be opened to cleanse men from their sin and impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1); and the Apostles represent the great end of his incarnation and death to have been, "to sanctify and cleanse the Church with the washing of water by the word, [Ephesians 5:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-26)."

Peter's inconsiderate, though well-meant, opposition to his Master's will, gave occasion for that solemn declaration, whereby our Lord has made known the universal necessity of submitting to him, and to the method prescribed by him for the salvation of our souls. His words may be applied to every child of man, "If I wash you not, you have no part with me." There is no other way whereby we can obtain a saving interest in Christ: we must be washed in his blood; and we must be sanctified by his Spirit: "he came not by water only, but by water and blood, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.6);" and we must experience the virtue of both, if ever we would participate in the blessings of his kingdom.

The vehemence of the same ardent disciple was yet further overruled for the making known the excellency of Christ's work. When told, that he must submit, he exclaimed, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Our Lord informed him, that, as a person who has been bathing, needs no more than to wash his feet from the defilement they have contracted in coming from the bath: so those who have been washed by his blood and Spirit, need a partial purification indeed every day and hour, on account of the defilement they contract every step they take in this polluted world; but they never will need the same universal cleansing as before, verse 10, seeing that they are purified from all their former guilt, and are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." In respect of such a universal washing, "he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified, [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14)."

We shall have a very incomplete view of this action, unless we still further consider it,

***~~III. As explanatory of his will—~~***

A declaration to this effect is made by our Lord himself. He tells us that he intended, in what he now did, to set an example to all his disciples; and to teach them, that they should not affect a superiority above each other; that they should rather delight themselves in all offices of love; and that they should account nothing too humiliating or self—denying, if by any means they might promote each other's welfare.

The disciples had been disputing which of them would be the greatest: and he had told them, that they ought not to resemble the Gentiles, who loved to have pre-eminence, and were applauded in proportion as they gained an ascendant over others: on the contrary, they would measure their honors by the degree in which they stooped for the good of others, and by the exertions they made in administering to their fellow-creatures, [Luke 22:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.24-27). How happy would it have been for the Church, if all its ministers, and all its members, had attended to this rule! How happy if, instead of being "lords over God's heritage," they had submitted themselves one to another in the fear of God, [1 Peter 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.3); [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5), and had striven only, who would be least of all and servant of all!"

To abound in offices of love is an ambition infinitely more worthy of the followers of Christ.

Love is the fulfilling of the law.

Love is that which above all things characterizes the true Christian.

Love is the image of God upon the soul.

Love is the foretaste of Heaven.

To inculcate the *necessity*of love,  
to *exemplify*it in his own conduct,  
to *impress*it on the hearts of his disciples, and  
to stir them up to a holy imitation of his example  
—were the more immediate objects of our Lord's solicitude. Nor will our admiration of his conduct profit us at all, if it have not this effect on our hearts and lives.

In many instances *much self-denial is required, in order to impart any substantial benefit to our fellow-creatures*. The visiting of the sick, especially when poverty and disease combine to render our access to them unpleasant, is an irksome task to those whose hearts are not penetrated with love to God and man. This indeed is less felt when humanity stimulates us to assist in the recovery of their bodies; but when we have no view but only to benefit their souls, then to instruct them, then to pray with them, then to repeat our visits, when perhaps we see scarcely any prospect of doing them good, or any desire in them to receive benefit; and then to persevere in our endeavors, when they madly say, like Peter, "You shall never wash my feet;" this is the love we are called to manifest; and in comparison with this, the most liberal bestowment of alms is as nothing.

It is far easier to give away thousands of silver and gold, than to spend our lives in such acts of kindness to man, and of zeal for God. But this is to "love others as Christ has loved us," and "to do to others as Christ has done to us:" and to exercise less love than this, is to "love in word and in tongue only, instead of loving in deed and in truth, [1 John 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17-18)."

**As an improvement of this subject our Lord suggests a most solemn warning**, "If you *know*these things, happy are you if you *do*them, verse 17;" and this would I also adopt as my monition to you from the text,

***~~1. In allusion to its figurative and emblematic import—~~***

Instructed as you have been, few can be ignorant of the efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse from sin, or of his Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart. But what will this knowledge avail you, if you do not experience both the one and the other in your souls? I beg you to remember, that our Lord does not say, 'if you *know*these things, happy are you.' No! *An unproductive knowledge of them will only aggravate your guilt and condemnation*: it is then only that you can be accounted happy, "if you do them,"

***~~2. In allusion to its spiritual and practical import—~~***

It is intimated that some *know*these things, but *do*them not; but that others both "know and do them."

How lamentable is it that any would know the character of Christ, and profess to experience the benefits of his salvation, while yet they bear no resemblance to him in their spirit and conduct! Alas! whatever they may imagine, "they have no part with him!" without a conformity to him m the sincere exercise of love, we are only as sounding brass, or as tinkling cymbals, [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1). [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27).

To those who delight in every office of love we say, "Happy are you:" for it is a most unquestionable truth, that *the more lowly we are in our own eyes, the higher we are in God's eyes*; and the more we delight in doing good to others, the more richly will the blessing of God rest upon ourselves, [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

***~~#1679~~***

***~~Practical Religion Enforced~~***

***~~[John 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.17).~~***

"If you *know*these things, happy are you if you *do*them."

SO little was the virtue of *humility*understood among the heathen, that neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word whereby to express the idea. The lowliness of mind and poverty of spirit which we admire as the summit of Christian excellence, they would have accounted baseness and weakness. But our blessed Lord has instructed us in a far clearer manner than the philosophers of old could do, and *has illustrated every one of his instructions by his own example*.

The act of condescension that is recorded in the chapter before us, very strongly exemplifies the virtue of which we are speaking: though Jesus was the Lord both of Heaven and earth, and his disciples were no higher than poor fishermen, he made himself their servant, and performed for them the basest office, even that of washing their feet. He then told them that such was the spirit which he would have them cultivate, and such the conduct he would have them pursue towards all their fellow disciples. He declared, moreover, that such views of Christian excellence, attended with a corresponding practice, would prove to them a source of the richest happiness.

We shall not however confine our views to this particular virtue; but shall take occasion from the words of our text to point out, in a more general manner, the connection between "*knowing*and *doing*" the will of God. We shall show,

***~~I. Their worthlessness when separate—~~***

As for doing, without knowing, the will of God, that is impossible; since knowledge is, and must be, the foundation of all practice. No act can be a pious act, unless it be done with a direct reference to the will of God ordering and directing it to be done. But *knowledge may exist without practice*: and when it does so, it is altogether worthless.

***~~1. Knowledge without practice has no intrinsic excellence—~~***

The devils have knowledge in common with us, and probably to a far greater extent: but do they possess anything that is truly good? Virtue is good, even though it resides only in the mind, and has no scope for exercise; but *knowledge, when considered without reference to practice, is as empty and worthless as ignorance itself.*

***~~2. Knowledge without practice is productive of no good—~~***

The science of astronomy, and the knowledge of the magnet, are among the most useful of human attainments: but of what use would they be, if not applied to practical purposes? In the same manner, the knowledge of medicine would never benefit any one, if it were not improved for the healing or preventing of disorders.

Thus it is also with respect to divine knowledge. We may be able to delineate all the perfections of God, to trace all the ways of his providence, and to open all the wonders of redemption; we may be able to descant upon virtue, in all its bearings and relations; yes, as the Apostle says, we may "understand all mysteries and all knowledge;" and what are we the better for it all, or what good do we effect by it, if it floats only upon the mind, and never operates upon our life and conduct? We are only "as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals, [1 Corinthians 13:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-2).

If it be said, that, by communicating our knowledge, we may influence others; this only amounts to what we are insisting on, that knowledge is of use only in reference to practice; and that it then only does good, when it stirs men up to a suitable improvement of it.

***~~3. Knowledge without practice only aggravates our condemnation—~~***

We are assured, that "to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin, [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17)." Exactly as much good therefore as "sin" does us, so much does unimproved knowledge. *Knowledge is a talent of which we are to give an account*: and "to whom much is given, of him will the more be required." The man who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, was beaten with many stripes; while the ignorant offender was beaten with comparatively few, [Luke 12:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.47-48). Thus shall we find it in the day of judgment. If, on the one hand, unavoidable ignorance will be considered as an extenuation of our guilt, so, on the other hand, will *unsanctified knowledge*prove a fearful aggravation of it.

We would not, however, depreciate either knowledge or practice; but rather point out,

***~~II. Their excellence when combined—~~***

When connected with each other as the root and the fruit, they have an efficacy,

***~~1. To please God—~~***

The fruits of righteousness that spring from an enlightened mind, are truly acceptable to God, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16). [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5). They answer the end for which he originally gave us to his Son, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4); [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10), and for which his Son laid down his life, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14). There is not any one act that can flow from just views of ourselves and of Christ, which God will not behold with delight and accept with joy, [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42). [Jeremiah 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.24).

***~~2. To bring comfort into the soul—~~***

Works of piety are like the incense which, when offered by the priest, not only honored God, but also regaled the offerer. It is truly said (though many who admire the expression, have very inadequate notions of its import), that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness and peace," and that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." Who ever set himself to serve and honor God, without finding that "the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness was quietness and assurance for ever?" It cannot fail but that those who abound in the exercise of virtue, must have the testimony of their own consciences respecting it; and wherever that is, there must be a never-failing source of joy and peace, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

***~~3. To embolden us in reference to the day of judgment—~~***

That there is no merit in our works is certain; and if we were to found our hopes of acceptance with God upon them as meritorious, we would delude ourselves to our eternal ruin. Nevertheless we are authorized to expect that God will deal with us according to our works: and, if we have the testimony of our own consciences that it is our endeavor to "walk worthy of God unto all pleasing," we may "assure our hearts before him," and "have confidence towards him" in reference to his future judgment, [1 John 3:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-21); [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17). Knowing in our own souls that we have fought a good fight and kept the faith, we may say without doubt or fear, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me, [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8)."

***~~4. To augment our everlasting happiness—~~***

Who needs to be told, that men will be rewarded in proportion to their improvement of their talents, [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14); [Luke 19:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.16-17). [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8). This is so *plain*a truth, that it cannot be denied; and so *encouraging*a truth, that it ought not to be concealed. *A life of holiness is even now recompensed by the richest consolations, but its full value will be known only in Heaven.*

***~~From this subject we shall take occasion to,~~***

***~~1. Challenge with the ignorant—~~***

We have before observed, that knowledge is the parent of all acceptable obedience. What then must be your state while you are ignorant of those great things which belong unto your peace? God himself has told you that you will find "no favor" at his hands [Isaiah 27:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.11), but will inevitably and eternally perish, [Hosea 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.6). Do but reflect on the condition of a soul that finds "no favor" at the hands of an angry God. Surely "better were it for that person that he had never been born."

***~~2. Counsel the enlightened—~~***

Value not yourselves upon your knowledge, if you have not a practice suitable to it: for, it is "not the hearer of the law that is just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified, [Romans 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.13)." You may say, "Lord, Lord," and profess to have known and served him in many things; but you can never enter into the kingdom of Heaven, if you have not cheerfully and unreservedly performed his will, [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21); [Matthew 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.23). Take care therefore that you "be not hearers only of his word, deceiving your own selves; but be doers of it also; for then only shall you be blessed in your deed, [James 1:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22-25)."

***~~3. Comfort the practical Christian—~~***

"Happy are you," God himself being witness. Every prominent feature of your character has been mentioned by our Lord as a distinct and certain ground of blessedness, [Matthew 5:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-12). You are fitly "compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock, [Matthew 7:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.24-27)." Compare the difference between such a man, and a foolish man that builds his house upon the sand: and you will then see your own happiness in a just point of view. Hold on then in this good way; and "as you have learned how to walk and to please God, see that you abound more and more, [1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1)."

***~~#1680~~***

***~~Ingratitude Depicted~~***

***~~[John 13:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.18).~~***

"That the Scripture may be fulfilled: He who eats bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me."

THERE was scarcely any circumstance relating to the death of our blessed Lord which was not the subject of prophecy. That to which my text refers, was the betraying of our blessed Lord by one of his own disciples. This event was shadowed forth by the treachery of Ahithophel at the time of Absalom's rebellion. He was the intimate friend and counselor of David: yet, in the hour of David's extremity, he forsook him, and by his counsel labored to effect his destruction. Of this David complains, saying, "My own familiar friend, whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lift up his heel against me, [Psalm 41:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.9)."

But, under these circumstances, David was a type of Christ, as Ahithophel was of Judas: and the complaint which, in its primary sense, was a mere historical record, in its secondary and subordinate sense was a prophecy relating to the manner in which our blessed Lord would be delivered into the hands of his enemies.

In considering this prophecy, I shall show,

***~~I. In whom it may be said to be fulfilled—~~***

We need not confine our attention to Judas. We may well extend it generally to all who partake of God's mercies, and requite them only with ingratitude. It may be considered, then, as fulfilled in,

***~~1. The Atheist—~~***

God, in the works of creation, has loaded us with benefits; so that, whether we survey the heavens or the earth, we cannot but acknowledge that his mercies have greatly abounded towards us: But what is the return which many make? They endeavor to shut him out, as it were, from the universe, saying, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways." They deny that he takes any cognizance of the affairs of men; saying, "He sees us not; the thick clouds are a covering to him: He regards us not;" "nor will he do to us either good or evil." They even go further still, and say in their hearts, "There is no God! [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)."

Now, what a base return is this for all the benefits they receive; and what an impiety to deny the *Providence*, if not also the very *existence*, of Him, "in whom they live, and move, and have their being!" Truly they are justly guilty of the wickedness that is described in my text.

***~~2. The infidel—~~***

The revelation which God has given us is a stupendous display of his goodness. In it he has shown us how we are to obtain his favor; and how, notwithstanding all our past impieties, we may be ultimately saved. But many make no other use of the sacred volume, than to hold it up to scorn and derision. They examine it, not to find instruction for their own souls, but rather to find occasion against it.

Persons of this description do, in fact, tread in the very steps of Judas. He knew the Savior personally, and availed himself of that knowledge to render his treachery the more effectual for the destruction of his Lord: and *these persons acquaint themselves with the Scriptures only with a view to undermine their authority, and destroy their influence in the world*.

***~~3. The hypocrite—~~***

By assuming the Christian name, we, in effect, declare ourselves servants of Christ. But behold the Christian world! Wherein do the great mass of them differ from the heathen themselves, except in the performance of some occasional rites, which have no effect whatever upon their character! Persons of this class are ready to condemn others as hypocrites, never once suspecting that they themselves are guilty of the crime which they profess to abhor.

Why do they profess to believe the Scriptures, when they will not regulate themselves by them; and "call Christ, *Lord, Lord*, when they will not do any one thing that he commands?" To "name the name of Christ, while they will not depart from iniquity," is hypocrisy of the basest kind. And of such persons Christendom is full, even of persons "professing that they know God, while in works they openly and habitually deny him."

***~~4. The apostate—~~***

Rich is the grace, and sweet is the peace, which the Lord Jesus Christ grants to the returning penitent. Where is there one upon the face of the whole earth, who did not find him slow to anger, and ready to forgive, yes, to forgive without upbraiding? But yet, how many are drawn aside from the good way, and turn back to the world. One, like Demas, is turned aside by the love of this present evil world. Another, like the stony-ground hearers, is turned aside by the fear of persecution. Another runs after some vain conceit, and "denies the Lord who bought him." Never do they reflect what dishonor they do to Christ, or what a base return they make to him for all his love. They are intent only, like Judas, on the gratification of their lusts; and they sacrifice him and his interests for a thing of nothing.

See this man, whoever he may be, who, "after having escaped the pollutions of the world, is again entangled therein and overcome; and say, whether he is not guilty of the charge before us," and awfully accomplishing the prediction in my text.

Thus extensively is the prediction verified. Let us now consider,

***~~II. What we may learn from the accomplishment of it—~~***

No doubt it is an instructive circumstance that our blessed Lord would be so betrayed by one of his own disciples. We may surely learn from it,

***~~1. That Christianity must be true—~~***

Had there been any collusion between Christ and his disciples, Judas would now most assuredly have made it known. But when he had agreed to betray his Master, he could do nothing more than point out his person: he could not allege anything against him: he could not divulge any secret confided to him. And after he had betrayed his Master, so far was he from finding in his own mind anything to justify his conduct, that he went to the chief priests, and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood. Nay more, he cast back the money that he had received, and went away and hanged himself. This was a clear proof, that, as far at least as he knew, there was nothing in Christianity which would not bear the light.

If it be said that the circumstance of our Lord's being betrayed by one of his own disciples was suspicious, and tended to cast a reflection on our Lord himself; I answer, that our Lord himself predicted it; and declared it to all the other Apostles, on purpose that, instead of being stumbled at it, they might rather make it an additional ground for believing in him, verse 19.

***~~2. That the falls of its professors afford no just argument against it—~~***

In all ages of the world have the falls of religious professors afforded occasion to the ungodly to pour contempt on religion itself. The sins of David prompted them, not to condemn David only, but to "blaspheme God himself." And in the apostolic age, "the way of truth was evil spoken of," when its adherents did anything unworthy of their high calling.

So at this day, if there is any one of public notoriety or eminence that has conducted himself amiss—the blame is cast, not on him only, but on the Gospel itself; as though that sanctioned, and even promoted, unholy tempers and immoral conduct.

But how unreasonable would it be to impute the wickedness of Judas to the principles in which he had been instructed, and to represent Jesus himself as the abettor of such impiety! There was nothing in the doctrines of Christ which could lead to such conduct; and therefore to impute evil to him and to his religion for Judas' sake, would be as absurd as to impute to the orb of day that darkness which it was created to dispel.

The Gospel must be tried by a far different standard: it must stand or fall, not according to the conduct of its professors, but according to its own proper tendencies and effects. It is "a doctrine according to godliness;" and if any walks unworthy of it, the fault is not in it, but in them.

***~~3. That no man can tell what evils he may perpetrate, if Satan is permitted to assault him—~~***

Judas, no doubt, was unsound from the beginning: for being, from the first, the depositary of the stock by which our Lord and his Apostles subsisted, he appropriated sums to his own personal use: "he held the money-bag, and was a thief."

But it was not so with Peter, or the rest of the Apostles; yet he denied his Lord; and all the rest, in his extremity, forsook him. In vain were all their resolutions and engagements when the hour of trial came.

*Just so, who can tell what he himself may do, if Satan is permitted to assail him.*

Of all men upon the face of the earth, David was the last whom we would suppose likely to commit the enormous sins of adultery and murder: yet, in the hour of temptation he fell. And there is no man living who has not reason to cry continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" To every one among you, then, I would say, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." "Be not high-minded, but fear."

***~~4. That God's conduct towards us is the very reverse of ours towards him—~~***

We, "after eating bread with him, are ever ready to lift up our heel against him." But he, on the contrary, after we have dealt ever so ungratefully towards him, is ever ready to receive us, and to admit us to the most endeared fellowship with him. He has even spread a table for us, even "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, and wines on the lees well refined;" and he invites us to partake of it. When we ungratefully refuse his invitations, he renews them with greater urgency, and directs his servants to *compel*us to come in. He sends them into the highways and hedges for this express purpose; and commissions them to declare, that whoever comes unto him, he will never cast him out. Not sins of a scarlet or a crimson die shall be deemed any disqualification for his favors, if only we will accept his offered mercy in Christ Jesus. Come then, brethren, into this state of holy fellowship with your gracious God and Savior. Let not a sense of your past rebellion discourage you. The Prodigal Son is a just image of a returning sinner; and the reception which he met with shall be yours.

***~~#1681~~***

***~~God Glorified in His Son~~***

**[John 13:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31-32).**

Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once." [John 13:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31-32)

IF it were asked, at what time, and on what occasion, God and his dear Son were more dishonored than at any other period of the world, the answer probably would be, that it was in that hour, when, by the united voice of all his own countrymen, the Lord Jesus Christ was delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, to be crucified. Doubtless this would be the judgment of all who viewed that event merely with the eye of sense.

But to the eye of faith it will appear in far different colors. The whole design of God in it will then be seen, and all the glory of the Godhead will be found to shine forth in it. This was the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who, at the moment that Judas went forth for the purpose of betraying him into the hands of the chief priests and rulers, said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once."

In opening to you these most important declarations, I will endeavor to show *what glory accrued from the sufferings of Christ*:

***~~I. To the Son himself—~~***

To enter fully into this subject, would occupy far too long a time, for I must content myself therefore, with stating, under each head of my discourse, only the more prominent points, for the elucidation of it.

The Lord Jesus Christ was now glorified, in that he was about,

***~~1. To complete his engagements with the Father—~~***

From all eternity had a council of peace been held between the Father and the Son, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13); the Father agreeing to give to his Son a chosen people; and the Son agreeing, on his part, to assume our nature, and in that nature to offer himself as the substitute and surety of sinful man. The Lord Jesus was first "to make his soul an offering for sin, and then was to see a seed who would prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord was to prosper in his hand, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)."

The agreement is thus stated by the Psalmist; and thus recorded also by an inspired Apostle, as in part already fulfilled: "When he comes into the world, he says, Sacrifice and offering you would not; but a body have you prepared me. In burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin you have had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8) with [Hebrews 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-7)."

But now the time was arrived for its completion. He was now about to endure the whole load of suffering which he had engaged to bear; and he was ready to drink to the very dregs the cup which had been put into his hands. Of the extent of its bitterness no finite imagination could conceive: but, "bloody as the baptism was, with which he was to be baptized, he was quite straitened until it would be accomplished, [Luke 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.50)." And in this unshaken fortitude and fidelity he was greatly glorified.

***~~2. To redeem a ruined world from damnation—~~***

This was the end of all his sufferings. They were altogether an atonement made for sin. Without such an atonement, no human being could be saved. By it, a way was opened for the salvation of every living man.

It was for this that he had become a man.

It was for this that he had fulfilled all righteousness.

It was for this that he had endured his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

It was for this that he was about to expire upon the cross:

and, if only he might "see of the travail of his soul" in the salvation of men, "he was satisfied, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11)."

This was "the joy that was set before him:" and, for the attainment of it, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2);" and rested not until he could say, "It is finished! [John 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.30)." Well, therefore, might he, in the near prospect of these events, say, "Now is the Son of man glorified."

We are next to contemplate the glory accruing,

***~~II. To the Father, through the Son—~~***

Now is the Son of Man glorified, and "God is glorified in him." Here, as before, we must contract our observations to the smallest space, lest we detain you too long. The Father was here greatly honored,

***~~1. In the display of all his perfections—~~***

*There was not an attribute of the Deity which did not here shine forth in its utmost splendor*.

His wisdom, in having devised such a stupendous plan for the salvation of men.

His love, in having given his only-begotten Son to die for them.

His justice, in exacting of him the utmost farthing of their debt.

His mercy, in receiving all who would come to him in the name of this divine Savior.

His power, too, was displayed, in upholding his Son under all his various and complicated trials, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1), and in enabling him to finish the work he had begun.

His holiness, too, was made known, in that not a human being would ever find acceptance with him, but by acknowledging his own desert of condemnation, and pleading the merits of this vicarious sacrifice.

All these perfections were now made to harmonize, and every one of them to reflect a glory on the rest—a glory of which it would never have been susceptible, if this plan had not been devised and executed for the manifestation of it.

***~~2. In the accomplishment of all his purposes—~~***

Salvation may be considered as *originating*with the Father, who sent his Son for the *accomplishment*of it. For the fallen angels he prepared no such mercy: but for sinful men he determined to execute this stupendous plan, so that mercy might be exercised towards them in consistency with the demands of justice, and holiness, and truth. And all was now brought to maturity. Justice was about to be satisfied for the sins of man, and a jubilee was now to be proclaimed to man. Now all the millions of the redeemed stood, as it were by anticipation, around his throne, and gave him glory, such as had not yet been given from the foundation of the world: and this glory was obtained for him through the intervention of his Son: so that it might well be said, that, while the Son himself was glorified, the Father was glorified in him.

We have yet further to notice the glory added,

***~~III. To the Son, by and with the Father—~~***

The Father now, in his turn, glorified his Son:

***~~1. In the testimonies borne to him under his sufferings—~~***

Not only did several of our Lord's enemies proclaim his innocence, but universal nature bore witness to him. The sun at mid-day veiled his face in darkness; the earth quaked; the rocks rent; the dead arose: and all in attestation, that the person who had just expired was no other than our incarnate God. To these events our Lord more immediately referred, when he said, "He shall immediately glorify him."

***~~2. In the triumphant outcome of them—~~***

It seemed as if the Savior was vanquished, when he died: but it was "by death that he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14)." Yes, upon the very cross itself "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." In vain were the stone, the seal, the watch: they were placed by man to prevent his resurrection; but, overruled by God to attest it. In the presence of no less than five hundred brethren at once did he ascend to Heaven; from whence he sent down the Holy Spirit to bear witness to him, by mighty signs and wonders that were wrought by his Apostles in his name.

Our Lord had said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14);" and agreeably to this prediction did the Holy Spirit descend at the appointed time, and impart to the Apostles such powers as had never been communicated since the foundation of the world. Jesus himself, too, was then invested with all power in Heaven and in earth, as the reward of his own sufferings, [Philippians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9), and for the benefit of those for whom he died: and together with the Father is he made the object of adoration among all the hosts of Heaven. Hereafter, too, shall he come again to judge the world, and shall assign to all, whether friends or enemies, their proper portion.

***~~3. In the benefits conferred in consideration of them—~~***

Speedily after his ascension were not less than three thousand souls converted to him, and all the blessings of salvation were poured out upon them for his sake. From that day great numbers, in every quarter of the globe, have found mercy through him: millions are already seated with him upon thrones of glory, as monuments of his grace: millions, too, are at this very moment rejoicing in him upon earth: and, in due time, multitudes, as countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, will glory in him as the one Author of their eternal happiness; and will to all eternity adore him, as having "loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto their God." They will all unite in ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

Thus, while the Father is glorified in him, shall he himself also be glorified by, and with, the Father, as the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

***~~Let me now, in conclusion, entreat you, my brethren, to be like-minded with God, and to glorify the Lord Jesus,~~***

***~~1. By a humble trust in him—~~***

In this is he glorified, as much as by the saints before his throne. This is what he expects at our hands. This he regards as answering the end of all that he has done and suffered for us. Go then to him with all your sins. Let nothing keep you from him. Never, for a moment, limit either his grace or mercy; but believe him "able to save to the uttermost all that shall come unto God by him." Expect also from him all those supplies of grace and peace which are needful for you in this valley of tears. Let your expectations be enlarged to the full extent of your own necessities, and to the full extent also of all his great and precious promises. This is to glorify him: as he has said, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them, [John 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.10)."

***~~2. By an entire surrender of yourselves to him—~~***

This also is required of you: "You are not your own: you have been bought with a price: and therefore you should glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20)." Our Lord himself has said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)." And I may add, that herein is Jesus glorified also.

Let it be seen, then, what the effect of his sufferings is, and what is the redemption that he has purchased for you. This is the way to honor him: this is the recompense he expects at your hands. And if you glorify him thus in this world, you shall assuredly be "glorified together with him" in the world to come!

***~~#1682~~***

***~~Faith in Christ an Antidote to All Trouble~~***

***~~[John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1).~~***

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me."

AS God is eminently distinguished by that character, "The Comforter of all those who are cast down," so did Jesus evince his title to it during the whole time of his sojourning on earth: there was no distress which he did not remove from those who made their application to him; and not unfrequently did he anticipate the wants, which the unbelief or ignorance of his followers made them unable to express.

He had now been revealing to his disciples the things which were speedily to be accomplished: and, perceiving that they were greatly dejected by the prospect before them, he encouraged them in the words which we have read; "Let not your hearts be troubled," and then he prescribed an antidote, sufficient to dispel all their fears: "You believe in God; believe also in me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall show,

***~~I. The troubles which he taught them to expect—~~***

There were three in particular which seemed most to affect them;

***~~1. Their bereavement of his presence—~~***

This, if it had been only to a remote quarter of the globe, or after the manner of Elijah's departure, would have greatly depressed their minds; because of the love he had manifested towards them, and their entire dependence on him for instruction and support: but to have him withdrawn from them by cruel sufferings and an ignominious death, was distressing beyond measure; so that the very thought of it filled them with the deepest concern.

***~~2. The disappointment of their worldly hopes—~~***

They had supposed he was about to establish an earthly kingdom, and that they would be exalted to situations of great dignity. But when they heard, that, instead of reigning over other nations, he was to be rejected by his own; and that, instead of elevating them to posts of honor, he himself was to die upon a cross; they knew not how to reconcile these things with his former professions, or how to bear the shame which such a disappointment would unavoidably occasion.

***~~3. The persecutions they were to meet with from an ungodly world—~~***

Hitherto they had been screened from persecution, their Lord and Master having borne the brunt of it in his own person: but now they understood that they were to drink of his bitter cup, and to endure all manner of sufferings, and death itself, after his example. This excited painful apprehensions in their minds, and caused them the most serious disquietude.

What means he used to dissipate their fears, will be found in,

***~~II. The remedy he proposed—~~***

The verbs in our text may be taken either imperatively or indicatively; and many think it would be better to construe both of them alike: but the spirit of the passage seems best preserved in our translation; which acknowledges, that they do believe in God the Father, and exhorts them to place the same confidence in him as in the Father. They now thought they would lose him entirely and for ever. To rectify this error, he enjoins them, notwithstanding his removal from them, to believe in him,

***~~1. As present with them in their trials—~~***

*Though he would not be present to the eye of sense, he would be really near to them on all occasions*. Wherever they would be, there would be no bar to his admission to their souls: he would come and visit them, and dwell in them, and manifest himself to them, as he would not unto the world. This would be a far greater blessing to them than his bodily presence; so that they had no reason to regret his apparent withdrawment from them.

***~~2. As interested in their welfare—~~***

They had never found him indifferent about anything that related to them: nor would he forget them after he would have been taken from them into Heaven: on the contrary, he was going thither to prepare mansions for them; and he would still enter into all their concerns, sympathizing with them in their afflictions, and regarding everything that would be done to them as done immediately to himself. If any would give them a cup of cold water, he would acknowledge it as an obligation conferred on him; and, if any would presume to harm them in a way of injury, he would resent it as if they had "touched the apple of his eye."

***~~3. As sufficient for their support—~~***

They had seen what wonders he had wrought during his continuance among them: and they must not imagine, that, because he offered up his soul a sacrifice for sin, he was therefore deprived of his power to perform them: for though he would, in appearance, be crucified through weakness, he did really possess all power in Heaven and earth. *They might still look to him for the relief of every need, and support in every trial; and they would assuredly find his grace sufficient for them*.

***~~4. As coming again to recompense all that they might endure for his sake—~~***

He had told them, that he would come again, and that too in all the glory of his Father, with myriads of attendant angels, to judge the world. They need not therefore be anxious about any present trials, since he pledged himself to remember all that they would do or suffer for him, and richly to compensate their fidelity to him.

These were subjects on which he had often conversed familiarly with them: and if only they would trust him for the accomplishment of his promises, they might discard their fears, and be of good comfort.

It will be not unprofitable to consider more distinctly,

***~~III. The sufficiency of this remedy to dispel all anxiety from their minds—~~***

*Faith in Christ is a perfect antidote against troubles of every kind.* Faith has respect to him in all his glorious offices and characters:

***~~1. As the Savior of the soul—~~***

What has that man to do with fear and trouble, who sees all his iniquities purged away by the blood of Jesus, and his soul accepted before God? If he forgets these things, he may be cast down by earthly trials: but if he keeps this steadily in view, the sufferings of time will be of no account in his eyes: he will feel that he has ground for nothing but unbounded and incessant joy.

***~~2. As the Governor of the universe—~~***

Who that sees how perfectly everything is under the control of Jesus, will give way to fear or grief? Not a sparrow falls, nor a hair of our head can be touched, without him: and, if he allows any injury to be inflicted on us, he can overrule it so as to convert it into the greatest benefit. What then have we to do, but to let him work his own will, and to expect that all things shall work together for good?

***~~3. As the Head of his people—~~***

He is to all his people the head of vital influence; and will he forget to communicate what is necessary for the welfare of his members? We are weak and our enemies are mighty: but is that any ground for fear, while we remember whose members we are? Can we not do all things through Christ strengthening us?

***~~4. As the Judge of living and dead—~~***

The distribution of rewards and punishments is committed unto him; and he has told us what sentence he will pronounce on all his faithful people. And will not that word, "Come you who are blessed," or that, "Well done, good and faithful servant," richly repay all that we can do or suffer for him in this world? Can we survey the thrones of glory which he has prepared for us, and be afraid of the trials that await us here?

***~~Behold then,~~***

***~~1. The happiness of believers—~~***

They may, they must, have their trials; and while they possess the feelings of men, they will find some trials grievous to be borne: but they neither have, nor can have, any cause for anxious fear: while God is for them, none can be against them. Let them therefore "be anxious for nothing," but "cast all their cares on Him who cares for them."

***~~2. The misery of unbelievers—~~***

Where has God said to *them*, "Let not your hearts be troubled!" No such word can be found in all the sacred volume. They have need of continual fear and terror: for, what refuge have they, while they are not united unto Christ by faith? Where can they go under the trials of this life? and what consolation can they have in the prospects of eternity? Better were it, if they had never been born. Hear then what Jesus says to you: Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God; and besides me there is none else. His address, in the text, is a proof of his Godhead, and consequently of his sufficiency to save all that come unto God by him.

***~~#1683~~***

***~~The Comfort to Be Derived from Christ's Ascension~~***

***~~[John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3).~~***

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

*A hope of future eternal happiness affords strong consolation under present trials.* The children of God, if destitute of this, would be "of all men most miserable;" but this renders them incomparably more happy, even under the most afflictive dispensations, than the greatest fullness of earthly things could make them.

Our Lord opened these springs of comfort to his disconsolate disciples. Being about to leave them, he not only told them where, and for what purpose, he was going, but that he would assuredly return to recompense all which they might endure for his sake, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

We shall consider,

***~~I. Our Lord's description of Heaven—~~***

We are taught to conceive of Heaven as a place of unspeakable felicity. The description given of it by John is intended to elevate our thoughts, and enlarge our conceptions to the uttermost, [Revelation 21:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.19); [Revelation 21:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.21); but a spiritual mind, which is dead to earthly things, may perhaps see no less beauty in our Lord's description.

***~~Our Lord thus describes it, "My Father's house with many mansions"—~~***

Here seems to be an allusion to the temple at Jerusalem: God dwelt there in a more especial manner, [1 Kings 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.10-11); around it were chambers for the priests and Levites. Thus in Heaven God dwells and displays his glory, [Isaiah 57:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.15); there also are mansions where his redeemed people "see him as he is."

***~~This description may be depended upon—~~***

The disciples had left all in expectation of a future recompense: our Lord had taught them to look for it, not on earth, but in Heaven. Had no such recompense awaited them, he "would have told them so." Thus he pledges, as it were, his love and faithfulness for the truth of what he had told them.

Our Lord further acquaints them with the reason of his ascending thither:

***~~II. The end of his ascension thither—~~***

All which our Lord did on earth was for the good of his people. He consulted their good also in his ascension to Heaven: he went "to prepare a place for them," which he does,

***~~1. By purging Heaven itself with his own blood—~~***

Heaven would have been defiled, as it were, by the admission of sinners into it; he therefore entered into Heaven to sanctify it by his blood. This was typified by the atonement made for the altar and the tabernacle, [Leviticus 16:15-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.15-20). The type is thus explained and applied, [Hebrews 9:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.21-24).

Here is a parallel drawn not only between the Holy of holies and Heaven, but also between the purifying of the Holy of holies by the high-priest, and the purifying of Heaven itself by Christ with his own blood: and both are declared to have been necessary; the one as a type, and the other as the anti-type.

***~~2. By taking possession of it as their Head and Representative—~~***

He is the head, and his people are his members, [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16). His ascension to Heaven is a pledge and pledge of theirs, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20). In this view he is expressly called "our forerunner, [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20)."

***~~3. By maintaining their title to it—~~***

They would continually forfeit their title to it by their sins: but he maintains their peace with God by his intercession. Hence his power to bring them finally to that place is represented as depending on his living in Heaven to intercede for them, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

By these means every obstacle to his people's happiness is removed.

***~~III. The prospects which his ascension affords us—~~***

His ascension is the foundation of all our hope: as it proves his mission, so also it assures us,

***~~1. That he shall "come again"—~~***

The high-priest, after offering incense within the veil, was to come out and bless the people. This was a type of our Lord's return from Heaven when he shall have finished his work of intercession there, [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28).

***~~2. That he shall take his people to dwell with him—~~***

He had promised this as a condition of their engaging in his service, [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26). He declared it to be his fixed determination just before his departure, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24). It may even be inferred from his ascension; seeing that his ascension would have been utterly in vain without it, [1 Corinthians 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.14).

What a bright and blessed prospect is this! *What an effectual antidote against their approaching troubles!*

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How wonderful are the condescension and grace of Christ!~~***

We cannot conceive anything more tender than the whole of this address. Such is still his conduct towards all his people. Let us admire and adore this compassionate high-priest.

***~~2. How highly privileged are those who believe in Christ!~~***

How different was our Lord's address to unbelievers, [John 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.21); but to believers he says, "Where I am, you shall be also."

Let this inestimable privilege have its due effect upon us;  
let it stimulate our desires after Heaven;  
let it reconcile us to the thoughts of death;  
let it engage us more earnestly to serve God, [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.9-10).

***~~#1684~~***

***~~No Way to God but Through Christ~~***

***~~[John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6).~~***

"Jesus said unto him: I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me."

THERE is in the Christian church a great diversity of character. Some, like Nebuchadnezzar's image, have *heads*of gold, while their *feet*are of materials as unstable as they are unsuitable, even of iron and clay. *Others are upright in their conduct, while yet their views of divine truth are very imperfect.* Such the Apostles showed themselves all the time of our Lord's sojourning on earth: *nor could the plainest instructions wholly eradicate the errors in which they had been educated from their earliest years*.

Our Lord had just informed them, that he was about to die, and to go to his Father; and that he would soon come again and receive them to himself, that they might be with him for ever. And, knowing that, in general, they were acquainted with his intentions, he said, "You know the way to the place where I am going, [John 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.4)"

But, alas! though this was true in the general, *their minds were at present so engrossed with the notion of an earthly kingdom*, that they supposed him to be speaking of some great palace, where he was about to erect his standard. Hence Thomas requested further information: to which our Lord replied in the explicit manner related in the text.

In discoursing on his words, it will be proper to consider,

***~~I. Our Lord's description of himself—~~***

He speaks of himself as,

***~~1. The way—~~***

The first way to Heaven was, by the covenant of works. But, when man had sinned, that way was closed forever, [Genesis 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.24). From that time another way was opened, through the incarnation and sufferings of God's only Son. This was announced to the unhappy pair, who were informed, that "the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head." To him therefore they were to look as their mediator and advocate, and through him they were to obtain reconciliation with God.

There were two obstacles to their re-admission to the divine favor: these were the *guilt*of sin and the *corruption* of sin. But both of these were to be removed by Jesus; the former by his blood, the latter by his Spirit. Thus is Christ our way also to the Father making atonement for us by his meritorious death, and renewing us by his all-sufficient grace. Amidst a multitude of passages to this effect, see [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13); [Ephesians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.16); [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18) and [Hebrews 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-20).

***~~2. The truth—~~***

As the disciples might not be able to reconcile this with the ceremonial law, which appeared to prescribe other means of access to God, our Lord informed them that the legal sacrifices were only shadows, of which he was the substance; and figurative representations, of which he was the truth. There had been many persons raised up as saviors and deliverers. Many different things also were intended to mark out the way of salvation: the manna from Heaven; the water from the rock; the brazen serpent; the daily sacrifices, with innumerable others—but *they all pointed at him as the one true source of reconciliation, of healing, of spiritual vigor, and of eternal salvation*. He was the one scope and end of all, in whom all were united; from whom all derived their efficacy; and by whom they all were both accomplished and annulled.

***~~3. The life—~~***

It would have been to but little purpose to direct his disciples in what way to go, if he had not told them how they might obtain life and strength to walk in that way. They, as well as all others, were by nature dead in trespasses and sins. Jesus therefore added yet further, that he was "the life." By this we are not to understand merely that Jesus is the author and giver of life: but that he is really to the soul what the soul is to the body. Without the soul, the body is altogether motionless and senseless. It is the soul that animates, as it were, the different members, and enables them to perform their proper functions. So, without Christ, the soul has no spiritual motion or perception: it is from its union with Christ that it has a sufficiency for anything that is good, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). Christ must live in the soul, as the soul does in the body. If we live, it is not we that live, but Christ who lives in us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." Hence He both calls himself, [John 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25), and is called by others, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4), "our life."

This description will appear of the greatest importance, if we consider,

***~~II. His declaration founded upon it—~~***

***~~Many are the ways which men have devised of coming unto God—~~***

Some have sought for mediators among their fellow-creatures. Others have trusted in their own repentances and reformations. Innumerable are the *refuges of lies*in which sinners have sought to hide themselves from the displeasure of God.

***~~But there is no way to God but through Christ—~~***

Nothing can be plainer than our Lord's assertion.

If we ask, What is the way to God?

He answers, 'I am.'

If we inquire, What other way is there?

He answers, 'None.'

If we wish to be informed whether there be not some exception in favor of those who have served God from their earliest infancy, as Timothy, or to the most advanced age, as John?

The answer is, 'No! "No man comes unto the Father, but by me:"

*Timothy*must come as *Mary Magdalen*, out of whom seven devils were cast. *John*, must come as the *thief*, who died a few hours after his conversion. All need equally to have their guilt expiated, and their hearts renewed: and there is none but Jesus who can do either the one or the other of these things fur us: therefore there is no other name or power but his, that can ever save us, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are ignorant of the Savior—~~***

Have you so little concern for Heaven that you will not inquire the way thither? Or do you suppose that a life of worldliness and carnal ease is the path that leads to God; and that men will find it, as it were, blindfold? If this were the case, Jesus would never have become incarnate, and died upon the cross, to open a way for you; nor would he have warned you to the contrary in such solemn terms as those before us. Consider this; for every tittle of his word, whether believed or not, shall be fulfilled.

***~~2. Those who desire to come to God—~~***

Beware lest you attempt for a moment to find any other way than that marked out for you by Christ. He must be your only way of access to God. We do not say that you are not to walk in the way of holiness, (for the Scripture asserts the contrary in the strongest terms [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8).) but this we say: It is the blood of Christ, and not your own holiness, that must reconcile you to God; and it is the Spirit of Christ, and not your own natural powers, who must enable you to believe in him, or to serve him. Submit to this at once, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3); for you must be brought to it, if ever you would enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

You cannot come to God in prayer, but by Christ; much less can you be admitted to him in Heaven. Even Christ himself, as the sinner's representative, entered into Heaven by his own blood, [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12); think not therefore that you shall enter in by any other way.

***~~3. Those who have already come to God—~~***

Yes; blessed be God, many have come, through Christ as their way, and by Christ as their life. O, where are they going? To their Father's house, where Christ is gone before to prepare a place for them! What a joyful thought! *Every day and hour brings them nearer to their home!*and, for anything they know, they may arrive at those blissful mansions within the space of a few months, or days, or even hours! Regard not then if your road is occasionally rough; but keep in it; press forward; turn not from it even to the end; and, "when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory."

***~~#1685~~***

***~~Christ One with the Father~~***

***~~[John 14:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.8-11).~~***

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

IT was a great advantage to the *Apostles*, that, at the close of his daily ministrations, they were admitted to a more intimate and familiar fellowship with their Lord: for by this means they received a much fuller instruction than others, and gained a deeper insight than others into the discourses which had been publicly delivered.

Nor do *we*derive less benefit from this than they: because the explanations which were given to them in private are handed down to us, and unfold to us many things which we would not otherwise have been able to comprehend.

We behold, too, their errors rectified. They were greatly mistaken in many things. Their spirit was far from being, on some occasions, what God would approve; as for instance, when they would have called fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village; and also when "they disputed among themselves which of them would be the greatest." Their views, also, of the Messiah's kingdom were extremely erroneous; insomuch that, when our blessed Lord told them what was coming upon him, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, That be far from you, Lord, [Matthew 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22)."

In like manner, they could not conceive aright of his divine character. Sometimes, indeed, they spoke well respecting it: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, [Matthew 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16). [John 6:69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.69);" but, at other times, they showed that their judgment respecting it was very wavering and ill-informed. When our Lord spoke of his equality with the Father, they knew not how to understand him: and though he told them, that, in having "seen and known him, they had seen and known the Father, verse 7," Philip, in the name of all the rest, asked him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us." And this brought from our blessed Lord an answer, which is of the greatest importance to the Church in all ages, inasmuch as it establishes the doctrine of the divinity of Christ beyond all contradiction.

In opening to you this passage, we will consider,

***~~I. The desire expressed—~~***

***~~This, in part, was good—~~***

To desire a manifestation of the Father's glory could not but be pleasing to God himself. After the giving of the law, such a revelation had been given to Moses, and Aaron, and "the nobles" of Israel, [Exodus 24:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 24.9-11); as, at a subsequent period, it had been in a more especial manner to Moses alone, in answer to that request of his, "Lord, I beseech you, show me your glory." Of this request God had expressed his approbation, by "proclaiming to him his name," and causing "all his goodness to pass before him, [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19); [Exodus 34:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6)."

Now, therefore, at the first introduction of the Gospel, the Apostles conceived it possible that their Divine Master might favor them with somewhat of a similar manifestation; more especially because he had, without any solicitation on their part, spoken to them on the subject of "seeing the Father, verse 7."

The satisfaction, too, which they expressed, at the expected result of such a manifestation, could not but be pleasing to their Lord and Master: "Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us." It must not be forgotten here, that the Lord Jesus had been speaking to them of his expected departure, an event which they could not but contemplate with extreme pain, verse 2 with chapter 16:5, 6. Yet, in the very prospect of such an overwhelming loss, Philip says, "Show us the Father, and it suffices us;" that is, there is no bereavement which we shall not readily submit to, if only this extraordinary token of the Divine favor may be conferred upon us.

In this view, I cannot but consider the request as expressing a piety like that of David, when he said, "Many say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us." That is the good, the only good, that my soul desires. But,

***~~In some respects it was faulty—~~***

Our blessed Lord had often represented the Father as speaking in him, and working by him, and as, in reality, one with him. Indeed, so plainly had he spoken on this subject, that his enemies had repeatedly taken up stones to stone him for blasphemy. They understood him to be affecting an equality with God, yes, and an identity with God: and they were filled with indignation against him on account of it, as a usurpation of the Divine prerogative, [John 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.17-18); [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30); [John 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.33)."

And well they might be indignant, if he was not really God: for, after they had brought the accusation against him, he demanded, in yet stronger terms, their acquiescence in his claims, and their acknowledgment of him under his true and proper character. He told them plainly, that God required all men to "honor the Son, even as they honored the Father;" that the works which he performed bore ample testimony to him as equal with the Father, because they were wrought, not, like the miracles of others, by a power derived from above, but by a power inherent in himself, [John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.19); [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23); [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36); [John 10:36-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.36-38).

Now, of this the Apostles ought to have been aware: they would not have allowed things of such infinite importance to escape from their memory, or to pass without more minute inquiry into their true meaning: and least of all would they, when informed by their Divine Master in plain terms, "Henceforth you know the Father, and have seen him," have questioned the truth of his assertion.

Inasmuch, therefore, as their reply argued a blameable ignorance and inadvertence, it may justly be considered as deserving of reproof.

Yet nothing could be more mild than,

***~~II. The reproof administered—~~***

Here let us mark,

***~~1. How decisive was our Lord's assertion—~~***

"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

What words could our Lord have used more clearly declarative of his identity with the Father, than these? The way to estimate the force of them aright will he to put them into the mouth of any of his Apostles, or of any creature whatever. Can we suppose that any created being would use such words, and use them too in a way of reproof, and in answer to such a desire as was here expressed? No! if any creature in the universe dared to arrogate to himself such an identity with the Father, we would instantly unite with the Jews in denouncing him as a blasphemer! Moreover, the very circumstance of its being a reply to such a request, and of its being uttered in so emphatic a manner; not as a mere assertion, but a reproof; and not in a way of simple affirmation, but in an appeal to the person reproved; this, I say, gives a weight and force to the words, which nothing can withstand. And, if they do not prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, the divinity of our Lord, we shall in vain look for words capable of expressing such an idea.

***~~2. How strong the testimony with which it was confirmed—~~***

"Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." The repetition of the point before asserted, and of the very words in which it had been asserted, shows the earnestness with which our Lord sought to establish and confirm it. And, if his own testimony to this mysterious truth was thought not sufficient, he was willing to abide by that which was given in his works. Here it is of importance to observe, that, in this appeal to his works, we must clearly understand him as referring to the manner in which they had been wrought: for otherwise there would be no force in his appeal to them; since, if the mere working of miracles were of itself a proof of his identity with the Father, it would prove the same in reference to his Apostles; who, as he foretold, would soon work even greater miracles than any which he had wrought. But no Prophet or Apostle ever professed to work miracles by any power of his own: they utterly disclaimed any such vain and impious conceit, [Acts 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.12); [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16). Whereas, Jesus, though he spoke of "his Father as doing the works," spoke of himself as concurring with the Father, in a way of personal and independent exertion. Compare verse 10 with [John 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.17); [John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.19); [John 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.21). And as this had been his habit from the beginning, he might well expect that his Apostles would have comprehended his meaning, and have been fully satisfied, that he was indeed "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3)."

***~~We may see from hence,~~***

***~~1. How slow even the best of men are to apprehend and believe the truths of God—~~***

After the day of Pentecost, the Apostles had more accurate views of their Lord and Savior. They might then say with truth, "We beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." But, previous to that time, they did not even understand the true nature of his kingdom, [Acts 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.6); and the answer of Philip clearly showed that they did not yet fully see him as their incarnate God.

Just so, is there not reason to complain that multitudes in this day hear the Gospel, but understand it not; and have the whole counsel of God declared unto them—yet perceive it not? It is perfectly surprising, that persons would have line upon line, precept upon precept, repeated to them for many years together, and yet never attain a distinct knowledge of "the truth as it is in Jesus." But so it is: and our adorable Lord may yet, with just displeasure, address himself to many among us, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me?"

This may be illustrated either in the plainer or in the more hidden doctrines of the Gospel, as occasion may require.

I beg you, brethren, be more attentive to the blessed truths which from week to week are brought before you; and "give more earnest heed to them, lest in future, as in past times, you let them slip, [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1)."

***~~2. How much imperfection there is mixed even with our best services—~~***

Certainly, upon the whole, the request of Philip must be considered as an expression of a pious mind. But yet it was full of imperfection. And who that examines his prayers, either in public or in private, must not blush at the recollection of the infirmities that have attended them? Were they all scrutinized, and weighed, as it were, in a balance—then how defective would they all be found! Had Philip's error not been pointed out, he would probably have taken credit to himself as deserving the highest commendation: whereas his words rather merited reproof.

Let us not, then, be too confident respecting any of our services as pleasing and acceptable to God. At all events, let us bear in mind that they are attended with many imperfections; and that, "if God were to call us into judgment for them, we could not answer him for one of a thousand."

***~~3. What reason we have to bless our God, who has provided us with such a Savior—~~***

It is not a mere man, no, nor the first of all created beings, who is appointed to be a Savior to us. It is our incarnate God, "Jehovah's Fellow, [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)," "God over all, blessed for evermore, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." Hear this, and rejoice, all you who feel your guilt and helplessness! It is "God who has purchased the Church with his own blood, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)." It is God who has wrought out a righteousness for his believing people, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24). [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6). He, "in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)," has in him "a fullness treasured up for us," out of which we are to receive, according to our diversified necessities, "even grace upon grace, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19) with [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)."

Have you, then, seen Christ, known Christ, received Christ? Then you have seen, and known, and received the Father also. If Christ is dwelling in you, then does the Father also dwells in you: and, if you are one with Christ, then are you one with the Father also. Know you this, my brethren, that He who has said, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth," has added, for your encouragement, "for I am God, and none else, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." Go on your way, therefore, rejoicing in him; and let this be your song and boast, "In the Lord Jehovah I have righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

***~~#1686~~***

***~~Christ Engages to Answer Prayer~~***

***~~[John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14).~~***

"Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

THE Gospel is properly termed "glad tidings of great joy."

It finds men *guilty*; and reveals to them a way in which their iniquities may be pardoned.

It finds them *polluted*; and provides means for their restoration to the Divine image.

It finds them altogether *destitute*; and supplies them with everything that their souls can desire.

The words before us are fully decisive on this point: they were addressed, indeed, by our Lord, to his own immediate disciples only. But they must not be confined to any individuals of any age: they were intended for the whole world. As referring to the persons to whom they were addressed, they may be considered as including a promise of miraculous powers: but, as extending to us, they unequivocally engage that we shall possess all that we pray for, provided we ask for it in Jesus' name.

That we may more fully enter into the scope and meaning of them, we will show,

***~~I. To what extent Jesus will answer prayer—~~***

***~~Our blessed Lord is appointed of the Father to answer prayer—~~***

It was a part of the reward bestowed on him as Mediator, that he would have the whole universe subjected to his dominion, [Philippians 2:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-11). For this end, everything, upon his ascension to Heaven, was committed into his hands; that as "a Prince" he might subdue his enemies, and as "a Savior" he might secure the happiness of his believing people, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31). He was in a more especial manner constituted "Head over all things to his Church, [Ephesians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.21)," and furnished with an inexhaustible fullness of all good, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19), that he might give to all according to their respective necessities, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22). He received gifts himself, in order that he might give them unto men; Compare [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with the Apostle's citation of it, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8); and he will impart them to all who pray to the Father in his name.

***~~Nor is there any limit to his bounty in answering it—~~***

In our own name it is impossible to approach God: *he is a holy God, and we are altogether filthy and abominable; and of this our unworthiness we ought to be deeply sensible; but at the same time we would have such a view of Christ's worthiness*, as emboldens us to expect the most favorable acceptance with God for his sake.

We would come trusting in his sacrifice, and pleading the merit of his blood. This is indispensable in all our addresses at the throne of grace. We must not think of asking for anything, but in His name. This is twice mentioned in the text; and frequently elsewhere. See [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16); [John 16:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23-24); [John 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.26). But if we have a befitting respect to him, we need not be straitened in our requests to God: we may "open our mouths wide, and he will fill them."

Of course, a*person thus humbled with a sense of his own sinfulness, and thus exercising faith in the Lord Jesus, will desire nothing but what is agreeable to the Divine will*. He will readily resign himself to this limit to his prayers, he himself will readily resign, [1 John 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.14); *he will take the promises as the legitimate standard of his petitions*: and, so doing, he needs not be afraid of asking too much: the repeated declarations of Christ shall be literally fulfilled: "Whatever he asks, he shall have." Compare [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7) and [Matthew 21:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.22) with the text. Yes, he shall have "exceeding abundantly above all that he can ask or think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20);" nothing can be so great, but it shall be granted to him; nothing so small, but he shall be heard concerning it. Of this we have repeated assurances from our Lord in the words before us: "Whatever you shall ask, that will I do: if you shall ask anything, I will do it."

Of the accomplishment of these promises we have the strongest pledge, when he tells us,

***~~II. For what end he will answer it—~~***

The end for which Jesus left the bosom of the Father was to do his Father's will, [Psalm 40:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.7-8); and during the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he invariably sought, not his own glory, but the glory of Him who sent him, [John 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.30); [John 8:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.50); and in the last prayer he offered with his disciples, he desired only to be glorified himself, that he might thereby advance the Father's glory, [John 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.1). This same end does he keep in view in answering the prayers that are offered in his name.

***~~1. The effect of his answers is, that his Father is glorified—~~***

See what effects were produced by the miraculous powers which he bestowed on his Apostles:  
multitudes were converted by their ministry,  
the empire of sin and Satan was weakened,  
the authority of God was established over the hearts of men,  
and all the perfections of the Father were magnified and adored.

Similar effects are produced by every communication of his grace to the souls of men; who are thereby "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Only trace the change that is wrought in the heart and life of any individual, when the Spirit of God works effectually in his soul, and it will instantly appear how greatly the honor of God is advanced by the answers which our Savior gives to the prayers of men.

***~~2. The circumstance of the prayers being answered by him tends also to the glory of God the Father—~~***

The *power*of God would appear equally if the prayers were answered by the Father: but not so his other perfections: they are more eminently displayed by that office being vested in the Lord Jesus.

By that, the *justice*and *holiness*of the Father are exalted; inasmuch as men are thereby taught, that God cannot accept a sinner, if coming in his own name; nor reject him, if coming in the name of Jesus: the holiness of God prohibiting all access to him, except through a Mediator; and the justice of God withholding from none the blessings which have been purchased for them by the Savior's blood.

By that also, the *love*and *mercy*of God are magnified; in that, when there was no possibility of salvation to our fallen race if left to themselves, God gave his only-begotten Son to obtain salvation for them, and to impart it to them.

By that too, are the *truth*and *faithfulness*of God displayed; because, the promises being given us only in Christ Jesus, [2 Corinthians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.20). [Galatians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.17), the accomplishment of them by Christ is an evidence that "with God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

If it would be thought by any, that the delegation of this power to Christ derogates from the honor of the Father, let him know that God the Father accounts himself then alone honored, when equal honor is given to his co-equal, co-eternal Son, [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.11). [John 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22-23).

***~~Hence then we may see,~~***

***~~1. Whence it is that so few persons receive answers to prayer—~~***

Many offer prayers, both in public and private; but they do not pray with that *humility*, or that *faith*, which are necessary to procure an answer from God. They do not feel that deep consciousness of their own vileness that makes a Mediator necessary: though they may notionally acknowledge Christ as their Savior, they do not really feel the impossibility of coming to a holy God in their own name: and consequently they do not depend so entirely on the merits of Christ as the only ground of their hopes; nor do they plead his merits for the acceptance of their prayers, as they ought. Hence it is that the Father does not hear their prayers; and that the Lord Jesus does not answer them. If then we would really experience the truth contained in our text, let us seek help from God, that we may be enabled to approach him in that way which alone will prevail for our eternal good. Let us also draw near to him with that frequency and delight, which a firm belief in our Savior's veracity must produce.

***~~2. What they would attend to, who have received answers to prayers—~~***

That which is Christ's end in answering prayer, ought to be our end when an answer has been obtained; we would seek to glorify our heavenly Father. Do we ask, "How can we glorify him?" I answer, "In bringing forth much fruit, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)."*Holy tempers, and a life devoted to the service of God, are the proper fruits of grace received.*As a seal stamps its own image on the wax, so does the sealing of the Spirit impress the Divine image on the soul. By this we must judge of answers to prayer.

It is not by vain conceits, or transient impressions, that we can judge, but by the practical results. "If we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him;" or, in other words, "we must walk as he walked."

Where such fruits of prayer are lacking, God is grievously dishonored: *it is only by a conformity to Christ in all his dispositions and actions that we can approve ourselves his disciples*. Beware then how you substitute the reveries of enthusiasm for the holiness of the Gospel: "He who does righteousness, (as every disciple of Christ must,) is righteous, even as he is righteous."

***~~#1687~~***

***~~The Gift of the Spirit an Encouragement to Obedience~~***

***~~[John 14:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.15-17).~~***

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

*IT has pleased God to unite man's happiness with his duty, and to ordain, that the paths of righteousness alone would be paths of pleasantness and peace.* Hence our Lord, in his last discourse, wherein he labored more abundantly to comfort his disciples, *insisted on obedience to his commandments as the best proof of their attachment to him, and the best means of securing blessings from above*: yes, when he was informing them how richly the loss of his bodily presence would be overbalanced by the indwelling of the Spirit in their hearts, he first reminds them, that this benefit was inseparably connected with holiness of heart and life.

In discoursing on his words, we shall consider,

***~~I. The promise made by Christ to his obedient disciples—~~***

***~~Our Lord requires all his followers to "keep his commandments"—~~***

The believer is said to be "dead to the law;" but though dead to it as a covenant, he is as much alive to it as ever as a rule of life. The marriage connection which once subsisted between him and it, is dissolved: but it is only dissolved, "that he may be married to another, even to the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him may, in the quality of his Spouse, be enabled to "bring forth fruit unto God, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4)."

*The obeying of Christ's commandments is the only satisfactory evidence that he can give of his love to Christ*. In fact, to his last hour he must try himself by this test. All the professions in the world will be regarded as hypocrisy, if destitute of this evidence and this support.*Obedience and love are inseparable from each other. Love without obedience is no better than dissimulation, as obedience without love is mere servile drudgery.*The command therefore here given to the disciples, must be considered as given to all the followers of Christ in all ages.

***~~To those who follow this injunction he gives the most encouraging of all promises—~~***

His disciples were now about to lose his presence by reason of his removal to the worlds above. But he promised, that, "if they would obey his commandments, he would pray the Father for them, and that the Father would send them another Comforter to abide with them for ever." And here let me observe, that the Holy Spirit is represented by him, not as a quality, or operation, but as a distinct Person: not as a Comfort, but a Comforter; who would come from the Father, in answer to the intercessions of the Son, and abide in the bosoms of God's obedient people. Yes, as in the days of old, God, by the bright cloud, the Shechinah, the symbol of his presence, abode first in the tabernacle, and afterwards in the temple; so will the Spirit of God now descend and dwell in the hearts of Christ's obedient followers, displaying before them his glory, and imparting to them his blessings to the full extent of all their diversified necessities.

They, like the Apostles, are subjected to trials, and called both to act and suffer for their Lord: but the Holy Spirit shall give to them all needful support and strength, and make them more than conquerors over all their oppressors. Never for one moment will he leave them, until he has accomplished in them all that God of his unbounded love and mercy has ordained for them.

Enlarging on this promise, our Lord shows his disciples,

***~~II. What a distinguished blessing they are privileged to enjoy—~~***

***~~This divine Comforter is known to none but Christ's obedient followers—~~***

"The world knows him not, nor can, in fact, receive him." As "the Spirit of truth" he spoke in all the prophets: but the ungodly world cast his word behind their backs. In the days of our Lord they did the same. The same also they did when he spoke by the Apostles. And the same they do at this day. For lack of a spiritual discernment, "they see him not:" for lack of an enlightened understanding, "they know him not:" and for lack of holy dispositions, they neither do, "nor can receive him." Their hearts are closed against him: and are so full of corrupt affections, that he could not endure to make his abode with them.

If for a moment he enters as a Spirit of conviction, he cannot possibly abide there as a Spirit of consolation. But to the obedient followers of Christ he comes with all his glorious manifestations and endearments. In their hearts he "sheds abroad the love of God:" to them; he "witnesses their adoption into God's family:" and he is in them "a pledge of their eternal inheritance."

***~~In all this, the distinction between them and the ungodly world is incalculably great—~~***

Mark the contrast as it is here drawn by our Lord himself, between the obedient Christian and the disobedient professor. The one is benefitted by the Savior's intercession; the other not. The one has received the Holy Spirit; the other not. The one has an experimental acquaintance with the Spirit of truth; the other scarcely "knows whether there is any Holy Spirit," or, if he does, he has no delight in anything that he knows respecting him. The one has the Spirit dwelling in him as a Comforter; the other, instead of experiencing the Spirit's consolations, cannot so much as know or receive them. The one has all the persons of the ever-blessed Trinity interesting themselves in his behalf; the other has God, even the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for his enemy. The world may ridicule these things as mere enthusiasm, if they will: but they are the true sayings of God. And I pray God, that these thoughts may be laid to heart by every one here present: for, as God is true, no man shall dwell with God in Heaven, who has not first had the Spirit of God dwelling in him on earth, [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9).

***~~See then here,~~***

***~~1. The importance of consistency—~~***

A man professes to love the Savior, and rests his pretensions on some internal feelings and conceits of his own, while by his life and conduct he dishonors and denies his Lord. But to every such person our Lord will say, "Why do you call me *Lord, Lord*, and do not the things which I say?" Beloved brethren, whatever you may profess, as to Christian principles, or pretend, as to Christian experience, you shall find that saying verified at the last, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord!" Look into the text, I beg you, and see, that our Lord gave these promises on purpose to encourage your obedience.

If then you would be partakers of them, treasure them up in your minds, and say, 'How highly are we privileged! How wonderfully are we made to differ from the world around us! Is there no less than a divine Person sent down to dwell in us as our Comforter? Have we a Comforter, whom none but a chosen few are qualified to receive? And is this marvelous gift bestowed upon us in answer to our Savior's intercessions? Shall we not then testify in every possible way our love to him? Has he done such things for us, unasked, and shall we not do for him the things which he commands?'

This is the consistency that he requires: and this alone will be accepted as any proof of your love to him.

***~~2. The benefit of self-devotion—~~***

We suppose that some of you at least are giving up yourselves to the Lord in a way of holy and unreserved obedience: look up then to Heaven, and there you may see the Savior interceding for you. There too you may see the Holy Spirit of God just ready to come down at the very first intimation of the Father's will, to take possession of your bosom, and to make your soul his habitation. From thence will he come with all his consolations and supports, so that there shall be nothing in the whole universe able to depress you, or to stop your progress in the divine life.

With him shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship, such as no worldly man can have the least idea of; and by him you shall be progressively prepared for the enjoyment of your God in Heaven. Only wait on the Savior in the way of his appointment; and his promises shall he fulfilled to you in all their boundless extent. You have seen how they were accomplished to the Apostles, and in what felicity they issued: and to those who trust in them, not one jot or tittle of them shall ever fail.

***~~#1688~~***

***~~Our Life Dependent on the Life of Christ~~***

***~~[John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19).~~***

"Because I live, you shall live also."

AMONG the various sources of consolation which our Lord opened to his disciples, to support them under the disappointment that would be occasioned by his death, a very principal one seems to have been, that they themselves would be greatly benefitted by his departure: for that he would send to them his Spirit, who would more than supply the lack of his bodily presence; and that he himself would more effectually advance their eternal interests than he could do if he were to continue upon earth. He assures them, that though dead as to the body, he would still live; and that, "because he lived, they would live also."

From this declaration of his, we shall make two inquiries:

***~~I. What connection has the life of Christ with his people's life—~~***

Those who are not altogether ignorant of Christ are yet more apt to think of him as a dying, than as a risen Savior; whereas his life is not at all less connected with our salvation than his death.

***~~His life is the ground and confirmation of all our hopes—~~***

What do we most wish to be assured of, in reference to Christ? We wish to know that he was indeed the Son of God, and not a common man—that he was sent of God on purpose to redeem a ruined world—and that what he did and suffered for us has been accepted in our behalf. These are points of infinite importance, and that lie at the foundation of all our hopes.

But by the *resurrection*of Christ they are all clearly and satisfactorily ascertained: "By that he was declared to be the Son of God with power, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4);" by that was the sign, which above all others he himself appealed to in proof of his divine mission, fulfilled, [Matthew 12:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.38); [Matthew 12:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.40); and by that is the acceptance of his sacrifice made known, since *the release of our Surety is an undeniable evidence that our debt is paid*, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25).

Hence the testimony borne by the Apostles to the resurrection of Christ, was considered as a complete and sufficient proof of everything that they asserted respecting him.

***~~It is also a pledge of all our joys—~~***

Do we feel happiness in the thought of our being made partakers of eternal life, and in the prospect of a speedy possession of it? Behold him risen, him ascended, him seated at the right hand of God: in what capacity does he enjoy all this exaltation? As a mere individual? No! but as the Head and Representative of all his people: in his resurrection, he is "the first-fruits" of which there remains a whole harvest to be gathered, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20); in his ascension, he is gone as "our Forerunner," "to prepare a place for us, [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20). [John 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2);" and even enthroned as he is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, he does not sit there alone; for we, though personally on earth, are mystically "made at this very hour, to sit with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus! [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6)."

What then is his life but a pledge of ours? Since it not only assures to us a future blessedness, but is itself the very commencement of our bliss?

But the expression in our text intimates, that *the life of Christ is not merely intimately but also inseparably, connected with the life of his people.*

Let us proceed therefore to notice,

***~~II. What security it affords them that they shall live—~~***

Here let it be considered how our Lord is now occupied, and what he has engaged to do for his believing people:

***~~1. He intercedes for them—~~***

As the high-priest, after offering his sacrifice, went within the veil to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy-seat, and to burn incense before it, so did our Lord ascend to Heaven on purpose to complete the work he had begun, and to offer continual intercession for us at the right hand of God. Now we are assured that "the Father hears him always;" and consequently the benefits of his intercession are poured out on all his people. Hence there is peculiar stress laid on this act of his, as ensuring to us the benefits of his death, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25). [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

His *death*indeed is represented as making the atonement for our sins, and reconciling us to God.

But it is his *resurrection*to a life of glory in Heaven, that completes our justification, and perfects our salvation, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25); [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10); [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

***~~2. He works effectually in them—~~***

By his Spirit he yet dwells in all his saints, see verse 17, 18; and he has engaged that "his grace shall be sufficient for them," so that the weakest of them all shall be "enabled to do all things through his strength" communicated to them, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13). It is this which renders them invincible: "their life is hidden with Christ in God;" yes, "Christ himself is their life;" and therefore, when he shall appear in his glory, they will assuredly appear there with him! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).

***~~3. He will come at last, and take them to himself—~~***

When they shall have fought the good fight of faith, and gained the victory over all their spiritual enemies, they will not be forgotten by him: he will send his angels to bear up their spirits to the realms of bliss; and in due time he will restore also their bodies to life; that, in a re-embodied state, they may inherit the kingdom prepared for them. This assurance he gave to his disciples in the preceding context, verse 3; and when, by that event, death shall be swallowed up in victory, then will the promise in our text be finally accomplished; and their life of grace will be completed in a life of glory.

***~~Behold what encouragement this subject affords to all!~~***

***~~1. To believe in Christ—~~***

Were Christ unconnected with us in his present state, we might well doubt the expediency of putting our trust in him: but when we are informed that his almighty power is always occupied in forwarding our salvation, we would instantly commit ourselves into his hands, and expect from him all that our necessities can require. Do we, as creatures dead in sin, desire life? Or, as persons quickened from the dead, do we desire more life? Or, being possessed of life, do we desire an assurance that we shall never lose it?

Behold, Jesus, who "came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly," meets your case with exactly such a promise as you want, [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10); [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26).

Let me then put the question to you, "Do you believe this?" O beg of God that he would enable you so to do: say, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

***~~2. To suffer for him—~~***

Sufferings of some kind you must expect: *there is not one of his people but has some cross to bear*. You will find too at times that your trials are heavy: but the heavier they are, the more will his power be magnified in you. This thought afforded inexpressible consolation to the Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, and made him even "take pleasure" in his multiplied afflictions, [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10). Your enemies think little respecting Christ as actively engaged in behalf of his people: but in you they shall see his power and grace: and, while his death is exhibited in your sufferings, his life shall be manifested in your support, [2 Corinthians 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.11). Only take the promise in the text, and you need fear nothing!

***~~3. To press forward for universal holiness—~~***

You are not called to beat the air, or to engage either in an uncertain or an unproductive contest. You have a living Savior, that is pledged both to give you the victory, and to reward your conflicts. Will you not then fight? Will you leave a sin unmortified, or an enemy unsubdued? Prepare for the combat: put on the whole armor of God: be courageous like men, and know assuredly, that "your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~#1689~~***

***~~Obedience the Test of Our Love to Christ~~***

***~~[John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21).~~***

"He who has my commandments, and keeps them—he it is that loves me: and he who loves me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

IT is supposed by many, that to profess an assurance of our acceptance with God is the very height of presumption. But, while we acknowledge that such a profession may be made very erroneously, and by persons who deceive their own souls, we cannot admit that no such thing as a scriptural assurance exists. On the contrary, we affirm, that a consciousness of so great a change as takes place in conversion cannot but exist in some degree; and that our blessed Lord has taught all his people to expect it: "In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you, verse 20."

If indeed such a persuasion were to be entertained without being subjected to any test, then would it be the most enthusiastic, and most dangerous: but, if we have an infallible rule whereby to try it, then have we no reason to feel that jealousy respecting it, which so generally prevails. The truth is, that in this very passage where our Lord has sanctioned an assurance of our state, he has established a criterion whereby all our professions must be judged: nor, until our experience has been found to accord with that standard, have we any right to expect the rewards and consolations of his Gospel.

Now in these words we may see,

***~~I. How to judge of our love to Christ—~~***

We must not imagine that the adoption of certain religious sentiments, or the joining of ourselves to a particular set of religious people, or the manifesting of a regard for religious ordinances, or the having had great exercises of mind in reference to religion, with many hopes or fears, or joys or sorrows, or the feeling a strong confidence about the safety of our own state—are any certain proofs of genuine love to Christ. These things not only may, but often do, exist, where there is no genuine love to Christ in the soul. There is one mark, and one only, whereby we can form any decided judgment about the states of men; and that is, "By their fruits you shall know them." Those alone truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, who manifest a due regard for his commandments:

***~~1. Who "have them" in their HEARTS—~~***

Those who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," desire a perfect conformity to his mind and will. With this view they study his commandments: they do not read them in a cursory way, but meditate on them, and search into them, and beg of God to open them to their view, and are thankful for any light that may be cast upon them, even though their own conduct would thereby be condemned.

Having obtained a deeper insight into them, they treasure up the welcome truth in their minds, and "hide it in their hearts," as a rule of their conduct, "that they may no longer sin against him." "They account not any one of them grievous," but approve of them in their utmost extent, and "pant" after a more entire conformity to them, and long to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Psalm 119:127-128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.127-128); [Psalm 119:131](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.131). This last verse beautifully expresses the ardent longing of his soul to be conformed to them. They would not willingly have "a thought, that would not be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

***~~2. Who "keep them" in their LIVES—~~***

Those who truly love Christ will be always "walking in the way of his commandments." Do you inquire into their general conduct? you will find them "laboring, not so much for the food that perishes, as for that which endures unto everlasting life." They will "not be taking thought what they shall eat and drink, and be clothed with—as the poor ignorant Gentiles do; but will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "not laying up treasures upon earth, but laying them up in Heaven." In "love to the world and the things thereof, they will form a contrast with the ungodly world, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16). [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2)."

In like manner, if you inquire into their conduct under any particular circumstances, you will know beforehand where to find them: you need only examine the commandments in relation to that subject, and you will know how they will act.

You will not expect to find them conceited, selfish, querulous: because they are commanded to "prefer others in honor before themselves;" to "mind, not their own things, but also the things of others;" and "in whatever state they are, therewith to be content."

Nor will you expect to find them censorious, passionate, unforgiving, or vindictive; because Christ has bidden them "not to judge others," or "to say to any one, You fool!" but rather to "turn the left cheek to any one that smites them on the right," and to "forgive him not only seven times, but seventy times seven."

They are not unlike a *mariner*who is ordered to sail in a given latitude. There is no visible object in the ocean to which he directs his way; but he consults his chart, and his compass, and the heavenly bodies, and then makes his observations with all the accuracy that he can. The spot is not so defined, but that a difference of opinion may exist respecting its precise situation: but a skillful mariner will not be far wrong; or, if for a moment he is driven by a storm from the place he would occupy, he will be sensible of his departure, and will make every effort to return to his post again as soon as possible.

Thus it is with all who truly love Christ: they have in their hands the means of ascertaining the way that they would walk in: and they use those means with diligence, knowing that any considerable and habitual departure from it will be an impeachment of the sincerity of their love.

The commandments indeed, especially in circumstances of expediency, are not always so defined, but that there may be room for difference of opinion respecting the precise line of conduct prescribed by them: but, in relation to the *spirit*in which we would act, they leave nothing doubtful; they are as clear as the light at noon-day: so that, though a difference of opinion may exist, it never can be such as to occasion any great departure from the path of duty.

A man, who, being ordered to sail in a northern latitude, would go to the southern hemisphere, and then maintain that he was in his proper place, would be justly deemed unworthy of any credit as a mariner.

Just so, the man who justifies himself in the indulgence of any evil tempers, is unworthy of the name of a Christian: a proud Christian, an angry Christian, a covetous Christian, a lewd Christian—is as much a contradiction in terms, as an infidel Christian, an idolatrous Christian, or a murderous Christian.

This is the criterion whereby every man must be judged: and though there are imperfections even in the best—yet this on the whole is the true, the manifest, and the uniform character of all who really love Christ. All others, whatever they may be, only deceive their own souls! [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3) and [1 Corinthians 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.19).

Our Lord having thus accurately drawn the *character*of his people, shows us,

***~~II. What to expect, if we truly love him—~~***

It is not possible to enlarge our expectations too much, if only we confine them within the promises of God. As surely as we attain this character,

***~~1. We shall possess his favor—~~***

Much as "he abhors all the workers of iniquity," he will retain no unkind thought towards us: on the contrary, "he will love us," approving our spirit, accepting our services, and "rejoicing over us to do us good, [Jeremiah 32:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.41). [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)."

The Lord Jesus Christ also says, "And I will love you." A love of *benevolence*he felt towards us when we were yet enemies; but now he will feel a love of *delight*, even such a love as shall make him attentive to our every need, our every concern.

Of course, it must here be supposed, that our obedience to his commandments proceeds from proper principles; not from a desire of establishing a righteousness of our own, but *from a grateful sense of his redeeming love, and from a zeal for his glory*. If this be not the case, our best efforts will be even hateful both to the Father and to Christ, inasmuch as they are substituted in the place of that atoning blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from all sin. But if our obedience be pure in its principle, uniform in its tenor, and impartial in its extent, then shall it surely be accepted for Christ's sake, and be rewarded with the everlasting favor of our God. See [John 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.27).

***~~2. We shall have the present manifestations of it to our souls—~~***

There are manifestations of God to the soul, which the world has no idea of. In reading of the word, in prayer, in meditating on the promises—God will take away the veil from our hearts, and reveal himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and "shed abroad his love in our hearts." By the communications of his Spirit to us, he will enable us to cry, *Abba, Father!*He will witness with our spirits that we are his children; he will give us a pledge of our inheritance, even the present foretaste of Heaven itself in our souls.

Our Lord, when interrogated by Judas, confirmed this truth by repeated asseverations, and repeatedly also confirmed what he had spoken respecting the character of those to whom these blessings would be given, verse 22-24. We may be assured therefore, that to expect these spiritual manifestations is no presumption; but, on the contrary, they are the proper portion of all who love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

***~~From this subject we may clearly see, that religion is,~~***

***~~1. A holy thing—~~***

*That there are those who profess religion and yet grievously dishonor it by their conduct, is a melancholy truth*; and that the prejudices of many against religion are hereby greatly strengthened, is also true. But religion is no more accountable for the inconsistencies of those who profess it, than *reason*is for the follies of those who pervert it. What is the true tendency of love to Christ, has already appeared: and every one must try his professions by that test.

I would solemnly call upon all those who are habitually violating any one commandment, to remember, that all their pretended love to Christ is mere hypocrisy and delusion: and the more confident they are of their own acceptance with him, the more they deceive their own souls, [1 John 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.3-4). Who would have thought that such persons as are here described, exist? Yet they do exist. Compare the concluding words of this passage with the words immediately preceding the text. See also [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26) and [Matthew 7:16-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.16-23).

All who are in a measure showing forth their faith by their works, I would exhort to abound more and more; that, "making their light to shine more bright, they may constrain all around them to glorify their heavenly Father."

***~~2. A happy thing—~~***

As there are unholy, so are there also unhappy professors of religion. But shall we therefore conclude, that Christ will not fulfill his promises to his loving and obedient people; or that there are any circumstances under which his presence with the soul cannot make it happy?

***~~#1690~~***

***~~Christians Branches of the True Vine~~***

***~~[John 15:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1-2).~~***

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

THE union which exists between Christ and his Church is mysterious: the Scripture sets it forth both in figurative and plain expressions. It is spoken of not as a speculative or doubtful point, but as well known, [John 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.20). It is declared in the text under a beautiful similitude:

***~~Christ is the vine—~~***

If this was a continuation of our Lord's discourse, the idea of a vine might arise from what he had just before said respecting the fruit of the vine, [Luke 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.18); if it was spoken in his way to the Mount of Olives, it might be suggested by his passing through a vineyard. The representation respects Christ not personally, but as united to his Church.

In this view it fitly exhibits our *union*with him—

This union is not natural to any. We are, by nature, plants of a degenerate vine, [Jeremiah 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.21); we are, however, separated from it by Almighty power, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20), and are made willing to be united to Christ, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3); we are then engrafted into Christ by the Spirit on God's part, and by faith on ours, [Ephesians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16-17). Thus we become branches of the true vine; and the union, when formed, is intimate and inseparable, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17); [Romans 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35); [Romans 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.39).

It expresses, moreover, our *dependence*on him—

A branch derives all its fructifying power from the root: so believers receive all their grace out of Christ's fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). Hence it is that Christ is so precious to them, [1 Peter 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.7); hence, too, they determine to live entirely by faith in him, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20).

***~~The Father is the gardener—~~***

The gardener has many offices to perform—

He engrafts the scions, digs about them and dungs them, guards them from the weather, prunes the luxuriant branches, etc.

The Father performs these offices—

He chooses (but not for their superior goodness) what scions he will: he separates them from their stock by the means he judges best: he engrafts them, in his own time and manner, into the new stock: he continues to promote their good by his word, his Spirit, and his providence: he separates or combines, renews or changes, the various means of culture, as he sees occasion.

***~~His treatment of the branches is suited to their state—~~***

There are "branches in Christ," which are so **only in appearance**—

They have never been thoroughly separated from their old stock: they have never been truly engrafted into Christ. The change wrought in them has been only partial: they bring not forth such fruit as the living branches do.

These the Father "takes away"—

They are a disgrace to the vine, and to the gardener himself: he, however, exercises forbearance towards them, [Luke 13:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.8-9). His culture of them, in the meantime, shows their unfruitfulness to be of themselves, [Isaiah 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.4); but he will before long separate them from the others. He will take them away, in order to burn them, verse 6. How fearful would we be lest we be found such branches at last! And how carefully would we examine our fruit, in order that we may not be self-deceived, [Matthew 7:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.17-20).

There are other branches, which are **vitally united to Christ**—

They manifest that they are so, by the fruits which they produce.

These the gardener prunes—

Notwithstanding their fruitfulness, they need the pruning-knife. Afflictions have a tendency to make them more fruitful. God therefore sends them afflictions of various kinds. This he does to "every one of them, [Hebrews 12:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6-8);" he even promises affliction to them as a blessing, [Jeremiah 30:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 30.11) with [Hebrews 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10-11).

***~~Let us then inquire whether we are living branches of the true vine—~~***

Let us study to answer the ends of all his care. If we are indeed fruitful branches, let us welcome affliction as a blessing in disguise. Let us, above all, seek to be confirmed in our union to Christ, and our dependence on him, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7).

***~~#1691~~***

***~~Our Impotency Without Christ~~***

***~~[John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).~~***

"Without me you can do nothing."

THE various systems of heathen philosophers were all calculated to confirm the pride of man: the tendency of the Gospel, on the contrary, is to humble and abase the soul. Its sublimest doctrines are by far the most humiliating. The sovereignty of God, for instance, annihilates, as it were, our imagined greatness; and the atonement of Christ brings to naught our boasted goodness. Thus *the mysterious doctrine of union with Christ proclaims our insufficiency for anything that is good*. Our blessed Lord declares this, first by a comparison, verse 4, and then in plain terms, "Without me you can do nothing."

In discoursing upon this assertion, I will,

***~~I. Explain it—~~***

In explaining the words of Scripture we must take care not to strain them beyond their obvious meaning. These must evidently be understood in a qualified sense:

They must not be understood in reference to things which come within the province of the natural man—

A *natural*man has the same faculties and powers as a spiritual man: his understanding is as capable of comprehending common subjects, or of investigating the depths of human sciences: his will and affections are as capable of being exercised on objects according to their quality, as much as ever they will be when he shall be converted to God: and his memory is as retentive as that of any other man.

A *spiritual*man has no advantage over him in these respects. Consequently, our Savior's assertion must not be interpreted as extending to things purely intellectual, or even moral: since, beyond a doubt, a natural man may either do or forbear many things which come under the designation of morals.

***~~They refer exclusively to what is spiritual—~~***

There are different gradations or different kinds, of life, if I may so speak: there is a vegetative life, an animal life, a rational life, and a spiritual life: and the powers of each are limited to its own order.

A thing which *vegetates*, is not capable of animal exertion.

Nor is an *animal*capable of exercising the faculties of reason.

Nor does the *rational*man comprehend or enjoy what is *spiritual*. If any one order of being will affect the offices of that above it, it must first attain the powers of that superior order: for without the powers suited to the object, its efforts will be in vain. There is indeed this point of difference between the different kinds of life. The three first differ in their nature: but the last differs only in the application of powers previously possessed. Yet the last is called a *new nature*, because it is produced in the soul by the Spirit of God, who "opens the eyes of the understanding," constrains the will, and purifies the affections, and thus, in fact, makes the person so changed, "a new creature, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17) with [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)."

But our Lord's illustration will place the matter in the clearest light.

"Christ is a vine: his people are the branches;" and by virtue derived from him they are enabled to bear fruit. If a branch be broken off from a vine, it can no more bear fruit: it has nothing in itself independent of the stem; and, if separated from the stem, it must wither and die.

Just so, we, if separated from, or not united with, the Lord Jesus Christ, are incapable of bearing fruit; because we have nothing in ourselves independent of him, and have no means of deriving grace and strength from him. In respect of *natural*actions, we can effect all which nature qualifies us to effect: but in respect of *spiritual*exertions, we are incapable of them; because, *in consequence of our separation from Him, we are destitute of all spiritual life and power.*

This is, as clearly as I can state it, the import of our Lord's assertion, I shall now proceed to,

***~~II. Vindicate it—~~***

I grant, that in itself the assertion is very broad and unqualified: but in the sense in which it has been explained, it may be fully vindicated:

***~~1. From Scripture—~~***

Throughout all the Holy Scriptures man is represented as dependent upon God for the communications of his grace.

In himself he has nothing but evil, [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5);  
his whole soul is corrupt, [Jeremiah 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 17.9);  
and he must have "the heart of stone taken away, and an heart of flesh given him," before he can keep the commandments of his God, [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27).

So far is this carried, that the natural man is declared to be incapable of performing a good **act**, [Jeremiah 13:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.23), or uttering in a befitting manner a good **word**, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.3). [Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.34), or entertaining with real approbation a good **thought**, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5) with [2 Corinthians 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.16).

And with this statement our Church fully accords, when, in addressing Jehovah, it says, "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." As far as the Scripture testimony therefore is admitted, the point is clear; and our Savior's declaration is fully justified.

***~~2. From experience—~~***

Where shall we find one from the beginning of the world to this hour, who ever served God but by a power derived immediately from God, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8). If anyone thinks he have a power in himself to do good works, let him try what he can effect by any power of his own. Go, and get your soul filled with love to God; or with hatred of sin; or with a contempt for this present evil world and all that is in it: go, determine to do these things; and then carry them into effect: and then we will confess that what our Savior has affirmed is not true.

There is not anyone, I apprehend, who will not acknowledge three things necessary to the salvation of his soul; namely, repentance, faith, and obedience.

Go then, and **repent**with real contrition, and sincere self-loathing and self-abhorrence.

Go, and work up your soul also to **faith**in Christ, so as to flee to him, and rely upon him, and cleave to him, and glory in him as all your salvation and all your desire.

Go also, and get your whole soul cast into the mold of the Gospel, so as to delight in every part of God's revealed will, and to and all your happiness in the performance of it.

Do any one of these things, and we will confess, either that the word of God is altogether false, or at least that it is so expressed, as to mislead every person who endeavors to understand it. But I will not require so much at your hands. Only go home from this place, and fall upon your knees in your secret chamber before God, and for one half hour pour out your soul before him in fervent supplications for mercy, and in devout thanksgivings for all the blessings of redemption as set before you in the Gospel. Put this matter to a trial: see whether you can effect even this small matter by any power of your own.

I am not afraid to abide the test of this experiment, and to constitute this whole assembly judges in their own cause. If then not so much as one among you is able to do this small thing, know that the declaration in my text is true.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet without Christ—~~***

Truly, while you are "without Christ," you are "without any scriptural hope" of salvation, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12). Renounce therefore, I beg you, brethren, all confidence in yourselves. That you have brought forth fruit, I confess; but it has been "only wild grapes, [Isaiah 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.2-4)." But it is a far different fruit that God looks for: and in order to bring forth that, you must be cut off from the stock on which you have hitherto grown, and be engrafted into Christ, [Romans 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.24). Seek then to become living branches of the living vine: seek a union with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith: so shall you be enabled to bring forth fruit to his glory, and be approved by the Great Gardener in the day that he shall come to inspect his vineyard, verse 1, 2, 6, 8.

***~~2. Those who by faith are united to him—~~***

Happy, happy are you: for, as "those who are separate from him can do nothing," you, on the contrary, by virtue of your union with him can do everything; as Paul has said, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)." In order to this however, you must "abide in him," just as the branch abides in the vine. You must be continually "receiving out of his fullness the grace" which your necessities require, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). This life of faith is your wisdom, your happiness, your security, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20); and the more entire is your affiance in him, the more will you "be filled with all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God!"

***~~#1692~~***

***~~Fruitfulness in Good Works~~***

***~~[John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8).~~***

"Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples."

IT is not uncommon to hear those who preach or profess the Gospel spoken of as depreciating and disregarding good works. But this is nothing more than what the Gospel itself teaches us to expect: and, if we are not spoken of in a greater or less degree as undervaluing good works, there is reason to fear that we have not yet fully embraced that Gospel which Paul preached. We see it was the objection raised against him, when he proclaimed salvation by faith in Christ; and therefore he took frequent occasion to obviate it, and to show that it had no real foundation. He abhorred the idea of such a consequence being deduced from the doctrines of grace, and therefore shuddered at the very mention of it: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Yes, he affirms, that however salvation by faith alone may appear to ignorant or prejudiced minds to supersede the necessity of good works, it has directly the opposite tendency: "Do we then make void the law through faith?" says he; "yes, we establish the law." If the objectors understood aright the nature and office of faith, they would see that nothing but that would secure the performance of good works; since it is by that only that we are united to Christ; and it is only in virtue of that union that we can perform any good work whatever.

But, in various other respects, also, is faith favorable to good works. To go no further than the text, we see in these few words two of the strongest inducements to Christian practice that can possibly be imagined; namely, that it:   
conduces most eminently to the glory of God, and  
 evidences most decisively the sincerity of our own souls.

Let fruitfulness in good works be considered then by us in both of these points of view:

***~~I. As glorifying God—~~***

We are not to imagine that any act of ours can really add anything to the Divine glory: for "our goodness, however it may benefit our fellow-creatures, can never extend to him, [Psalm 16:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.2-3)." But, as God is pleased frequently to speak of our conduct as reflecting glory upon him, we also may with propriety adopt that language, and say, that our fruitfulness in good works glorifies him; in that it shows,

***~~1. The proper scope of his Gospel—~~***

His Gospel was never revealed for the mere purpose of informing our understandings in relation to mysteries which we could never otherwise have known: nor was it revealed for the mere purpose of saving man from perdition. It had a higher and nobler end in view: namely, the destroying of sin, and the restoring of sinners to the Divine image. "The grace of God, which brings salvation," was revealed to "teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we would live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)."

The gift of Christ as a Savior was:  
"to save us from our sins, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21);"              
delivering us from the present evil world;  
and purifying unto himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)."

The gift of the Holy Spirit, also, was "to convince us of the evil and bitterness of sin, [John 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8);" and to "sanctify us throughout, in body, soul, and spirit, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

There is not a promise belonging to the gospel, which had not this direct aim in view, that, by laying hold of it, we might "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Corinthians 7:1."

It is clear, therefore, that the Gospel, as being altogether designed to restore men to the Divine image, does and must reflect the highest glory on Him from whom it proceeds.

***~~2. The efficacy of his grace—~~***

Whatever we had been, even though we had been as perfect as when we first came out of our Creator's hands, the practice of universal holiness would have been honorable to Him from whom our powers had proceeded; but, considering what creatures we really are, how corrupt and sinful in all our parts—the change wrought in us displays the marvelous efficacy of God's grace.

If a gardener takes good scions, and they all prove fruitful, his skill is displayed and honored in the estimation of all who behold it. But, suppose he were to take none but dry and withered sticks, and to make all of them fruitful, his honor would be the more exalted, in that he would be able to educe fruits from dead sticks, which in themselves were incapable of producing any.

Such honor is the Lord's when we dead and barren creatures are enabled to bring forth any fruit unto our God. Such "trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting" do indeed reflect the highest glory upon him, [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3).

***~~3. The blessedness of his salvation—~~***

Let anyone behold a "wilderness made to blossom as the rose, and a desert to become, like Eden, the garden of the Lord;" then he will have some little idea of what is wrought upon the soul by the grace of Christ.

See, on the day of Pentecost, the change wrought by a single discourse upon three thousand murderers, whose hands were yet reeking with the Savior's blood! Was God not glorified in that?

Or let us look among ourselves. Are there none of us, who, previous to our reception of the Gospel, were left to show what was in our hearts, and to manifest that we were altogether "led captive by the devil at his will?" Compare those persons now with their former state of folly and wickedness; and will anyone say that the change, though still very imperfect, reflects no glory on the Lord?

Let the converted persons themselves judge. Are you not happier now than in the days of your unregeneracy? Would you willingly go back to your former state? Does not every day evince to you the blessedness of the change that has taken place? And can you forbear to honor Him who, by the mighty working of his power, has wrought it in you?

But let us contemplate fruitfulness in that other view; namely,

***~~II. As an evidence of our own sincerity—~~***

Our blessed Lord told his disciples, that "if they would continue in his word, then they would be his disciples indeed, [John 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.31). In truth, fruitfulness in good works is that test of sincerity which is,

***~~1. Exclusively admissible—~~***

All professions without this are vain: "Why do you call me *Lord, Lord*, and *do*not the things that I say?" "Not every one that says unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he who *does*the will of my Father which is in Heaven." But if a person manifest a great zeal for divine ordinances, will not that suffice? No! God, speaking by the Prophet Isaiah, says of many of his professing people, "For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" Yet these people he proves to have been immersed in the vilest wickedness.

By the Prophet Ezekiel, also, he describes the same kind of professors in very striking terms: "Son of man, the children of your people speak one to another, saying, Come, I beg you, and hear what is the word that comes forth from the Lord. And they come unto you as the people comes, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not *do*them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you are unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they *hear*your words, but they *do*them not [Ezekiel 33:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.30-32)."

Take the favorable part of this description, and you would suppose them all to be very eminent saints: but see the dark part of their character, and they are most detestable hypocrites. In the parable of the sower we have the same truth yet more fully delineated; for persons may bring forth fruit for a season, and prove apostates at last; yes, they may continue to bring forth fruit to the very end of life, and be found at last to have brought forth no such fruit as God will approve; the briers and thorns having so choked the grain, that "it brought forth no fruit to perfection, [Matthew 13:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-22)."

Hence it is clear, that nothing short of "a patient continuance in well-doing" can ever prove us to be truly upright before God. If we would be acknowledged by Christ as his, we must be "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no deceit."

***~~2. Universally sufficient—~~***

Show me a fruitful Christian, and I inquire not to what Church he belongs, or what are the subordinate tenets of his creed. I know full well that nothing but a union with the Lord Jesus Christ can ever render a man fruitful in good works. Philosophy never could accomplish this; no, nor could the law of Moses, with all its precepts, and promises, and threatenings, effect it. An outward form of religion was all that the law could give; the Gospel alone could supply the spiritual power.

Hence Paul says, "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin did; that is, he condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, [Romans 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3-4)." "The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did, [Hebrews 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.11)."

Yes, the Gospel sanctifies us throughout, in body, soul and spirit, and transforms us altogether into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness: and that image, enstamped upon the soul, proves to demonstration whose we are. To ourselves it is "an evidence that we have passed from death unto life:" and "by it all others, also, know us to be Christ's disciples."

***~~You will now be anxious to ASK,~~***

***~~1. What are those particular fruits, by which we are to judge of our state before God?~~***

It is not by any particular class of fruits, but by fruits of every kind, that we would judge of our state. There must be "no partiality" in God's law; "nor any hypocrisy," in preferring one part of it before another.

In all that relates to God:   
we must be upright,                                   
humbling ourselves before him,   
embracing the salvation he has offered us in Christ Jesus,               
and devoting ourselves unreservedly to his service.

In all that relates to our neighbor, we must do unto him exactly as we, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for him to do unto us.

In all that relates to ourselves, there must be:  
a subjugation of our own passions,  
a government of our tempers, and  
a habitual exercise of all holy and heavenly affections.

The whole circle of the Divine commandments must be our rule of duty; and superadded, as it were, to them must be the whole life of faith in the Son of God, and the whole life of love to him and to his people for his sake.

In a word, see what were the fruits which the *Vine*itself, the Lord Jesus bore; and then you will see what is expected from the *branches*, and what will prove you to be vitally united to him. Set "Christ before you as an example, and follow his steps" and you will need no other directory whereby to prove you are his disciples.

***~~2. What encouragement have I to address myself to this laborious undertaking?~~***

If I were to say, that in so doing you will save your souls alive, I would speak what would be amply sufficient to encourage you.

But what if I would say, that God would be glorified in you? Would you need more than that, to animate your endeavors? I do say it then, yes, and declare it most confidently, *that in proportion as you are fruitful in good works, you will glorify your God.*This is the uniform declaration of the inspired volume, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10); and on this is grounded that exhortation of our blessed Lord, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)."

***~~#1693~~***

***~~The Father's Love to Christ, and Christ's to Us~~***

***~~[John 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.9).~~***

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Continue in my love."

*Reason*could never suggest motives sufficient to counteract our sinful lusts. The *law*of God itself, with all its sanctions, could not change the heart. The *Gospel*alone can make sin odious, and holiness delightful. It effects this by revealing to us the love of Christ, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14). Hence our Lord reminds us of his love in order to confirm our love to him.

***~~I. The nature and extent of Christ's love to us—~~***

The comparison in the text denotes not equality, but resemblance, [Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.48). The love of Christ to us, like that of his Father to him, is,

***~~1. Without beginning—~~***

There never was a period when the Father first began to love his Son.

He loved him before his entrance on his ministry [Matthew 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.17), before his existence in the world, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18), before Isaiah's time, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1), from all eternity. In this sense many commentators explain, [Proverbs 8:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.22-23); [Proverbs 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 8.30): and if that interpretation be admitted, the eternity of Christ's love may be confirmed by verse 9. But, however this passage be interpreted, the fact itself stands on the most unquestionable authority. [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24).

There never was a period when Christ first began to love us.

His love is first manifested when we believe in him. But our faith in him is the effect, not the cause, of his love to us. This is affirmed by the prophets, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3). [Ezekiel 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.6), and by Christ himself [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16).

***~~2. Without measure—~~***

The Father's love to Christ was unbounded.

He is one with Christ in nature, and therefore in affection, [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30). He has shown the greatness of his love to him, in the gifts bestowed upon him, [John 3:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.35). [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19), and in his constant cooperation with him, [John 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.19-20).

Christ's love to us is also boundless.

It produces most astonishing acts of kindness towards us, [Ephesians 5:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25). [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6). Human affections fall far short of it, [Isaiah 49:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.15-16). It "surpasses all knowledge," whether of men or angels.

***~~3. Without variation—~~***

The Father's love to Christ was unchangeable.

His love seems to have been withdrawn for a season, [Matthew 27:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.46); he seemed not to answer his prayers, [Luke 22:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.42); [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44); but he heard him always, [John 11:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.42), and loved him always. The apparent suspensions of his love were the necessary means of accomplishing the purposes of his love even towards Christ himself, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10).

Christ's love to us also is unchangeable.

There are seasons when he seems to withdraw his love. But his chastisements are tokens of his love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6). He hates sin indeed, and will correct his people until they put it away: but he will not withdraw his love from them, [Psalm 89:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.31-33). Wherever he fixes his love, he rests unalterably in it, [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17).

***~~4. Without end—~~***

The Father's love to Christ shall endure for ever.

He has given him a pledge of this in his exaltation to Heaven.

Christ's love to us shall also be everlasting.

He knows no change of mind with respect to what He has bestowed, [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29). Whoever he loves he continues to love, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1). This truth is a just ground of joy and confidence, [Romans 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35); [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39).

What returns can we ever make to Christ for such amazing love?

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

This part of the text requires application rather than discussion.

It sets before us, not merely our privilege (which is, to continue in a sense of Christ's love to us) but our duty:

***~~1. To love Christ—~~***

This would have been our duty, though he had not so loved us. But the obligation to it is greatly increased by his love. Let him then he exceeding precious to us. Let us despise everything in comparison with him, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8).

***~~2. To continue in love to him—~~***

We are too apt to decline in our love, [Matthew 24:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.12). But declensions, however secret, are very offensive, [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4). They will, if continued in, disqualify us for Heaven, [Luke 9:62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.62); they will reduce us to a worse situation than ever, [2 Peter 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.22). Let us therefore cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, [Acts 11:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.23).

***~~3. To abound in all acts and offices of love to him—~~***

In secret, let us contemplate, admire, and adore his excellencies. In public, let us confess, honor, and obey him, [Matthew 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32). [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21).

It commends to us that duty as resulting from the declaration that precedes it—

*The love of Christ towards us is the strongest of all motives for our love of him.* Was Christ's love to us so unmerited, unbounded, invariable, and lasting? And shall ours to him be weak and transient? Let it operate then suitably on all our hearts. Let us not rest satisfied with what we have attained, [Philippians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-13). Let us meditate on his love to us, as the means of increasing our love to him, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19).

***~~#1694~~***

***~~Christianity Intended to Promote Our Happiness~~***

**[John 15:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.11).**

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

THOUGH every possible perfection was exhibited in its brightest colors in the person of our Lord—yet the most striking feature of his character was benevolence. Like the sun in its course, he diffused blessings wherever he went, and labored with indefatigable zeal to promote the good of mankind. By his discourses as well as by his miracles he sought to advance the happiness of his followers.

In the passage before us he assures his disciples that this was the one end of the instructions he had given them. That we may improve this gracious declaration, let us inquire,

***~~I. What THINGS he had spoken to them—~~***

We do not apprehend that he refers to his discourses in general, but to the things which he had been just uttering:

***~~The doctrinal part of what he had spoken related to their union with him—~~***

He illustrates their union with him by the similitude of a vine and its branches; and informs them that their fruitfulness in good works depended entirely upon their receiving of grace from him verse 1-6. This is the most sublime, and the most important doctrine of our holy religion. It is, alas! too commonly overlooked, even by those who think themselves well versed in the truths of Christianity. It does not so much as enter into the mind of Christians in general. They have no idea what is meant by a union with the Lord Jesus Christ. They have some general notion that we are to be saved by him; but, in what manner, they know not. But this doctrine cannot be too attentively considered, seeing that it is the very corner-stone of our religion: the one means of procuring us a saving interest in Christ: and the only method by which we can derive any blessings from him.

***~~The preceptive part directed them how to secure the full advantages of that union—~~***

Some might possibly infer from the foregoing representation, that the disciples of Christ were secure by virtue of their union with him, even though they would not exert themselves at all in the way of duty. He therefore cautions his disciples against any such mistake. He bids them to "abide" in him by the continual exercise of faith, and to approve themselves to him by a diligent observance of his commandments verse 4, 10. These injunctions mark the duty of all his followers. If on the one hand we must not depend on ourselves, but receive continual supplies of grace out of his fullness; so neither on the other hand are we to be supine as though we had nothing to do. We must go to him in fervent prayer: rely upon him with unshaken affiance: and labor to serve him with our whole hearts.

After having delivered these instructions our Lord condescended to declare,

***~~II. For what END he spoke them—~~***

***~~Our Lord desired to confirm the joy that he and his disciples mutually communicated and received—~~***

Our Lord rejoiced exceedingly in his disciples, even as a bridegroom over his bride. See the figurative representations, [Luke 15:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.4); [Luke 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.9); [Luke 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.24); but especially [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.5). His delight in all his redeemed people is as great as language can possibly express, [Isaiah 65:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.18-19). [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17). As a mother forgets her pangs when she beholds her first-born, so is our Lord satisfied with the travail of his soul, when he beholds those whom he has redeemed with his blood, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11). The prospect of saving them was his great support when he endured all the shame and misery of crucifixion, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). Now, if his disciples would turn back from the faith, his soul can have no more pleasure in them, [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38). But he is not willing to resign this happiness, and to feel all the painful sensations which their apostasy would occasion. He wept even over his blood-thirsty enemies: how much more would *his soul be filled with anguish if any of his elect were left to perish!*To guard effectually against this calamity, he showed to his disciples, and left on record for our instruction, both the privilege and the duty of all his followers; the privilege, to "abide in him;" the duty, to "obey his commandments."

As he rejoices in his disciples, so do they in him. It is the most distinguishing feature of true "Christians, that they rejoice in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3)." Some are so highly favored that they rejoice in him with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). Nor would Jesus wish them ever to lose that joy. He would rather that what they now possess would be perfected in Heaven.

But, alas! how would it all vanish in an instant, if by any means they would be "moved from their steadfastness!" That they might never thus "cast away the rejoicing of their hope," but "hold it firm unto the end," and finally "obtain a full reward," he opened to them whatever might conduce to the comfort of their minds or the encouragement of their souls.

***~~His instructions were admirably calculated to promote this end—~~***

What could be more encouraging to his disciples at that time, or indeed at any time, than to know that there was a fullness of grace treasured up for them in him?

What could be more consoling than to know that they were united to him as branches to a vine?

How trivial would they think any losses that they might sustain, or any trials they might endure, when they had such provision and security in Christ Jesus!

The caution also that was given them would of necessity operate to make them watchful. Thus would they be preserved both from open and secret declensions, and "be to their Lord for a praise, and for an everlasting name that would not be cut off, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How erroneous is the idea that religion tends to make us melancholy!~~***

A religious person may have a constitution that inclines to melancholy as well as any other person; or he may be rendered melancholy by mistaken views of the Gospel. But let not the blame in either of these cases attach to the Gospel. We are assured that the Gospel, so far from producing such an effect, is "glad tidings of great joy to all people"—it enjoins us all to "rejoice in the Lord always;" and, where it is best understood, and most experienced, namely, in Heaven—the most exalted joy abounds universally without the smallest intermission. Let then this prejudice be for ever banished; and let Christians be careful to so walk in delightful fellowship with Jesus, as to show to the world that his yoke is easy and his burden light.

***~~2. How precious ought the Scriptures to be in our eyes!~~***

It is in them that Jesus, being dead—yet speaks to us; and if we will attend to his instructions, they will "make us wise unto salvation." The intent of every word he there utters, is, to secure us to himself, and to make us eternally happy with himself in Heaven.

Why then do we not love the Scriptures more? Why do we give such a decided preference to books of human composition, yes, perhaps to plays, or novels, or the common publications of the day? Let us no longer treat indignity that sacred volume with such. "Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16);" and let us, like the prophet, eat it, that it may be the joy and rejoicing of our heart, [Jeremiah 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.16). Especially let us regard what it speaks of our union with the living vine. Let us seek to be engrafted into Christ; that, deriving sap and nourishment from him, we may be fitted for every good work, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

***~~#1695~~***

***~~Love to the Brethren~~***

***~~[John 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.12).~~***

"This is my commandment: That you love one another, as I have loved you."

THE law and the Gospel are in perfect unison with each other.

The *law*, as a covenant, sends us to the Gospel, that we may obtain mercy with God.

The *Gospel*sends us back again to the law, as a rule of life, that, by obeying its commands, we may honor and glorify our God.

The loving our neighbor as ourselves was enjoined by the law, and indeed was a summary of all the duties of the second table; Compare [Leviticus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 19.18) with [Romans 13:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.8-10) and [Galatians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.14). Our blessed Lord, enjoining the same duty from new considerations, calls it "a *new*commandment," and emphatically *his*commandment; so that we may be led to examine it with stricter attention, and to regard it with deeper reverence. He says, in effect: Labor constantly to fulfill that old commandment of the law; and, that you may never lack either a directory to guide, or a motive to animate you in your exertions, *take my love to you as the reason and pattern of your love to each other*.

To elucidate his words, we shall show,

***~~I. How Christ has loved us—~~***

We must, of course, content ourselves with a few hints only of a subject, which has a height and depth, and length and breadth that can never be comprehended, never explored. Consider then the love of Christ to us:

***~~1. The love of Jesus, how FREE!~~***

Who ever did anything to procure it? It exerted itself towards us long before we had any existence in the world. Who can do anything now to merit it? We deserve to forfeit it every day and hour; but to earn a saving interest in it is beyond the power of man. *We have nothing of our own but sin; and that would be a strange price to pay for the love of Christ.*Indeed, if we deny the freeness of his grace, we rob him of the brightest jewel in his crown.

***~~2. The love of Jesus, how TENDER!~~***

There is not one of his redeemed people, however weak and afflicted, whom he does not watch over with more than parental tenderness, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading those who are with young." Yes, "we have not a High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." "In all our afflictions He is afflicted." If we are stricken by the hand of persecution, He feels the blow, [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4), "Whoever touches us, touches the apple of his eye." In every possible state he sympathizes with us, as a head with the members; and never fails to support us with "grace sufficient for us."

***~~3. The love of Jesus, how ABUNDANT!~~***

If we regarded only the *temporal*blessings we receive at his hands, we must confess his love to us to be very abundant. But who can contemplate his unwearied intercessions at the right hand of his Father, or the incessant communications of his Spirit to their souls, and not stand amazed at the exceeding riches of his grace and love? And besides all this, he is "preparing mansions for us in his Father's house," and training us up daily, that we may be counted worthy to inhabit them for ever and ever. Well is his love represented as "surpassing knowledge [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19)."

**4.** **The love of Jesus, how COSTLY!**

A free as his love was to us, it was not exercised by him but at an expense that exceeds all calculation. Before it could operate for our advantage, he must leave his heavenly glory, assume our human nature, endure the scoffs and insults of his own creatures, and "pour out his soul unto death" as a sacrifice for sin. And would he pay this amazing price, in order to redeem our souls from death and Hell? Yes, he undertook and executed the mighty work; and never drew back until he could say, "It is finished!"

From contemplating this stupendous mystery, let us proceed to inquire,

***~~II. In what respects his love to us is a pattern for our love to each other—~~***

The love which the saints would hear to each other is of a sublime nature, very different from that which they owe to the world around them The two are carefully distinguished from each other, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10). [1 Peter 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.17). To resemble that of Christ to us, our love to others should be:

***~~1. Our love to others should be UNSELFISH—~~***

Our love to the saints should not be confined to those of the same Church or party, nor should it have respect to any pleasure or advantage that we expect to derive from them; for this is only a refined species of self-love, [Matthew 5:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.46-47).

It should respect them as children of our heavenly Father, as members of Christ our living Head, and as joint-heirs of the same eternal glory. It should be proportioned to their piety, rather than to any other endowments; and be occupied in advancing their happiness, not only as much as our own, but oftentimes in preference to our own. It was thus that the love of Christ operated towards us; and it is proposed for our imitation more especially in this point of view, "Mind not every one his own things, but every one also the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4-5)."

***~~2. Our love to others should be SYMPATHIZING—~~***

We are all passing through a valley of tears, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Hence we need each other's care and assistance through the whole of our lives. The kindness of friendship is a remedy which God has put within our reach, to enhance our joys and to alleviate our sorrows: we should therefore enter into the concerns of others, and feel them as our own; "weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing with those who rejoice." By this we are told, we shall more especially comply with the injunction in the text; "Bear one another's burdens," says the Apostle, "and so fulfill the law of Christ [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

***~~3. Our love to others should be BENEFICENT—~~***

Love must not interest merely the *feelings*of the mind: it must exert itself in *acts*correspondent to the occasions on which it is exercised.

Is our neighbor distressed? We must relieve him.

Is he ignorant? We must instruct him.

Is he weak? We must strengthen him.

Is he fallen? We must raise him up.

Has he shown some infirmities? We must bear with him.

Has he offended us? We must forgive him.

Are there any opportunities whatever of doing him good? We must gladly and speedily embrace them.

It is in this way also that the Apostle urges us to imitate our Lord and Savior: "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)."

***~~4. Our love to others should be SELF-DENYING—~~***

That love which will exert itself only in things that are easy and pleasing to oneself, is not worthy of the name of love. A truly Christian affection will lead one:  
to "condescend to men of low estate;"  
to visit the chambers of the sick;  
to enter into the dungeon of the prisoner;  
to cut off some of one's superfluities, in order to supply the necessities of others;  
to do good in return for evil;  
to expose oneself to the derision of a thoughtless world, in order to be instrumental in turning some of them from the evil of their ways;  
"to lay down, if need be, even our own lives for the brethren."

This was the way in which Paul manifested his love, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18); and in which we also, after the example of our Lord, are called to manifest ours, 1 [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16)."

This being the way in which our love may resemble his, we shall show you,

***~~III. The obligation we are under to follow that pattern—~~***

Our blessed Lord has enjoined a conformity to him in these respects,

***~~1. As an act of obedience to him—~~***

He does not recommend such love as decorous and beneficial, but commands it as a duty which he will on no account dispense with. He stamps his own authority upon it; intimating thereby, that he will make it a subject of particular inquiry in the day of judgment. Indeed, the decision at the last day is represented as turning principally upon this point; those who for his sake have abounded in offices of love being made exclusively the objects of his favor, while those who have neglected them are marked as objects of his indignation and abhorrence. If therefore we have any regard to his authority, or any dread of his everlasting displeasure, we must see the importance of following the example of his love.

***~~2. As an evidence of our love to him—~~***

Having in another place enforced this duty in terms similar to the text, he adds, that the exercise of brotherly love is the distinctive badge of our profession, the habit whereby all his followers must be known, [John 13:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.34-35)." To the same effect his loving and beloved disciple also speaks, declaring that our profession of love to God is mere hypocrisy without this, [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.20); and that without this we can have no assurance, no evidence, that we have passed from death unto life, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14); [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17); [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19).

Shall we then at once write 'Hypocrite' upon our foreheads? Shall we be contented to be ranked with "murderers, who certainly have not eternal life abiding in them, [1 John 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.15)." If not, we must see the necessity of imitating Christ, who "has left us an example that we should follow his steps."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How little of true religion is there in the world!~~***

So far is love to the saints from being the common disposition of mankind, that almost all are rather filled with hatred against them: and where candor prevails over the enmity of the human heart so as to subdue its workings, there yet is a total lack of that unselfish, sympathizing, beneficent, and self-denying love, which characterizes a true Christian.

***~~2. What reason have even the saints themselves to be ashamed before God!~~***

Let the most zealous and active Christian compare his love with that of Christ—how poor and defective will his best efforts appear! Alas! alas! how often are things found among professing Christians that are not only defective, but directly contrary to Christian love! Beloved brethren, let us study more carefully Paul's description of love, 1 Corinthians 13; and above all, let us contemplate more the love of Christ to us. So shall we feel its constraining influence, and be stimulated to the exercise of this delightful duty.

***~~#1696~~***

***~~Christ's Followers, His Friends~~***

**[John 15:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.15).**

"No longer do I call you *servants*, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, for everything that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

KNOWLEDGE of every kind is excellent and useful; but that of religion far transcends all other. Hence we are commanded to pay a peculiar respect to those who labor in the word and doctrine, [1 Thessalonians 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.12). Hence also our Lord himself, having revealed to his disciples the whole will of God, adduces his fidelity in this respect as one of the strongest tokens of his affection for them.

***~~I. In what light Christ regards his followers—~~***

The state of believers under the Gospel differs widely from that of those under the Mosaic dispensation. They were in the condition of *servants*of God, but we of *friends* of God. Christ assures us that from "henceforth" his people would be regarded by him in that light.

***~~He has taken away from us the yoke of the ceremonial law—~~***

This was an exceedingly heavy burden, [Acts 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.10); but Christ has delivered his people from it, [Galatians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.1). He has imposed only two rites, and those easy and instructive Baptism and the Lord's Supper; his service is perfect freedom, 1 [John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.3). [Matthew 11:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.30).

***~~He has delivered us from a sense of guilt—~~***

The offerings of a Jew afforded no assurance that God had accepted him, [Hebrews 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.9); they were rather so many remembrances of his sin, [Hebrews 10:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-3); but Christ has freed us from the pains of a guilty conscience, [Hebrews 10:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.14).

***~~He has set us at liberty also from a servile spirit—~~***

The Jews could not enter into the most holy place; none could go there but the high-priest, and he only on one day in the year, and then not without blood, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7); but now all believers are priests, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6). The veil which separated the most holy place was rent at the death of Christ. It was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very time of the evening sacrifice, by means of which it was opened to the view of all the worshipers in the temple; all therefore may enter thither without fear, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22).

***~~He has put us into the state of adult sons—~~***

Believers under the law were like minors, or children under age, [Galatians 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.1-3); but we are brought to the full possession of our privileges, [Galatians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.6-7).

Our Lord proceeds to prove his assertion:

***~~II. What evidence we have that he does so regard us—~~***

He still carries on the comparison between servants and friends. He points out one particular wherein he has eminently distinguished us, and exalted us above all the Jewish saints.

***~~He has revealed to us the perfections of God—~~***

These were but little known to the Jews; but Christ has more clearly revealed them. He has declared them to us in his discourses, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18); he has exhibited them in his life, [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3).

***~~He has shown us the way of acceptance with him—~~***

This was but obscurely shadowed under the law. Many even rested in the ceremonies themselves; but Christ has plainly declared himself to be the way to the Father, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6). He has expressly told us that we have acceptance through his blood, [Matthew 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.28); [Matthew 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.28).

***~~He has unfolded to us the privileges of God's people—~~***

The Jews were encouraged by temporal promises; but "life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel." Christ has fully opened to us our present privileges, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23), and our future prospects, [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24).

***~~He has "made known all which he himself had heard from the Father"—~~***

At that time he had not absolutely revealed all, [John 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.12); but he had declared all which he had been commissioned to reveal, or was necessary for them to know; and he completed his revelation soon afterwards.

***~~This was a most undeniable evidence of his friendship—~~***

Servants are not admitted to the secret views and designs of their masters; but Christ has made known to us all the mysteries of his Father's counsels, [Colossians 1:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.26-27). What abundant evidence of his friendship does this afford!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How should we esteem the Holy Scriptures!~~***

It is by the Scriptures that Christ declares to us the Father's will. In them therefore we see the strongest testimony of his love. The written memorials even of a creature's love are dear to us. Of what inestimable value then would we account the word of Christ! Let us regard it with the same affection as David did, [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10); let it "dwell richly in us in all wisdom, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16)."

***~~2. What love and honor should we show to Christ!~~***

We would not consider him merely as a lord and master: we should rather view him as *our dearest friend*. Let us then delight ourselves in communion with him: let us open to him all our cares, wants, fears, etc; let us give him that best proof of our regard, a willing and unreserved obedience, [John 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.14).

***~~#1697~~***

***~~The Doctrine of Election Explained~~***

***~~[John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16).~~***

"You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you would go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit would remain."

IT is of great importance to have a just view of the doctrines contained in Scripture. *There are many passages which at first sight appear to contradict each other; but they are all true and consistent when properly explained.*The assertions respecting the freedom of our will, and our proneness to apostasy, are true, and necessary to excite us to care and watchfulness. Nor are those that respect our election of God, and our assured perseverance in his ways, less true, or less conducive to our spiritual welfare. They have a strong tendency to produce in us humility and a dependence on God. All these passages therefore ought to be insisted on in their season. That which now demands our attention is a part of our Lord's farewell address to his disciples. It naturally leads us to consider,

***~~I. The doctrine of election—~~***

***~~This being frequently misrepresented, it will be proper to state what we mean by the doctrine of election—~~***

The doctrine of election imports, that "that we have not chosen God." No man by nature chooses God. The carnal mind is enmity against him [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7), and prefers the vanities of time and sense before him: nor is any man ever brought to choose him without having manifested much reluctance, and *been overcome by the constraining influence of Divine grace,*[Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3).

The doctrine of election imports, moreover, that "God has chosen us." He from eternity chose some to life. This choice of his was free and sovereign, without any respect whatever to works either done, or to be done, by us. *In due time, God manifests his election, by sending his grace into our hearts*: nor does any man differ from another, but in consequence of grace thus derived from God, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). Hence every saint on earth or in Heaven must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

The doctrine thus stated is capable of the fullest proof,

***~~1. From reason—~~***

God is a Being of infinite perfection. But he could not be *independent*if the accomplishment of his purposes depended on our free-will. Nor could he be *omniscient*, if he did not know how we would act. Nor could he be or could he be *immutable*, because his knowledge must increase with a succession of events.

It is not sufficient to say that He *foresees*everything, though he has not *fore-ordained*it; for if things are uncertain, they cannot be foreseen; and if they be certain, they cannot but be fore-ordained, since the certain operation of every distinct cause must be traced up to the first great Cause of all.

Again, It is ordained, that man shall never have nothing to boast of before God, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27). [1 Corinthians 1:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.31). But if the doctrine of election be not true, man may boast that he has made himself to differ, contrary to 1 Corinthians 4:7.

Again, Jesus Christ must have a seed to serve him. But if none are elected by God, it may happen that none will choose God; and thus Christ may have shed his blood in vain.

***~~2. From Scripture—~~***

In the Old Testament we find that God had a peculiar people, and that some from among them were chosen by him to particular stations: Levi to the priesthood, David to the throne, etc.

Nor can any argument be brought against God's election of men to eternal life, which will not be equally valid against the right he has confessedly exercised in choosing them to the enjoyment of the means of grace.

In the New Testament, we are plainly told that some of the Jews were chosen to special and saving mercies, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5); [Romans 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.7); they were called in time, in consequence of having been predestined from eternity, [Romans 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.30). God had no respect to any works of theirs, either done by them, or foreseen by him; but simply to his own eternal purpose, [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). Paul not only argues this point at large, but, conceiving that he has fully established it, he lays it down as an incontrovertible truth, that *the salvation of every man is entirely owing to the grace and mercy of God!*[Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16).

***~~3. From experience—~~***

Whence is it that so small a part of the world is evangelized? or that the persons who, according to human appearance, are least likely to receive the Gospel, are still, as in the early ages, the first to embrace it? Whence is it too that *all the godly, not excepting even those who are most prejudiced against the word Election, are yet ready to ascribe their own salvation to the unmerited grace of God?* These things strongly corroborate the testimonies of reason and Scripture; and though there are difficulties attending this doctrine—yet are there much greater difficulties attending the denial of it. And since God has affirmed it to be true, we would say to all objectors, Who are you that replies against God? [Romans 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.20).

The principal objection against this doctrine will be obviated, if we consider,

***~~II. The ends to which we are elected—~~***

There is no reason to think that this doctrine injurious to morality. Indeed there is no other doctrine that secures morality on so firm a basis—

***~~1. We are chosen expressly to good works—~~***

Our Lord might refer in part to the labors of his disciples, and to their consequent success in them. But he certainly had a further view also to the fruits of righteousness which they would bring forth. In this sense his words are applicable to all believers. God has ordained holiness as the way to Heaven, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14). [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10). [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29); and has appointed the means no less than the end, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2). [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4). Yes, he has decreed the end to be obtained only in and by the means, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). Hence the performance of good works is secured by that same decree which secures the salvation of God's elect.

***~~2. We are chosen also to persevere in them—~~***

God does not leave us at liberty to return to sin: on the contrary, he will have no pleasure in those who do, [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38). He will regard all the righteousness which they have wrought as though it had never been, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24); and their latter end will be worse than their beginning, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21).

But against such apostasy God will secure his own elect. He has given them a new heart, that they may fear him forever, [Jeremiah 32:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.39). He has promised, that their path shall be steadfast, [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9), and progressive, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18). And every saint may indulge a humble confidence that it will be so, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who object to this doctrine—~~***

For argument sake, we will give up the doctrine, and allow the first choice to arise from ourselves. Have you then chosen Christ? Have you chosen him as your almighty Savior and your rightful Lord? If you think you have, consider how much is implied in such a choice. If you acknowledge you have not, "out of your own mouth shall you be judged."

***~~2. Those who doubt their own election—~~***

You are too apt to perplex yourselves with unprofitable inquiries. You would rather examine whether you have been called. It is by your effectual calling that you are to know your election, [1 Thessalonians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.4-5). Keep your evidences of conversion clear, and they will be indisputable proofs that you have been chosen to life.

***~~3. Those who have good reason to hope that they have been elected of God—~~***

Never can you sufficiently admire the goodness of God to you. Well may you say, Why was I taken, while so many better than myself were left? But at the same time remember to what you are chosen. Never attempt to separate the end from the means. If you have this hope, you are bound to purify yourselves, even as God is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3).

***~~#1698~~***

***~~Consolation to the Persecuted~~***

***~~[John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20).~~***

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

WELL might our Lord enjoin his disciples to love one another; for, if they are not united in affection towards each other, they will in vain look for any love in the world. They are "as sheep in the midst of wolves:" the wolves indeed are kept from devouring now, as they have done in former times; but the disposition to devour still remains in the minds of ungodly men, and the godly are still regarded as their legitimate prey, [Isaiah 59:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.15). Our Lord may be considered as addressing his own immediate disciples in the first place: but the grounds on which he teaches them to expect hatred from the world, are such as apply equally to all his people in every age; and consequently we may consider the words as addressed to all his followers.

We shall take occasion from them to consider,

***~~I. What it is in Christians that calls forth the enmity of the world—~~***

The reasons usually assigned are, that they are enthusiasts, and hypocrites, and disturbers of the peace of mankind; but the true reasons are those which our Lord assigns in the text, namely:

***~~1. Their election out of the world—~~***

"The whole world lies in wickedness," all being equally alienated from God, however they may differ from each other in their moral conduct. But *God has from eternity chosen a people, whom he has given to his dear Son, and whom in due time he calls by his grace, and brings out of nature's "darkness into the marvelous light" of his Gospel.*These, when called, are made sensible that they owe the change, not to any merit or power in themselves, but altogether to the effectual working of his grace: and they acknowledge thankfully their obligations to him, saying, "By the grace of God I am what I am! See [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9). [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5)."

This acknowledgment is very offensive to the world. They cannot endure to hear of the sovereignty of God: they think that God cannot choose some to be objects of his favor without being unjust to others. Though they cannot but see that God has exercised his sovereignty in every age, in the case of Abraham, for instance, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of the Jewish nation, and of those nations that now enjoy the light of his Gospel, yes, in the redemption of fallen man when he never provided such a remedy for the fallen angels—yet they will not allow him to do so now: and *every person who ascribes his conversion to the distinguishing grace of God, they consider as actuated by consummate pride; when, in fact, the doctrine of election is the most humiliating that can be imagined*, and the denial of it is the fruit of ignorance and presumption.

That this is a principal ground of men's enmity against the people of God is asserted by our Lord: and it is confirmed by every part of the sacred records. Why did Cain hate Abel, but for the distinguishing favor shown him by God, [Genesis 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-5). [1 John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.12). In like manner Esau hated Jacob, not merely for the manner in which he had gained the blessing, but because the birthright was transferred to him. Thus Saul hated David also, because he saw that God was with him: and the Jews sought to destroy our Lord for no other reason than because he had brought to their recollection some instances wherein God had imparted to Gentiles favors which he had withheld from his own peculiar people [Luke 4:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.25-29).

***~~2. Their separation from the world—~~***

When once the Christian sees the sin and danger of a carnal life, he will of necessity depart from it. He not only desires to obey the command which says, "Come out from among them and be separate," but he perceives, that, with his new views and principles, he can no more maintain communion with the world than light can with darkness, or Christ with Belial, [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-17). Hence he no longer walks in "the broad road that leads to destruction, but in the narrow path that leads unto life."

This is another great occasion of offence to the ungodly world; for *in departing from the pursuits and vanities of the world, the Christian does, in effect, declare the danger of those who still adhere to them*; just as "Noah condemned the world" by building the ark, and Lot condemned Sodom by fleeing from it, [Proverbs 28:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.4). "Those who are of the world, the world will approve and love;" because their spirit and conduct have a direct tendency to justify the world in all its proceedings: but "those who, like their Lord, are not of the world," and refuse to be conformed to its maxims and ways, will assuredly become objects of the world's displeasure; for though their testimony is never audibly delivered, it will be seen and felt; and every effort will be made on the part of the world to bring back those who have deserted its standard and enlisted themselves under the banners of the Lord Jesus, [Psalm 38:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 38.20). [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29).

That there is, however, no cause for alarm, will appear, if we consider,

***~~II. What are those considerations which Christ has suggested for their support—~~***

We confine ourselves to those mentioned in the text—

***~~1. Our Lord himself was so treated—~~***

For the truth of this he appeals to his own disciples: they had seen how justly he was characterized by the prophet, as "one whom man despised, and whom the nation abhorred, [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7)." *They had seen how wickedly he had been treated, notwithstanding his unerring wisdom, his spotless piety, and his unbounded benevolence*.

Now, if He, our Head and Chief, was so hated by an ungodly world, how can we hope to escape their enmity? We have in him an indisputable proof, that *no wisdom, no prudence, no perfection of character, can enable us to obtain the approbation of worldly men: on the contrary, the more entirely we resemble him, the more shall we be hated by his enemies.*

And may we not find in this abundant consolation? If we were not so treated, we would have reason to doubt whether we were "walking as he walked:" but if we are reviled and persecuted as he was, then have we an evidence that we belong to him; and we have reason to "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings, [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13)."

***~~2. He has forewarned us to expect no other treatment than that which he himself received—~~***

We might well suppose, that, if he was so treated, we would meet with similar treatment: for reason itself teaches us that the servant ought not to expect a better reception than his lord. But our Savior himself also has told us this, [Matthew 10:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22-26), and particularly calls upon us to "remember" his words.

Indeed, if we only remembered what he has spoken to us, we would never be surprised at anything that we meet with; seeing that he has so plainly forewarned us of it. He has even told us, that the persecutions we meet with shall "turn unto us for a testimony." Being then forewarned, we would be forearmed.

This was the consideration with which Paul endeavored to comfort the Thessalonians, when they were startled at the greatness and multitude of his afflictions, [1 Thessalonians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.4); and, in truth, if the Scriptures are fulfilled in us, as they were in Christ, *we may well be reconciled to whatever an ungodly world may inflict upon us.*

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are afraid of incurring the hatred of the world—~~***

Doubtless the hatred of the world is not to be desired: we would rather, if it could be, that they would love us: but, if the friendship of the world is incompatible with fidelity to God [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4), then may we very cheerfully forego it. What is there to fear, [Isaiah 51:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.12-13). Man, at the utmost, can only kill the body; whereas God can kill the soul: and therefore God only and exclusively should be the object of our fear, [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5).

***~~2. Those who have braved and borne the enmity of the world—~~***

Do you repent of what you have done? Has not God made up to you all that you ever suffered for his sake? Do you think that you will ever feel regret, when you come to Heaven, that you suffered so much in your way thither? Are you not even ashamed that you ever for a moment accounted the cross of Christ heavy, or that you groaned under its weight? Sure I am, that "you shall receive an hundredfold even in this life, with persecutions;" and that*one moment's enjoyment of your Savior's presence will abundantly repay all that you endured for his sake*. Be not anxious then what men may do against you; and determine through grace, that they "shall find no occasion against you, except concerning the law of your God."

***~~#1699~~***

***~~The Great Sin of Rejecting Christ~~***

***~~[John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22).~~***

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin."

*EVERY sin is committed against an infinitely good and gracious God*: yet the stoical doctrine of the equality of sins is not therefore true. Guilt may be aggravated or diminished by a variety of circumstances. Hence our Lord denounced peculiar woe against Chorazin and Bethsaida. To the same effect he speaks concerning the Jews in the text.

***~~I. How greatly aggravated the sin of the Jews was in rejecting Christ—~~***

Sin admits of so many degrees of malignity, that one may be considered as no sin in comparison with another; not that any man can be absolutely without sin, [1 John 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.8), nor is any man really excusable in the sight of God, [Romans 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.19-21); but comparatively some may be said to "have no sin, [John 9:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.41)." Thus it was with those of whom our Lord spoke. If he had not come to them, they might have pleaded a lack of the necessary means of salvation: but our Lord's preaching rendered them wholly inexcusable.

***~~They could not plead any lack of Instruction—~~***

Our Lord often spoke in parables. This was the means of inflicting judicial blindness on the proud, [Luke 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.10); but it was well calculated for the instruction of the humble. Besides, he delivered many things in the simplest terms.

***~~They could not plead any lack of Evidence—~~***

Our Lord wrought many and stupendous miracles. He performed them by a touch, a word, and even at a distance. His miracles were as benevolent as they were open and undeniable. Those who wished to discredit them, imputed them to the agency of Satan. Our Lord mentions them as aggravating the guilt of those who rejected him, verse 24.

***~~They could not plead any lack of Warning—~~***

There was no lack of fidelity on our Lord's part. He warned the people in the plainest and most solemn manner, [John 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.21); [John 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.24).

***~~They could not plead any lack of Encouragement—~~***

Every one who thirsted for his benefits was invited by him, [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17). He offered to give spiritual life to all who would come to him, [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38). He promised also to crown them with eternal happiness and glory, [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26).

If they were thus without excuse, it befits us to consider,

***~~II. How much more inexcusable we are if we reject him—~~***

Christ has come and preached to us by his word and ministers, and many reject him after the example of the unbelieving Jews. Though we be not avowed infidels, we practically reject Christ, when we do not receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent; and if we do so, our guilt is peculiarly aggravated.

***~~We have not any Jewish prejudices to encounter—~~***

The Jews had received their law from God; they had been accustomed to expect a temporal Messiah—yet they saw a man altogether destitute and despised, and beheld the law of Moses superseded by a new religion. His works indeed would have obviated all these difficulties: but we have not these difficulties to contend with. We profess that the Gospel is from God. We profess that Christ's kingdom is of a spiritual nature. We profess that his cross is his own glory, and his Church's hope.

***~~We see the whole design of God unfolded—~~***

The Jews had only partial and contracted views: they could not reconcile many seeming contrarieties. The disciples, even after Christ's resurrection, were at a loss to account for the occurrences they had seen, [Luke 24:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.21). But we behold the counsels of God completed; the various prophecies are all accomplished; the characters and offices of Christ are opened; the great ends of his incarnation and death are effected; the glory of God, as shining in his face, is fully displayed.

***~~We have witnessed the success of the Gospel—~~***

Those to whom our Lord spoke, saw his ministry despised: the great and learned of their nation rejected him. His followers were only a few, and those of the lowest class: but we have seen the "mustard seed become a large tree:" the Gospel has spread to the remotest corners of the earth; it has triumphed over the prejudices and passions, the interests and powers, of the world; its influence is yet daily exhibited before our eyes.

How heinous then must be our guilt if we reject him! Surely our "sin must be of a crimson or a scarlet die!"

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who make excuses for their neglect of Christ—~~***

With what foolish and weak excuses do men deceive themselves We may notice a few:

"I have not time." For what is time given?

"I am not able." Do you do what you can?

"There is time enough yet." Shall you certainly live, and have the grace you now slight, offered you again?

"I have the majority on my side." Are you not then in the broad road that leads to destruction? Will the majority mitigate your pain?

"Professors are hypocrites." Is that a reason you would not be sincere?

"God is merciful." To whom? the impenitent?!

Surely God will not be deceived by these foolish excuses. What cloak for your sin will you find when he shall call you to account? Will you plead a lack of instruction, evidence, warning, or encouragement? Know that in that day you will be speechless! [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12). Your love of sin and hatred of the light are the true causes of your rejecting Christ! [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40), and this will be the ground of a more aggravated condemnation, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19).

***~~2. Those who desire to attain the saving knowledge of him—~~***

It is a great mercy to have such a desire formed in the heart; but beware of cloaking or extenuating your sin. Remember that solemn yet encouraging declaration of [Proverbs 28:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 28.13), "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy!" Confess your sin with all its aggravations. There is a virtue in the blood of Jesus to cleanse you from it all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7).

***~~#1700~~***

***~~Hatred of Christ, Is Hatred of the Father~~***

***~~[John 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.23).~~***

"He who hates me, hates my Father also."

MEN are ever disposed to palliate their sins, and, by representing them under some specious name, to conceal their real enormity. But God calls every sin by its proper name, and speaks of it with just abhorrence. Covetousness in his eyes is not prudence, but idolatry! [Ephesians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.5). A disregard of his presence is not mere inadvertence, but a denial of his most essential attributes, [Psalm 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.11); [Psalm 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.13). *A contempt of his Gospel is not a trivial ignorance or inattention, but an absolute hatred both of Christ and of the Father*. To confirm this truth we will endeavor to show,

***~~I. Who they are that hate Christ—~~***

It may be thought that none but Jews can be guilty of hating Christ, and that the bearing of his name is a sufficient testimony of our regard for him. But there are too many who, notwithstanding they have been baptized into his name as infants, are yet "enemies to him in their minds." Certainly we must number among his enemies,

***~~1. Those who disregard his Gospel—~~***

The Gospel of Christ ought to be universally received as "glad tidings of great joy," but the greater part of mankind feel an aversion to it.

Some dislike its fundamental doctrine of salvation by faith, and represent it as injurious to the interests of morality.

Others hate the duties it enjoins, and traduce it as requiring a state of mind totally incompatible with the discharge of our offices in social and civil life.

Many even of those who approve of the Gospel in their judgment, are yet very far from experiencing its power in their souls.

They do not enjoy its promises, they do not fulfill its precepts, they do not know its renovating, sanctifying effects. It may be asked, Are all these persons haters of Christ? Let Christ himself answer that question. He states, that a practical renunciation of his authority is a proof that they are enemies to him in their hearts, and will cause them to be treated as his enemies in the day that he shall judge the world! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14); [Luke 19:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.27).

***~~2. Those who neglect his ordinances—~~***

Our Lord has promised his peculiar presence to us while we seek him in the ordinances of his own appointment. Would not then the hope of enjoying his presence endear the ordinances to us, and make us regard them as our most inestimable privilege? But how are they regarded by the generality among us? *Does not worldly business or pleasure often detain us needlessly from the house of God?*And when we are assembled for worship, do not our thoughts rove to the very ends of the earth, so that, though we "draw near to God with our lips, our hearts are far from him?" *Are not almost all persons cold and remiss in secret prayer?*And is not family religion either banished altogether, or conducted with such formality as to render it irksome and unprofitable?

Our Lord left it as his dying command that we would often partake of bread and wine in remembrance of his body broken and his blood shed for us. Yet is not his table either shamefully deserted, or else profaned by impenitent, unsanctified communicants? And what construction must we put on such conduct? Our Lord plainly tells us, that he considers them as his enemies, and that none of those who thus despise his invitations, shall ever taste of his supper, [Luke 14:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.18); [Luke 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.24).

***~~3. Those who persecute his people—~~***

Persecution is not carried now to the same extent that it has been in former ages. But has it ceased? Experience proves that *there is the same enmity in the hearts of men against the faithful servants of God as ever there was.*There are many at this day who are true descendants of Cain and Ishmael; and, as long as there shall be an unconverted man upon earth, it will be found, that they who are born after the flesh, will persecute those who are born after the Spirit, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29). If they do not kill the saints, they will "revile them, and separate them from their company, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake."

Are not such persons enemies to Christ? Yes; he considers himself as the real butt of their malice. Saul thought he was justly punishing some wild fanatics when he dragged the Christians to prison and to death; but Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ME? [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4). And the prophet tells us that whoever touches the Lord's people, touches the apple of his eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8).

The extreme enormity of their conduct appears in this,

***~~II. That the hatred of Christ is, in fact, a hatred of the Father also—~~***

Christ is essentially "one with the Father;" and as "whoever had seen Christ, had seen the Father," so, "whoever hates Christ must of necessity hate the Father also." But it is evident in other points of view that they hate the Father; for,

***~~1. They hate his authority—~~***

God commands all men to believe in his Son, to "kiss him" with holy reverence, and to honor him even as they honor the Father, [Psalm 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.12). [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23). But the unequivocal language of those who comply not with his command is, "We will not have this man to reign over us!" "Who is the Lord that we would obey him? We know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice!" Whatever they may pretend, they are not deceived through unavoidable ignorance, or impelled by irresistible force to reject Christ; they do it from a rooted aversion to the Father himself, and evince by their conduct the truth of that declaration, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7)."

***~~2. They hate his image—~~***

The word, the ordinances, and the people of God, all bear upon them the impression of God's holiness: and this is the very ground of that aversion which rises against them in the hearts of the ungodly. *The Gospel is disliked as requiring so much purity and self-denial.*The worship of God could be easily tolerated, if an outward form would suffice; but the spirituality and devotion necessary to an acceptable performance of this duty, causes the carnal heart to revolt from it as irksome. If the saints would countenance the world in its sinful practices, the offence of the cross would cease: but they "make their light to shine before men;" and on this account they, whose deeds are evil, hate, revile, and persecute them.

Now this clearly proves, that holiness itself is their aversion, and consequently that the image of God, which principally consists in holiness, is hateful to them. Will any say, "It is *hypocrisy*that they hate, and not holiness?" Why then were Christ and his Apostles so universally the objects of cruel persecution? Was there any deceit in him? Was he not "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" and walked not his disciples in his steps? It is certain, not only that the image of God is hated by the enemies of Christ, but that everything that bears his image is hated by them on that very account, and in proportion as it exhibits a resemblance of him.

***~~3. They hate his very existence—~~***

It is vain indeed to entertain the thought that God could be annihilated: but, if we could suppose for a moment that it were declared from Heaven, "There is no God!" would not the tidings excite a general satisfaction? *Would not all the haters of Christ congratulate themselves that there was no God to call them to an account, none to punish them for their iniquities?*Would they not look forward to an unrestrained indulgence of their lusts with pleasure, instead of weeping for the loss of their best and dearest Friend? Yes, as the enemies of Christ exulted in his crucifixion, so would all who hate him rejoice, if the Father also was utterly extinct. That this is no fanciful idea will appear from the declaration of God himself, "The fool has said in his heart, No God! [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How desperate is the wickedness of the human heart!~~***

Why is it that men are so full of enmity against Christ and his Father? Is it for having given us his dear Son that they hate the Father; or do they hate Christ for laying down his life for us? Many good things has he done; for which of them do we reject him? O let "the haters of God," as the Apostle calls all of us in our unconverted state, [Romans 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.30), blush and be confounded; let them abhor themselves for all their iniquities and abominations: for what our Lord says of us is strictly true, "We have hated both him and his Father! verse 24."

***~~2. What a dreadful place must Hell be!~~***

Here on earth the wickedness of men is restrained by the preventing grace of God: but in Hell it will rage without control. How will all the miserable spirits then vent their malice! How will they gnaw their tongues, and blaspheme God! [Revelation 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 16.9). May we never know this by bitter experience!

***~~3. How astonishing is the tender mercy of our God!~~***

One would suppose that God would feel nothing but indignation against such an ungrateful world. But behold! he "waits to be gracious unto them;" he sends them offers of pardon; he even entreats and "beseeches them to be reconciled to him, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20). O let his goodness lead us to repentance! Let us cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and bow to the scepter of his grace. So shall we yet be numbered among the friends of God, and be living monuments of his mercy to all eternity!

***~~#1701~~***

***~~The Personality and Office of the Holy Spirit~~***

***~~[John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26).~~***

"When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."

THE characters of the most holy men may suffer from envy and malevolence; but their righteousness often shines forth the brighter afterwards, as the sun obscured for awhile by an intervening cloud. According to all human appearances, our Lord's name must either have sunk into speedy oblivion, or been handed down with infamy to the last posterity. It scarcely seemed possible that the ignominy of his cross could ever be so obliterated as to be succeeded by respect and honor: but our Lord knew that the testimony of the Spirit would assuredly effect this. While therefore he consoled both himself and his disciples with the reflection, that the causeless enmity of his countrymen was nothing more than a completion of the prophecies, he taught them to look forward to the time when the Spirit of God would come down visibly from Heaven, and by the most indubitable testimony efface every stain, and rectify the mistaken apprehensions of the world respecting him.

Let us consider,

***~~I. Our Lord's description of his promised messenger—~~***

*In speaking of the inscrutable mysteries of our religion, we are constrained to represent heavenly things in terms, not strictly just perhaps, but such as are best accommodated to our own feeble apprehensions.*We observe then respecting the messenger whom Jesus undertook to send, that,

***~~He is a distinct person—~~***

Many deny the distinct personality of the Spirit, and affirm that he is only a virtue or quality belonging to the Father: but our text clearly shows, that this is not a just and scriptural idea: the names here given to the Spirit, as "the Comforter," and "the Spirit of Truth," import that he is a distinct person. And the circumstance of his mission leaves no doubt upon the subject; for he "proceeds from the Father," is "sent" by the Son, and comes down to us. Besides, the very end of his mission implies the same; for he comes to "testify," that is, to be a witness.

***~~Yet, though distinct from the Father, he is, in his essential properties, equal to him—~~***

He is sent to testify to all persons, in all places, at the very same instant of time: and does not the execution of such an office require both omnipresence and omniscience? Must he not know what every person needs to be instructed in, and be everywhere present to hear and grant their requests? And are there any attributes more appropriate to the Deity than these? Yet these the Spirit has in common with the Father: David says respecting him, "Where shall I go then from your Spirit? If I go up to Heaven, you are there; if I go down to Hell, you are there also, [Psalm 139:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.6-7);" and Paul observes that "the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God, [1 Corinthians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.10)." Nor are these testimonies unsupported by others that are yet more direct and clear: for the Spirit is constantly joined both with the Father and the Son as equally worthy of the highest honor, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19), and equally a source of the richest blessings, [2 Corinthians 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.14). Indeed he is expressly and repeatedly called God. They who lied unto him, were therefore guilty of lying unto God, [Acts 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3-4); and those who had him dwelling in them, were therefore the temples of the living God, [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17).

***~~Nevertheless in some respects he is subordinate both to the Father and the Son—~~***

In the order of subsistence, as the Father is not of the Son, but the Son of the Father, so neither the Father nor the Son proceeds from the Spirit, but the Spirit from them, inasmuch as *he proceeds from the Father, and is sent by the Son*.

In the order of operation also the Spirit is inferior: the Father is represented as the fountain of authority and of blessings: the Son acts as his servant, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1); and the Spirit acts under Christ, being sent or deputed by him, (according as it was determined in the eternal counsels of the Father,) to apply to men that redemption, which was procured for them by his death.

The Spirit acted in this subordinate capacity before the time of Christ's incarnation: it was by him that Christ went and preached to the antediluvian world, [1 Peter 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18-19); by him also he inspired the prophets to foretell the things relating to his sufferings and glory, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11). During the days of our Lord's ministry on earth the Spirit still acted in subserviency to him; it was by the Spirit that Christ cast out devils, [Matthew 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.28), and performed his other miracles.

In a more especial manner did the Spirit exert himself in subservience to Christ after he had ascended to Heaven; it was then that the Spirit began fully to execute the office assigned him, and to "glorify Christ" before an ungodly and unbelieving world, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14). To this very hour does the Spirit bear the same part, "convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, [John 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8)," in order to magnify Christ, and to enlarge his kingdom.

As our attention is principally directed to the Holy Spirit, we shall proceed to state,

***~~II. The particular office committed to him—~~***

*The Father, Son, and Spirit, have distinct and different offices in the economy of redemption.*The office of the Spirit is twofold:

***~~1. To be a witness for Christ—~~***

Our blessed Lord died under circumstances of the deepest ignominy and reproach; being treated by his whole nation as the vilest of malefactors. Nor could it be conceived that one, who under such circumstances saved not himself, would be constituted by God the Savior of others. This was, to all appearance, so absurd an idea that it never could have gained any credit in the world, if it had not been confirmed by the most unquestionable testimony. To overcome these obstacles, the Holy Spirit testified of two things, namely, the righteousness of his person, and the sufficiency of his salvation. While the Apostles testified of these things to the ears of men, the Spirit confirmed their word with visible signs, [Hebrews 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.4), and sealed it on men's hearts by his invisible, but effectual influence, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5). This he did, not only on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted at once, but on many other occasions. It is worthy of remark, that when he visibly descended on the Gentiles in confirmation of the word that was delivered by Peter, he descended at the very instant that the Apostle began to speak of the fullness and excellency of Christ's salvation, [Acts 10:43-44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43-44); as though he designed to intimate that this was the great truth which he came to attest, and which we ought to receive with our whole hearts.

***~~2. To be a Comforter to us—~~***

When a soul begins to feel its guilty and undone state, it needs a comforter: but there is no creature in Heaven or earth that can administer effectual consolation; none but the Holy Spirit is sufficient for so great a work. If he reveals Christ to the soul, all tears will instantly be wiped away; but if he withholds his influence, sorrow and despondency will overwhelm it utterly. Thus also in all subsequent trials and temptations, it is the Holy Spirit alone who can heal the wounded spirit, or bind up the broken and contrite heart. And it must further be noticed, that the principal, if not the only, way, in which he administers consolation to us, *is by testifying of Christ; it is by showing to us his beauty, his sufficiency, his truth and faithfulness, and by enabling us to rest entirely on him*: and as there can be no comfort until this be done, so there can be nothing but joy and exultation arising from it.

***~~This subject naturally leads us to reflect,~~***

***~~1. How great and glorious a person Christ is!~~***

It has been already shown that the Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father: yet has Christ authority to send him into our hearts. If Christ says:

Go, my Spirit, and quicken that dead sinner!

Go and dwell in that polluted heart!

Go and comfort that drooping and desponding soul!

In short, whatever commission Jesus gives to the ever-blessed Spirit, it is executed instantly, and to its utmost extent. No unworthiness in us excites any reluctance in the mind of the Spirit; if Jesus does but speak, it is done.

Who then would not wish to have this glorious person for his friend? Who does not desire a saving interest in him? Who would not seek him who is so able and willing to save? Blessed Lord, send your Spirit now to testify of you, and to glorify you in all our hearts!

***~~2. How unspeakable is the happiness of Christ's faithful people!~~***

These enjoy the witness of the Spirit in their own hearts, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10). The Spirit not only testifies to them that Jesus is the Savior of believers in general, but *their*Savior in particular: he witnesses to, and with, their spirits, that they are children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16-17). Can we conceive any greater happiness than this? Surely not in this present world. Let every one then aspire after this honor; *let every one seek the Spirit, not merely as an instructor, but a comforter*. Thus shall we be filled with consolation, even under the most afflictive circumstances; and his testimonies shall prove to us a pledge, and a foretaste, of our heavenly inheritance.

***~~#1702~~***

***~~Offices of the Holy Spirit~~***

***~~[John 16:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8-11).~~***

"When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."

IN judging of the dispensations of God's providence or God's grace, we are extremely apt to err. Hence *we often mourn for things, which, if we knew the end of them, would afford us occasion for joy.*This was the case with the disciples, who were dejected on account of their Lord's approaching departure from them. To relieve their minds, our Lord not only promised them another Comforter, but told them for what ends and purposes that Comforter would come:

***~~I. To "convince the world of SIN"—~~***

***~~This office the Spirit executed among the Jews—~~***

The sin of rejecting Christ was that which the Spirit was more particularly to reveal to the world; and he manifested it fully by his miraculous operations on the disciples. Christ had rested, as it were, the whole credit of his Messiahship on this one point: consequently, the visible descent of the Spirit, accompanied with the miraculous gift of tongues, was such an attestation to Christ, as could not be doubted, and such a reproof to his murderers as could not be withstood, and wrought an irresistible conviction of it by his gracious influences on the hearts of thousands.

***~~This office too he yet executes in the Christian Church—~~***

The *external*testimony which he gave, remains the same in all ages. The *internal*witness is given to those only whom "God has ordained to life." To them the Spirit shows the number, the greatness, the malignity of their sins; and particularly, the guilt, and danger of that unbelief, in which they have ignorantly lain. This is the Spirit's work; nor is it wrought in any, but by his almighty power, [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6). [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5). [1 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.11).

If he proceeded no farther than convicting his people of sin, he would not be a Comforter; but it is his office also,

***~~II. To convince the world "of RIGHTEOUSNESS"—~~***

***~~This also was accomplished by him on his first descent from Heaven—~~***

Christ, though professing himself the Savior of the world, had been crucified as a malefactor. The Spirit therefore was to evince, both that Christ was a righteous person, and that through his righteousness others also might be saved. Accordingly, by his descent, the Spirit proved these things beyond a doubt. He showed that Christ was accepted by the Father (which he would not have been, if he had been an impostor), and had finished all that was necessary for our salvation; seeing that, if anything had remained to have been done on earth, he must have returned hither in order to complete it. He moreover inclined, and enabled multitudes to believe on him for righteousness, whom they had just before reprobated as worthy of universal execration.

***~~And yet daily is he occupied in glorifying Christ among us—~~***

*Whomever the Spirit convinces thoroughly of sin, he leads also to discoveries of Christ.* He shows to the soul the suitableness and all—sufficiency of Christ's righteousness to all those who trust in it, verse 14, and leads them, with holy glorying, to say, "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

He has yet further undertaken,

***~~III. To convince the world of JUDGMENT—~~***

***~~He showed to the first Christians that Satan was a vanquished foe—~~***

By the descent of the Spirit it was manifest, that Christ had triumphed over sin and Satan, death and Hell, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8). [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15). By his gracious influences also, he rescued myriads from their power, and inspired them with a holy confidence, that they would finally prevail over all their spiritual enemies, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12).

***~~Thus at this day does he cause the weakest to exult over their fallen enemy—~~***

However active and malicious Satan is, his head is bruised, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15), his power is limited, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10). [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8), his doom is fixed, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20). Of this the Holy Spirit assures the weak and trembling believer; and puts into his mouth, even in the midst of all his conflicts, that triumphant song, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39)

***~~Uses—~~***

***~~1. Of conviction—~~***

*All true Christians have received the Spirit for the ends and purposes for which he is here promised.* In vain then will be our orthodoxy in sentiment, if we have not this evidence of our conversion to God, [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9). Let us pray that the Spirit may be poured out upon us; and let our views of our guilt and weakness lead us to glory in Christ alone.

***~~2. Of consolation—~~***

Are we bowed down with a sense of sin? We may be sure that Christ has sent his Spirit to work that conviction in us; and that, if we be instant in prayer, he will, by the same Spirit, lead us also to a view of his righteousness.

Are we ready to despond by reason of the power of sin? The resistance which the Holy Spirit has enabled us already to make to its dominion, is a pledge that "we shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loved us, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." Let us only seek the Spirit as our Comforter, and we need regret no loss, no pain, no trouble, that may be the means of bringing him into our hearts.

***~~#1703~~***

***~~The Office of the Spirit to Glorify Christ~~***

***~~[John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14).~~***

"He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

MANY imagine that the doctrine of the *Divinity of Christ*is founded on some few passages only of Holy Writ, on passages too which may possibly be of doubtful interpretation. But the truth is, that that doctrine pervades the whole New Testament; so that scarcely any part of it can be fairly explained except on the hypothesis that Christ is God.

Take for instance the passage before us. Our blessed Savior told his disciples that he would "send to them the Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, who would guide them into all truth, and show them things to come, verse 7, 13." But is he a man, or a mere created being, who arrogates to himself this power?

Of that Spirit he proceeds to say, "He shall glorify me." What language is this? Does a creature say, he will send the Spirit of the living God to glorify him? That God would send a creature for the advancement of his own glory, is intelligible enough: but that a creature would send God for the advancement of his glory, is what no rational being would for a moment admit.

But further; our Savior adds, "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." What! Has a creature any thing that he can call his own; and which is of so mysterious a nature, that it cannot be known, unless God himself shall make it the subject of a special revelation? And has he such an exclusive propriety in that thing, that it must be acknowledged to be his, at the very time that God is taking of it in order to show it unto men? This was so strong an assertion of his Godhead, that the disciples themselves appear to have been staggered at it; on which account our Lord proceeded to vindicate and confirm the expression he had used: "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you, [John 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.15)"

The whole declaration, if viewed in this light only, is of infinite importance: but, without insisting on this doctrine, which only incidentally arises out of the text, we shall turn our attention to the doctrines more directly contained in it; and shall show you,

***~~I. The office of the Spirit—~~***

The whole of our Savior's life was a state of humiliation: the establishing of his proper character was committed to the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, who was in due time to come down from Heaven for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. In what way he was to glorify Christ, is specified in the text; he was to take, as it were, all the excellencies of Christ, and to display them before the eyes of all his people. Among these excellencies we will mention a few, which are deserving of more especial notice:

***~~1. The saving virtue of his sacrifice—~~***

Man, as soon as he begins to be truly "convinced of sin," is apt to doubt whether his iniquities are not too great to be forgiven. But the Holy Spirit reveals to him from the word, that the death of Christ was an atoning sacrifice, not for the sins of a few only, but for the sins of the world; that "his blood has an efficacy to cleanse from all sin;" and that all who believe in him "shall be justified from all things," even from "sins of a scarlet or crimson dye." How glorious does Christ then appear in the sinner's eyes!

***~~2. The prevalence of his heavenly intercession—~~***

After a person has believed in Christ, he still is renewed only in part; "the flesh still lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that he cannot do the things that he would." Hence he is sometimes led to fear that God will cast him off, and be no more entreated by him. Then the Holy Spirit shows him that Christ is "his Advocate with the Father, [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2)," and that he "ever lives in Heaven on purpose to make intercession for him." He convinces him that Christ can never intercede in vain, for that "him the Father hears always;" and that consequently the backslider, as well as the newly awakened sinner, shall be saved to the uttermost, if only he looks to Christ as his all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator. Thus the Spirit still further endears the Savior to the believing soul.

***~~3. The sufficiency of his grace—~~***

Conflicts innumerable both with sin and Satan will still remain, even such conflicts as may bring the believer sometimes to the borders of despair. But then the Spirit again proceeds in his work of glorifying Christ: he shows the soul, that there is, by the Father's own appointment, *an inexhaustible fullness of grace treasured up in Christ*, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9), out of which his people shall receive all the grace that they shall stand in need of, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); and that, whatever their conflicts or temptations may be, his grace shall be sufficient for them, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

How precious does Christ then become, when the believer, after crying, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" is enabled to add, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 7:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24-25);" "In the Lord I have righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)."

***~~4. The extent of his love—~~***

Of this no finite being can form any adequate idea; much less can the language of mortality express it. But in some degree it is the privilege of all saints to have it "revealed to them by the Spirit." The times and seasons, as well as the manner and degree, of making this revelation to the soul, are altogether ordered by that Spirit "who gives to every man severally as he will." Generally it is in some season of trial or affliction, and by means either of some remarkable providence, or of the written word, that he thus glorifies Christ. But, O! when he does take of the love of Christ, and reveal unto men "its length and breadth and depth and height, [Ephesians 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17-18), what joy and transport does he impart! Truly it is "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory;" a very Heaven upon earth.

Such manifestations of the Savior's glory cannot be made to the world, because the world has no dispositions suited to them: but to the believer they are made; and they produce in him a determination of heart to consecrate himself wholly and for ever to the Lord.

***~~5. The greatness of his salvation—~~***

Salvation, when first embraced, is regarded almost exclusively as a deliverance from everlasting punishment. But when the Spirit of God brings it more fully to our view, how amazing does it appear, and how glorious does that Savior appear who has obtained it for us! The renovation of the soul after the Divine image, and the investing of it with all the glory and felicity of Heaven, a glory inconceivable, a felicity everlasting; truly salvation, in this view of it, overwhelms the soul with wonder, and prepares it to do and suffer whatever can be done or suffered for the ultimate enjoyment of it.

Such being the office of the Spirit, let us consider,

***~~II. Our duty arising from it—~~***

We have an office similar in some respects to that which is sustained by the Spirit himself: we are all in our place and station to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and show them unto men.

This is our duty,

***~~1. As Ministers—~~***

Our Lord particularly marks this connection between the office of the Holy Spirit, and that which his disciples were to execute in the world, [John 15:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26-27). They were sent forth, as all other ministers are, to testify of Christ, and to exalt him in the eyes of men. At this day, no less than in the apostolic age, is this the duty of those who are his ambassadors to a guilty world: we are to speak of Christ, to set forth the fullness and excellency of his salvation, and to commend him to the love of all around us. Counting all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ ourselves, we should labor day and night to impart it unto others.

How earnest the Apostles were in this blessed work, may be seen from their first addresses to the unbelieving Jews, [Acts 2:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.32-36); [Acts 4:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10-12); and we in like manner would "contend earnestly for the faith," and determine to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The treasure of divine knowledge is put into us, as earthen vessels, for this purpose; and "God has shined into our hearts for this very end, that we may give unto all around us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, [2 Corinthians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6-7)." What a glorious office is this! O that every minister bore it fully in mind: and that all who profess to execute it, might execute it with their whole hearts, and "with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven!"

***~~2. As private Christians—~~***

Our Lord assigns the same office to all his people. All indeed are not called upon to exert themselves as ministers, but *all are to glorify Christ by a holy conduct, and are to take of his virtues and his graces, and to exhibit them to the world*. This is one end of their calling, namely, "to show forth the virtues of him that has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light, 1 Peter 2:9." All are to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" in their own conduct, so that all may read it, yes, may be compelled to read it, as transcribed in their lives, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16). What an exalted office is this for every private Christian! O that all might be ambitious to execute it aright! for Christ himself has said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that you may bring forth much fruit; so shall you be my disciples, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)."

***~~#1704~~***

***~~The Benefit of Prayer~~***

***~~[John 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.24).~~***

"Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

*THIS world is justly characterized as a valley of tears.* Even those who experience the most happiness, find many interruptions of it: nor is there any way of securing permanent tranquility, but by waiting upon God in prayer.

The disciples were sorrowful on account of the approaching departure of their Lord, with whom they had hitherto enjoyed the most familiar fellowship. Our Lord tells them, that though they would no longer be able to inquire of him, yet, if they would ask of the Father in his name, he would grant them whatever they would need; and that the answers which they would receive to their prayers would abundantly overbalance the loss of their present privileges, and fill them with unutterable joy.

In the direction given them, we may notice,

***~~I. Our duty—~~***

It is comprised in one word, "Ask." Now this is,

***~~1. An easy duty—~~***

We do not mean that it is always easy to pray, for there is nothing more difficult when the heart is indisposed for that exercise; but that is the easiest condition that could possibly be imposed*. When the heart is in a proper frame, prayer is as easy to the soul, as breathing is to the body*: it is the first, and most natural, effort of a living soul, "Behold, he prays! [Acts 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.11)."

***~~2. A reasonable duty—~~***

*Man is a dependent creature; and it is but reasonable that he would acknowledge that dependence at the throne of grace, and ask for those mercies which he stands in need of.*The very heathen have felt the propriety of supplicating their deities, and have established ordinances whereby they might conciliate the favor of their gods.

It is true, that God knows our necessities before we ask: yet is it highly proper that we would spread them before him, in order that we ourselves may be humbled under a sense of them, and that God's mercy in relieving them may be more clearly seen.

***~~3. A necessary duty—~~***

Though God cannot be prevailed upon by dint of importunity, the expressions, [Luke 18:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7-8), must not lead us to think of God as though he were wrought upon as we are—yet *he has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings*. He has said, "I will be inquired of to do it for them, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)." There is no room therefore left for us to speculate upon the use of prayer: it is quite sufficient that God has required it as means to an end: and if we will not comply with his injunctions respecting it, it is utterly in vain for us to expect his blessings.

***~~4. An acceptable duty—~~***

Prayer offered to the Father without any respect to the mediation of Christ, is not acceptable: but when presented in a humble dependence on his atonement and intercession, it comes up before God as incense, and prevails beyond the utmost extent of our conceptions. It is to prayer offered in this manner, that the promise in the text is given, verse 23, 24. And this has been the qualification of all acceptable prayer from the beginning.

Abel was heard on account of his sacrifice, [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4). The penitents under the law obtained mercy in no other way, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22). The Jews, when unable, by reason of their captivity, to offer their accustomed sacrifices, were to look towards the temple, which was a type of our incarnate God, [1 Kings 8:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.47-48). [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10). And to that same Jesus must we look, trusting in him as "our Advocate with the Father, and as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2)." Nor did anyone ever ask in this manner without obtaining a supply of all his needs.

To counteract the backwardness of our hearts to this duty, let us consider,

***~~II. Our encouragement to perform it—~~***

***~~The promise of acceptance is without any limit or exception—~~***

There is no exception with respect to the persons who may apply to God. The vilest person in the universe, provided he asks in the manner prescribed in the text, shall be heard as readily as the very chief of the Apostles. His past iniquities, of whatever kind they have been, shall not operate as any bar to his acceptance with God.

Nor is there any limit respecting the blessings we implore: provided they will really conduce to our good and to God's glory, they shall be given. However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10). [John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14)." The frequent and solemn repetition of this truth by our Lord himself, must of necessity remove all doubt upon the subject, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8)."

***~~And instances of its accomplishment occur in almost every page of the sacred writings—~~***

Whether Abel's prayer was answered by fire from Heaven which consumed his sacrifice, or by some other token of the Divine favor, the acceptance of it was equally manifest, and the fact is equally encouraging to us. To recount the various instances that occurred from that period to the times of Christ and his Apostles, would be a pleasing task, but would occupy many hours. Suffice it to say, that whether men's prayer has been offered for themselves, [Jonah 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1); [Jonah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.7), or for others, [Exodus 32:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.11-14). [Acts 12:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5-9), and whether it has been of a more stated and solemn kind, [Psalm 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.6), or only in a sudden ejaculation [Nehemiah 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.4-6)—it has equally prevailed; it has prevailed speedily, [2 Kings 20:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.2); [2 Kings 20:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.4-5). [Daniel 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.20-21); [Daniel 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.23), and to a most incredible extent [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18); and shall yet prevail, by whoever it may be offered, [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16).

This encouragement to prayer is greatly heightened by what is added respecting,

***~~III. The consequence of a due and acceptable performance of it—~~***

God delights in the prosperity of his people, and desires that they would be happy here, as well as in the world to come. It is with this view that he has enjoined prayer as a duty; because, when performed aright, it is the means of filling the soul with the sublimest joy.

***~~1. It tranquillizes the most perturbed mind—~~***

Let a person under any sudden irritation or calamity betake himself to prayer, and he will speedily find the tempest calmed, and his agitations quieted. No other thing will operate like this. It will enable him to educe good out of every evil: it will not only blunt the edge of all his trials, but will turn his sorrows into joy! [Psalm 30:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 30.8-11); [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3).

***~~2. It brings God near unto the soul—~~***

God in answer to prayer will take away the veil which intercepts our views of him, and "manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world." What an exhibition of his glory was that which he given to Moses! What a bright display of Christ's excellency was that which the three favored disciples were admitted to behold on Mount Tabor! We say not indeed that any similar vision of the Father or the Son shall ever be presented to our bodily eyes: but God will certainly "shine into the hearts of those who call upon him, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6);" and will enable them 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)." What ineffable delight must such manifestations bring with them!

***~~3. It gives us a pledge and foretaste of Heaven itself—~~***

The happiness of Heaven consists in the vision and fruition of God: and this, as far as it can be enjoyed by faith, is enjoyed in prayer. There is not anyone who has abounded in the performance of this duty, but has had frequent occasion, when in his closet, to exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven, [Genesis 28:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 28.17)." In such seasons as these, a man has no occasion to search out evidences of his acceptance with God, or of his title to Heaven; for the very fellowship which he has with the Deity is, if we may so speak, Heaven brought down to earth; it is an actual foretaste of Heaven, and a pledge of his complete possession of it in due season.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who ask without receiving—~~***

Think not that God has violated his promise. The reason of your not receiving is, that "you ask amiss, [James 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.3)." Your petitions are cold, formal, hypocritical; and you have not a due respect to the name of Jesus in presenting them to God. Perform your duty as you ought, and you shall never complain of a lack of acceptance in it.

***~~2. To those who have received answers to prayer—~~***

Let not your communion with God puff you up with pride, but rather abase you in the dust. If once you grow vain and secure, you will provoke God to hide his face from you, and to withhold the communications of his grace. Rejoice in the glorious privileges you possess; but "rejoice with trembling."

***~~#1705~~***

***~~The Objects of the Father's Love~~***

***~~[John 16:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.27).~~***

"The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God."

THE atonement and intercession of Christ are doubtless the grounds of a Christian's hope, and the richest source of his comforts: but much consolation also may be derived from the consideration of the Father's love; nor do we understand the Gospel aright, until we see that *Christ himself was the gift of the Father's love, and that every blessing which we receive through Christ was prepared for us in the eternal counsels of the Father*. Our Lord, solicitous to comfort his disciples previous to his departure from them, directed their views unto the Father, assuring them, that, while they prayed to the Father in his name, they would find acceptance and support; and this too, not merely in consequence of his intercession, but also in consequence of the love which the Father himself bore towards them. In discoursing upon his words, we shall speak of,

***~~I. The objects of the Father's love—~~***

The description which our Lord gives of his own disciples will characterize *all his faithful followers*to the end of time—

***~~They love the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

There is not a real Christian in the universe who does not esteem the Lord Jesus above every other being, desire him more than thousands of silver and gold, and delight in him as the only source of true happiness. To love him more, and to serve him better—is the daily labor of his soul, and the very summit of his ambition.

***~~They believe in him—~~***

True Christians do not merely assent to the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah; but they most cordially acquiesce in his appointment to that office; they trust altogether in his mediatorial work; and they seek to receive out of his fullness the blessings which he was sent to communicate.

***~~All who are of this description are, for that very reason, objects of the Father's love—~~***

By the exercise of faith and love, they honor the Lord Jesus Christ in the world; and in so doing they honor the Father also, [John 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.23); on this account the Father loves and honors them. We do not mean to intimate that their graces *merit*the Divine favor—for "their best righteousnesses are as filthy rags, [Isaiah 64:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.6)."; or that their graces are the spring and source of the Father's love—for God's love was from everlasting, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3), and was exercised by him in a perfectly free and sovereign manner. But we do say that their exercise of faith and love is the occasion of God's manifesting his love to them.

*Abel's*offering of a lamb, in token of his dependence on that Lamb of God which was to be slain in due time, was the occasion of God's testifying his acceptance in a visible manner; and God justified his apparent partiality, by declaring this act to have been the ground of the preference he had shown to Abel, [Genesis 4:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-7). [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4).

When *Abraham*also had offered up his son, God made his faith and obedience the occasion and the ground of manifesting his love to Abraham, [Genesis 22:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 22.16-17).

The Scriptures uniformly speak the same language, [Psalm 91:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.14-16); nor are we in danger of erring, provided we discriminate between the *meritorious*ground on which God's favors are secured, and the particular occasion on which his love may be manifested.

If we believe that any are so distinguished by the Father we cannot but wish to know,

***~~II. The manner in which he displays his love towards them—~~***

We might easily trace this part of our subject in the experience of those to whom the words of the text were immediately addressed; but, as it is of general importance, we shall rather treat it in a way that is alike applicable to all sincere believers:

***~~1. He watches over them by his providence—~~***

The dearest of God's children may appear to others, perhaps also to themselves, to be forsaken of God. But *the Father's eye is ever upon them for good*, and "runs to and fro throughout the whole earth, to interpose effectually in their behalf, [2 Chronicles 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 16.9)." They may be allowed to want for a season, in order that they may be stirred up to seek relief from him: but they shall assuredly be supplied with everything that is needful for them, [Psalm 34:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.10). They may experience many deep and heavy afflictions, but not one which shall not ultimately "work for their good, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28)."

***~~2. He preserves them by his grace—~~***

God is not an unconcerned spectator of his people's conflicts. He shields their heads in the day of battle. If they fall, he raises them up; if they are wounded, he heals them; if they faint, he renews their strength, [Psalm 146:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 146.7-8). He will not endue them with such a degree of grace as shall supersede the need of vigilance and exertion; nor will he commit to them a stock that shall suffice for months or days: but he will give them "grace to help in the time of need, [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.16);" and that "grace shall be sufficient for them." Thus will he secure them from the destruction which they fear, and make them "more than conquerors, through Him who loved them, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

***~~3. He comforts them by his presence—~~***

Who can express the consolations which God sometimes pours into the souls of those who wait upon him? They have been weeping perhaps under a sense of sin, or lamenting a state of spiritual darkness; and behold, God reveals himself unto them: their "light rises in obscurity, and their darkness becomes as the noon-day." Often will God "manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world;" he will give them "a spirit of adoption, whereby they shall cry with confidence, *Abba, Father!*" and will so "shed abroad his love in their hearts," that they shall have "a pledge of their inheritance," and a foretaste of the heavenly glory. This is promised by God himself to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is actually experienced by many who can attest his fidelity [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are destitute of love to Christ, and of faith in him—~~***

If a *mere profession*of Christianity be a sufficient proof of our faith and love, we may spare ourselves the trouble of addressing any as though they were destitute of those graces. But if none truly love Christ or believe in him, except those who are *altogether devoted to him in heart and life*, then the persons we are addressing will be found to constitute the greater part, we fear, of almost every congregation.

What shall we say to such persons? Shall we address them in the words of our text, "The Father himself loves you!" Would to God we could! But there is not one among you so ignorant, as not to know, that such an assertion would be false. Let your own consciences judge: Can God love those who neglect and despise his dear Son? Let the Scriptures determine. Does not Paul say, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha! 1 Corinthians 16:22."

Be assured that God cannot be your Father: for our Lord says expressly, "If God were your Father, you would love me, [John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42)."

Be assured too, that if you die as you are, you must perish for ever; for Christ says again, "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins! [John 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.24)." Repent then of all your ingratitude and unbelief, and "turn to your stronghold, as prisoners of hope;" begin to "live by faith in the Son of God;" and "delight yourselves in him" now, that you may be fit to enjoy him in the eternal world.

***~~2. Those to whom Christ is precious—~~***

Thanks be to God! there is a little flock that hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and that follow his steps. Think then, you who love the Lord, how greatly you are honored, how highly you are privileged; the Father himself loves you! To say that all good and holy men loved you, or that all the angels in Heaven loved you, would be a rich blessing. But to be loved by the Creator of men and angels, to be loved by the Father himself, O! who can estimate this blessing?

It is true that the very thing which causes God to love you, will cause the blind and the wicked world to hate you, [John 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.19); but why would you regard the hatred and contempt of men, if you are owned and approved of your God? "Let them curse, provided your God condescends to bless." And if your "love at any time be ready to wax cold through the abounding of iniquity" around you, remember that the very thing which heightens man's resentment, will call forth the manifestations of God's favor; and that when your enemies shall "want a drop of water to cool their tongue," you shall "be drinking of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore!"

***~~#1706~~***

***~~An Inquiry into the Reality and Degree of Our Faith~~***

***~~[John 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.31).~~***

"Jesus answered them: Do you now believe?"

THE meekness and gentleness of Christ were manifested on all occasions. Even his reproofs were tempered with inexpressible kindness, and fully justified the description given of him by the prophet, "He shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." He had been speaking plainly about his departure from the world: and his disciples, understanding him somewhat better than before, were now confident that they believed in him. But he, knowing the very low state of their attainments, mildly reproved their mistaken confidence, and warned them of the sad discovery which they would shortly make of their unbelief. The mode in which our Lord put the question to them was very significant. To mark its true import, I will bring it before you,

***~~I. In a way of explanation—~~***

If we consider the question in connection with the foregoing and following context, it will be found to contain several important truths:

***~~1. That many think they believe, when they are wholly destitute of saving faith—~~***

The nature of saving faith is very little understood. It is generally supposed to be a *mere assent*that the Gospel is true. But in fact, faith is a living operative principle, infused into the soul by the Holy Spirit! [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). From these mistaken views of faith, every one of course conceives himself to be a believer. The worldling, the self-righteous Pharisee, the sensualist, yes all, except avowed infidels, lay claim to this appellation. While they acknowledge themselves to need correction with respect to morals, have no idea at all that they need instruction with respect to the character of faith. This self-deception universally obtained among the unconverted Jews, who "trusted in Moses," not doubting that they believed his writings, though they showed by their rejection of Christ, that they did not believe them, [John 5:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.45-47); and too much of the same spirit yet manifested itself in those who had become the stated followers of our Lord.

***~~2. That many, who have some faith, are yet much under the influence of unbelief—~~***

As for unregenerate men, they have no saving faith at all, no, not even in the plainest truths of our religion; for *though they assent to many truths, they feel not the force, nor experience the vital influence of any*.

Nor, when faith is imparted to the soul, is unbelief altogether eradicated; yes, it will be well if the natural principle does not, in many and very alarming instances, overcome the new-created principle which ought to govern the whole man, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17); Thus it was with the Apostles in the passage before us: our Lord acknowledges that they were true believers, verse 27; but intimates that they would soon manifest, by their dereliction of him, how weak and insufficient their faith at present was. And thus it is with all, though in different degrees, until they have been taught and disciplined in the school of Christ.

***~~3. That heavy trials will reveal the state of our souls with respect to faith—~~***

***~~Affliction is a touchstone whereby all our graces, and especially our faith, may be tried.~~***

If our faith is *strong*, we shall approve ourselves to God under the most arduous circumstances*.*

If our faith is *weak*, we shall be ready to faint at the approach of any dangers we fear, [Matthew 14:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.30-31), and to adopt sinful methods of attaining any ends we desire, [Genesis 27:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 27.6-10).

If we have nothing but a *false faith*, we shall "make shipwreck both of it and of a good conscience" as soon as ever we are brought into any storms of difficulty and temptation. If our troubles are of a spiritual nature, we shall flee from God, and reject his grace, [Genesis 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.8); or if they arise from temporal things, we shall be offended with God, and condemn his providence.

For the effects of weak faith we need look no further than to the passage before us. The immediate scope of our Lord's question was, to put his disciples on their guard against their remaining unbelief; and, by warning them of their approaching fall, to encourage and facilitate their speedy recovery: and we may learn from their example that,*if our faith is not increased in proportion to our trials, we shall surely faint in the day of adversity.*

If such truths be implied in the interrogation before us, we may well urge it upon you,

***~~II. In a way of personal inquiry—~~***

We are particularly exhorted to "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5)." Let all of us then inquire into,

***~~1. The reality of our faith—~~***

Before we conclude too confidently that we are believers, we would ask ourselves: Whence we obtained our faith? Saving faith is not a plant of nature's growth; nor is it formed in us by human teaching. There is but one way in which it ever is or can be obtained, namely, by acknowledging our unbelief before God, and imploring him to create a living faith in our hearts by his blessed Spirit. If we have never been "convinced of unbelief," we have not yet one grain of real faith, [John 16:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8-9).

But if this inquiry is satisfactorily answered, we would further ask: How our faith operates?*If it is genuine and scriptural, it will overcome the world, and work by love, and purify the heart*, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4). [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6). [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). But has it these effects? We are warned by God that "all men have not faith, [2 Thessalonians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.2);" nor would we conclude that we have saving faith, unless we manifest it in its fruits.

***~~2. The degree of our faith—~~***

If we cannot ascertain precisely the degree of our faith, we yet have grounds whereon we may form some estimate.

Are we enabled to realize invisible spiritual realities? This is a very principal office of faith; and in proportion as we are enabled to set God before our eyes, and to keep Heaven in view, we may safely conclude that we have that principle, which alone can produce this effect.

Do we maintain our hope under discouraging circumstances? This was the mark whereby the strength of Abraham's faith was so fully known, [Romans 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18-20); and, if we be strong in faith, we shall be steadfast under heavy and long-protracted trials, and "against hope believe in hope."

Are we kept diligent in the way of duty? It is presumption, and not faith, that leads us to relax our diligence in the use of means: the more faith we have, the greater will be our activity in every good work, [1 Thessalonians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3).

The various offices of faith are fully delineated in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and by comparing our spirit and conduct with that of the saints there mentioned, we may weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary. In this way we may provide an answer to the interrogation in the text; and, instead of boasting as though we had attained, shall learn to reply, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Trials must before long come upon every soul among us: and then nothing but faith will support us, [1 Peter 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5-7). And even now if our graces be examined, it will be found that our progress has been in exact proportion to our faith. Let us then pray with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith; that through it we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

***~~#1707~~***

***~~Our Lord's Prayer to Be Glorified on Earth~~***

**[John 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.1).**

"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." [John 17:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.1)

THE work of *intercession*belongs to Christ, as the High-Priest of his Church. We know not the precise manner in which He carries it on within the veil, but we may form some idea of it from the specimen recorded in this chapter. He had given all the instructions necessary for the support and comfort of his disciples; and now, in their hearing, concluded with this sublime and pathetic prayer; but before he interceded for them, he offered one petition for himself.

In explaining the words before us, we shall consider,

***~~I. Our Lord's request—~~***

His outward gesture corresponded with the feelings of his heart. Deeply affected with his own condition, he presented a request well suited to his circumstances. It imported,

***~~1. That his Father would bear testimony to him in his trouble—~~***

Jesus was now to endure all possible indignities as an impostor. On this account he more than ever needed a testimony on his behalf; and God, in answer to this request, gave ample testimony to his Messiahship. He caused both him that betrayed, and him that condemned, our Lord, to attest his innocence; and made even the inanimate creation to bear witness to him.

***~~2. That his Father would support him under it—~~***

*As man, our Lord needed the supports of Divine grace: and these he was to obtain, like ourselves, by fervent prayer*. Nor was his application for them made to his Father in vain. Under his most accumulated distresses, both of body and soul, he was kept unspotted with the slightest stain of sin or error, [John 13:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31).

***~~3. That his Father would bring him out of it—~~***

Had there been no interposition of the Deity to rescue him from his disgrace, his enemies would have had reason to triumph; but God delivered him from the grave, and exalted him to glory, and *made those very precautions that were used to ascertain and expose his imposture, the means of establishing the truth which they were intended to subvert*.

***~~4. That his Father would render it effectual to the salvation of men—~~***

Without this, all our Lord's sufferings would have been in vain. But while he yet hung on the cross, the saving efficacy of his death was shown; and speedily after his ascension, multitudes flocked to him, as doves to their windows.

These things being necessary to the glorifying of himself, Jesus taught them with befitting earnestness—

***~~II. The pleas with which he enforced it—~~***

*Our own necessity and God's glory are among the most powerful pleas which can be urged*. Such were those with which our Lord enforced his petition;

***~~1. His own necessity, "The hour has come"—~~***

The hour alluded to was the season of his sufferings and death. This had been fixed from eternity in the Divine counsels, and had been foretold and typified from the beginning of the world. Until its arrival, none of his enemies could lay hands on him; but now men and devils, yes, and God himself, were to concur in afflicting him. What a weighty reason was this for his petition! He had been ordained by the Father himself to those sufferings. The weight which he was to sustain was inconceivably great. The smallest failure on his part would defeat the end of his mission: nor could anything less than the most miraculous testimonies counterbalance the offence of the cross. Under such circumstances, the Father could not but answer this seasonable request.

***~~2. His Father's glory—~~***

The Father's glory was deeply interested in the event of that hour. *His justice was to be honored, and a way was to be opened for the free exercise of his mercy*. To effect this, was the great object of our Lord's desire, both in life and in death; and it was this, which, above all, stimulated him to present the petition before us As Elijah, at the hour of Evening Sacrifice, felt jealous for God's honor ([1 Kings 18:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.36-37)), so did our Lord at this time.

Could there possibly be a more weighty and prevailing argument?

The Father could not but desire the advancement of his own glory.

He could not but wish his own eternal counsels fulfilled.

He could not but approve the means which he himself had appointed to that end.

He could not but delight to glorify his Son, who was, in such an humiliating way, endeavoring to glorify him.

***~~Let this subject lead us to view Jesus,~~***

***~~1. As our Savior—~~***

For us did he agree that that dreadful hour would come; and to us he looks, that we may join with the Father in glorifying him. And shall we not glorify him, by trusting in his blood and righteousness? Shall we not proclaim to the whole world, that he is our only hope and refuge? O may he see of the travail of his soul! O may he save us from the wrath to come!

***~~2. As our Example—~~***

He knew, and could fully estimate the weight of, his impending sufferings. Nor could it fail but that his human nature would shrink back from them; yet he submitted to them, that his Father might be glorified, [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28).

Let us in like manner be resigned to the trials that are allotted to us.

When our hour shall come, let us look to him as our example.

Let us consider him, lest we be weary and faint in our minds.

Let us welcome whatever comes to us by Divine appointment.

Let us desire that God may be glorified in us, whether by life or death.

Thus shall we be honored and comforted in the midst of our sufferings; and after them be rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory.

***~~#1708~~***

***~~Christ's Power to Give Eternal Life~~***

**[John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2).**

"For you granted him power (authority) over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him."

WE have in these words an unbounded prospect from eternity to eternity: they present to our view the commission first given by the Father to the Son; they exhibit the Son in due season pleading that commission, and finally executing it when the world shall be no more: they lead us to contemplate,

**I. The power** **and authority given to Christ—**

As *God*, he possessed all power equally with the Father; but, as *Mediator*, he received his power from the Father.

***~~1. His power and authority are universal in its extent—~~***

Not only was the material world, with all the brute creation, subject to his will, but man. "Power was given him over all people."

His ENEMIES are entirely under his control:  
he restrains their violence, [Psalm 76:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.10),  
he defeats their plots, [Job 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.12), and  
he overrules their efforts for the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels, [Psalm 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.4).

His REDEEMED PEOPLE are his more especial care:  
he watches over them for good continually, [Psalm 34:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.15),  
he supports them when tempted, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18),  
he strengthens them when weak, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9), and  
he accomplishes in them all the good pleasure of his goodness, 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

***~~2. His power and authority are infinite in its degree—~~***

There is nothing beyond the reach of his power. If he chose to annihilate the whole human race, he could effect it in a moment, by a simple act of volition. If, on the contrary, he would change them all into his own divine image, he could as easily create them all anew, as he at first produced them out of nothing. *By making use of second causes, he conceals his own agency; but there is nothing done in the whole creation, which does not originate in him, as the only source of wisdom and of strength*.

But we are yet more particularly interested in considering,

**II. The end for which he was invested with all power** **and authority—**

***~~The Father gave to Christ an elect people—~~***

It is worthy of notice, that Christ, in this his intercessory prayer, speaks again and again of those who were "given to him" by the Father. And, in truth, if the Father had not given to him an elect people, we have no reason to think that any would ever have given themselves to him, since there is not in fallen man either the inclination or the ability to do so, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13). In consequence of their having been "predestined unto the adoption of children from before the foundation of the world, [Ephesians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-5)," those who are "made willing in the day of God's power, yield themselves up to him, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)."

***~~To these elect people "Christ gives eternal life"—~~***

The life of grace which is *begun*in their souls, is the gift of Christ, [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14); [John 6:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.51).

The *continuance*of grace is the effect of his continued communications, [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).

The *consummation of*gracealso is bestowed by him, [John 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.32); [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19), without any merit in us, or any motive in himself, but a concern for his own, and his Father's glory, [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13).

Grace, in every stage of it, both in this world and the next, is entirely his free gift. One is as much indebted to him for it as another: there will not be one in Heaven that will not owe his salvation altogether to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his grace.

***~~And for the accomplishment of saving his elect people, he both received and exerts his power—~~***

It would have been to little purpose to have received from the Father an elect people, if he had not been invested also with power to secure them to himself. The Father well knew how many obstacles there would be to their salvation; and therefore he committed all power and authority to his Son, that nothing might resist his will, or prevent the accomplishment of his eternal counsels. Jesus, thus qualified, orders everything, both in Heaven and earth, with an immediate reference to this great design. Events may sometimes appear to oppose his gracious intentions: but, as in a well-constructed watch, the seemingly contrary movements all conduce to one end, so every dispensation, whether of providence or of grace, ultimately tends to his glory in our salvation, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What madness is it to neglect the Lord Jesus Christ!~~***

If any man has great preferments in his gifts, he is sure to have many courting his favor. But the Lord Jesus Christ has eternal life to bestow upon us, and yet we can scarcely be induced to ask it at his hands. What strange infatuation! O let us awake from our slumbers, and implore of him the benefits he is so willing to confer.

***~~2. How great is the security which the Lord's people enjoy!~~***

Jesus both possesses and exerts omnipotence in their behalf. What then have they to fear? Let them only secure his aid, and they defy both men and devils. "If he is for them, none can effectually be against them."

***~~3. What obligations do we lie under to love and serve the Lord!~~***

Is Jesus incessantly exerting his almighty power for us, and should not we employ our talents for him? O for a heart duly sensible of his love, and altogether devoted to his service!

***~~#1709~~***

***~~Jesus' Dying Appeal to the Father~~***

***~~[John 17:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4-5).~~***

"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world began."

A DYING scene, especially when the person is of an exalted character, creates in all a very deep interest, and calls forth a more than ordinary attention to everything that he either says or does. But here we have a scene such as never occurred either before or since: it is no less than the dying scene, if I may so speak, of the Savior of the world. "Father," says he, "the hour has come." Yes, "the time was come that he must depart out of this world, and go unto his Father." And here we are permitted to behold him in the attitude of prayer; and to hear his every petition, both for himself, and for his people to the very end of time. It is that part of his prayer which related more especially to himself, that will occupy our attention at this time. In it we notice,

***~~I. His appeal to God—~~***

The Lord Jesus, in his Mediatorial capacity, was a servant, sent by God to execute an appointed work: and, having executed it, he here appeals to God,

***~~1. That "he had glorified God on earth"—~~***

This, in fact, had been the one end for which he had lived.

He had glorified his Father in his **life**; every hour of which had been devoted to the executing of his will, and to the promotion of his glory, [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34).

He had glorified him especially in his **doctrine**. Never once had he sought his own glory, but, on all occasions, the glory of Him who sent him, [John 7:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.16); [John 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.24); and when he testified of himself, it was only as the person bearing a commission from the Father, and as sent by him to open for men a way of access to him as a reconciled God, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6).

He had glorified him no less by his **miracles**: for though he wrought them by his own power—yet he always ascribed them to his Father, who had concurred with him in these exercises of omnipotence, [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36); and thus he had constrained the beholders to acknowledge the Father in them, [John 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.10) with [Matthew 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.8).

But, above all, he had in purpose, though not in act, glorified his Father in his **death**: for in death he not only displayed the power of the Father, who upheld him under all his trials, but *reflected honor on all the perfections of the Deity; causing them all to shine forth in united and harmonious splendor, and every attribute to appear more glorious than it could possibly have done in any other way*.

Hence, on the near approach of this great event, the Lord Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall immediately glorify him, [John 13:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.31-32)."

***~~2. That "he had finished the work which God had given him to do"—~~***

This was a work which none but an incarnate God could ever have effected.

For, first of all, he was to **expiate the sins**of a ruined world. This was to be done by offering himself as a sacrifice for sin. And though this was not literally fulfilled in all its extent, until he died upon the cross, yet, in mind and intention, it was already done; and there were but a few hours to elapse before the mighty debt would be discharged, even to the uttermost farthing: so that justice itself would have nothing further to require of those who would plead the payment made by Him, as their Surety.

Next, he was **perfectly to fulfill the law**of God; so that all who would trust in him might have a perfect righteousness made over to them for their justification before God. And this also he did: for, though he was in circumstances of trial which far exceeded any that ever were sustained by mortal man, he never, either in word or thought, transgressed any one command: and all, not excepting even his bitterest enemies, were constrained to acknowledge that they could find no fault in him.

Further, he was to **introduce and establish a new dispensation**. And this, too, he did; fulfilling and abrogating every part of the Mosaic Law; and erecting "a kingdom, which consisted not in foods and drinks and carnal ordinances, but in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, [Romans 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.17)."

In a word, there was not any one part of his mediatorial work, so far as it could be completed at this time, that had not been accomplished: so that our Lord's appeal, in relation to it all, was just and true.

From this appeal we proceed to notice,

***~~II. His petition, founded upon it—~~***

He had, in the commencement of this prayer, desired to be glorified on earth, verse 1; and now he requests that he may be glorified in Heaven.

***~~He had from all eternity possessed a glory with the Father—~~***

From eternity he had "been in the bosom of the Father, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)." In truth, he was one with the Father: for that very "Word which was made flesh, was in the beginning with God, and was God, [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." Yes, "being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, [Philippians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-8)." This he did for the purpose of accomplishing the work he had undertaken, the work of redeeming and saving a ruined world. But, having done all that was necessary for the effecting of this great purpose,

***~~He desired to resume the glory, which for a season he had laid aside—~~***

Not only did he desire that his humiliation, as God, would cease; but that his exaltation, as man, would commence; and that, in his human nature, he might possess all the dignity and glory to which it was entitled by its union with the Godhead. It had been the instrument of effecting Jehovah's purposes; and therefore it was right that it would participate in the glory of that divine nature to which it was united, and in connection with which it had accomplished this great work.

And now, agreeably to this request, that God-man, who died upon the cross, is "highly exalted, and has a name given to him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11)."

On the very throne of God the human nature sits: for Jesus there appears as "a Lamb that has been slain, [Revelation 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.6);" and there does he receive the praises both of men and angels, on a perfect equality with the Father, [Revelation 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.13).

And though the time will come when the mediatorial office will cease, and the kingdom established by means of it will be given up to the Father, [1 Corinthians 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.28); yet to all eternity will Jesus be the Head of his elect people, the acknowledged Author of all their bliss, and, together with the Father, the object of universal adoration!

***~~While we thus view the Savior in his last moments, we may learn from his dying words much which respects his followers:~~***

***~~1. The ground of their hopes—~~***

What hope has any man but what is founded altogether on the finished work of Christ? Had he left any part of his work undone, not a human being could ever have been saved. What if his atonement had been incomplete? What if he had not wrought out a perfect righteousness? What if he had not gone to Heaven to carry on the work which he began on earth? Is there one among us that could have supplied the least deficiency?

But, thanks be to God! there is no need of anything to be added to His all-perfect work. There is in Christ a sufficiency, not for us only, but also for the whole world: nor shall any soul that relies on Him ever perish. Only let our reliance on him be simple, and without the least mixture of self-dependence, and we have nothing to fear; for "He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him!"

***~~2. The object of their life—~~***

Every Christian has the very same end in view as Jesus himself had; even to "glorify God on earth, and to finish the work which God has given him to do." In these respects Christ is an example to us; and every one of his followers is bound to "walk as he walked."

See then, brethren, that you maintain this character, and that "there be in you the same mind as was in your Savior Christ."*If you are his indeed, you will make this the one object of your life, to glorify your God and Father*.

Every day brings with it its appointed work, which it befits you to execute with all fidelity; that, when your last hour shall arrive, you may be able, amidst all your short-comings and defects, to say, 'Father, sinful as I am, and conscious of innumerable infirmities—yet I can with humility appeal to you, that I have, according to the grace given me, endeavored to "glorify you on earth, and to finish the work which you have given me to do." '

***~~3. The end of their labors—~~***

*For every faithful follower of Christ is a recompense reserved, even glory and honor and immortality, at the right hand of God*. Yes, in a dying hour the true Christian may look up with confidence, and say, "Now, Father, glorify me with your own self, with the glory that I shall have with you when this world shall no longer exist. To this recompense have I had respect; and for the hope of it I have willingly resigned all that this world could give me; yes, and cheerfully endured also all that your enemies have been permitted to inflict: and now do I welcome death itself, that I may enter into the joy of my Lord, and be for ever with my God!"

Dear brethren, only follow your Savior in the exercise of faith and love; and his glory shall be your glory, his kingdom your kingdom, for ever and ever!

***~~#1710~~***

***~~The Objects of Our Lord's Intercession~~***

**[John 17:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-10).**

"I pray for *them*. I do *not*pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."

THE Apostles were but weak in knowledge and grace until the day of Pentecost; nevertheless, they were greatly beloved by their Lord and Master. He declared in their hearing that they were true believers, verse 6-8. He testified also that they were the peculiar objects for whom he prayed.

***~~I. For whom our Lord interceded—~~***

***~~The disciples of Christ are characterized as persons "given" to him by the Father—~~***

This is a just description of every child of God:*none would ever give themselves to Christ, if they were not previously given to him by the Father; or come to Christ, if they were not drawn to him by the Father*,[John 6:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44). As every grace we possess must be traced to the operations of the Spirit, as its immediate cause, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7). [Galatians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22), so *must it be traced to the electing love of God, as its primary and original source*, [Ephesians 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-5). And it is of great importance, both for our humiliation and for God's glory, that this matter would be clearly known and understood.

This description of God's people is repeated five times in seven verses. See verses 6-12. Was there no design in this? and is there nothing to be gathered from it?

***~~It was for the elect alone that Jesus interceded—~~***

We apprehend that the apparent exclusion of the world from his intercessions is not to be understood strictly and positively, but only in a comparative sense. In this respect it resembles [Hosea 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.6): for our Lord did pray for the ungodly world, [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34) and had their good in view even in this very prayer, verse 21; but *certainly the saints were the objects whom, both in this and all other intercessions, he had principally in view*.

The high-priest, in bearing the names of the twelve tribes upon his breast-plate whenever he went within the veil, was a type of Christ in this particular, [Exodus 28:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.9-12); [Exodus 28:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 28.29-30). Christ would not be a high-priest, if he omitted this part of his office; since intercession was no less necessary to that office than oblation: but *he does intercede for his people*, and lives in Heaven, as it were, for that very purpose, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24); [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25). Yes, He who formed the universe, and upholds it by his power, and whose petitions are commands, says, "I pray for *them*." And the petitions he then offered for his living disciples had respect to all his believing people, even to the end of the world! verse 20.

This distinguishing favor, however, was not conferred without reason—

***~~II. Why he interceded for his elect people in particular—~~***

The reasons of the Divine procedure are in many cases inscrutable; but our Lord condescended to state some reasons why he interceded for his elect people in particular this occasion—

***~~1. Believers are the Father's property, "They are yours"—~~***

All things belong to God as his creatures; but believers are his in a far higher sense.

He has made them his by adoption.

He has confirmed his interest in them by regeneration.

He esteems them as his peculiar treasure, [Psalm 135:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 135.4), in comparison with whom the whole universe is as nothing in his eyes.

Hence our Lord interested himself more particularly on their behalf.

His zeal for his Father's glory would not allow him to be for one moment unmindful of their interests.

***~~2. Christ himself has an equal propriety in them, "All of mine," etc.~~***

They belong to Christ:  
by the Father's donation,  
by his own purchase, and  
by the closest possible union with him.

They are one body with him, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30), and one Spirit, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17). Will he then be regardless of this precious gift, and lose the purchase of his blood, and allow his own members to perish, for lack of his continual intercession? Surely his interest in them is a very sufficient reason for his unwearied solicitude respecting them.

***~~3. Christ is glorified in them—~~***

The ungodly world bring no glory to Christ; but it is the labor and delight of his people to glorify him.

He is glorified *now*in their faith, love, worship, and obedience.

He *will be*glorified and admired in them at his second coming, 2 Thessalonians 1:10; he will be glorified by them to all eternity. While therefore he has any concern for his own glory, he cannot but be studious of their welfare.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How honorable a character is the true Christian!~~***

The Christian is eminently distinguished from all the rest of the world. He is highly esteemed both by the Father and by Christ, who equally claim him as their property, "He is mine!" "He is mine!" He is savingly interested in all which Christ has done or is now doing.

How infinitely does this honor exceed that which comes of man! Let every one be ambitious to attain it: nor let any earthly attainments whatever satisfy our desires.

***~~2. How secure and blessed is his state!~~***

Christ's people are continually remembered by him before the throne. They therefore are sure to have every need supplied; nor can any defeat the purposes of their blessed Lord.

Let therefore every Christian rejoice and glory in the Lord.

Let the thought of Christ's intercession dissipate all fears of condemnation, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

Let Christ be viewed as an Advocate under every freshly contracted guilt, 1 [John 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.1).

Let every believer seek to glorify him, and to be glorified with him.

***~~#1711~~***

***~~Preservation from Sin, More Desirable than Deliverance from Affliction~~***

***~~[John 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.15).~~***

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil."

WE admire the solicitude which a dying parent expresses for the future and eternal welfare of his children; nor can we easily shake off the concern which such a spectacle creates in our minds.

Such a scene, but incomparably more affecting, is here presented to our view. The Savior of the world was unmindful of his own impending sorrows, and was altogether occupied with the concerns of his Church and people. Having given his last instructions to his disciples, he poured out his soul in prayer for them. One of the principal subjects of his prayer is specified in the text.

We shall consider,

***~~I. What our Lord prayed for on behalf of his disciples—~~***

***~~He did not pray "that they would be taken out of the world"—~~***

He had just declared that the world hated his disciples. Hence we might suppose that he would wish them to be taken out of the world; and many reasons might have been urged by him to enforce such a request. God had often taken away his beloved people in a signal manner, [Hebrews 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.5). [2 Kings 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 2.11); he speaks of a sudden removal in evil times as a favor to them, [Isaiah 57:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.1). He would hereby manifest his indignation against the world for crucifying his Son; and our Lord might then have carried his disciples with him as trophies. Nor can we doubt but that such a measure would have been extremely pleasing to his disciples.

But on the whole such a petition would have been *inexpedient,*

*first, on account of the world*. The disciples were to be the instructors of mankind, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19), and to be living examples of true piety, [Matthew 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.14). They were also to intercede on behalf of their fellow-creatures; but, if they were taken away together with our Lord, their commission could not be executed, and the world would lose the benefit of their instructions and prayers. What an inconceivable loss would this have been both to Jews and Gentiles! Yes, in what a state of ignorance would we ourselves have been at this moment!

*Next*, *it would have been inexpedient on God's account*, if I may so speak. The disciples were to be like the dispossessed Gadarene, monuments of God's mercy [Luke 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.39). They were to exemplify in their own persons the all-sufficiency of Divine grace under every situation. They were to be instruments also whereby the eternal counsels of the Deity were to be accomplished: their removal therefore would have robbed God himself of his glory.

*Lastly, it would have been inexpedient on account of the disciples themselves.* They would have been glad to have accompanied their Lord; but it would not have been for their advantage at that time. Their reward was to be proportioned to their labors and sufferings, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8). If they had been taken away at that time they had done but little for God; consequently they would not have possessed so bright a crown as they now do. How glad are they now that their abode on earth was prolonged!

***~~The request which our Lord offered for them was far better—~~***

He prayed that they might be kept from the evil of it. Satan is by way of eminence called "the evil one." He is incessantly plotting the destruction of God's chosen people, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8), and our Lord might have respect to their preservation from him. Satan is often called *the wicked one*, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16) and [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18); but Jesus rather refers to *the moral evil that is in the world*. And there was good reason why he would pray for their deliverance from that.

The *temptations*they would have to encounter were innumerable. Their poverty might beget impatience and discontent. Their persecutions might provoke them to retaliation and revenge. Their incessant danger of a violent death might tempt them to apostasy. They were to have innumerable trials from without and from within: how needful then was it that they would have *an almighty Keeper!*

They were utterly unable of themselves to withstand the smallest temptation. The disciples were altogether men of like passions with ourselves; nor had they any more sufficiency in themselves than the weakest of us, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). The most confident of them fell, as soon as he boasted of his strength, [Matthew 26:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.33); [Matthew 26:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.35); [Matthew 26:74](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.74). Almighty power was then, as well as now, necessary to keep any man from falling, Jude verse 24, 25. How kind then was our Lord's solicitude to interest his Father in their behalf!

Their fall would be attended with the most pernicious consequences. It would open the mouths of their adversaries, and cause them to blaspheme, [2 Samuel 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.14). It would utterly destroy all hopes of success in their own ministry; and, even if they would be recovered, and saved at last, they would be deprived of a great part of their reward, [1 Corinthians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.15). Hence our Lord's request was the best that could be offered for them.

Hence we may see,

***~~II. What we would mainly desire for ourselves—~~***

*An exemption from the troubles and calamities of life, however desirable in some points of view, is not greatly to be coveted*. Paul, it is true, "desired to depart and to be with Christ:" but it was not in order to get rid of his trials, but that he might have full possession of the glory which awaited him; not that he, his earthly tabernacle, might be unclothed, but clothed, that mortality might be swallowed up of life, [2 Corinthians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.4)."

But to be preserved from "the corruptions that are in the world through lust, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)" is most desirable.

The snares with which we are surrounded in this vain world are very many, and replete with danger. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are soliciting us continually, and presenting temptations to us exceeding difficult to be withstood: Even though we may have withstood them manfully for a season, we are yet in danger of being overcome by them at last, and of perishing thereby with an aggravated weight of guilt and condemnation, 2 Peter 2:20. So eminent a character was Demas, that Paul himself, a good judge of characters, twice united him with Luke in his salutations to the Churches: yet of him it is said, "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present world! 2 Timothy 4:10."

Who then can hope to stand, if he is not upheld by the Almighty power of God? Truly it is God alone who is "able to keep us from falling, Jude verse 24;" and therefore we would make our supplications to him continually for that end.

***~~For the obtaining of this mercy, it is not possible for us to be too importunate—~~***

It was in order to this end that Christ himself came into the world, and died upon the cross: "He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father [Galatians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.4)." And to produce this blessed effect is the great scope and tendency of his Gospel: "By the cross alone it is that the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)." In fact, there is not a person upon earth that ever gets a victory over the world, except by faith in Christ, [1 John 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.5). On the other hand, every one that is really born of God does gain this victory, 1 [John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.4).

This is the distinguishing character of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; they all resemble him in this particular, "not being of the world, even as he was not of the world, verse 14, 16."

If we would *reign with Christ hereafter*, then we must *resemble him now*; and never cease to implore help from God, that the world and all its lusts may, in answer to our prayers, be put for ever under our feet.

***~~In conclusion I would say,~~***

***~~1. Learn to form a right estimate of the world—~~***

It is, in fact, a wilderness, through which we are to pass to the promised land; and we are but pilgrims passing through it, or sojourners taking up our residence in it for a few days at most. Whether we have a more or less gratifying accommodation in it, is a matter of small consequence. We are going to our Father's house, where we shall possess all that our souls can wish; and present things are only of importance as they advance or retard our fitness for our heavenly inheritance. The instant that we have arrived at our journey's end, we shall see what judgment we ought to have formed of the world, and everything in it. Let us anticipate that judgment now; and we shall rise superior to the attractions of all created things, and to the solicitations of every unhallowed appetite!

***~~2. Seek to have, in reference to it, "the same mind as was in Christ Jesus"—~~***

In asking for you a preservation from the snares of the world, he judged right. *He wished not to abridge your happiness, but to promote it.*And, if we call upon you to renounce the world, and all its lusts, we are not Cynics, as you are apt to imagine, but your best and truest friends. Even when all his own sufferings were coming upon him, the Savior, forgetful of himself, implored this blessing for you. And if I were never to address you more, I would, with all earnestness, urge this duty on you, and implore this blessing on your behalf.

You can only be happy in proportion as you rise above this world to the pursuit and enjoyment of heavenly things. Look at the Savior, and see how superior he was to all the things of time and sense. That is the state I wish you to attain; and the more you resemble him now, the richer shall be your enjoyment of his presence in the eternal world!

***~~#1712~~***

***~~Christians Are Not of the World~~***

***~~[John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16).~~***

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

SUCH is the enmity of a carnal mind to the will and law of God, that men usually hate us most for those very things which render us most acceptable in the sight of God. The sanctity of Abel was the real ground of the inveterate hatred that rankled in the bosom of Cain, and that impelled him to destroy his brother whom he could not imitate. And David in his day complained, that when he put on sackcloth and chastened his soul with fasting, pleasing as that conduct must have been to God, profane scoffers turned it to his reproach.

Thus our Lord told his disciples that the world would hate them because they did not conform themselves to its habits: but at the same time, repeating what he had spoken of their holy singularity, he pleads it as an argument with his heavenly Father to interpose more effectually for their preservation from evil, and their sanctification through his truth, verse 14-17. The assertion before us leads us to show,

***~~I. In what respects Christ was not of the world—~~***

Our Lord fulfilled with the utmost exactness all his social and relative duties, and worked, until the age of thirty, at his father's trade, [Mark 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.3). But though he filled up his proper station in the world, he was not of the world,

***~~1. In his spirit and temper—~~***

A levity of mind, a disregard of God, and an indifference about eternal things, characterize the generality of mankind. But no such disposition was ever seen in our adorable Emmanuel. A holy gravity invariably marked his demeanor: he had a continual sense of the Divine presence, a deep impression of the importance of time, and an unremitting zeal to finish the work assigned him: "It was his food and drink to do the will of him that sent him."

***~~2. In his desires and pursuits—~~***

The world desires nothing but the things of time and sense: pleasure, riches, and honor are the idols which they worship. But our Lord desired none of these things. Had he wished for pleasure, he had a mind and body framed for the most exquisite delights of which our nature is capable: as his bodily organs were not weakened by any sinful habit, so his intellectual faculties were capable of comprehending all the wonders of creation, and of deriving the sublimest pleasure from the contemplation of them.

But he was occupied with thoughts widely different from these: he found no time for the amusing speculations of philosophers. He had come to atone for sin; and, that he might do so, chose rather to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Had he desired *riches*, how easily could he, who commanded a fish to bring him a piece of money to pay his tax, have possessed himself of inexhaustible stores of silver and gold! But he chose rather to be destitute even of a place where to lay his head, and to be a pensioner upon the bounty of some pious women, [Luke 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.3); [Luke 9:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.58). He did indeed carry a purse, but it was not for the procuring of superfluities for himself, but that he might administer to the necessities of the poor.

Had he been ambitious of *honor*, with what crowds of followers might he have been attended, all of them monuments of his tender compassion and almighty power! But he dismissed them from him, and frequently with the most solemn charges, that they would tell no man what he had done for them: and when the people would have taken him by force to make him a king, he rendered himself invisible, and withdrew from them. So little did he covet what the foolish world admires; and so different was he from the world in the whole of his deportment.

Singular as he appeared in his day, it will be found,

***~~II. That his disciples all resemble him—~~***

The followers of Christ, whatever attainments they may have made, were once "walking after the course of this world even as others:" but the very instant that they obtain a saving knowledge of their Lord, they begin to tread in his steps and imitate his example, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14); "as they have once borne the image of their earthly father, they now bear the image of their heavenly father."

***~~1. They do not indulge a worldly spirit—~~***

Believers are not free from the imperfections of their former state: their constitutional or acquired habits still in some measure remain. Hence one is yet too easily drawn aside to levity, another to earthly-mindedness, and all to the "sins which most easily beset them." But this is their pain, their grief, their burden: they desire from their inmost souls to be delivered from such a spirit: though they too often fall into it, they would not indulge it; they would far rather have their souls nourished with spiritual blessings; and would account it an infinitely richer mercy to receive an increase of grace and peace, than to enjoy all the wealth or pleasure that the world can bestow!

***~~2. They do not desire worldly company—~~***

From their situations in social life they are necessitated to have much interaction with the men of this world: but they regard the world as a physician does a hospital which it is his office to attend: they consider it as the theater on which they are called to act; and they endeavor to approve themselves to God and to their fellow-creatures by a diligent discharge of their duty: while in it, they seek the good of those around them, and study to improve themselves by all which they see.

But they do not take up their abode there; they are glad to retire from it when their work is finished: their friends and companions are selected from among another people; their "delight is in the saints that are in the earth, and in such as excel in virtue:" they show by their conduct that "light cannot have communion with darkness, nor Christ with Belial, nor he who believes with an unbeliever, [2 Corinthians 6:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14-15)." Like Moses, they would rather suffer affliction with the people of God than participate in the pleasures and honors of a king, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26).

***~~3. They are not engrossed with worldly pursuits—~~***

They are not indifferent about the things of this world, nor are they of necessity precluded from the enjoyment of them when God in his providence casts them into their lap: they may even seek these things in subordination and subserviency to their more important concerns. But they will not be engrossed with such base pursuits: they will not suffer their affections to be set on such worthless objects: their hearts are in Heaven, and their pursuits also are for Heavenly realities." They seek "pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore;" they labor to be "rich towards God in faith and good works;" and they aspire after "the honor that comes from God," the honor of being "children of God, yes, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." And though much time and thought is spent by them in things relating to the world—yet when at liberty to follow the bent of their minds, they return to God as their beloved and their only true rest.

***~~We shall conclude the subject with some suitable advice—~~***

***~~1. Guard against the self-deception which too generally prevails—~~***

We have reason at this time to adopt the Apostle's words, and say, that "many walk, of whom we have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and that their end will be destruction, because *they mind earthly things,*[Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)." There are, alas! too many who "call Christ, *Lord, Lord*, but will not obey his commands," or "walk as he walked." But let us remember, that "the tree must be known by its fruits;" and that we must judge of our interest in Christ by our conformity to his image. If our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are excited principally by worldly things, we certainly are of the world. But if, with Christ, we are "crucified to the world," and our spirit and temper, our desires and pursuits, resemble his, then, and then only, may we conclude that we are Christ's. For "all that are born of God have overcome the world; and all that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4). [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)."

***~~2. Do not be afraid of a necessary singularity—~~***

We would not recommend a needless singularity, or insinuate that there is any virtue in making ourselves appear ridiculous; but wherein the world deviates from the mind and will of God, there we may, and must differ from them. If we are singular, the fault will be theirs and not ours. No blame can attach to our Lord because he was singular; nor can it to us while we "shine as lights in a dark world," "holding forth in our conduct the word of life."

We would "make our light to shine before men," and be "as a city set upon a hill;" and though the besotted world will "gaze strangely at us, and wonder that we run not with them to their excess of riot," we shall have enough to counter-balance their contempt in the testimony of our own consciences, and in the approbation of our God.

We know that it is our duty to despise all the vanities which the world can offer us, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16), and that, if we would not be found enemies of God in the last day, we must relinquish all desire after that friendship of the world which is enmity with God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Let us therefore go on boldly in the way of duty, and if we meet with a cross in our road, let us not turn aside from it, but take it up and glory in it.

***~~3. Seek more and more conformity to the Savior's image—~~***

The command of God is, "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The way in which we are to comply with this command is set before us in our Lord's example. We are not indeed to attempt the things which were peculiar to him as a Prophet of the Most High God; but to get the same mind which was in him; to imitate him in his spirit and temper, and to*manifest the same superiority to things visible and temporal, and the same decided preference for things invisible and eternal*: then, like the higher regions of the atmosphere, we shall remain serene, while those who grovel on the earth are agitated by incessant tempests.

"Come out then from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and God will be a father unto you, and you shall be his sons and daughters! [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18)." Know that the more your conduct is in Heaven now, the greater will be your fitness for it whenever you shall be called hence.

***~~#1713~~***

***~~The End for Which Christ Dedicated Himself to God~~***

***~~[John 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.19).~~***

"For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

*Sanctification is no less necessary for our usefulness in this world, than it is for our happiness in the world to come*. Hence our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer, made this a very prominent subject of his requests in behalf of his disciples whom he was about to leave in the midst of an ensnaring world: "Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth verse 17." And for the encouragement of all his followers to the last period of the world he declares, that the attainment of this object in their behalf has been a very principal end of all that he ever had done, or was at that instant doing, for them: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

In opening to you these words I will show,

***~~I. What is that ACT to which our Lord here refers—~~***

To "sanctify" means to *purify from sin*, and to *devote to God*. In the former sense it may be properly applied to men: but it is in the latter sense only that it can have any reference to Christ.

Under the Mosaic law the priests and all the vessels of the sanctuary were sanctified to the Lord, [Exodus 30:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 30.26-29). The offerings there made, all shadowed forth the Lord Jesus Christ, who sanctified and set apart himself to the work of saving a ruined world. This he did,

***~~1. When he first undertook our cause—~~***

From eternity he entered into covenant with the Father to redeem our souls by his own obedience unto death: and the utter insufficiency of all other sacrifices being acknowledged, he engaged to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8).

***~~2. When he assumed our nature—~~***

Paul cites the foregoing passage with an express reference to "the time of Christ's coming into the world:" and there is a remarkable variation in his language suited to that occasion. In the Psalm it is said, "My ear have you opened;" referring to the law which ordained that a servant who devoted himself for ever to the service of his Master, would "have his ear bored through with an awl, [Exodus 21:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 21.5-6);" but in the Epistle it is said, "a body have you prepared for me, [Hebrews 10:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5-7)." At his incarnation therefore he sanctified himself afresh to this great work.

***~~3. When he submitted to the baptism of John—~~***

John wished to decline the office of baptizing so exalted a person. But, on entering upon the office assigned him, the Lord Jesus Christ judged it necessary to consecrate himself to it afresh by this solemn ordinance, in which he was openly and ostensibly devoted unto God: "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)."

***~~4. When he went up to Jerusalem in order to his crucifixion—~~***

The paschal lamb was to be separated and set apart four days, in order to its being fully ascertained by the most accurate examination, that it was without spot or blemish, and therefore fit to be offered in sacrifice to God, [Exodus 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.3); [Exodus 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.6). And on the fourth day previous to his crucifixion did our blessed Lord go up to Jerusalem, that after the strictest examination his very judges might proclaim his innocence, and consequently his fitness for the work assigned to him, of making an atonement for the sins of the world. And his persisting in his work in opposition to all the dictates of his suffering humanity, showed that on this occasion also he sanctified himself to the office he had undertaken, [John 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.12-13); [John 12:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.27-28)."

***~~5. When he surrendered up himself into the hands of his murderers—~~***

He knocked them all to the ground, when they came to apprehend him; to show that he could with his word have struck them all dead upon the spot, [John 18:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.4-8). He took care also to exempt his disciples from a participation of his lot, because their work was scarcely yet begun. But himself he resigned into the hands of sinners, in order that all which he had undertaken to do and suffer might be accomplished in him.

Having seen what the act was, let me show,

***~~II. What light his performance of it throws upon his CHARACTER as fully God and fully man—~~***

***~~There was a most mysterious composition in his character—~~***

All others, even Aaron himself, were sanctified through the instrumentality of one appointed to that office: but Christ "sanctified himself." He was at the same time the *Sacrifice*, and the *Priest*who offered it, and the *Altar*on which it was offered, [Hebrews 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.10).

***~~And this it was which gave his offering its efficacy—~~***

Had he been a mere man, his sacrifice could never have availed for the redemption of the world.*But he was God and man in one person: and his divinity, while it gave an infinite value to his sacrifice,*both qualified and authorized him to present himself as a sacrifice to God. Both his body and soul were alike offered; the one to endure all that was due to our bodies, the other, all that was due to our souls. And his was not a *typical*offering, like those presented under the law, but *a real and true atoning sacrifice for sin*. Nor did his sacrifice avail for a typical and temporary remission of sins, but for the full and everlasting forgiveness of all sin, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14). Thus the expression in my text, while it seems to convey nothing very particular to the mind, gives us, in reality, an insight into the deepest mysteries of our religion, and shows, that it was God who purchased the Church with his own blood, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)."

Stupendous in this view, was the act to which he referred. But let us consider,

***~~III. What his ENDS were in the performance of it—~~***

Generally, it was *for the sake of his people*that he did this. But particularly, it was, "that they might be sanctified through the truth."

***~~The sanctification of his people was a very principal end which he aimed at in all that he did and suffered for them—~~***

His people must be sanctified unto the Lord, even as he was. The different vessels of the sanctuary, no less than the offerings presented there, were altogether devoted to the Lord. In like manner must the disciples of Christ be sanctified. In this view they are called "a kind of first-fruits," which could on no account, and in no degree, be alienated from the Lord, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18). Nay more, we are called to "offer up our whole selves as living sacrifices unto the Lord, as a reasonable and acceptable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

That we might be thus sanctified was the great end of all that our blessed Lord either did or suffered for us: "he gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous for good works [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." And the very same object he still keeps in view in all that he is at this moment doing for us in Heaven, [Romans 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.9).

***~~This however must be accomplished through the instrumentality of his word—~~***

*His Holy Spirit indeed is the agent, without whom not even the word itself would produce any good effect.*But he is pleased to make use of his word as the means of quickening us to a heavenly life, [1 Peter 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.23), and of carrying on his work where it is begun, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2), and of completing it even to the end, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. *His word is the mold into which we are to be cast*, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17), *and by which we shall be altogether changed into the divine image*. This is the state to which he desires to bring us; and by his word ministered unto us, "he will turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)."

***~~Observe now from hence,~~***

***~~1. How great is the love of Christ to fallen man!~~***

He well knew all that he must endure if he would become a substitute and surety for fallen man: yet he undertook our cause, and came down from Heaven for us, and never ceased from his work until he could say, "It is finished!" Methinks the ox and the donkey may well reproach our more than brutish ingratitude! [Isaiah 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.3).

***~~2. What obligations have we to holiness!~~***

*By holiness, I mean a total surrender of ourselves to God*. And if we aspire not after this, what do we but pour contempt upon all that Christ has done and suffered for us, and cause him, as far as lies in our power, to have "sanctified himself" in vain. What excuse shall we offer for this when he shall call us into judgment? Truly if, being "called to be saints," we be not found so at the last day, it would be better for us never to have heard of Christ at all1

***~~3. What guilt do those contract, who turn back from the service of God!~~***

As Aaron and his sons were sanctified with the blood of the Mosaic covenant, [Leviticus 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 8.30), so are we with the blood of the Christian covenant. And, "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, we do, in fact, tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant with which we have been sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace."

What then awaits us in the eternal world? The despisers of Moses' law died without mercy: but a much sorer punishment will come on us, even the everlasting wrath of our offended God! [Hebrews 10:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.26-29). O let not any of you turn back unto perdition; but be of those who believe unto the saving of their souls, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39).

***~~#1714~~***

***~~The Importance of Unity among Christians~~***

***~~[John 17:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.20-21).~~***

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

IN the former part of this chapter our Lord has been interceding principally for his own immediate disciples: but *here he intercedes for all his people*to the end of time. Who the particular persons were, is known only when the word of God reaches their hearts, and they are made obedient to the faith of Christ. But the substance of the petition is evidently most important; because our Lord had before made the same request in behalf of his own disciples; and because he repeats it again more strongly in the two verses following our text.

We will endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is that union which Christ prayed for in our behalf—~~***

If we would interpret the union spoken of in verse 11, as relating only to the testimony which the Apostles were to bear concerning Christ; still we cannot possibly limit the import of the text to that sense: the terms are too varied and too strong to admit of such a limitation.

The comparison instituted between Christ's union with the Father, and ours with each other in him, leads our thoughts into a far different channel; a channel mysterious indeed, but deeply fraught with the richest instruction. Christ is one with the Father, in essence and in operation; being "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person," and at the same time acting in everything in perfect concert with the Father, having no will but his, speaking nothing but according to his commands, doing nothing but by his direction, and seeking only the glory of his name.

This fitly illustrates the union which his people have with each other in and through him:

***~~1. They are formed into one body—~~***

Sometimes they are represented as a *temple*, composed of living stones, and having a living stone for its foundation, even Jesus Christ himself; and built up as an habitation for God himself, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5). [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22).

At other times they are spoken of as a *body*, of which Christ is the Head, and all the different individuals are members, [1 Corinthians 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.12-13); 1 Corinthians 12:27.

Thus while they are united with each other, they are united also with the Father and the Son: "the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in them; and thus they are made perfect in one," ever "growing up into Christ as their Head," and contributing to each other's perfection, until they arrive at "the full measure of the stature of Christ, [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16)."

How earnestly the Lord Jesus Christ desired this, may be gathered from the frequent repetition of it before noticed: and well he might plead for it in this manner, since the accomplishment of it was the principal design of his death, [John 11:51-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.51-52), and the great end of God the Father in the whole economy of redemption, [Ephesians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.9-10).

***~~2. They are all animated by one Spirit—~~***

"He who is joined to the Lord," says the Apostle, "is one Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:17." This is true of every individual, and of the whole collective body of believers. "Christ dwells in all of them;" and "as Christ himself lived by the Father, so do they live by him, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17). [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4). [John 6:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56-57)."

Hence, as there is no distraction in the body, but, in consequence of its being under the control of one living and governing principle, its powers are all harmoniously exerted for the attainment of the same object; so*the members of Christ's mystical body are one in sentiment, in affection, and in the scope and tenor of their lives.*

In **sentiment**they are one: for though, in matters of inferior consequence, there may be a wide difference between them—yet in the fundamental points, such as:  
our fall in Adam,  
our recovery by Christ,  
our renovation by the Spirit,  
the evil of sin,   
the beauty of holiness,  
the security of believers,

and many other points connected with the spiritual life—there is no difference. All who are taught of God agree in these things; or, if they differ a little in modes of expression, when disputing for opinions—*they agree perfectly when they come upon their knees before God*; which shows that their differences are rather imaginary than real. There is "a unity of faith" to which they all come [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); and which the untutored Indian attains as easily as the most learned philosopher; for it is learned by the *heart*rather than the *head*; and it is God alone who can guide us to the knowledge of it, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14).

In **affection**also they are one, being "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," and "loving one another with a pure heart fervently." They are all "taught of God to do so, [1 Thessalonians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.9)."

What the real tendency of Christianity is, may be seen in the effects produced on the first Christians, [Acts 2:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-45); [Acts 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32); and if there is not the same measure of love among Christians of the present day, it is not owing to any lack of efficacy in the grace of God, but to the slender measure in which it is possessed: for, *in proportion as the grace of Christ abounds in the soul, will ever be the measure of our faith and love*, [1 Timothy 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.14). [Ephesians 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.3-4); [Ephesians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7).

Moreover, in the **scope and tenor of their lives**also they are one. They all acknowledge the Scriptures as the one directory which they are to follow; and, according to their several attainments, "they walk by the same rule, [Philippians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.16). [Galatians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.16)." Without this, all other "unity," whether "in the faith," or "in the Spirit," is of no avail.

This "holding of the Head" by *faith*,  
this ministering to each other by *love*, and  
this progressive increase of the whole body in the ways of *holiness*,  
constitutes that true union which the Gospel produces, and which our Lord so earnestly desired in our behalf [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.19).

Let us now consider,

***~~II. The unspeakable importance of it—~~***

Truly it is of the utmost importance: for on it depends,

***~~I. The honor of Christ—~~***

In the days of the Apostles, the Messiahship of Christ was abundantly proved by the most stupendous miracles wrought in confirmation of it. But it was the design of God, that, when Christianity was once established, it would carry its own evidence along with it, and convince men by producing such effects in the world as would demonstrate its Divine origin to all. The perfect consistency which there was in the testimony of all the Apostles and of the first teachers of Christianity showed, that they must have been inspired by the same Spirit; who kept them all from error, and guided them into all truth.

In the whole apostolic age we read of but one point of difference that arose, namely, Whether the believing Gentiles would be required to submit to circumcision or not; and even that was discussed, not for the satisfaction of any of the Apostles, but only for some of the less-enlightened converts. And *the agreement which there was in doctrine, was rendered still more manifest by the wonderful unity which was displayed in the life and conduct of the whole Church*. There were indeed spots and blemishes in many; but these were reproved by the apostles in their letters, and served to illustrate more clearly the proper efficacy of the Gospel, [1 Corinthians 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.19).

Twice does our Lord suggest, that this union of his people would confirm the truth of his mission. Compare verse 23 with the text. And certain it is that the same effects are produced by it at this time. Where shall we look for such a union of *sentiment*, of *affection*, and of *conduct*—as is to be found in the Church of Christ? Hence believers are marked as a peculiar people; and the very peculiarity which pervades the Church of God, makes an impression on the hearts of thousands, who, if they could in an instant attain to the measure of peace and holiness which they see in the true believer, would willingly sacrifice all that they have in the world for it. And though, from the inveteracy of their corruptions, they are determined to go on in sin, they are constrained to acknowledge that the Gospel of Christ is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.

***~~2. The credit of the Church—~~***

God the Father "loves *his people*, even as he loves his only dear Son, see verse 23." But how is it to be known that he loves them? Who can look into their hearts, and see those manifestations which he makes of himself there, as he does not unto the world? When "he sheds abroad his love there," who can discern it, but the persons themselves? Or, as Solomon expresses it, who can "intermeddle with their joy?" But *it is to be discerned by the effects it produces on their lives*, just as the irradiated countenance of Moses attested the fellowship he had held with God.

Accordingly, where the piety of any person is of an exalted kind, it carries with it a conviction to the minds of others; it makes religion itself appear honorable, and induces many to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is truly with you."

***~~3. The welfare of the world at large—~~***

The world in general "hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds would be reproved." But Christians, when truly exemplary, are living witnesses for God: they are epistles of Christ, known and read of all men; and *their whole spirit and conduct is a sermon to all around them*. Peter tells us, that many unbelieving people, who utterly despise the word of God, are "won by the good conversation" and conduct of their pious friends. On the other hand, we know that divisions or scandals in the Church are the means of casting before many a stumbling-block, over which they fall, to their eternal ruin. What can more strongly manifest the importance of union in the Church, than such considerations as these? Surely, if the welfare of the world so much depends upon it, we cannot wonder that our Lord offered such repeated supplications for it in our behalf; nor would there be any intermission to our exertions for the advancement of it in the Church of God.

***~~From this subject we may see,~~***

***~~1. The duty of the world to repent and believe—~~***

The Church is represented as "one fold under one Shepherd." To that fold we must be gathered: nor must we decline that open profession that shall distinguish us for his sheep. If we are ashamed of Christ and his people, Christ will be ashamed of us. We must not only "believe with our hearts unto righteousness, but make confession with our mouths unto salvation." As Judah and Israel are to become one at the latter day, like the two sticks in the prophet's hand, [Ezekiel 37:16-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.16-22), so are Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, to be all one in Christ Jesus, [Galatians 3:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.28). I call on all therefore "to give themselves unto us," as Paul expresses it, but first to "give up their whole selves to the Lord, [2 Corinthians 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.5)."

***~~2. The duty of the Church to be united among themselves—~~***

Who that hears our blessed Lord pleading so earnestly for this object, can doubt what his duty is in relation to it? If a doubt remains, let the Apostle Paul determine it: so desirable was this object in his eyes, that he seemed as if he could never be sufficiently urgent with his converts to cultivate it with all their hearts, [1 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.10). [Philippians 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1-4).

Let us then beg of God to "give us one heart and one way," thus shall the sweetest fellowship be produced, not only with each other, but with the Father and with Christ; and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son shall cleanse us from all sin! [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3); [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)."

***~~#1715~~***

***~~The Glory Which Christ Gives to His People~~***

***~~[John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22).~~***

"The glory which you gave me, I have given them."

THE dignity of human nature is a favorite subject with many: nor, if man be considered in his *original*state, can it be estimated too highly. But man is a *fallen*creature, and reduced to the most abject condition. The Scriptures speak of him in the most humiliating terms: nevertheless, through the grace of the Gospel, he is restored to his primitive honors: he in some respects is elevated even above the angels of Heaven. No words can express his dignity more fully than those of the text. Do we inquire what that glory is which the Father gave to Christ, and Christ gives to his Church and people?

We will specify it in five particulars:

***~~I. The glory of manifesting the Divine power—~~***

Angels have been used as instruments of Divine power both for the preservation and destruction of mankind; but it is peculiar to Christ and his people to manifest the Divine power in conflicts with their enemies.

***~~Christ had this glory given him—~~***

He had innumerable enemies, both men and devils, [Psalm 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2). [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53); but he conquered sin, Satan, death, and Hell, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15). [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8). This he did through the support and influence of his Father, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1).

***~~This glory has Christ given us—~~***

His people are in a state of warfare, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); but the very weakest of them triu mph at last through Christ, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37). Paul acknowledges this to the praise of his Divine Master, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).

***~~II. The glory of displaying the moral perfections of the Deity—~~***

***~~The material world displays the natural perfections of God; but not even the angels in Heaven can set forth all his moral perfections—~~***

Never having been injured, they cannot exercise mercy, forbearance, love of enemies, etc.

***~~This is the peculiar prerogative of Christ—~~***

Christ manifested the most wonderful compassion, [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41); [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34); [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47). In so doing he displayed the Father's perfections, [John 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.9). This honor he himself received from the Father, [John 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.10).

***~~His people however are made to share this glory with him—~~***

They, as stars in their several spheres, reflect the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. How strongly was his character delineated in the life of Paul and in the death of Stephen! Every one of them endeavors to "walk as he walked." They are enabled to do this by Christ himself, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13).

***~~III. The glory of being sons of God—~~***

The angels are sometimes called sons of God; but they bear this relation to him only as creatures.

***~~Christ has this honor in an infinitely higher sense, [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5)—~~***

Christ is the Son of God both in his divine and human nature. He is emphatically called by the Apostle "God's dear Son, [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13)."

***~~The same honor has Christ conferred on us—~~***

Every believer is brought into this relation to God, [2 Corinthians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.18). This astonishing mercy may well excite wonder and admiration, [1 John 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.1). It is bestowed on the believer by Christ himself, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12).

***~~IV. The glory of being united to God—~~***

***~~The Scriptures often speak of the union that exists between Christ and the Father—~~***

Our Lord himself affirmed that he and the Father were one, [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30). Paul declares that all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). What our Lord did as man, is attributed to him as God, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28).

***~~A similar, though not the same, union exists between Christ and his people—~~***

Our Lord represents them as branches of the living vine, [John 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1); he compares their union with him to his with the Father, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21); he declares not only that he himself is the author of this union, but that it is a part of that glory which he has given us, verse 22, 23.

***~~V. The glory of reigning with God—~~***

Both the good and evil angels are called principalities and powers, but they are never said to "reign" with God.

***~~Our Lord however has received this honor from his Father—~~***

All power in Heaven and in earth is committed to him, [Matthew 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.18). He is exalted far above all principalities and powers, [Ephesians 1:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-21). It is decreed that every soul shall submit to Jesus, [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23).

***~~This honor also has Christ given to his people—~~***

The victorious saints will exercise a kind of dominion over the ungodly at the last day, [Psalm 49:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 49.14). [Revelation 2:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.26-27). [Psalm 149:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 149.7-9); they will sit with Christ as assessors in judgment over men and devils, [1 Corinthians 6:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.2-3); they have a kingdom appointed to them even now, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29); they will be formally invested with it at the last day: they will receive it as a special grant from Christ himself, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What an exalted character is the true Christian!—~~***

Christians are despised by the unbelieving world: but the Scriptures describe their dignity in most exalted terms. How can we ever estimate aright the glory given them by their Lord! What glory can the earth afford in comparison with this! Let us not then act unworthy of this high character.

***~~2. How marvelous is Christ's love to his people!—~~***

Everything which he himself has received of the Father, he gives to them: he even bought it with his blood, that he might bestow it upon them. How incomprehensible is this love! Let us entertain worthy conceptions of it: let us be constrained by it to love and serve him.

***~~#1716~~***

***~~Christ's Intercession~~***

***~~[John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24).~~***

"Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which you have given me."

THERE is an height, and depth, and length, and breadth in the love of Christ, which can never be fathomed. *His assumption of our sinful nature, and his submission to the accursed death of the cross for our sake, will fill the universe with wonder to all eternity*. Next to those unparalleled instances of his love, we cannot but notice the concern which he expressed for his people's welfare in the last hours of his life. Well did he know all that was coming upon him; yet instead of being occupied, as might have been expected, about his own sufferings, he was intent only on the salvation of others. Having prayed in the hearing of his disciples that they, and all his followers to the end of the world, might be preserved and sanctified—he adds the petition which we have now read; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

***~~I. The subject-matter of the petition—~~***

***~~The manner in which it is expressed is worthy of notice—~~***

It is generally considered as an authoritative demand, which he made in consequence of the right he had in them, and with a more especial view to their comfort. Certain it is that, as his people had been "given to him by the Father," and as he was now about to confirm his title to them by the surrender of his own life in their stead, he might justly claim the blessings which he asked in their behalf.

But the same expression is elsewhere used where nothing more is intended than great earnestness in the request, [Mark 6:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.25); [Mark 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.35); and this seems to be the real import of the words before us.

Our Lord had come down from Heaven to rescue *his people*from destruction; nor could he endure the thought of returning thither without first securing them to himself as the trophies of his victory. Hence was there an extraordinary emphasis laid on this petition, because, if that would not be granted, all which he had done and suffered for them would be in vain.

***~~The petition itself represents the final glorification of all his disciples—~~***

Jesus was now going to his Father in Heaven. He was already in Heaven as to his divine nature; but his human nature also was speedily to be removed thither. A short separation from them was necessary, in order that he might prosecute his mediatorial work in Heaven, and they discharge their apostolic office on earth. But he had promised that, "where he was, there would also his servants be, [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26);" and that, as he was going to prepare mansions for them, so he would surely come again and receive them to himself, that they might be with him forever, [John 14:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.3).

Besides, he had already given them a glimpse of his glory, which they had seen through the veil of his flesh, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14). [2 Peter 1:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.16-17); and taught them to expect that what they had beheld in the dawn, would be revealed to them in its meridian splendor, [Matthew 19:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.28). These expectations he would never disappoint. Hence *in his intercession he gave them an additional assurance, that they would in due time possess the promised bliss*.

At the same time he taught them by his example, that the promises of God were not to supersede, but to encourage prayer: and that, however secure they might feel themselves in knowing the eternal purposes of God, they were never to relax their earnestness in prayer until every decree of God would be finally accomplished To the same effect, see [Jeremiah 29:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.11-12) and [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37).

As we cannot conceive any petition more important, we shall proceed to mark,

***~~II. The blessedness of those who are savingly interested in it—~~***

There are two things suggested for their comfort,

***~~1. Their security in this world—~~***

The saints are frequently, especially in this intercessory prayer, spoken of as "given to Christ by the Father." And when were they given him, but from all eternity, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4). Nor was it merely in his personal, but also in his official character, as the head and representative of his elect, that "the Father loved Christ from before the foundation of the world, [Isaiah 42:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.1)."

Can we suppose then that they were given to Christ, and that it was left uncertain whether he would ever enjoy the gift? Has not our Lord himself repeatedly declared, that they would never perish, and that none would ever pluck them out of his hand, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29). Further, it was for them that Jesus prayed; and "we know that him the Father hears always." For them too he is carrying on his intercession in Heaven; and is not he an all-prevailing Advocate? Yes, is not his intercession for them a ground of assurance, that he both can, and will, save them to the uttermost [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

"Fear not then, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)." Rejoice in your security, and know that "having loved you, our Lord will love you to the end, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1)." *Having "bought you with a price," he will never allow himself to be deprived of "his purchased possession."*

***~~2. Their felicity in the world to come—~~***

It is the glory of Christ which irradiates Heaven, and makes it what it is; "the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Hence the Apostle speaks of "being with Christ," and "being present with the Lord," as terms equivalent with the glorification of his soul: yes, he mentions it as that which conveys the most consoling idea of Heaven, [1 Thessalonians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.18). Now if we only consider what unspeakable joy arises from a view of Christ, through the medium of the written word, we may well conceive that *an immediate vision of his unveiled glory constitutes the felicity of Heaven*. And this, believer, is your portion: it is reserved for you, and you for it. You shall behold him face to face! [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12). Though now you cannot endure the splendor of the meridian sun, you shall soon have your organs of vision strengthened to gaze on him, who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." What felicity must this be!

If the Queen of Sheba, enraptured with the glory of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are your men, happy are these your servants who stand before you, and that who your wisdom [1 Kings 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 10.8)." what must be the happiness of those who behold "the Lamb upon his throne," and enjoy that beatific vision without weariness or intermission? O that we might all aspire after this honor, and that not one of us might ever come short of it!

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Let every one of us now inquire: Am I savingly interested in this prayer?~~***

This surely is an important inquiry: it is, in fact, to ask: Shall I behold my Savior's face with joy—or shall I behold it only at an unapproachable distance, a wretched outcast from Heaven, an hopeless monument of God's displeasure? Let us enter into this inquiry with fear and trembling.

But it may be asked, Is it not presumptuous to attempt an answer to such an inquiry? for who can specify the persons that have been given to Christ? who has looked into the book of God's decrees, that he shall undertake to answer such a question as this?

We answer, that the question may easily be resolved, without presuming to pry into the secrets of God. The point may be determined by asking, Have I given myself to Christ? *Have I as a guilty, helpless, and undone creature—given up myself to Christ, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his Spirit?*Have I done this repeatedly, with deep humiliation, with fervent prayer, with sincere faith? If our consciences bear witness that we have indeed done this, then do we know that the Father gave us to him from all eternity; for "we *love*him, because he first loved us, [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.19);" and we *chose*him only in consequence of our having before been chosen of him, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16). Hither then let our researches be directed; nor let us ever conclude ourselves his, until we have shown ourselves willing and desirous to he his.

***~~2. Let us all live as those who are looking for a speedy answer to it—~~***

*How worthless would all earthly vanities appear, if we were looking daily for the glory that shall be revealed!* How effectually would death be disarmed of its sting! Methinks, we would be "looking for and hastening to the coming of that day:" we would be "desiring to depart, that we may be with Christ," and that "mortality," with all its cares or pleasures, "may be swallowed up in life," Let this be your state, brethren, and you have nothing to fear. Only maintain habitual fellowship with Christ here, and doubtless you shall be with him hereafter.

Be daily surveying his glory now, and you shall assuredly behold it in the world to come. His prayer was offered not for his immediate disciples only, but "for all who would believe on him through their word." Be of this number, and all the glory of Heaven shall be yours!

***~~#1717~~***

***~~Christ's Enemies Smitten down by a Word~~***

***~~[John 18:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.4-9).~~***

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"

They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said to them, "I am He."

And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.

Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

THE offence of the cross of Christ has been a stumbling-block to both Jews and Gentiles in every age: they think it absurd to expect salvation from one who saved not himself, and life from one who was made subject unto death. But every step of his humiliation was accompanied with circumstances which abundantly attested the dignity of his person, and counterbalanced the ignominy of his low and suffering condition.

When he lay in a manger, he was pointed out to the Eastern Magi by an extraordinary star; when he agonized in the garden, there came an angel from Heaven to strengthen him; and when he was apprehended as a thief, he beat down the whole band of his enemies by a word of his mouth. This miraculous exertion of his power, though not recorded in the other Evangelists, is a very interesting and instructive part of our Lord's history. I wish you to notice,

***~~I. The particular incidents here related.~~***

***~~1. His successful resistance to his enemies—~~***

Our Lord went forth boldly to meet his enemies. Many from among ourselves will go forth to face danger, and will manifest great boldness in the midst of it, because they hope to escape the troubles that threaten them, and to overcome the enemies that oppose them. But if they could look into futurity and see the sufferings which they would be called to endure, they would not be so precipitate; they would be glad, if possible, to avoid the evil, especially if they found that their submission to it would entail on them nothing but disgrace.

Not so our blessed Lord: "he knew all things that would come upon him:" he had already tasted of the *bitter cup*, and knew that he was about to drink it even to the very dregs; he knew all that he would endure from men, from devils, and from his heavenly Father; yet he went forth unappalled, "enduring the cross and despising the shame."

He showed them, however, how vain would be their attempts to apprehend him, if he chose to stand in his own defense. Inquiring calmly whom they sought, and being told, "Jesus of Nazareth," he answered, "I am he." Here were no reproaches (for though reviled, he reviled not again), but a plain acknowledgment that he was the object whom they wanted. But with what a glorious power were his words accompanied! No sooner were they uttered, than all the band of soldiers, with Judas at their head, were struck as with lightning, and staggering backward, they fell to the ground.

This miracle, though at first sight it may appear vindictive, was, in fact, as replete with mercy as any that Jesus ever wrought. It was calculated to show them their guilt and danger, and thereby to lead them to repentance. The chief priests and elders in particular, (for they also were close at hand [Luke 22:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.52),) could scarcely fail to call to mind the signal vengeance that had been inflicted on two bands of soldiers who went to apprehend Elijah, and to contrast with that the mercy they had received, [2 Kings 1:9-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 1.9-14). The recollection of this might have convinced them that they were at this instant monuments of God's forbearance, and that Christ, if he had chosen, could have struck them all dead upon the spot. Happy would it have been for them if they had indulged such obvious and suitable reflections.

But his hour being come, he satisfied himself with merely showing them what he could do, if he pleased; and that they could no otherwise apprehend him than by,

***~~2. His willing surrender—~~***

Notwithstanding this most solemn warning, they still persisted in their intention to apprehend Jesus. *If the eyes are blinded and the heart hardened, it is in vain to expect any great benefit either from judgments or mercies.*Like Pharaoh we may be affected for a moment, but shall soon "return with the dog to his vomit."

No sooner had they recovered a little from their surprise, than they resumed their purpose. But O! who would have conceived that the ministers of religion would be so employed, and that the Apostle Judas too would be found standing in such company, and on such an occasion? Contemplate him one moment as rising from the ground, and instantly leading on again the murderous band; *what a solemn picture of human depravity! Lord, what is man! What a monster of iniquity, if left to follow the dictates of his own heart!*

Our Lord, having thus demonstrated his power to resist, surrendered up himself into their hands. Our Lord had before affirmed that no man could take away his life, but that he would lay it down of himself, [John 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.18). Before his hour was come he repeatedly withdrew himself both from injudicious friends and from incensed enemies, [Luke 4:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.29-30) and [John 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.15). But now he proceeded to fulfill his word, and willingly gave up himself into the hands of his enemies. As, when first he undertook our cause, he said to the Father, "Lo, I come, I delight to do your will, O God! [Psalm 40:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.7-8)," so now, at the close of his undertaking, he went up to his enemies again, and asked, Whom do you seek? and replied again as before to the answer given him. Now he allowed himself to be bound as a criminal, and yielded up himself to all those indignities and miseries, which, as our surety, it became him to endure.

This voluntary surrender of himself was necessary in order to his being a sacrifice for us; and it was one principal circumstance that rendered his sacrifice so peculiarly acceptable to God; "He loved us," says the Apostle, "and *gave himself*for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savor! [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)."

Nevertheless, even while he thus humbled himself, he further evinced his power by,

***~~3. His dignified capitulation—~~***

He did not see fit to let his disciples participate yet in his bitter cup. He had ordained that they would be conformed to him in their death as well as in their life. But they were yet but weak in the faith, and not able to encounter great difficulties. A premature discouragement might prove fatal to them.

Our Lord therefore would "not put new wine into old bottles," or allow his disciples to be tried beyond their strength. On this account he stipulated with his enemies that they would not molest any of his adherents. He did not make a request to his enemies, for there was no probability that they would listen to it for one moment. He imposed it on them with authority, that they would let his disciples go; and, by his invisible agency, he constrained them to obey him. And so effectual was his command, that they could not even retaliate upon Peter, whose temerity had exposed both himself and his fellow-disciples to most imminent hazard.

Jesus had just before declared to his heavenly Father, that he had preserved all whom the Father had committed to him, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12). He was therefore peculiarly solicitous for their welfare in the hour of danger: and showed that, though he saved not himself, he was both able and determined to save those who had put their trust in him.

From these striking incidents we shall be led to notice,

***~~II. The light which they cast on the general character of our Lord—~~***

Behold him here,

***~~1. As a surety for sinners—~~***

What he did on this occasion is precisely what he has done with respect to all the enemies of our salvation. Does the justice of God arrest us, or his holy law condemn us? Behold, Jesus gives up himself in our stead, and says respecting us, "Let these go their way!" Isaac was not more certainly doomed to death in the purpose of his father, than we were by reason of our iniquities: but Jesus, like the ram, is accepted in our stead, and we rise to a life of immortality and glory. Let us ever view Jesus in this light; let us regard him as our surety and substitute; nor doubt, but that through his willing sacrifice, and authoritative mediation, our souls shall live for ever.

***~~2. As an avenger of his enemies, [Isaiah 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.24).—~~***

We have seen what Christ did when he was about to surrender up himself, and to stand as a criminal at man's tribunal: what then will he not do when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and summon the universe to his tribunal? If an armed band were smitten to the ground by the power of his word in the hour of his deepest humiliation, how shall an individual, unarmed, resist him in the day when he shall sit on his throne of judgment? When he shall say, "I am he," whom you despise, "I am he," whose invitations you did slight, and on whose blood you did trample; what confusion will cover us! what terror will seize us! and how irresistible will be the power that shall consign us over to perdition! Surely, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" O let us seek Jesus, not to betray and dishonor him, but rather to serve and glorify him with our whole hearts.

***~~3. As a protector of his people—~~***

As his people were beset with enemies at that time, so are they in every age, and every place. As malignant as they were who came to apprehend our Lord, they were but instruments in the hands of that malicious fiend who seeks to destroy us. But all the hosts of Hell are as much subject to the power of Jesus, as Judas and the soldiers were. "Not any weapon formed against us can prosper," if only we put our trust in him! Let us then flee to him; and he will hide us under the shadow of his wings! As birds flying to protect their young, so will the Lord defend us. And as the attendant angel passed between the destroyer and the houses sprinkled with blood, so will the Lord pass over to preserve us from the assaults of our enemies, [Isaiah 31:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 31.5). Let us rely on him, and we shall find him a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall, [Isaiah 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 25.4).

***~~#1718~~***

***~~Jesus Smitten in the High Priest's Palace~~***

***~~[John 18:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.19-23).~~***

The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."

And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"

Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"

THE Holy Scriptures are generally considered as containing only matter of historic record. Whereas in reality, with the difference only of some outward circumstances, they exhibit a faithful picture of all that is passing at this present day, in ourselves, and in the world around us. Religion is the same now as it always was; and human nature is still the same; and consequently the operations of religion also are the same, whether in those who hate, or those who embrace, it.

In the history before us, we must, doubtless, primarily regard our blessed Lord as suffering what God in his determinate counsels had ordained him to suffer for the sins of men: but, if we would reap the full benefit from these occurrences, we must view them in their general aspect, as showing us,

***~~I. How religion is opposed—~~***

Few will admit at all that religion is opposed in the present day: but daily experience proves that it is still, precisely as in former ages, opposed,

***~~1. With inveterate prejudice—~~***

The interrogations put to Jesus by the high-priest had the appearance of candor (for the bitterest enemies of Christianity wish to maintain somewhat of the semblance of justice,) but they proceeded from nothing but a desire to elicit something from Jesus which would serve as a ground of accusation against him. This was clearly perceived by our blessed Lord; and therefore, instead of allowing himself to be thus ensnared by his blood-thirsty persecutor, he referred him to the very people who were seeking his destruction, that he might learn from them the crimes which they had to lay to his charge.

Had the high-priest been sincerely desirous of knowing, from Jesus himself, what his doctrines were, and what he expected of his disciples, that he might guard the more effectually against any misrepresentations or mistakes, and administer justice with impartiality, our Lord would not have withheld from him the necessary information. But the high-priest had no such objects in view: his design was only to find an occasion against Jesus, either on account of something which would proceed out of his mouth, or as concealing truths which he dared not to avow.

And do we not here see the spirit in which inquiries are still made at this very hour, in relation both to the *doctrines*of the Gospel, and to the *people*who profess it?

In what a captious way are questions continually put to Christian people, by those who hate the doctrines of the Gospel! The object of the inquirers is not to gain such a knowledge as shall convince and satisfy their minds, but to draw forth some answer, which shall either really, or in appearance at least, justify their rejection of all true religion.

So also in relation to the followers of Christ; their enemies have no wish to hear anything in their favor: all that they want, is to collect anecdotes to the disadvantage of those who profess godliness, and to find reasons for holding them up to derision and reproach. The very same spirit which urged on the enemies of Daniel, [Daniel 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.4-5), wrought also in the enemies of Jesus, [Luke 11:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.54), and still reigns, though often cloaked under the most specious garb, in all who embrace not the Gospel of Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.12).

***~~2. With licentious violence—~~***

Nothing could be more honorable than our Lord's appeal to those who surrounded him; since they had all heard his discourses continually in the temple, and were thoroughly disposed to bring their accusations against him, if they were able to lay anything to his charge. Yet behold, this appeal, instead of being received as a declaration of his innocence, was resented as an indignity offered to the high-priest; and that too in a way which was contrary to all law, or equity, or common humanity. In a court of justice itself, an officer of that court, in the very presence of the judge, struck the prisoner, not only uncondemned, but unheard, yes, and before even an accusation had been brought against him! In what court under Heaven would such injustice be tolerated in a common cause? Yet was this passed over without any testimony of disapprobation, either from the judge, or from any of his attendants!

And do we not here see how the rights of God's people are trampled on by all who choose to persecute and oppress them? Yes truly, the most injurious treatment may be shown to them, and none will stand up to vindicate their cause. They are neither judged, nor protected by the same laws as other men. Against a godly man acting for his Lord and Savior, anyone may rise, and may insult and injure him, not only with impunity, but with the approbation of many. While, if the very same line of conduct were pursued by a professor of godliness against a man of this world, a fire would be kindled in every bosom, and a general indignation excited against the offending person.

We cannot descend to particulars; but the observation of every man may furnish them in abundance: and, if anyone is acquainted with instances of such licentious violence, we desire him only to look at the means which are used to cramp the efforts of the godly, and to arrest the progress of vital godliness; and then to ask himself: What he would think of religious persons, if they were to adopt such measures against the opposers of the Gospel as the opposers of the Gospel adopt towards them?

And we will venture to say, that a very few minutes' consideration shall convince him, that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit," and that the descendants of *Cain*, of *Ishmael*, and of *Doeg*, are not by any means extinct.

***~~3. With hypocritical pretenses—~~***

This officer professed a high regard for order and decorum; but a greater act of indecorum can scarcely be conceived than that which he himself committed at that very time; since the taking for granted that the judge who sat there, to administer justice, would suffer all the rights of justice to be so violated in his very presence, was as severe a reflection upon the judge as could well be cast on a human being. Yet this was the man who complained of a lack of order and decorum in our blessed Lord, and made that a plea for the outrage which he himself committed.

What hypocrisy was here! yet it is no other than what is practiced every day by those who hate the Gospel, and labor to obstruct its progress. Need we go to Rome to hear the plea, that, from the labors of Christ's faithful servants, the Church is in danger? With what sanctimonious zeal will many cry out against lectures on a Sabbath evening, as injurious to morality; while they never lift up a voice against the theaters, in which so much iniquity abounds! And what concern will many express about the peace of men's minds as disturbed by the Gospel, when they have never, on any occasion whatever, shown any regard for the spiritual interests of others, or even for the welfare of their own souls!

I mean not to say, that the welfare of the Church, and the interests of morality, and the peace of men's minds, ought to be deemed of small importance; for they ought, beyond a doubt, to be regarded with the utmost care and tenderness. But this I say, that they are not uncommonly made a pretext for opposing religion, by persons who on any other occasion would show no regard for them at all. Rather than not prevail to destroy the Lord Jesus, the Jews would cry out, "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend!" when they would not have hesitated to throw off Caesar's yoke at any moment, if they could have attempted it with any prospect of success, [John 19:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.12).

Their loyalty to Caesar was but a pretext; their only object being to ensure the condemnation of one, whose innocence the very judge himself had repeatedly proclaimed.

The truth is, that the godly are a prey which every man is at liberty to hunt down; and in the taking of which he is at liberty to use any means which his ingenuity may devise, [Isaiah 59:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.15).

But while in the conduct of the Jews we see how religion is opposed; we see, in the conduct of our Lord,

***~~II. How it true religion to be maintained—~~***

None of the weapons which are made use of by the enemies of religion, are to be employed by its friends. If they contend with evil, we are to contend with good, and to "overcome evil with good." The cause of Christ must be maintained,

***~~1. With undaunted firmness—~~***

Our blessed Lord was not intimidated by this crude assault; but, as one who felt that he was possessed of a good conscience, and a good cause, he firmly expostulated with his adversary: "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite me?" Now this shows us, that we are not called to submit to injuries without maintaining that we have still the same rights as other men, and that, when those rights are violated, we have just reason to complain.

Paul, when a Roman Centurion had bound him with chains, and was about to scourge him, asserted his right, as a Roman citizen, to be regarded as innocent, until his guilt had been proved in a court of justice, [Acts 22:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.25); and at another time, after having been unjustly beaten and imprisoned, he would not leave the prison until the magistrates, who had so treated him, would "come to fetch him out, [Acts 16:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.37)."

Thus we may avoid injuries when no sacrifice of conscience is required: but, rather than violate, in any instance, our duty to God, we must brave all the injuries that can be inflicted on us. The three Hebrew Youths have set us an excellent example in this respect. When menaced with being cast into the fiery furnace, they expressed their confidence in God, that he would interpose for their deliverance: but whether such an interposition would be given or not, they were determined to hold fast their integrity at all events: "Our God will deliver us. But, if not, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods! [Daniel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.18)."

No trials whatever should at any time drive us from this point. Whatever persecutions may arise, we must say with Paul, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself!" In a word, we must "not fear man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him alone, who can destroy both body and soul in Hell, [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5)."

***~~2. With unruffled patience—~~***

Though our Lord's answer was firm, there was not the smallest degree of irritation in it. And herein he showed how superior he was to any mortal man. *Moses*was the meekest man upon the face of the earth; yet, when greatly tried, he broke forth into unadvised expressions, which brought the displeasure of God upon him, [Numbers 20:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.10-12). And when *Paul*was injured precisely in the same way that Jesus was, he resentfully addressed the judge that had so injured him: "God shall smite you, you white-washed wall: for sit you to judge me after the law, and command me to be smitten contrary to the law, [Acts 23:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.2-3)."

Our duty in all circumstances is to imitate "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," who, as Peter informs us, "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we would follow his steps: who, being reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him who judges righteously, 1 Peter 2:21-23." If we betray any unhallowed temper, our adversaries have so far gained a victory over us. We must, under all circumstances, "possess our souls in patience;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

***~~From the whole then, we may learn,~~***

***~~1. What to expect—~~***

"The servant must not expect to be above his lord." "If men called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Our blessed Lord strongly guards us upon this very point: "Marvel not," says he, "if the world hates you: if it hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, [John 15:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-20)."

Nor is it mere hatred that we must expect to encounter, but injuries also, yes, and injuries of the most atrocious kind. "If we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we shall assuredly suffer persecution!" Let us then "count the cost;" and be ready to pay it. "The pearl of great price" is worth it all!

***~~2. How to act—~~***

Let us set our Lord Jesus Christ before us as our example. "He, when oppressed and afflicted, opened not his mouth: he was brought as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he did not opened his mouth, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6)." O blessed attainment! how rare! how beautiful! "To turn the left cheek to him who smites us on the right! to let a man who sues us at law, and takes away our coat, take away with him our cloak also! and when compelled to go with a man one mile, to accompany him voluntarily another, [Matthew 5:39-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.39-41)."

What hard savings are these to the carnal man! and how difficult to be carried into execution, even by the most spiritual! But, beloved, let us not despair of attaining these things; for "the grace of Christ is sufficient for us;" and we may rest assured, that, if only we "be strong in him," we shall "be able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us."

It is but a little time that we shall be called to these sacrifices. Soon we shall be beyond the reach of all our adversaries: having "suffered with Christ, and overcome through him, we shall soon be glorified together, and sit down with him upon his throne, as he overcame, and is set down with his Father upon his throne! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21)."

***~~#1719~~***

***~~Christ's Good Confession~~***

***~~[John 18:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.37).~~***

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

*IN the whole of our Savior's life there was a strong apparent contradiction between the character he professed, and that which he visibly sustained*. At his introduction into the world he was announced as a most exalted personage, even as "the King of the Jews, [Luke 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.11-12);" yet was he found born in a stable, and laid in a manger. When he entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, and was welcomed with loud hosannas as the Son of David, he did not assume the pomp of earthly monarchs, but rode thither, in a meek and lowly manner, seated on a young donkey, [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9) with [Matthew 21:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.2-9).

But this opposition between his mean appearance and his high pretensions never was more visible than when he stood before the bar of Pilate. He was like any other poor man; except indeed that he was bound as a criminal, and held by his whole nation as more execrable than even a robber or a murderer: yet at this time did he assert his claim to kingly authority, or, as Paul expresses it, "he witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.13)."

In his answer to Pilate, there are two things to be considered;

***~~I. His confession—~~***

The Jews had already condemned him, for making himself the Son of God, [Matthew 26:63-65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.63-65). But he could not be executed, unless Pilate also would condemn him. But Pilate did not regard any questions relating to the Jewish law; and therefore the Jews brought a different charge against him before Pilate; affirming that he had set up himself as a King against Caesar. On this charge Pilate questioned him, and received the answer which we have just read.

In this answer we notice,

***~~1. The boldness of it—~~***

Our Lord had already told Pilate, that he disclaimed any idea of establishing an *earthly*kingdom; and that there was no ground for fear or jealousy, as if he was invading the rights of Caesar, or attempting to rescue his country from the Roman yoke. He appealed to the prohibition which he had just before given to his disciples respecting their using the sword in his defense; and declared, that the kingdom to which he aspired was:  
not of a worldly nature;  
not established on worldly principles,  
nor supported by worldly force,  
nor governed by worldly policy,  
nor in any respect interfering with the interests of other monarchs.

Yet even in thus rectifying the misapprehensions of Pilate, he thrice used the words, "My kingdom." He might have satisfied himself with simply denying his interference with *human*governments: but he would on no account conceal what it was of importance to the world to know: and therefore, though he foresaw all the consequences of his confession, he answered plainly to the next interrogation, "You say truly; I am a King."

***~~2. The truth of it—~~***

The *prophets*had abundantly testified of the regal dignity of the Messiah, [Isaiah 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6-7). [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44); [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14); [Daniel 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.25) and [Psalm 72:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.1); [Psalm 72:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.11); and in the New Testament it had been confirmed by the testimony both of men and angels [Matthew 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.2). [Luke 1:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.32-33). The very *works*also which he had wrought, bore witness to him, [John 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.25).

The difference which subsisted between his government and earthly kingdoms, so far from invalidating his claim, served only to establish it on the firmest basis: for, whereas other kings had dominion only over the *bodies*of men, he reigned over their *souls*: others had their territories bounded by seas or mountains; but his extended over all the earth.

But we shall have a further insight into the truth of his confession, while we consider,

***~~II. His explanation of it—~~***

The connection between the two parts of our Lord's answer is not obvious at first sight: but, on comparing them with attention, we shall find, that in the latter he explains,

***~~1. The manner in which he exercises his kingly office—~~***

Satan is "the God of this world," "the prince that rules 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)." He has usurped a power over the whole race of mankind, and he governs them all as his vassals, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

Now Jesus has not, like other kings, any persons who are his subjects by birth—every one of his subjects is rescued from under the dominion of Satan, and constrained to submit to him.

But with what *weapons*does our blessed Lord invade the kingdom of Satan? Not with those which are used in earthly wars, but with the force of truth. It is by darkness and falsehood that Satan retains men in his service; and it is by the light of truth that Christ delivers them from their bondage.

Satan makes men believe that "God is even such a one as themselves;" that they have no reason to fear his displeasure; that their own good works or repentance will save them; and that it is sufficient for them to maintain a moral and decent conduct.

Our blessed Lord, on the contrary, proclaims that God is a just and holy Being; that sinners are obnoxious to his wrath; that there is no reconciliation with God but through him; and that those who would be happy in the next world, must now devote themselves wholly to the service of their God. It had been foretold that He would be "a witness to the people, [Isaiah 55:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.4);" and he came agreeably to the prediction, "to bear witness to the truth." "For this very end was he born;" and by executing this office, he prevailed, and still does prevail, on thousands to renounce their allegiance to Satan, and to "take upon them his light and easy yoke."

***~~2. The distinguishing character of his subjects—~~***

Those are said to be "of the truth," who have been begotten, or converted, by it: just as those are said to be "of God," who have been born of God. Compare [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18) with [1 John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19). Now every one that has experienced the influence of truth in "bringing him out of darkness into light," and "in translating him from the power of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9). [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13)," from that time "hears the voice of Christ," and obeys it without reserve. Other lords had dominion over him before:  
the *world*governed him by its maxims;  
the *flesh*captivated him by its allurements;  
the *devil*enslaved him by his temptations.

But from henceforth he will not listen to the syren voice of pleasure, or regard the calls of interest or reputation. He has sworn allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ; and for him he is determined to sacrifice every other consideration.

This designates the character of Christ's subjects. Wherever such persons are found, these are the subjects of his kingdom. Other kings exercise their sway over those only who are born in a particular country: but in whatever country these persons live, they belong to Christ; to Christ supremely, to Christ alone. All other authorities are subservient to his; and are to be obeyed so far only as shall be agreeable to his laws, and conducive to his honor.

At the same time, none are his subjects who do not correspond with the character here given. Whatever they may *profess*, they are not his: they may call themselves Christians; but he calls them traitors, rebels, enemies.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who never yet submitted to Christ's government—~~***

Whose are you? There are but two monarchs who divide the whole world between them; and these are, Christ and Satan.

If then you have never been smitten with that "two-edged sword, the word of truth;"  
if you have never been so deeply wounded, that nothing but the "balm of Gilead" could heal you;  
if you have never cast down the arms of your rebellion, and surrendered up yourselves to Christ, we must say of you, as Christ himself did of the Jews, "You are of your father the devil! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)." And if you are Satan's vassals, from whom, and with whom, must you expect your reward? Let this question come home to your hearts; and choose this day "whose you will be, and whom you will serve, [Joshua 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.14)."

***~~2. Those who are afraid to yield themselves up to Christ—~~***

Alas! that any would be deterred by fear or shame from acknowledging Christ; when he braved even the most cruel death, rather than deny the office which he bore for us! What can be your loss or pain, when compared with his? What is the contempt poured upon you, when compared with the accursed death of the cross to which he submitted for your sakes? Perhaps you expect to be acknowledged as his subjects, though you shun the odium of acknowledging him as your king. But this cannot be; for those who deny him shall be denied by him; and those only who confess him, shall be confessed by him in the presence of his Father, and of his holy angels, [Matthew 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32-33).

***~~3. Those who call themselves his subjects—~~***

What our heavenly King said of himself, may be fitly applied to all his subjects, "For this end were you born, and for this cause you came into the world, that you would bear witness unto the truth." You are to be God's witnesses in the world: "you are to be as lights," and "as a city set on a hill." Let it appear then that "the truth has made you free, [John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32)." Let it be seen in you, that *truth will rectify, not only the errors of the mind, but the propensities of the heart*; and that, when it is "mighty through God, it will bring every thought and desire into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5."

***~~#1720~~***

***~~Pilate's Inquiry about Truth~~***

***~~[John 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.38).~~***

"What is truth?" Pilate asked.

THE rich and powerful are for the most part under great disadvantages for the attainment of religious knowledge. Their appointed teachers too often "prophesy smooth things to them;" and those who would deal faithfully with their consciences, are kept at a distance from them. Their dispositions and habits also are generally unfavorable for the reception of truth: and hence it is, that if they have an opportunity of gaining instruction, they rarely avail themselves of it, so as to derive any essential benefit to their souls, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26).

*Herod*heard John the Baptist; but "knew not how to use the price put into his hand."

*Festus*, and *Agrippa*, and *Felix*were variously affected with the preaching of Paul; but no one of them was savingly converted unto God.

*Pilate*, as governor of Judea, had Christ himself brought before him, for the express purpose of inquiring into his pretensions to the kingdom of Israel: and when our Lord had informed him what kind of a kingdom it was that he claimed, and that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

Happy man, who made such an inquiry; and who had One before him so capable of giving him instruction respecting it! Surely this man could not fail of being saved. But, alas! he waited not for an answer. We do not think that he put the question contemptuously, as though he had said, "Why do you talk to me about truth?" The notice which the Evangelist takes of his question, gives us reason to think that it was intended seriously; though the outcome showed, that he was not sufficiently concerned to obtain the information which he had professed to desire.

However, the question was important; and, had his mind been duly impressed with its importance, we would have had to number him among the followers, rather than the enemies, of that despised Nazarene.

For our present improvement, we shall endeavor to state,

***~~I. The importance of the inquiry—~~***

Truth is of various kinds: physical, moral, and religious.

By *physical*truth, we mean that which comprehends all the phenomena of nature.

By *moral*truth, we mean that which relates to the whole system of morals, independent of religion. That an inquiry into these is important, appears from its having been the employment of all wise men from the beginning of the world; and from the value that has been set even on the smallest measures of truth which have, by means of the most patient and laborious investigations, been at any time brought to light.

But *religious*truth, and that especially of which our Lord came to testify, is, beyond all comparison, more important than any other. What that truth is, we will state in few words. The point upon which our blessed Lord was examined before the Jewish council, was, "Are you the Christ?" and that before Pilate, was, "Are you the King of the Jews?" To both of these he answered in the affirmative, "I am."

Now these two points comprise all that truth respecting which our blessed Lord came to testify:  
first, He is the anointed Savior of the world;  
secondly, He is the King and Governor of all whom he saves.

This is truth: this is the sum and substance of the Gospel Compare [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36) where these two points, that "Jesus is both Lord and Christ," are spoken of precisely in this view; there is nothing connected with the justification, the sanctification, or the complete and everlasting salvation of mankind, which is not comprehended in this. Consequently, an inquiry into this must be of the very first importance.

***~~1. Truth is important, for the forming of our principles—~~***

Man without a principle is like a ship without a rudder, driven by every wave of temptation, and every gust of passion. He has nothing whereby to judge of good and evil in matters of the greatest consequence. He has no standard, to which he can refer a doubtful opinion. He has no touchstone, by which he can try a specious sentiment.

But where can a man go for the forming of his principles? If he apply to heathen philosophers, he finds nothing fixed, nothing certain, nothing wherein they are generally agreed. Even the question, "What is the chief good of man?" he finds unsettled; and can obtain no clue that can lead him to any definite judgment.

But in the Gospel, all his doubts are solved. There he sees, that love to Christ as his Savior, and obedience to him as his King, are to be the main-spring which must set every wheel in motion. Whatever accords with the principle of love to him, and with the rule of his revealed will, is good; and whatever deviates from the one or other, even if it be only an hair's breadth, is wrong. To this standard every feeling of the heart, and every expression of it in act, may be referred; and, if rightly referred, its true nature and quality will be infallibly determined.

***~~2. Truth is important, for the regulating of our conduct—~~***

As the principles of the greatest philosophers were involved in doubt and uncertainty, so were they altogether destitute of any sanctifying influence: they wrought no change on the morals of men; they produced no consistent change even on their own morals. Even Christianity itself, if there is not a direct and constant reference in the mind to that particular truth spoken of in the text, will not prevail to the renovating of the soul. Of this we have decisive evidence in the lives of *nominal*Christians; who, though they have a higher standard of morals than the heathen, are strangers to that heavenliness of mind, which characterizes a real saint.

But the knowledge of this truth will bring, not the *actions*only, but even "the *thoughts*, into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The truth, cordially embraced, will operate as fire on metal, pervading the whole soul, and transforming it, as it were, into its own image. See the lack and the attainment of it contrasted in [Ephesians 4:17-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.17-24).

***~~3. Truth is important, for the saving of the soul—~~***

Men ignorant of the Gospel are invariably represented as in a state of guilt and condemnation. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost." Indeed, the very circumstance of "Christ's coming into the world on purpose to bear witness to the truth," and his submitting to the accursed death of the cross in confirmation of that truth, is proof sufficient, that *the knowledge of the truth is essential to our eternal happiness*, and that every living creature is bound to inquire into it.

The *objects*and *reasons*of our inquiry being thus defined, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. The manner in which it would be made—~~***

Here Pilate was greatly defective: and, in marking his defects, we are unavoidably led to notice the manner in which such an inquiry should be made: it should be made,

***~~1. With seriousness—~~***

Some will inquire about religion with as much levity as if it were quite a trifling concern: they have nothing in view but the gratifying of their curiosity. They resemble the Jews who came to converse with Paul when he was a prisoner at Rome; "We desire to hear what you think, [Acts 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.22);" or those who ridiculed the doctrine of the resurrection; "We will hear you again of this matter, [Acts 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.32);" or those foolish ones of whom we read, that they were "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, [2 Timothy 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.7)."

But religion is a serious matter; and in our inquiries respecting it we would remember, that on our acceptance or rejection of the truth our everlasting welfare depends.

***~~2. With candor—~~***

While some are light and trifling, others make inquiries only that they may carp and cavil at the word. Such were the Herodians, the Sadducees, and Pharisees of old, who brought forth their respective difficulties, merely to ensnare Jesus and entangle him in his talk, [Matthew 22:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.15-17); [Matthew 22:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.23-28); [Matthew 22:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.34-36). And such were those also, who "urged him vehemently to speak of many things, that they might find something whereof to accuse him, [Luke 11:53-54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.53-54)." But we would rather imitate the *Bereans*, who, instead of determining at once that all which they heard from time to time was folly and delusion, "searched the Scriptures daily, to find whether things were as they had been represented to them".

***~~3. With humility—~~***

There are many things revealed to us in the Gospel which are contrary to the generally prevailing opinions of mankind: "they are even foolishness unto the natural man; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In order to understand them aright, *we must receive them simply on the authority of God; and conclude them to be true, because he has revealed them*. We must beg of him "the gift of his Holy Spirit, that we may know the things which are freely given to us by God:" *for then only shall we know him, when "he gives us an understanding to know him*," and reveals his dear Son in our hearts as the hope of glory. If we are so wise that we will not seek instruction from him, God will "take us in our own craftiness".

***~~4. With diligence—~~***

It is not a transient or superficial inquiry that will suffice: we must "search for wisdom, and dig for her as for hidden treasures." We must not presently give over the pursuit, because we find that we have not yet attained: the promise is, "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord." *There are in the Gospel heights and depths which cannot be explored*: and therefore, however deep our acquaintance may be with this stupendous mystery, we should still "not count ourselves to have attained," but continue to "give attendance to reading," and to pray with unabated fervor, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!"

***~~5. With a determination to embrace whatever we may find to be agreeable to the mind and will of God—~~***

This is the main point: "If we will do God's will, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of him." If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, God will give us over to believe a lie, in order to our more aggravated condemnation, [2 Thessalonians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.10-12). To receive truth *speculatively*will be to no purpose: for it were better to be wholly ignorant of it, than to "hold it in unrighteousness," or turn from it after having once professed to embrace it, [Romans 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.18). [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6). [2 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.21).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

As Pilate asked of Jesus, "What is truth?" So you are come hither professedly to make the same inquiry. Behold then, in Christ's stead we answer your inquiry: This is truth; that Jesus is the Christ; and that his people look unto him as the Savior of the world. This is truth; that Jesus is also the King of Israel; and that all who are his, submit to his government.

Now go not away, as Pilate did, regardless of your own question; but reflect upon it; consider its importance; meditate on the answer given to it; and examine your own hearts, how far you *understand*it: how far you *feel*it: and how far your lives are *conformed*to it. "If you know the truth, it will make you free:" but if it does not "sanctify you" in this world, it can never profit you in the world to come!

***~~#1721~~***

***~~Pilate's Further Attempt to Save Jesus~~***

***~~[John 19:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.5).~~***

"Then Jesus came forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate said unto them: Behold the man!"

IT is common to speak of our fallen nature as altogether corrupt, and destitute of any good thing. But this must be understood with caution: for though it is true that there is nothing really and spiritually good in the natural man, (as Paul says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing,") yet there is a principle of conscience, which, in proportion as it is enlightened, deters men from evil, and prompts them to what is good. Of this we have many examples in the Holy Scriptures; and a very striking one in the passage before us.

Pilate was persuaded in his mind that Jesus was innocent, and therefore could not endure the thought of putting him to death. He strove by every means in his power to pacify those who sought Jesus' life: a great many different times he bore witness to his innocence; and, when that would not succeed, he labored in a variety of ways to release him. He offered to inflict upon him the punishment of scourging, under the idea that his enemies would be satisfied with that: and now, after having inflicted that punishment, and permitted him to be treated with every species of indignity, he had recourse to one more device, in hopes that he would at last prevail upon them to spare Jesus. He brought forth Jesus, arrayed as he was in mock majesty, and his face defiled with blood and spittle; and said unto the people, "Behold the man!"

This may be viewed,

***~~I. As a political expedient—~~***

Pilate, not daring absolutely to refuse the demands of the Jews—yet still bent on effecting the release of Jesus, had recourse to this,

***~~1. To excite their pity—~~***

He well knew that *the most savage heart, however insensible to the cries of misery when heard only at a distance, is apt to relent, when the suffering object is presented before the eyes*. He therefore set Jesus before them in this state; hoping thereby, that they would be moved with compassion at the sight of his unmerited distresses. Pilate's address to them was probably to this effect: "Behold the man whose crucifixion you have demanded: I have already repeatedly told you that I could find in him nothing worthy of death: but, as I take for granted that you have some cause for your complaints, I have punished him by scourging; yet I am still constrained to renew my testimony, that I can find in him no fault at all. Supposing however that he has in some respect offended against your law, I can assure you he has already suffered severely for it; and therefore I hope you will be satisfied, without urging me to proceed any further against him. Look, and see what a pitiable object he is! and let your anger give way to the nobler sentiments of pity and compassion."

Well might Pilate adopt this expedient, because Christ himself is represented as pleading in this very manner with his relentless persecutors, [Lamentations 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 1.12), though, alas! without attaining the object of his desires, [Psalm 69:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.20).

***~~2. To shame their enmity—~~***

The nation had accused Jesus of stirring up rebellion in the land. Now Pilate hoped, that a sight of him in his present deplorable state would convince them, that there was nothing to fear from him on this head: for the meekness with which he had borne all his sufferings showed clearly, that he was not of a turbulent disposition; and the circumstance of his not having a single friend or partisan to speak for him, proved, that, whatever his inclination might be, he had not the power to do harm.

"Look at him," we may suppose Pilate to say: "see what a contemptible appearance he makes! Is this a man of whom the whole nation has cause to be afraid? Is this a man of whose power and influence you need to be so jealous, that you cannot rest until he is put to death? Supposing that he has had some influence, what influence could he have in future? Only let him alone, and in a little time it will scarce be known that such a poor despised creature exists."

Such were the arguments with which David had repeatedly appeased the murderous wrath of Saul, [1 Samuel 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 24.14); [1 Samuel 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 26.20). And Pilate might reasonably hope that they would have weight, especially when addressed to them by the judge and governor, whose exclusive duty it was to watch over the interests of the state. But, alas! the chief priests and scribes, who had acted covertly before, now took the lead in clamor and tumult, and bore down all before them. Nothing but the crucifixion of Jesus would satisfy them; and they gave Pilate to understand, that, if he did not comply with their wishes in this respect, they would denounce him as an enemy to Caesar, and a traitor to his own country, verse 6, 12.

There is yet another view in which we may regard the words of Pilate; namely,

***~~II. As a prophetic intimation—~~***

It is well known that Caiaphas, when intending nothing himself but to recommend the execution of Jesus as necessary for the good of the state, unwittingly uttered a prophecy respecting the saving benefits of his death, and that not to the Jews only, but to all the world, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52). Now the words of Pilate bear much more of a prophetic aspect than those of Caiaphas, since they accord with many acknowledged prophecies, not in spirit merely, but almost in the express terms, [Isaiah 40:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.9); [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22); [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1) and [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10).

Moreover, Pilate's wife had had somewhat of a revelation respecting Jesus that very morning, and had sent word of it to Pilate, while he was yet upon the seat of judgment, [Matthew 27:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.19); and he himself had invariably, and with great constancy, borne testimony to the innocence of Jesus: so that his words on this occasion might well bear that kind of construction which God himself has taught us to put upon the words of Caiaphas.

But, as the Scripture affirms nothing respecting this, so neither do we: we may however, with great propriety, put these words into the mouth of a Christian preacher, and take occasion from them to lead you to the contemplation of your suffering Lord. I say then, "Behold the man!" Behold him,

***~~1. To engage your confidence—~~***

To a superficial inquirer, all these humiliating circumstances would appear to justify a doubt whether Jesus were the Son of God. But to one who examines thoroughly the prophecies relating to him, these very circumstances afford the most satisfactory proof that he was indeed the Christ.

Was he treated with the utmost contempt, and that too by the whole nation?

Was he mocked, reviled, spit upon?

Was he beaten with scourges, so that his flesh was even ploughed up with stripes?

Then I see that he was the Christ; for not only the ancient prophets, but he himself expressly told us that it would be so. Compare [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7); [Isaiah 50:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.6); [Isaiah 53:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3-5) and [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3) with [Mark 10:32-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.32-34). Did he endure all these things without one word of murmur or complaint? Then I am sure that he was the Christ. Compare [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7) with [1 Peter 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.25).

But it is not in this view only that his sufferings afford us grounds of confidence. *While they prove him to be the true Messiah, they prove also, beyond a possibility of doubt, his willingness to save all who come unto him.*In enduring all these things, he submitted willingly. He could, if he had chosen, have had more than twelve legions of angels for his defense: but then the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled, nor would the work of our salvation have been accomplished.

If then he willingly submitted to these indignities for us when we were enemies, what will he not do for us when we throw down the weapons of our rebellion, and implore his mercy? Surely no person, whatever he may have been or done, shall ever apply to him in vain.

***~~2. To inflame your gratitude—~~***

It is well said by the Apostle, that "the love of Christ surpasses knowledge." It is not possible for any finite mind to comprehend it. Something of it indeed "every saint may comprehend, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19);" but its full extent can never be fathomed. That however which we do see of it, would operate with irresistible energy upon our minds.

Brethren, "behold the man!" See the royal robe which they have put upon him; the cane in his hand, for a scepter; the crown of thorns upon his head; and the blood issuing from his lacerated temples. See him ready to faint through the severities inflicted on him; and then say, *These are the fruits of his love to me; these things he endures, to rescue me from "everlasting shame and contempt*."

Then ask yourselves, What returns he merits at your hands? Surely to compliment him with the name of Savior, will not be thought sufficient: there must be a tribute, not of the lip only, but of the heart; in the heart, a flame of love should be kindled, which, like the fire upon the altar, should never go out.

***~~3. To stimulate your exertions—~~***

There is no one so blind as not to see that our acknowledgments to Christ would show themselves, not in sentiment only, but in action. Indeed he himself tells us, that it is by obedience to his commands we are to prove our love to him, [John 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.15); [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.14).

What then shall we do to evince our love to him? What? Let us follow the example of his love to us.

When the people sought him to make him really a king, he refused their services, and hid himself from them: but when they arrayed him in mock majesty, and put a crown of thorns upon his head, he submitted willingly to that, because it would conduce to our benefit.

Thus let us be regardless of all personal gratifications, that we may exalt and honor him: and if we are called to suffer for his sake, let us suffer willingly and meekly. As "he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," "sustaining the cross and despising the shame" for us—let us "follow him, bearing his reproach." If we are made "a gazing-stock" and "a spectacle to the world," let us be content to be loaded with every species of ignominy for his sake. Let us remember, that "he gave himself for us, to purchase unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works;" and let it be our fixed determination to answer in this respect the end of his sufferings and, provided "he be magnified in our body," let it be a matter of indifference to us "whether it be by life or by death."

***~~#1722~~***

***~~The Superscription Affixed to the Cross~~***

***~~[John 19:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.19-22).~~***

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

NOTHING was left undone which could add to the sufferings of our blessed Lord. From the tribunal at which he was condemned, he was hurried away to execution, and crucified between two most notorious malefactors, as being himself the vilest of the human race. This however served only to fulfill the Scripture, which had said, "He was numbered with the transgressors!

On such occasions it was common to place above the head of the criminal an inscription, by which all the spectators might know both his name and the crime for which he suffered. This was observed at the crucifixion of our Lord: and (as no circumstance respecting him is uninteresting) we shall call your attention to,

***~~I. The superscription put over him—~~***

This, however intended at first, must certainly be considered by us in a two-fold view:

***~~1. As an accusation against him—~~***

The principal charge which had been exhibited against him before Pilate, was, that he had professed himself to be "Christ, a King, [Luke 23:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.2)." On this point he had been interrogated by Pilate; and had "witnessed a good confession," acknowledging plainly, that he was a King, though his kingdom was not of this world, [John 18:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.36-37) and [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16). Pilate, seeing that this claim did not at all interfere with the temporal government of Caesar, considered it as unworthy of his attention; and therefore sought by all possible means to release him.

But the chief priests, being determined to prevail, represented this claim of his as an avowed hostility to Caesar; and declared that the protecting of Jesus was nothing less than treason, verse 12.

This terrified Pilate into a compliance with their wishes. He instantly consented to his death; and, according to custom, ordered the crime of which Jesus was accused to be affixed to his cross, in these memorable words, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews."

***~~2. As a testimony in his favor—~~***

As Caiaphas, when designing only to destroy Jesus, unconsciously declared the extensive benefits which would flow from his death, so Pilate, meaning only to inform the people for what reason Jesus was put to death, unintentionally attested his innocence. Had Jesus falsely pretended to be the King of the Jews, he would have been guilty of fraud and imposture: but as he really was what he claimed to be, the title placed over his head was nothing more than a plain truth, containing not only no crime at all, but not even the smallest charge of crime. What could be a stronger testimony in his favor than this?

The testimony itself contained the most important truth that could possibly be affirmed: it declared that Jesus was the King of Israel, that very King predicted in the prophets, [Jeremiah 23:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.5-6). [Zechariah 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 9.9), even "Messiah the Prince, who would be cut off, not for his own sins, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26)," but for the sins of others. And, that it might be universally known, it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin; (the three languages most known in the world at that time,) so that, in fact, *Pilate himself became the first preacher of a crucified Redeemer*.

Whether the precise mode of expressing the accusation was intentional on the part of Pilate, or not, we cannot but wonder at,

***~~II. The firmness of Pilate in relation to it—~~***

That the superscription would give great offence, we may easily conceive: for the priests, so far from acknowledging Jesus as their king, had got sentence of death pronounced against him for arrogating to himself that honor. They did indeed expect the promised Messiah, and supposed that he would erect a temporal kingdom among them; and this very expectation made them feel still more keenly the indignity which this inscription offered them; since it intimated, that any person who would hereafter attempt to rescue them from the dominion of Caesar, would be crucified in like manner.

Without delay they make known to Pilate their wishes upon the subject, and propose an alteration in the words: but behold, he is firm and immoveable: his only answer to them is, "What I have written, I have written."

Now to understand his answer aright, we must consider Pilate,

***~~1. As incensed against them—~~***

They had urged, and (so to speak) compelled him to give sentence against a man whom he knew to be innocent: and, being condemned in his own conscience, he could not but feel exceedingly displeased with them. The alteration which they proposed in the inscription was very trifling: it might have been made without in the least derogating from his authority: and, no doubt, if he had not been offended with them, Pilate would have readily complied. But to a person irritated, no concession appears trifling. He felt himself injured by them: and therefore would not give way, even for a moment. His pride was hurt, and he determined that he would make them sensible of his displeasure. Hence he not only refused their petition, but expressed his refusal in terms most authoritative, most contemptuous, and most repulsive.

***~~2. As over-ruled by God—~~***

Though perfectly free to follow the dictates of his own mind, he was undoubtedly under the influence of God; just as Balaam was, who though of himself disposed to curse Israel, was invariably constrained to bless them, [Numbers 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.18); [Numbers 22:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 22.38); [Numbers 23:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.8); [Numbers 23:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.11-12); [Numbers 23:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 23.26); [Numbers 24:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.10); [Numbers 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 24.13). The truth exhibited in that inscription was itself unalterable, and was to be proclaimed to every people of every language under Heaven. It was the corner-stone on which all mankind were to build their hopes: and therefore God, who had left Pilate to his natural timidity for the crucifying of his Son, now emboldened him to withstand their renewed solicitations, though in a matter of comparatively no importance, [Acts 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27-28).

Thus it was on that occasion, and thus it ever shall be; "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand, and he will do all his will." As far as "the wrath of man will praise him," he will allow it to act; but the remainder of it he will restrain.

***~~We may notice from hence,~~***

***~~1. What care God will take of his people—~~***

He permitted his Son to be put to death, because that was necessary for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes in the work of redemption. But he took care that all his enemies would attest his innocence: and where so small a concession as that before us might have counteracted their testimony, he makes Pilate, a poor shaking reed, as firm and immoveable as a rock.

Who then will be afraid to trust him? Who will not cheerfully commit his reputation, his interest, yes his very life, into the hands of such an almighty Friend? Know, beloved, that he is to his people both a sun and a shield; and that while he directs and invigorates them by his beams, he will protect and uphold them by his power: "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice, and the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."

***~~2. In what way they must attain to his kingdom—~~***

That which is the highest privilege of the saints, may be made the strongest article of accusation against them. In the primitive times, to be a Christian was to expose oneself to all manner of calumny and danger. And thus at this time, *to be numbered with the saints is to be classed with enthusiasts, fools, and hypocrites*. A man need have no other inscription over his head than, "This is one of the saints," and he shall never lack contempt or hatred. Let him call himself "a King," and men will be ready to cry out, "Crucify him! crucify him!" But this would not discourage us: it is the way the Savior trod before us.

We, like him, are kings, [Revelation 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.6); we have a crown and "a kingdom given to us, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29);" and in due time shall be "seated with Christ on his throne, even as he now sits on his Father's throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21)." But we must "suffer with him, if we would reign with him, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)." Even he, "though a Son, was made perfect through sufferings;" and we also must "go through much tribulation, before we can enter into the kingdom of Heaven, [Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22)."

Let us then consider what he endured for us; and "let us arm ourselves with the same mind, [1 Peter 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.1);" and let us rest assured, that, "if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together! [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)."

***~~#1723~~***

***~~Casting Lots for Our Lord's Vesture~~***

***~~[John 19:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.23-24).~~***

"When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did."

ON reading the history of our blessed Lord, we cannot but be struck with the extreme simplicity with which the most important circumstances of it are related. The historians never go out of their way to impress things on our minds; but leave truth to speak for itself. Even when they come to the last scene of his life, where we might have expected them to dilate upon his sufferings in order to affect our hearts, they pass over the whole transaction without a comment, and content themselves with barely mentioning the fact, that "he was crucified."

But, while they seem almost unfeeling towards their Divine Master, *they specify very minutely those occurrences which marked the accomplishment of prophecy*: and, as if indifferent about the agonies which he was enduring, they descend to tell us, how the soldiers who had nailed him to the cross occupied themselves in the disposal of his garments.

We would be ready to disregard this record as uninteresting and uninstructive: but no circumstance that took place at that time should be uninteresting to us; nor will this, if duly considered, be uninstructive. On the contrary, this very record will give us an insight into some of the deepest points that can be offered to our consideration.

It will give us an insight into,

***~~I. The nature of prophecy—~~***

Prophecy springs not from man's conjectures, but from a Divine revelation, 2 Peter 1:21. The prophets, so far from being the source and authors of their own predictions, could not even understand them, any farther than they were illuminated by that very Spirit by whose immediate agency they were inspired, 1 Peter 1:10-11. In some cases they were not even conscious that they foretold anything, [John 11:49-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.49-52). Perhaps this was the case much more frequently than is generally supposed.

Through the greatest part of the psalm quoted in our text, David spoke primarily respecting himself, though in some parts he was "moved by the Holy Spirit" to speak what had no reference at all but to the Messiah, whom he typified. That he did not understand his own expressions, we can have no doubt. He might perhaps be conscious that he was uttering that which would, in some way or other, have its accomplishment in the Messiah: but he had no clue in his own experience to lead him to the interpretation of his own words: he never had his "hands and feet pierced;" much less had he ever had his garments disposed of in the way he mentions, [Psalm 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.16); [Psalm 22:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.18).

Why then, it may be said, did he so express himself, that nobody could understand him, until the event had actually taken place? We answer, *it is of the very nature of prophecy to be obscure*; yes, it is altogether essential to the designs of prophecy: for suppose a prophecy to be perfectly clear, the friends of religion would be ready to exert themselves to fulfill it, as the enemies of religion would be to counteract it. Thus, if it were not accomplished, the religion which it was to support would be called an imposture; and, if accomplished, its accomplishment would be considered as the effect only of human prudence.

This is evident, from what actually took place in relation to the prophecies respecting the kingly office of Christ and his resurrection. The people who saw that he could feed multitudes with very small provision, and heal the sick of whatever malady they had, and even raise the dead, concluded that he was the king whom they expected to reign over the whole world; and therefore sought to make him a king by force: nor could he prevent it, but by withdrawing miraculously from their presence.

On the other hand, his enemies, who had heard him say that he would rise again the third day, set a guard around his grave on purpose to prevent it. In this manner persons would have acted in reference to all the prophecies, if all had been equally clear: and thus prophecy, as a means of establishing the true religion, would be superseded by a continued series of miracles; and Christianity would lose its strongest evidence and support.

The true nature of prophecy is not anywhere more clearly seen than in the passage before us: for, *until it was accomplished, no human being could understand its import; nor after its accomplishment could any one mistake it.*

***~~II. The origin of Christianity—~~***

Let any one who imagines Christianity to be a mere human contrivance, ask himself, whether any person, or set of persons, wishing to impose a religion upon the world, would be foolish enough to predict, that its founder's clothes would be disposed of in so strange a way? The event must he so entirely out of their own power, that they would never subject their imposture to such a test as this. But this event was predicted a thousand years before it came to pass; and the psalm in which it was contained was universally acknowledged by the Jews to refer to their Messiah.

How then can we account for its accomplishment? Is there any appearance of contrivance in the matter? None at all. The Jews put Christ to death for pretending to be their Messiah; and therefore would not at the same time contrive a plan that would prove him the Messiah. Besides, the thing was not done by Jews, but heathen; who were perfectly unconscious of doing anything worthy of attention. If Jesus had not happened to have a particular kind of garment, which was woven without a seam, and had probably been made a present to him by some of those women who ministered unto him—they would have had no more reason for casting lots for that, than for the other things they divided among them. And, after all, he had but just before been stripped of his clothing, not only to be scourged, but that, being arrayed in mock majesty, he might be made an object of universal derision; and in that dress had sentence of condemnation been passed upon him: so that, if God had not signally interposed to incline them to put his own garment upon him again, this prophecy would never have been fulfilled.

See then how minute was the prophecy, and how exact its accomplishment! If they had cast lots at all, the probability was that the whole would have formed but two lots, and that none would be torn in pieces: but as God ordained it to be, so it was; and from thence arises an indisputable evidence that the religion which was to be confirmed by it, was from God. Indeed, *the more insignificant the transaction itself was, the more decisive is the proof arising from it.*

In confirmation of this statement we would call your attention to the very words of our text; where the fulfilling of the Scripture is said to be the primary object of that arrangement: and again it is added, "These things therefore the soldiers did." We are not to understand from this, that the soldiers had this object in view; (for there was not anything further from their minds) but God inclined their minds to it for that end. *Everything which the Scriptures had spoken respecting the Messiah, must need be fulfilled*; and therefore this, as well as every other point, must be accomplished in him, [Luke 22:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.37). [John 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.35).

***~~III. The government of the universe—~~***

"Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world, [Acts 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.18)." Nothing was left to *chance*, but everything was both foreseen and foreordained.

It may be asked then, are we mere machines? I answer, No! God leaves us free agents; but makes use of our free agency for the accomplishment of his own purposes. This he did in reference to his Son. *There was not anything "done to him, which God's hand, and God's counsel, had not determined before to be done*, [Acts 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.28); [Acts 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.27); [Acts 13:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.29)." *Nevertheless, all who bore any part in those transactions, were perfectly free in everything they did*. None were compelled by any overbearing power; but all followed the bent of their own minds.

*Judas*was actuated by covetousness;  
the *priests*was actuated by envy; *Pilate*was actuated by fear; and  
the *soldiers*, who cast lots for one garment, while they divided the other in four parts, acted from a regard to greed.

But God made use of their respective weaknesses for the accomplishment of his own designs.

*It is in this manner that God is carrying on his plans on the great theater of the world*.

*Ambition*stimulates one; *jealousy*restrains another; *fear*paralyzes some, or *divisions*distract others.

But by all, God works his sovereign will, and renders all the dispositions and pursuits of men subservient to his own eternal purpose.

He uses the great conquerors now, precisely as he did Sennacherib of old, for the effecting of his own unerring counsels. "Howbeit, they mean not so, neither does their heart think so; but it is in their heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few, [Isaiah 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.7);" but "they are only his rod, and the staff of his indignation," which he will break and cast into the fire, as soon as they have executed their appointed task, [Isaiah 10:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5-6); [Isaiah 10:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.15-16).

It is thus also that God governs his Church. The very people who most labor to destroy it, are sometimes made unwilling instruments of its enlargement. This was particularly the case in the persecution that took place after the death of Stephen; when God rendered the scattering of the Christians the means of diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world, [Acts 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.3-4). And every individual, if he could trace back all the events of his former life, would find, that many circumstances, as little connected with religion as the curiosity of Zaccheus, [Luke 19:2-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.2-9), or the dishonesty of Onesimus, Philippians verse 10-18, have been *overruled by a gracious Providence for good*.

How little did these soldiers think of being witnesses for Christ! As little do we think that *everything, however small or casual, is ordered by God, and made a necessary link in the chain of his eternal counsels*. To everything he assigns its proper limit; "Hitherto shall you come, but no further." Men devise their way, "but the Lord directs their steps:" he draws them imperceptibly, but effectually; yet not as stocks and stones, but by means of their own understanding and will. "He draws them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love, [Hosea 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.4)."

It is not however for the formation of *theories*only that this subject is useful: it is equally beneficial in a *practical*view.

***~~We may Learn from it,~~***

***~~1. To adore God for his mercies to us in times past—~~***

*Who is it that has made us to differ from the most abandoned on earth, or the most miserable in Hell?* Is it not the Lord? and have not many of the occasions on which he has extended mercy to us been as much unsought for, and at the time unnoticed, as if we had been utterly independent of him? Let us remember then to whom we are indebted for all the temporal and spiritual blessings we enjoy: and let everything be improved by us "for the praise of the glory of his grace".

***~~2. To seek his guidance and protection in the future—~~***

Who can tell what consequences may ensue from one single step—perhaps the eternal preservation or ruin of our souls. Assuredly, if left to ourselves one moment, we shall fall and perish. But God sees effects in their causes; and in his eyes eternity itself is but a single point. In his hands then we shall be safe. Whatever enemies may menace our destruction, he will ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm. Only let us not lean to our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him, and he will "never leave us until he has fulfilled all the good things that he has spoken concerning us".

***~~3. To submit with cheerfulness to any dispensations, however adverse they may appear—~~***

The one who recollects the testimony of Joseph after all his multiplied afflictions, will not be ashamed of giving way to impatience under trials? "God sent me here before you," says he to his brethren, "to preserve life."

Above all, who that reflects on the outcome of our Savior's sufferings, will repine at being made a partaker of them? We have the promises of God on our side, "and the Scripture cannot be broken." We have our appointed measure to fill up, as well as he: and the termination of our trials will resemble his.

Let us wait then the Lord's leisure. If we see not distinctly what God's design is in this or that affliction, let it suffice, that "what we don't know now, we shall know hereafter." We have already seen abundant reason in past times to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted:" and the time is coming when we shall say the same in reference to our present trials. We shall see that every affliction was a necessary link in the chain of Providence, for the advancing of his glory in our salvation.

***~~#1724~~***

***~~Jesus Commends His Mother to John's Care~~***

***~~[John 19:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.26-27).~~***

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."

IN the hour of our Lord's crucifixion, when nearly the whole of his disciples had forsaken him, his female relatives adhered to him, and, together with John the beloved Disciple, preferred the pain and danger of a continued attendance on him, to the repose and safety of a disgraceful flight.

To this kindness of theirs, the dying Jesus was not insensible. On the contrary, he took that opportunity to secure to his mother a protector through all her remaining days; and to confer on John an honor, which even an angel might well have envied. The transaction, being one of the last in which the Savior was engaged, demands particular attention. We propose to consider it,

***~~I. As an emblem for our instruction—~~***

*Many of our Lord's miracles were certainly intended to shadow forth the spiritual blessings which he came to bestow*: and some of his actions also were plainly adapted to the same end. See [John 9:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.39); [John 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.8). We do not indeed assert, that such was the intention of the fact recorded in our text; yet we may without impropriety remark that it is well calculated to show,

***~~1. The care which Jesus takes of his suffering people—~~***

The time was now come, when, according to the prediction of the aged Simeon, "a sword pierced through the soul" of the virgin mother. But Jesus, though in the very agonies of death himself, was mindful of her, and committed her to one who would supply his place, and be to her as an affectionate and duteous son. His removal from this lower world has never diminished his concern for his afflicted people. As the High-priest of his Church, he is constantly attending to the interests of all its members. He is "not such a high-priest as cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." In the days of his flesh, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, though without sin, [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15);" and since, as well as before, his incarnation, "in all our afflictions he is afflicted, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9)." Are we in temporal distress? He engages that "bread shall be given us, and our water be sure, [Isaiah 33:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.16)." If our needs be of a spiritual nature, he assures us, that he will "never allow the soul of the righteous to famish, [Proverbs 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.3)," but will make all grace abound towards us, that we, "having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work, [2 Corinthians 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.8)."

***~~2. The subserviency of the whole creation to his will—~~***

Without hesitation, John accepted the trust; and no doubt he executed it with fidelity and joy. In like manner *the whole creation is ready to obey the command of Christ, and to fulfill his gracious appointments*. All the hosts of Heaven would, at the first intimation of his will, fly to our relief:

The *birds*of the air would sustain us, [1 Kings 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 17.4).

The *fish*of the sea would preserve us, [Jonah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.17).

The *clouds*would supply us with daily nutriment.

The *rocks*would give from their bosoms an unceasing stream for our support, [Nehemiah 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 9.20).

The very *enemies*of God and his people would open an asylum for us, in obedience to his word, "Let my outcasts dwell with you, Moab: be a covert to them from the face of the spoiler, [Isaiah 16:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 16.4)."

Hence he bids us "to cast our care on him;" and encourages the most destitute of mankind to expect from him a seasonable supply of all needful blessings, "Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive: and let your widows trust in me, [Jeremiah 49:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 49.11)."

Even though the foregoing views would not be thought necessarily connected with the subject, they are profitable in themselves, and are easily deducible from it: but no doubt at all can arise respecting this act of our Lord's,

***~~II. As a pattern for our imitation—~~***

Whatever Jesus did as the *Messiah*, was peculiar to himself; but whatever he did merely as a *man*, that is to be imitated by us; for "he set an example, that we would follow his steps." His Apostles also we are "to follow, as far as they were followers of him." Now the fact which is here recorded, affords us an excellent pattern,

***~~1. Of filial piety—~~***

Our Lord, during his youthful days, is particularly spoken of as having been "subject to his parents, [Luke 2:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.51);" and therein he has set an example to children in every age. But it is not in honoring their parents only, or in obeying their commands, that the duty of children consists; it is no less their duty to make provision for their parents, in case they would by any means be brought into circumstances to need support. This is particularly enjoined by God himself, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God, [1 Timothy 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.4)." This duty supersedes charity to others itself, on a supposition that the two are incompatible with each other: because the support of parents is an act of justice; it is a return which we are bound to make for all the care and kindness they exercised towards us in our early days: and *the claims of justice can never yield to those of generosity*. Indeed so indispensable is this duty, that if we do not perform it, we practically "deny the faith, and make ourselves worse than infidels! [1 Timothy 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.8)."

Moreover we would endeavor, as far as circumstances will admit of it, to make provision for our parents in the event of our own removal; so that we may requite them for all their love to us, while we were incapable of the smallest exertion for ourselves.

If our parents do not need support from us, we must not on that account imagine that our Lord's example is inapplicable to us; for that example shows equally, that it is our duty to consult the comfort of their minds, as well as the support of their bodies: and I pray God that all young people among us may lay this thought to heart!

***~~2. Of Christian charity—~~***

Though John had probably no great abundance for himself, he doubtless thankfully admitted the mother of our Lord to a participation of what he had; regarding her altogether as though she had been his own mother.

In this same light would we regard all the sons and daughters of affliction, especially "those who are of the household of faith." What our Lord said of all who did his Father's will, we, for his sake, should say also; "The same is my brother and sister and mother, [Matthew 12:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.50)." *We should consider the aged, the infirm, the young, the destitute, as having a claim upon us for all the aid that we can reasonably afford them out of the provision which God has made for us. We would look upon our property as a trust committed to our charge, to be improved for God, and to be accounted for to him in the day of judgment.*And, if the demands upon us be urgent, we must not on that account give grudgingly or of necessity, but rejoice that God has entrusted us with talents for such a blessed use.

As to *the comfort arising from such a use of our property, it is beyond all comparison greater than any that can arise from personal indulgence*. We entreat all therefore to seek their happiness in making others happy, and to tread in the steps of Him, who impoverished himself that he might enrich us! 2 Corinthians 8:9, and submitted to the most cruel death that we might inherit eternal life.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are afflicted—~~***

*Those who are most dear to the Lord, are often the most afflicted*. This was particularly the case with the mother of our Lord: and we are told in general, that "whom the Lord loves he chastens." It is possible too that he may bring us into troubles, from whence there appears not any probable method of escape; but he knows the fittest time to interpose in our behalf. He might have arranged matters for his mother long before: but he would not; because he knew what would be on the whole the fittest season.

Thus then let us wait the Lord's leisure, and be strong in faith, giving glory to him: and if at any time we be tempted to fear that he has forsaken and forgotten us, let us instantly check the dishonorable thought; believing that, though it is possible that a mother would forget her nursing child, it is not possible that He would ever be unmindful of us, [Isaiah 49:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.14-16). Nay, if, like Mary, we are brought into troubles for his sake, we shall receive from him "a hundred-fold in this world, and in the world to come eternal life! [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30)."

***~~2. Those who are at ease—~~***

If you were under the heaviest pressure of affliction yourselves, it would be no reason for being indifferent to the afflictions of others: but if God has been pleased to screen you from trials, you would be the more earnest in "bearing the burdens of others, that you may thereby fulfill the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2)."

Remember, that *sympathy is one of the finest feelings of our nature, and exceedingly fitted to purify us from our remaining dross*. Cultivate it then, and value every opportunity of exercising and strengthening that principle in your souls.

It is said by Solomon, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting:" and this witness is true. *Nothing tends more to create in us a thankful heart, than the seeing of the miseries to which others are exposed*. Are you then, like John, disciples beloved of your Lord? Then endeavor to tread in the steps of John: and if, with Peter, you are confident that you feel in yourselves a love to Christ, then comply with the command of Christ, and "feed his lambs, and feed his sheep, [John 21:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.15-17)."

***~~#1725~~***

***~~Our Savior's Death~~***

***~~[John 19:28-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.28-30).~~***

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*NOTHING but Divine grace can change the hearts of men!*

Signs and wonders may alarm and terrify, and may produce a momentary conviction on the mind; but unless the Spirit of God works in and by them, they will leave the soul unhumbled and unrenewed. It is probable that the darkness which prevailed during the three last hours of our Savior's life, produced an awe upon the minds of all; but yet it wrought no permanent change on any: for, when our blessed Lord poured out his soul anguish, his enemies mocked and insulted him, pretending to understand him as calling Elijah to his aid, when they could not but know that he was crying to his God. We might as easily mistake the sense of the words, "My God, My God," as they could mistake the import of "Eli, Eli," the resemblance of the sounds was merely a pretext for venting the malice that reigned in their hearts.

One more opportunity only remained for them to show the enmity that was in their minds against him; and they gladly embraced it: but in that very conduct they added another testimony to the truth of his Messiahship. Their conduct towards him in this particular had been the subject of prophecy; and, when that prophecy was fulfilled, there remained no further occasion for his continuance in the world: he therefore left the world, and went immediately to the bosom of his Father.

Two things are here presented for our consideration;

***~~I. The completion of prophecy—~~***

***~~There remained now but one prophecy to be accomplished—~~***

Everything relating to the incarnation, life, and death, of the Lord Jesus Christ had been foretold in the minutest manner; and everything, except that which is spoken in our text, had been fulfilled.

The thirst occasioned by his long and excruciating agonies both of body and mind, and the method used by his enemies to allay his thirst, had been particularly foretold by the Psalmist, [Psalm 22:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.14-15); [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21). To look for the accomplishment of these things in David is in vain. They never were fulfilled in David, or in any other person whatever, except the Lord Jesus Christ.

***~~That prophecy now received its accomplishment in Christ—~~***

The thirst predicted, came upon him: he complained of it: and the people filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it on a stalk of hyssop to his mouth. Before his crucifixion, his friends had offered him a drink of wine mixed with myrrh, as a cordial to support him under his sufferings; or rather as a stupifying potion to allay his pain. But of that he would not drink; because he would endure all that was necessary to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sins of men. Compare [Mark 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.23) with 36. The vinegar was presented to him by his enemies, who had no desire to sooth his anguish, but only to protract the period of his sufferings, and increase their weight. In this, however, they unconsciously fulfilled the prophecy concerning it, and thereby enabled our Lord to say, "It is finished!" All was now finished; all that was necessary to be done or suffered for the sins of men: and nothing remained, but to surrender up that life, which had answered all the ends for which it had been given.

Immediately upon this followed,

***~~II. The dissolution of our Lord—~~***

Two things are here particularly to be noticed;

***~~1. The voluntariness of his death—~~***

He had before expressly declared, that "no man could take away his life, but that he would lay it down of himself, [John 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.17-18)." And here the correspondence between the prediction and the event is clearly marked. Had the separation of his soul and body been occasioned altogether by his sufferings in a natural way, his strength would have gradually decayed, until he had sunk under them: but behold, immediately before his departure he cried out repeatedly with a loud voice; showing thereby, that his nature was not exhausted, but that *he resigned his soul voluntarily into his Father's hands*, [Matthew 27:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.50).

The Centurion who superintended his execution, was particularly struck with this, and was convinced by it that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world, [Mark 15:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.37); [Mark 15:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.39). The very terms used by Matthew to express his death confirm this idea. What we translate, "He yielded up the Spirit," is literally, "He dismissed his spirit:" so clearly did he manifest, even in death itself, that he was truly "the Lord and Prince of life! [Acts 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.15)."

***~~2. His confidence and composure—~~***

Though he had just complained of the hidings of his Father's face—yet he did not lose the consciousness that God was his Father: on the contrary, with dignified composure he committed his soul into his Father's hands, [Luke 23:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.46). Often had he spoken of going to his Father, just as a man would have spoken of going to a distant land, [John 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.16); [John 16:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.28); [John 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.11); [John 17:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.13); and now that his time was come, he meekly "bowed his head," and surrendered up his soul, having discharged his appointed office, and filled up his destined measure, both of active and passive obedience. How beautiful does death appear, when thus disarmed of its sting? O that we may be enabled thus to meet this *king of terrors*, and to welcome his arrival as the best of friends!

***~~Let this affecting subject be improved by us,~~***

***~~1. For the confirmation of our faith—~~***

*The wonderful minuteness of fulfilled prophecy, surveyed as it must be in the accomplishment of the predictions, affords the strongest ground for our faith and hope.*Peter laid great stress upon it in his addresses to the Jewish people, and urged the consideration of it as an encouragement to them to expect from Christ all the blessings of grace and glory, [Acts 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.18-19).

To you then would we make our appeal: in whom were these things ever verified, if not in Christ? or what room is there for doubt respecting his Messiahship, when he has fulfilled everything which the Messiah was either to do or suffer? I may add too, what doubt can exist respecting the accomplishment of all the promises to those who truly believe in him? Let us view him thus as "the Foundation which God has laid in Zion;" and let us expect from him whatever his grace has promised, and our necessities require.

***~~2. For the regulation of our conduct—~~***

We have seen the Savior's example both in life and death: and in conformity to that we would desire both to live and die. Let us not be anxious to depart from life, until we have completed the work which God has given us to do: On the other hand, let us not be afraid of death, but regard it as a departure to our Father's house. The words of David seem to have been referred to by our Lord on this occasion, and they are admirably suited to the case of a dying believer, [Psalm 31:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 31.5); and to one who can use them in faith, *death is nothing more than falling asleep in the bosom of our Lord*, [Acts 7:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59-60).

***~~#1726~~***

***~~Christ's Work Finished!~~***

***~~[John 19:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.30).~~***

"It is finished!"

THESE, with the exception of the words with which our blessed Lord commended his spirit into his Father's hands, were the last words which he spoke, previous to his death. In the original, they are comprehended in one word *ÔåôÝëåóôáé*; and since the foundation of the world there never was a single word uttered, in which such diversified and important matter was contained. Every word indeed that proceeded from our Savior's lips deserves the most attentive consideration: but this eclipses all. To do justice to it, is beyond the ability of men or angels: its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, are absolutely unsearchable. But that its import may be somewhat more clearly seen, we propose to show,

***~~I. The truths contained in it—~~***

Our blessed Lord not having expressly stated what he alluded to as *finished*, we are left to gather his meaning from a general view of that work which he came to accomplish. We understand then, that when he uttered this word, the following things were finished:

***~~1. The fulfillment of prophecy—~~***

Prophecy was of two kinds, one consisting of *typical institutions*, the other of *positive declarations*. Now both these kinds of prophecy received their accomplishment in the death of Christ.

1. Typical institutions: The brazen serpent, the daily sacrifice, the burning of the flesh of the sin-offerings outside the camp, with various other ordinances, shadowed forth the death of Christ by crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem; and at that moment, when our Lord was about to resign his spirit, were all fulfilled: for he was then "suffering outside the gate, [Hebrews 13:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.11-12);" and was "lifted up, that all who believed in him might be healed" of their wounds, [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15); and was "the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29)."

2. Positive declarations: The declarations of the prophets were so numerous and minute, that a history of our Lord might be compiled from them, fuller, in many respects, than is contained in any one of the Evangelists.

The person that betrayed him,  
the manner in which his trial would be conducted,  
the sufferings he would undergo previous to the final execution of his sentence,  
the death to which he would be doomed,  
the persons in whose company he would suffer,  
the manner in which his clothes would be disposed of,  
the very taunts with which he would be insulted in his dying hour  
—were all fulfilled as exactly, as if the agents in this bloody tragedy had designed to accomplish the predictions concerning him.

There remained only one single prophecy to be fulfilled—and who would have conceived that ever that would be fulfilled? It was customary for the friends of the persons who were executed to give them "wine mingled with myrrh," in order to blunt the edge of their sufferings: and the friends of our Lord had offered him such a potion; but he would not drink of it, because he would do nothing that would have a tendency to diminish his sufferings, [Mark 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.23); but when, in his last moments, he said, "I thirst!" the cruel soldiers, wishing only to mock him, and augment his anguish, [Luke 23:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.36), dipped a sponge in vinegar, and gave him that to drink; and thus fulfilled that prophecy of David, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink, [Psalm 69:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.21). This done, no other prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and therefore our Lord instantly said, "It is finished!"

***~~2. The work of Redemption—~~***

Two things were undertaken by our Lord, and were to be done by him in order to man's redemption:

1. the *penalties*of the law were to be *endured*by him, in order that Divine justice might be satisfied for our sins;

2. the *demands*of the law were to be *obeyed*by him, in order that sinners, who could have no righteousness of their own, might be made righteous in him.

Both of these things were now completed:

1. Our blessed Lord had *obeyed the law*in its fullest extent: not the smallest defect could be found in him: man could find none; Satan could find none; God himself could find none: for "he did always the things that pleased the Father;" and "in him was no sin." By his obedience, the law, which we had violated, was "magnified and made honorable:" and "a righteousness was brought in," a righteousness which shall be unto all and upon all them that believe, and which is amply sufficient for the justification of all who trust in it.

2. Moreover all was now endured that was necessary to make an atonement for our sins. Did we deserve shame, and condemnation, and misery? Did we deserve to have the face of God hid from us, and the vials of his wrath poured out upon us, and to be consigned over to everlasting death? All this he suffered, as far as was compatible with his nature, and as far as was necessary for the satisfaction of Divine justice. He was not indeed actually dead; but the moment was arrived for his surrendering up his life; and therefore he could properly say, "It is finished!"

***~~3. The salvation of man—~~***

All that was necessary for man's salvation was now effected. Nothing remained to be done, in order to the perfecting of his work on earth, or to the forming of a perfect ground for man's acceptance with God.

It is true, that man must REPENT: but he need not to repent in order to make satisfaction for his sins: no repentance of man can add to the value of Christ's sacrifice. *Men must repent, in order to justify God in the denunciations of his wrath, and to evince their abhorrence of their past ways, and to bring their souls to a fit state for the enjoyment of God's mercy*. But to atone for sin, he needs not to repent: the offering of the body of Jesus Christ upon the cross is a sufficient atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

It is true also, that man must OBEY: but he need not to obey in order to form for himself a justifying righteousness before God: he can never add to the perfection of Christ's righteousness; and any attempt to add to it will defeat, instead of furthering, his acceptance through it. Whatever obedience men may render for the honoring of God, and the adorning of their profession, they must renounce it utterly in point of dependence, and must look for salvation solely through the righteousness of Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9).

Nothing remains for man but to accept the salvation which Christ has purchased: and if he is enabled in his last hour (like the dying thief) to rely on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, he shall as assuredly be saved, as if he had repented and obeyed a thousand years. We do not say this to lessen the importance of repentance and obedience (for in their proper place they are of infinite importance); but only to explain and vindicate our Lord's assertion in the text.

The meaning of our Lord's declaration being ascertained, let us bring forth,

***~~II. The truths to be deduced from it—~~***

Selecting such inferences only as are most prominent, we observe,

***~~1. That there is a sure ground of hope for all who feel their need of mercy—~~***

If persons of a desponding frame would state what they could wish God to do for them, in order to remove their fears; we are well persuaded, not only that everything they can desire has been already done, but that *infinitely more has been done for them than they could even ask or think*.

Would they have an atonement made for their sins, even such an atonement as shall perfectly satisfy Divine justice, and discharge the utmost farthing of their debt? We must say to them, 'It is done;' "It is finished!"

Would they have a perfect righteousness wrought out for them? Would they be invited and commanded by God himself to clothe themselves with it as a robe, so that not even the piercing eye of God would be able to behold a spot or blemish in them? "It is finished!"

Would they have the gift of the Holy Spirit purchased for them, so that they may be assured of almighty aid in all their difficulties and conflicts? "It is finished!" Let them state what they will, (provided it be really calculated to inspire confidence, and suited to the condition of the Church militant,) and we do not hesitate to say respecting it, "It is finished!" Why then would any despond, as though their *guilt*were too great to be forgiven, or their *corruptions*too strong to be subdued? Let the humble and contrite only reflect on this dying declaration of our Lord, and they can never lack encouragement to trust in him.

***~~2. That they in whom a good work is begun, have reason to hope that it shall be carried on and perfected to the day of Christ—~~***

The work of bringing sinners to repentance, and of renewing them after the Divine image, is committed to Christ. "He is exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins." In him, according to the Father's appointment, all fullness dwells; and out of his fullness all his people are to receive the grace that shall be needful and sufficient for them.

Now if in the arduous work which Christ undertook to do for men, he persisted until he could say, "It is finished!" why would he not do the same in the work that he has engaged to accomplish in them? If he stops short in this, it must be either from a lack of *power*, or a lack of *inclination*, to persist in it.

But it cannot be from lack of *POWER*; since it is surely an easier thing to preserve life than to give it; and therefore if he have given it, he cannot want power to maintain it.

Nor can it be from a lack of *INCLINATION*; for, if he had not been carried on by an irresistible inclination to save us, he would not have persisted in his former work; he would have put away the bitter cup from his lips, instead of drinking it, as he did, to the very dregs. If therefore he drew not back in the former case, we may be sure he will not in this case: he will never cease from working effectually in us, until he can say, "It is finished!"

That this deduction is clear and scriptural, we have very abundant evidence. The prophet declares, that "He who has laid the foundation of the spiritual temple, will also finish it:" and that he will bring forth the top-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace, unto it! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7); [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9)."

On this account the Apostle also calls him, "The Author and Finisher of our faith;" and declares himself "confident of this very thing, that He who has begun the good work, will perform it until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." Let believers then "cast their care on Him who cares for them," and know assuredly, that "he will keep the feet of his saints, and perfect that which concerns them."

***~~3. That those who have obtained mercy have the strongest possible incentive to maintain good works—~~***

We have before stated, that Christ has done everything that was necessary for man's salvation; and that nothing remains for man to add to the finished work of Christ. But we also noticed, that, though man has nothing to do for the purpose of meriting salvation, or for laying a foundation of his acceptance with God—yet in other points of view he has abundant occasion to work; yes, he is commanded to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling."

*We have no other way of proving the truth of our faith, or the sincerity of our love—than by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.*

Shall this then be thought a wearisome task by any of us? Shall we wish to intermit our labors, or to stop short of the highest attainments? Surely not! For if Christ finished the work assigned him, because of his love to us, we can do no less than persist in our work, whereby we are to evidence our love to him. Let us then "go on towards perfection:" let us "forget what is behind, and press forward towards that which is before:" let us "work while our day lasts;" that in the evening of our life we may be able to say with Christ, "Father, I have glorified you on earth, I have finished the work which you have given me to do."

Then, while hypocrites and apostates shall take up this expression in reference to their hopes of salvation, and say, "My day of grace is finished, and all possibility of obtaining mercy is finished;" we shall shout in Heaven, "It is finished, it is finished!" "fears, temptations, conflicts, are all finished!" "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" and nothing now remains to me but an eternity of uninterrupted happiness and glory!

***~~#1727~~***

***~~The Treatment of Our Lord's Body on the Cross~~***

***~~[John 19:31-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.31-37).~~***

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

*UNSEARCHABLE is the depravity of the human heart*. Who that had not seen it recorded in the Holy Scriptures, would conceive it possible, that those who felt no remorse for having crucified the Lord of Glory, would yet pretend to feel such reverence for the Sabbath-day, as not to endure the thought of its being profaned by his body remaining on the cross on that day?

*Horrid hypocrisy!* This was indeed to "strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel."

What if there were extraordinary reasons for sanctifying that day, as being the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? [Leviticus 23:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.5-7); [Leviticus 23:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.15-16). Could they be supposed to operate on a mind that was dead to all sense of justice or of mercy? But all was wisely ordered and overruled by God, who by this means wrought more effectually to the establishing of the claims of Jesus to the Messiahship: for from hence arose their singular treatment of our Lord's body; which, together with the instruction to be gathered from it, will form the subject of our present discourse.

Let us consider,

***~~I. Their singular treatment of our Lord's body—~~***

***~~It was truly singular—~~***

The Romans were accustomed to leave upon the cross those who were so put to death, in order that they might be devoured by birds of prey. Agreeably therefore to their customs, the bodies of Jesus and of the malefactors would have been kept upon the cross. But the Jews, who on some occasions put persons to death by hanging, were forbidden to keep them on the tree all night, [Deuteronomy 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 21.23); and, as the next day was so great a day, they thought it right to interest themselves with the governor to adopt on that occasion the Jewish plan, instead of the Roman plan; proposing however, that the legs of the crucified persons would be broken, in order to effect and secure their death; thus making up by increased agony what might be equivalent to the longer duration of their misery.

Permission is granted; the order given; and in part executed: the legs of both the malefactors were broken; but, our Lord being already dead, the soldiers forbore to execute this order upon him. But one of the soldiers, wantonly and of his own mind, thrust a spear into his side; from whence issued a stream of blood and water; the water flowing from the pericardium, and the blood from the heart itself.

Now this we call singular: for it was strange, that an order given in relation to him as well as the other two, would be executed on them, and not on him; and it was strange also that an unauthorized act of violence would be committed upon him, and not on them: for, if done to them, it would have been an act of mercy; but, as done to him, it was only an act of malice, as impotent as it was inhuman.

***~~But God had wise ends in permitting this—~~***

There were prophecies yet remaining to be accomplished: and it was necessary that every part of Scripture would be fulfilled. Now it had been ordained respecting the paschal lamb, that "not a bone of it would be broken, [Exodus 12:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 12.46). [Numbers 15:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.12)." This lamb was intended to be a type of Christ; and that peculiar appointment in the type must be verified in the antitype: and, if not verified in him, Christ's claim to the Messiahship must be void.

Behold then, how nearly Jesus' title to the Messiahship was destroyed! The proposal of breaking the legs was made, and acceded to, in reference to him as well as to the malefactors who were crucified with him: it was also executed first on one of the malefactors, then on the other. Why does not the man proceed? Why does he presume to disobey the order? Who has told him to exercise his own discretion? Who interferes about the matter, or attempts either to restrain or to dissuade the executioner. *Had he but given the intended blow, there had been an end to all Jesus' pretensions to the Messiahship. But an invisible hand restrained him; God himself overruled his mind; and therefore overruled it, that the Scripture might not be broken.*

But why does one of the soldiers take upon him to offer an indignity to the body of Jesus, without any commission or order from his superiors? There was another prophecy to be fulfilled, which had said that the Jews would look on Him whom they had pierced, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10);" therefore God put it into the heart of his enemies to do to him what they did not to the others, and to refrain from doing to him what they did to the others; to do to him what they were not ordered, and to refrain from doing what they were ordered.

If this also had not been done, our Lord's claim to the Messiahship would have failed; and equally so, if the spear, instead of piercing between the bones, had struck a rib. But there are no such things as *mistakes*, where God's will is concerned: for *though every person is a free agent in what he does, he acts no less certainly, than if God used him as an involuntary machine!*"God's counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure [Isaiah 46:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 46.10)." The Scriptures had spoken these things, and it was not possible that "one jot or tittle of them would fail."

The more minutely we consider this subject, the more important will appear,

***~~II. The instruction to be gathered from it—~~***

While the foregoing circumstances evince the universal agency of God's providence, they are particularly suited to show us,

***~~1. What grounds we have for hope—~~***

The preceding circumstances fully establish the Messiahship of Jesus. But here arises a question: How do I know that he really died? I know that he was to "pour out his soul unto death, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12);" but am I sure that he really died? I know that just before the time he was supposed to die, he spoke repeatedly with so loud a voice, as clearly to prove that his strength was by no means exhausted: I know that "Pilate himself marveled at his being reported to be so soon dead." Am I sure then that he was not merely in a swoon? for if that were the case, all that he did and suffered can be of no avail for my salvation.

If he did not die, he did not atone for sin. If he did not die, the story of his resurrection is false; and, as the Apostle himself has said, our faith is vain. But, blessed be God! we are not left to entertain any such doubts: for the officious malice of the soldier who pierced him to the heart, put it beyond a possibility of doubt.

Had Jesus been in perfect health, this wound must have killed him instantly: and so publicly was it given, that amidst all the falsehoods invented by the Jews to justify their rejection of him, they never thought of saying that he did not die. Behold then, this point is clear: the Messiah was to die; and this person, to whom so many testimonies were given, did really die; "he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The atonement then that was to be made for sin, was really made: the debt due for our iniquities was discharged: and since "He who knew no sin was made a sin-offering for us, we, who have no righteousness, may be made the righteousness of God in him."

***~~2. What blessings we are to expect—~~***

The Apostle's solicitude to impress our minds with the things which he beheld, marks unquestionably the importance of them. He declares that his testimony was founded, not on report, but on ocular demonstration; and he demands credit of us upon that ground. But what was it which he so particularly noticed? Was it the wound inflicted with the spear? No, it was the flowing of water and of blood from the wound. And why was he so particular in the mention of it? it was because there was a deep mystery contained in it, even a typical exhibition of those blessings which we are to receive from him.

If we look into the Scriptures, we shall find our *justification*constantly ascribed to his blood, as cleansing us from sin, [Romans 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.9). [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7); [Ephesians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.13). [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14). [1 Peter 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.19). [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5).

And, in like manner, our *sanctification*as uniformly ascribed to his Spirit, [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9); [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13). [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27).

Under the law, these two blessings, together with the mode of their conveyance to our souls, were typified by the blood of the sacrifices, which purged from *guilt*—and by the various washings, which cleansed from *defilement*: and they were distinctly promised to the Church by express declarations of God himself, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1). [Ezekiel 36:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-26).

At the introduction of the Christian dispensation, they were mystically represented by the event of which we are speaking, where the blood and water, though flowing in one stream, were distinctly seen. This surprising appearance was designed to show, that *both blessings flow equally from the pierced side of Christ. They flow together, to show, that we are not to expect the one without the other; and they are kept distinct, to show, that the blessings are perfectly distinct, and must never be confounded.*

We will endeavor, in a few words, to render this more clear. Faith and holiness are distinct things, even as blood and water are distinct. Faith is necessary to procure for us a title to Heaven; and holiness is necessary to make us fit for Heaven: moreover, we must apply to ourselves the blood, in order to obtain the one; and we must also be sprinkled with the water, in order to obtain the other, [Hebrews 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22).

We must take care also not to mix the two: it is the blood alone that justifies, and the Spirit alone who renews. Our justification by faith will not supersede the necessity of holiness; nor will our renovation by the Spirit supersede the necessity of faith in Christ.

We must understand the proper offices of each; and must keep each in its proper place: only we must remember, that *they both flow from the wounded side of Christ; and that Christ is the only fountain from whence either the one or the other can be derived*.

It is possible that this interpretation may appear fanciful: but it will no longer be thought so, if only we consult the exposition which John himself has given us of this mystery: "This," says he, "is He who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood, [1 John 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.6);" from whence we may fairly infer, that "what God has so joined together, we must never attempt to put asunder."

***~~3. What dispositions we are to cultivate—~~***

The latter prophecy referred to in our text says, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced:" and the prophet adds, "They shall mourn and be in bitterness, as one mourns for his only son." Now this shows the two dispositions which we would exercise towards our adorable Lord and Savior: we would "look to him" with penitence and faith. *Never can we mourn too deeply, when we reflect that it was our sin that crucified the Lord of glory*: the Jews and Romans were the instruments; but our iniquities were the cause of all his sufferings: "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities" Nay more, by our sins we have "crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)."

If then we feel that the Jews have cause to mourn, how would we mourn, who have done that with our eyes open, which they did only through the blindness and ignorance of their hearts! Yet, while we mourn and are in bitterness, we would not forget that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, that he "bore them all in his own body on the tree," and that, by becoming a curse for us, he has redeemed us from the curse which our sins had merited. We should resemble the penitent under the law, who, while he presented his sacrifice to God and confessed over it his sins, put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice, and transferred his guilt to that as his substitute and surety.

Thus would we do: in our view of Christ upon the cross, we would unite penitence and faith: to separate the two will destroy their efficacy altogether: *an impenitent faith, and an unbelieving penitence, will leave us in no better state than that of devils*, of whom James says, that "they believe and tremble, [James 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19)." Let us then cultivate these dispositions to our dying hour; and look unto Jesus with *penitential faith*, and with *believing penitence*.

***~~#1728~~***

***~~The Burial of Jesus~~***

***~~[John 19:38-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.38-42).~~***

"Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there."

THE smallest circumstances relative to the life and death of our blessed Lord may well be supposed to deserve peculiar attention: but the mere interment of his body one would imagine might be passed over as a matter of no importance. Yet we find our Lord himself repeatedly referring to it during the course of his ministry. He mentions the indispensable necessity of his interment, in order to complete the purposes of his grace, [John 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.24); he specifies the term of his intended continuance in the heart of the earth, [Matthew 12:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.40); and he commends the fervent love of Mary in pouring ointment on his head, as a prophetic, though not an intended, preparation for his burial, [Matthew 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.12). In fact, the inspired history does not record anything more minutely and circumstantially than the funeral of our Lord: and the more carefully we attend to what is spoken respecting it, the more interesting and instructive it will appear. Let us consider then,

***~~I. The peculiar circumstances of his interment—~~***

In the moment when our Lord seemed abandoned by all, except a few women and his beloved Disciple, and when, as it would appear, no motive could any longer exist for showing a regard for him, God raised up two persons of eminence and distinction to pay that respect to him when dead, which had been refused to him when living. One of these persons is very particularly described: the different Evangelists being consulted, we learn his name and place of abode: he was "Joseph of Arimathea," or Ramah, in the tribe of Ephraim, the birth-place and residence of Samuel.

Next, we have his rank and condition: he was "a rich man, and an honorable counselor," one of the Jewish Sanhedrin, [Luke 23:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.50-51).

Further, we are informed of his character and conduct: he was "a just and good man," who, when the Sanhedrin had condemned our Lord as guilty of death, "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them."

Lastly, mention is made of his principles and attainments: he was "a disciple of Christ," who even then, when the Apostles had lost all thought that Christ's kingdom would ever be established, actually "waited for the kingdom of God," in expectation that it would yet appear. Compare [Matthew 27:57-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.57-60). [Mark 15:42-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.42-46) and [Luke 23:50-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.50-53) with the text. This person went in "boldly" to Pilate, and begged to have the body of Jesus at his disposal. This conduct of his manifested a considerable degree of fortitude: for it could not but be very offensive to the rest of the Jewish council to see one of their own body paying funeral honors to one, whom, but a few hours before, they had condemned and crucified as a malefactor. Besides, if Jesus would rise again according to the expectations that had been formed, he would infallibly be accused as a confederate with the other disciples, and as having assisted them in stealing away the corpse from the tomb.

Pilate, not believing that Jesus was so soon dead, sent for the centurion who superintended the execution, to inquire respecting it: and, on being assured by him that he was really dead, and that, subsequent to his death, he had been stabbed to the heart with a spear, he gave his consent.

Joseph therefore went and took down the body, and wrapped it in some fine linen which he had bought for the purpose. But in this he was assisted by another person of eminence, *Nicodemus*by name, "the same man who, three years before, had come to Jesus by night," to inquire into his doctrine; and who on one occasion had befriended him before the Jewish council, by stating that the Jewish law did not admit of any person being condemned until after an opportunity of vindicating his own innocence had been afforded him, [John 7:50-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.50-52). This man "bought a large quantity of myrrh and aloes, and other spices, about an hundred pound weight;" and, together with Joseph, wrapped up the dead body in it for the present, intending, probably after the Sabbath, to embalm it with greater care.

Joseph, after the custom of the Jews, had provided a new tomb, hewn out of a rock: and, it being near to the place where Jesus was crucified, he deposited the body there: and, for the sake of decency and security, rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher.

Such is the account given us of the burial of our Lord: and at first sight perhaps it may appear, if not uninteresting, at least destitute of any important instruction. But we shall not be of this opinion, if we duly weigh, as we propose to do,

***~~II. The practical benefits resulting from it—~~***

There is not a single circumstance in this account which is not very important; and the whole taken together is of singular use,

***~~1. To establish our faith—~~***

Two things are necessary to be ascertained, before we can have just grounds for our faith in Christ; namely, first, the truth of the facts recorded concerning him; and next, the agreement of those facts with the prophecies of the Old Testament.

Now the main facts to be ascertained, are the death and the resurrection of Jesus: for, if he did not *die*, he has made no atonement for our sins; and, if he did not *rise again*, we have no evidence that his atonement has been accepted in our behalf. But behold how these facts are contained in the history before us!

Pilate had doubts respecting the death of Jesus; and would not consent to Joseph's request, until the point was ascertained from the very person whom he had appointed to superintend the execution. Had there been a spark of life in the body, the enemies of Jesus would not have given it into the possession of his friends; nor would his friends have consigned it to the tomb. His death therefore was proved beyond a doubt; nor was the truth of his resurrection less clearly manifested: for the tomb was new; and we are repeatedly told, that no corpse had ever yet been laid in it. Had there been any other corpse there, the resurrection of Jesus might have been ascribed to that; as the restoration of a dead body to life was effected by its being brought in contact with the bones of the Prophet Elisha, [2 Kings 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 13.21); or it might have been affirmed that it was the other corpse, and not that of Jesus, that revived. But, when there never had been any other corpse deposited there, the resurrection of Jesus could not be confounded with that of any other person; nor could it be ascribed to any other power than his own.

Moreover, the sepulcher being hewn out of solid rock, was inaccessible, except at that entrance which was stopped by the stone, and guarded by the band of soldiers: had it been accessible in any other way, there might have been some plausibility in the story that the corpse was stolen from it by the disciples; but the very nature of the grave precluded a possibility of removing the body from it, without the knowledge of the Roman guard.

Thus far then the facts are clear: and now *mark their correspondence with the voice of prophecy*. It had been expressly foretold, that, though Christ would be "numbered with transgressors," and have "his grave appointed with the wicked: yet with the rich would be his tomb." See [Isaiah 53:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.9). This was as improbable as any event that could be conceived: the order was the same in relation to him as to the other malefactors, that his bones would be broken, and that he would be dealt with precisely in the way that the others were: yet behold, at the very instant when this prophecy appeared to have failed, God put it into the heart of "a rich man," already provided with a tomb, near to the very place, to ask permission to inter the body, and actually to inter it in his own tomb!

Surely, if the minute accomplishment of prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus were duly considered, it would not be possible for any human being, whether Jew or Gentile, to entertain a doubt respecting the truth of his Messiahship: yet is this but one point of a hundred whereon our faith rests, and whereby it may be established.

***~~2. To confirm our hope—~~***

Many are the prophecies relating to the Church at large, and the promises relating to every individual believer, which yet remain to be accomplished, and for the accomplishment of which no visible means exist.

Look at the state of the world, and see how impracticable, humanly speaking, the idea is, of forming the whole race of mankind into one great society, who shall all acknowledge the Lord Jesus as their Supreme Head, and trust in him as their only Savior, and serve him with their whole hearts, and enjoy and glorify him with their whole souls.

Or look at any individual believer, and see his manifold corruptions, his innumerable temptations, his potent enemies: how can we conceive that he shall ever attain the Divine image, and triumph over all the powers of earth and Hell?

Yet we may see in the history before us, that God will never lack means to effect his gracious purposes. He who raised up a Moses in the very court of Pharaoh, to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage; and foretold Cyrus even by name, three hundred years before he was born, as the destined Restorer of his people from their captivity in Babylon; and raised up Esther, in so astonishing a way, in the house of Ahasuerus, to save the whole Jewish nation from destruction; may safely be trusted to accomplish his own purposes in his own time and way.

We have no occasion to inquire, How shall he do this or that? it is quite sufficient that he has promised: and it is our privilege to know, that "what he has promised he is able also to perform;" and that of all the good things which he has authorized us to expect, "not one shall ever fail." See [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14).

***~~3. To enlarge our charity—~~***

We are too apt to judge of things according as they appear to us, without considering how limited our views are, and how incompetent we are to judge aright. If we see not many who openly acknowledge God, we are ready to think the number of his worshipers much fewer than they really are. The Prophet Elijah erred in this respect: he thought that he stood alone in Israel, and that all besides himself were idolaters; whereas God informed him that there were no less than seven thousand men in Israel who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal.

And we, if we had lived at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, would have concluded, that among the great council of the Jewish nation, who condemned him to death, there was not one who was not a decided enemy of the Lord Jesus. But the history shows, that there were two persons of great eminence among them, who were truly pious, though they had been restrained by fear from making a public profession of their sentiments.

We must not be understood as intending to justify or excuse the fear of man; for it is certainly a great and heinous sin; and a man who is ashamed of Christ, and denies Christ now, has reason to fear that Christ will be ashamed of him, and deny him at the last day.

But still it is comfortable to think that God has many "hidden ones" even among his most inveterate enemies, and many who will perhaps come forth at a future period with more "boldness," and to more effect, than others who have made an open profession of his truth.

I say again, We mean not to extenuate the guilt of cowardice; but still it is a fact that many persons, whose cowardice we deplore, have opportunities of rendering services to God which they could never have rendered, if their profession of religion had been more avowed: and therefore, while we lament the weakness of the religious principle within them, we must neither judge them too severely, nor undervalue their real worth. We must make just allowance for those who are in high official stations, whose difficulties are thereby greatly increased. We must not despise the day of small things; but must rather bear with the infirmities of the weak; and rejoice in the hope that those who are yet but "babes in Christ," will, in God's time, become men and warriors, and "valiant for the truth." Many, like Paul, are training in the ranks of Christ's enemies, who shall one day come forth as champions to fight and conquer in his cause!

***~~4. To reconcile us to the thoughts of death—~~***

Death is universally regarded as "the king of terrors." Our nature revolts at the idea of being committed to the tomb. But why should we shudder at it, when we see the Lord of life and glory going down into the heart of the earth? Surely he has perfumed and sanctified the grave: and *we may well be satisfied to be conformed to him in his death, when we have the blessed prospect of resembling him also in his resurrection*. He indeed "saw no corruption" there; whereas we shall be devoured by worms, and return to our native dust: but then this will be only for a time; for we shall surely at the last day be raised again, and "that which was sown in weakness, dishonor, and corruption, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory!" Yes, "this mortal body shall be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," and, together with our souls, be made partaker of everlasting felicity. All that we have to be concerned about, is, to be ready for the change; to seek a saving interest in that adorable Savior who died for us, and to get an experimental "knowledge of him in the power of his resurrection," that, "being rendered conformable to his death, we may by any means attain the resurrection of the dead, [Philippians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10-11)."

We condemn not the respect shown to departed friends, when we consign them to the grave. The pomp and splendor indeed of some funerals are an insult, rather than an honor, to the putrefying remains of one who is paying the penalty of sin. But a modest respect is due to that, which lately was a temple of the living God, and which shall before long be restored, in perfect purity, to the full enjoyment of his presence. Yet we need not be solicitous about this: let us only be anxious whether for ourselves or others, to "fall asleep in Jesus;" and then, whether honored or not in our funeral rites, we shall be raised, through him, to endless felicity and glory.

***~~#1729~~***

***~~Character of Nicodemus~~***

***~~[John 19:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.39).~~***

"He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds."

IT is generally supposed, that by conversion a man's character is *altogether*changed. But this is by no means true. Divine grace gives a *new direction*to a man's natural powers; but it does not divest him of them, so that he shall altogether cease to be the same as he was before. His moral dispositions, so far as they were evil, will be corrected; and, so far as they were good, will be improved: but the natural temperament of his mind will remain in a great measure the same as it was in his unconverted state, only under the control of a higher and better principle.

For instance, a bold and confident Peter will carry into his religious profession the same boldness and precipitancy which characterized him as a natural man: and, for the most part, a man's besetting sins (due allowance being made for a change of age and circumstances) will prove his besetting sins even to his dying hour. In conduct, the lion will become a lamb; but the disposition of courage or timidity will still adhere to each, according to his natural bias. Yet sometimes these matters shall be reversed, as we see in the history before us.

At the period of our Lord's lowest extremity, when he hung dead upon the cross, a cowardly Nicodemus united with another no less timid than himself, Joseph of Arimathea, to honor the Savior, whom the intrepid Peter had forsaken, and denied even with oaths and curses.

To cast further light upon this subject, I shall,

***~~I. Consider the character of Nicodemus—~~***

He was a man of very considerable distinction, at the time of our Lord's death. In his religious profession he was a Pharisee; in his civil station he was a member of the great council of the nation, and a ruler and teacher in a synagogue; and in the habit of his mind, a candid and honest man. Having heard of the miracles which the Lord Jesus had wrought, he concluded, that a person endued with such powers must necessarily have come from God, and, consequently, must have much religious information to impart. He determined, therefore, to obtain an interview with Jesus, and learn from him whatever he was commissioned to reveal. And, when he went to Jesus, he, though possessed of such rank and authority himself, addressed that despised and persecuted Teacher by the respectful appellation of "Rabbi;" confessing his belief in him as a Teacher sent from God. Thus far all was well. But there were in Nicodemus *two great defects*, to which I must now call your attention:

***~~1. His cowardice—~~***

Twice is Nicodemus mentioned after that interview; and both times is he stigmatized as the person that "went to Jesus by night. Compare [John 7:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.50)." In this he acted most unworthily. As a man of integrity, he would not have been ashamed of doing what was right, or afraid of any censure he might incur by following the dictates of his own conscience.

What have we to do with man's opinion? We would approve ourselves to God, without so much as thinking, and much less fearing, what man may either say or do.*It is the happiness of the Christian that he has none to fear, but God*.

But wherever Christ comes in the ministration of the word, there are too many who are like-minded with Nicodemus; and are kept from seeking instruction for their souls, through "that fear of man which brings a snare." Many will not even go so far as he. They have an inward conviction that this or that minister is really sent of God, and has most valuable information to impart; and yet they neither dare to hear him in public, nor to visit him in private, lest it would be known that they are inquiring after truth. Sad enemies are these to their own welfare, while they deprive themselves of opportunities which God has afforded them for the instruction and salvation of their souls! They may avoid the censure of men; but they have a stigma fixed upon them by God; and they have reason to fear that that Savior, "whom they thus deny before men, will deny them before his Father and his holy angels, [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38)."

***~~2. His unbelief—~~***

Our blessed Lord, instead of reproaching him for his cowardice, immediately opened to him that doctrine which he most needed to hear, and which was of most immediate importance to one of his caste and complexion.

Being himself a teacher of religion, and of that sect which was highest in repute for sanctity, he would of course think that he needed only some particular instruction which Jesus might have been commissioned to impart. But our blessed Lord told him, and with the strongest asseverations assured him, that he needed altogether a new birth; and that, without being born both, of water and of the Spirit, he could neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God. This, it might have been expected, Nicodemus would be well acquainted with: for the prophets, with whose writings he was so conversant, had most distinctly affirmed it, [Jeremiah 31:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.32-33). [Ezekiel 36:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-26). But Nicodemus could not at all comprehend such mysterious truths: he foolishly thought that our Lord must refer to some natural birth which his followers were to experience; and when our Lord explained himself more fully by a comparison which was familiar to all, and told him plainly that it was a spiritual birth that he spoke of, he still remained as ignorant as ever; saying, "How can these things be?" Hence our Lord reproved his unbelief; saying, "If I have told you earthly things, and you believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things, [John 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.12)."

Thus it frequently is found among ourselves. Frequently do we see persons who are most exemplary in their morals and most intelligent in their minds, and, on the whole, of candid dispositions too—yet stumbling at the truths of the Gospel, and "unable to comprehend them, for lack of a spiritual discernment, 1 Corinthians 2:14." And so it must ever be, when men "mix not faith with the word they hear, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2)."

Having seen the character of Nicodemus, let us,

***~~II. Make some remarks upon it—~~***

This subject would open to us a very wide field for observation; but I content myself with observing, that in Nicodemus we see:

***~~1. The power of the world in opposition to truth—~~***

It is clear that the words of our blessed Lord had made a lodgment both in the mind and in the heart of this timid man; and yet he did not dare to follow up his convictions. At no great distance of time, when the council was condemning Jesus unheard, Nicodemus ventured to express an opinion that such conduct was both ungenerous and unjust: "Does our law judge any man before it hears him and knows what he does, [John 7:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.51)." But for three years after this we hear no more of Nicodemus. No more does he seek to be instructed by our Lord, either in public or in private. The general voice was against our Savior; and Nicodemus dared not to encounter the reproach that would be cast upon him, if he would be known to be, even in heart, a follower of the despised Nazarene. Who would have thought that "a ruler in Israel" would be so timid?

But the fact is, that the more elevated any man is, the more fearful he is of subjecting himself to public observation and reproach. In Paul's day it was thus. He appealed to the whole Church of Corinth: "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26)."

And so it is in every age: let a man possess any distinction in society, and, instead of being emboldened by it to act according to his conscience, he is intimidated and restrained, and scarcely dares, even in private, to associate with one who is an avowed follower of Christ. In vain is it said that "the fearful shall not inherit the kingdom of God, [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8);" and that, "if we deny Christ, he also will deny us, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)." *So great is the power of a vain ungodly world, that we will please them rather than God; and, for fear of their censure, expose ourselves to the wrath of an offended God.*

***~~2. The power of truth in opposition to the world—~~***

The seed, which had been sown in Nicodemus's heart, "grew up, he knew not how, [Mark 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.27);" and, in an hour when, according to all human calculations, we would have least expected it to show itself, it sprang up, and brought forth fruit, to the honor of our blessed Lord.

The Lord Jesus was now dead upon the cross; and to pay him any honor was at the peril of a person's life. Yet then, when Christ's own disciples had forsaken him, Nicodemus, with "Joseph, who also had been a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews, verse 38," "went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus," in order that they might inter it with such a measure of honor and respect as the present circumstances would admit of. The boldness of this petition is particularly noticed by Mark, [Mark 15:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.43); but *truth, if allowed to have its proper influence, will embolden any man, and make him to disregard even life itself, if duty calls for the surrender of it,*[Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24).

On this occasion the force of truth appears particularly conspicuous, when it animated two such timid persons to so perilous an adventure, to which they had not been called, and which they might have declined without the slightest imputation on their character. *Let but truth erect its throne within the heart, and every adverse power it will utterly subdue*,[John 8:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.32).

***~~What, then, is my advice in relation to this matter?~~***

***~~1. Let us not covet the distinctions of this life—~~***

There is an idea prevalent among men, that the higher we rise in society, the greater will be our influence, especially if we stand well with the world, as not being "over righteous." Now, I will grant that persons of this description can often do things which more decided characters would be unable to effect. I think it highly probable, that not all the disciples together could have prevailed on Pilate to give them the body of Jesus; nor would the chief priests have suffered even Joseph and Nicodemus to have the body, if they had been generally known as followers of Christ. But the man that will draw back from Christ, and conform to the world with any such expectation as this, little thinks to what peril he subjects his own soul, and what a stigma will be fixed upon him by Almighty God, even if he would find mercy at his hands in the last day.

Beloved brethren, know this, that "you cannot serve God and mammon too, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24)." "If you will be friends of the world, you must be the enemies of God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)," and be dealt with as God's enemies in the eternal world. I mean not to discourage exertion in the pursuit either of wealth or science: but *an ambitious coveting of distinction I must declare to be utterly inconsistent with true piety*. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16)." I can have little doubt, but that if Joseph and Nicodemus had been in a lower sphere of life, they would have earlier confessed our blessed Lord. It was their elevation that kept them back: for lofty mountains are usually barren, in comparison with the lowly valleys.

And you likewise may have reason to curse the day that ever you were raised to spheres of eminence and distinction. *Be content, then, with the sphere in which it has pleased God to place you*. If only you reflect, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven," you will see the wisdom of that advice, "do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not! [Jeremiah 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 45.5)."

***~~2. Let us follow the dictates of our own conscience—~~***

How lamentable was it, that Nicodemus, for the space of three years, would suppress, instead of following, the voice of God within him. Were he now to return from Heaven, and sojourn here again, what shame would he take to himself for such unworthy conduct! Beloved brethren, let us serve God, and him only, even though all around us would depart from him, [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15). Let us, like Caleb and Joshua, "follow the Lord fully! [Numbers 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.24)." Who does not admire Elijah, when he stood alone, as he thought, in the midst of all Israel? Thus let us do. "If the Lord be God, let us follow him," in despite both of men and devils.

***~~3. Let us, whatever talents we possess, improve them for the Lord—~~***

Doubtless Joseph and Nicodemus felt, that on this occasion they could exert an influence which others did not possess: and they did well in improving it for the Lord.

Now, all of us, in our respective situations, have influence of some kind: and, whatever it be, let us use it diligently, for the honor of our God. There are times and seasons which we should seize; lest, by delay, they pass away, and our opportunity for serving God be lost for ever. Had Esther not promptly followed the advice of Mordecai, in going to Ahasuerus at the peril of her life, the whole nation of the Jews would have perished. She was the only person that, humanly speaking, could interpose with effect: and God signally blessed her pious exertions.

Let us, also, watch the calls of Providence, and every one of us, according to our ability, discharge the duties that lie before us. And, if a momentary fear arise in our hearts, let us, with Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt! [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26);" and, with the Apostle Paul, account martyrdom itself a ground of holy joy, [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17).

***~~#1730~~***

***~~The Resurrection of Christ~~***

***~~[John 20:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.8-9).~~***

"Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)"

ON this day was fulfilled that prophecy, which is so often quoted in the New Testament, "The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the cornerstone." Yes, "this is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it, [Psalm 118:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22-24)." It is true, the arrival of it in the first instance afforded no satisfaction either to the friends or enemies of our Lord. The earthquake that attended his resurrection filled the soldiers with consternation and dismay; insomuch that, when they saw "the angel who rolled away the stone from his sepulcher, they shook, and became as dead men:" and all the heads of the Jewish nation, when they saw how ineffectual their precautions had been, were mad with disappointment.

The disciples too were overwhelmed with grief: they had been taught to expect the resurrection of their Lord; yet they seemed to have really less expectation of it than his very enemies; so wholly were they absorbed in grief, and given up to despondency. At last, however, their sorrow was turned into joy; and they were constrained to believe, when they found it no longer possible to doubt.

We will endeavor to show,

***~~I. The reason of their unbelief—~~***

***~~Our text informs us, that "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead"—~~***

Our Lord had often told them, that "he must be killed, and on the third day rise again." He had spoken of it figuratively, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19); [John 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.21); he had declared it plainly, [Matthew 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.19); he had laid the whole stress of his religion upon it, [Matthew 12:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.39-40); and his very enemies considered that on this point depended either the proof of his Messiahship, or a decisive evidence of his imposture, [Matthew 27:63-64](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 27.63-64).

But his disciples never understood him, [Mark 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.9-10); [Mark 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.31-32); one of them had even presumed "to rebuke him," as though to talk of his death and resurrection was the result of needless fear or gloomy superstition, [Matthew 16:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.21-22). Thus, for lack of considering what the Holy Scriptures, and their Lord, had spoken on this subject, they could not conceive that such an event as his resurrection would ever take place.

***~~To the same source must be traced the unbelief that generally prevails—~~***

*The Scriptures speak plainly respecting our undone state by nature, and our recovery through Christ alone*. But when we declare these things to men, they are ready to reply, "Does he not speak parables, [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)." "They know not the Scripture;" they do not understand it; they do not regard it; they form their own opinions without any reference to it; and therefore they neither will, nor can, receive its decisions.

But as their unbelief was at last vanquished, we proceed to inquire into,

***~~II. The means by which it was overcome—~~***

***~~The Apostles diligently investigated the subject proposed to them—~~***

They were informed by Mary Magdalen, that the body of our Lord was removed from the sepulcher. Without loss of time they set out, as expeditiously as possible, to investigate the point. John being the younger man, and not, like Peter, oppressed with a load of guilt, arrived first at the place, and looked into the sepulcher. But Peter, being the more intrepid character, as soon as he arrived, went directly, and without hesitation, into the sepulcher, and saw the careful manner in which the linen and the napkin were folded up and laid in separate places, evidently showing that the body had not been taken away, nor had escaped but with the utmost calmness and composure.

John, emboldened by his example, used the same means of ascertaining the fact; and, on discovering it, "believed" that Christ was indeed risen; while Peter, though "wondering at the things that had come to pass," still retained some doubts respecting them. Still, however, the measure of conviction which was wrought in both their minds, was produced by the same means: but it was strongest on him whose mind was most under the influence of love.

***~~In a similar way must all unbelief be vanquished—~~***

We must search and examine for ourselves: we must also vie with each other, as it were, in the pursuit of truth, animating and encouraging one another both by testimony and example. To such diligent and candid exertions is the faith of the Bereans ascribed, [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12); and wherever they are used, with prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, they will sooner or later assuredly succeed.

From the circumstance of their not yielding an easy assent to what was told them, we shall be led to notice,

***~~III. The grounds which are hereby afforded for our faith—~~***

***~~The Apostles were very slow to believe the fact of Christ's resurrection—~~***

They would not believe the woman that had seen a vision, [Luke 24:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.4-11); nor even when Mary had had a personal interview with him, would they believe, [Mark 16:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.9-11); nor even when two of their own body had conversed with him, [Mark 16:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.12-13). They would scarcely believe the evidence of their own senses, [Luke 24:36-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.36-41). Nor, when all the others had been overpowered with the weight of evidence, would Thomas yield assent, until, by feeling the very wounds which had been made in the hands and side of Christ, he had a testimony which he could no longer doubt, [John 20:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.24-27).

***~~But all this tends exceedingly to confirm our faith—~~***

Had the disciples yielded an easy assent, their report had been the less worthy of credit: but when they were so incredulous, as to bring on themselves a severe rebuke from Christ for "their unbelief and hardness of heart, [Mark 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.14)," their testimony may be relied upon; because they asserted nothing which they had not ascertained to be true by the most solid and incontrovertible evidence. In this view their word may be implicitly received: but when, in addition to all this, their testimony was confirmed by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit, and by miracles without number, and, lastly, by their willingness at all times to seal it with their blood, there can be no room to entertain a doubt respecting it; nor can any testimony whatever be worthy of the smallest credit, if theirs be not considered as beyond the reach of doubt.

***~~Assuming then the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as proved, let us contemplate,~~***

***~~1. The benefits dependent on it—~~***

Every part of our salvation depends on this, even more than on his death itself, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34); [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25); [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10). O learn to see this, as the Apostles, when fully instructed, saw it! and rejoice in seeing everything secured to you both for time and eternity! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).

***~~2. The duties arising from it—~~***

Your great duty is, to be conformed to his resurrection; dying to sin, as he died for it, and living to God, even as he does. All the affections of your soul must follow him, [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2); and the renovation of your life must correspond in all things with the pattern which his resurrection exhibits to your view. Remember however to look to him for strength; for "without him you can do nothing," but "through his strength you can do all things".

***~~#1731~~***

***~~Inspiration and Authority of the Apostles~~***

***~~[John 20:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.21-23).~~***

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

IT is not easy to conceive what disappointment our Lord's disciples must have felt, when they found that he was dead upon the cross, and committed to the silent tomb. "They had expected that he was the person who would redeem Israel:" and the wonderful works which he had done, had appeared to justify that expectation, [Luke 24:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.19-21). But, behold, his enemies had prevailed against him, and the hopes which they had entertained were altogether frustrated.

But our blessed Lord left them not long in this disconsolate condition. He soon gave them evidences that he was risen from the dead. To some he appeared on the morning of his resurrection: and "in the evening of that day" he came to them all, while they were assembled within closed doors, for fear of the Jews; and both spoke peace to their troubled minds, and renewed to them the commission which he had given them to preach his Gospel to the world; enduing them, at the same time, with a more abundant measure of qualifications for their ministry than he had hitherto conferred; and assuring them, that all which they either said, or did, on earth, under the influence of his good Spirit, would be confirmed and ratified in Heaven.

Interested as we are in the office which was here assigned them, it will be well for us to ascertain, with some precision,

***~~I. The measure of inspiration given them—~~***

***~~The commission which the Apostles now received from Christ resembled that which Christ himself had received from the Father—~~***

Christ was furnished by the Father for the office that was assigned to him. "The Spirit of the Lord God was upon him, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1)," yes, and "was given to him without measure, [John 3:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.34)." "The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and made him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)."

At the time of his baptism, the Holy Spirit was sent down in a visible manner, both to attest his mission, and to qualify him for it, [Matthew 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.16-17). And this was the way chosen by God for manifesting to the world the commission given to the Apostles, and for imparting to them, at the same time, the qualifications necessary for the discharge of their high office.

***~~On them the Lord Jesus poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit, to fit and qualify them for their work—~~***

His "breathing on them" was merely an emblematic sign, to show them that he was empowered to communicate the Holy Spirit to whomever he would. He had before told them, that "he would send unto them the Holy Spirit from the Father, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26); [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7);" and he now imparted to them that heavenly gift; and assured them, that, within the space of a few days, they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.5)," and receive him in that abundant measure which would be necessary for the perfect execution of the various duties to which they would be called.

But there was, doubtless, an infinite disparity between our Lord and his disciples, both as to the measure of *inspiration*with which they were endued, and as to the perfection of *holiness*which they possessed. The knowledge of our blessed Savior was co-extensive with the knowledge of his heavenly Father, [John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.20); [John 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.15); [John 16:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.30); and in him was not the smallest possible imperfection, [Hebrews 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.26). But his disciples were still weak and sinful, and liable to err, except when under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. In acting, we know, in the instance of Peter, how fallible they were: and in recording what they had been commissioned to declare, they were left to themselves, to use their own language, and to report what they knew: they were indeed assisted by the Holy Spirit, who "brought all things to their remembrance;" and by the Spirit they were instructed in things which they could not otherwise have known: and by the same Spirit they were kept from error of every kind: so that all which they have spoken must be regarded as the word of God, no less than if their very words had been dictated from above: for though, I say again, *they were left to record everything in their own language, yet, in all that they stated, and in all that they revealed, they were kept from error of every kind and every degree*.

If, on some occasions, they delivered anything from their own minds, as matters of opinion, and not as divine authority, they failed not to inform the reader in what light he was to regard that particular sentiment which was so delivered, [1 Corinthians 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.6); [1 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.10); [1 Corinthians 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.25); 1 Corinthians 7:40; but in all other matters they claimed the authority of God himself, as sanctioning and confirming all that they uttered in his name, 1 Thessalonians 2:13; [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

This will yet more fully appear, while we consider,

***~~II. The authority committed to them—~~***

***~~The words in which this authority was conveyed have been grievously misinterpreted and perverted—~~***

The ministers of the Church of Rome found on this, and other similar passages of Holy Writ, a claim to the power of forgiving sins. When, indeed, they are accused of this, they will deny it, and will endeavor to explain away their arrogant assertions. But it is a fact, that they teach their people to conceive of them as possessing this power: and their people do entertain this opinion, and do look to them to exercise this power; and do submit to their unscriptural impositions, under this fallacious hope; yes, and do pay them, too, for administering to them this indulgence.

This power, say they, was given to Peter, [Matthew 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.19); and therefore the *Pope*, as the successor of Peter, possesses it. This power too, say they, was given to the *Church*; and therefore they, as constituting the Church, possess it, [Matthew 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.18). And again: this power was given to all the Apostles; and therefore they, as descendants of the Apostles, possess it.

But when did Peter ever exercise this power? Did he, when he first preached to the Jews? When, under great agony of mind, they cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" did he say, "I, Peter, forgive you." No! he assumed no such power to himself; but said, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, [Acts 2:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37-38)." Did he arrogate to himself any such power, when he opened the kingdom of Heaven to the Gentiles? No! when they would have been ready enough to yield him even divine honors, he forbad them [Acts 10:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.25-26); and, instead of saying "I forgive you," he referred Cornelius and his company to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only source of hope and peace; saying, "To him give all the prophets witness, that, through his name, whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins, [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43)."

When our blessed Lord himself forgave sins, the surrounding Jews, conceiving of him as a mere man, accused him of blasphemy. And their accusation was just, if he was not God; for, "who can forgive sins, but God alone, [Mark 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 2.7)."

***~~What, then, is the true import of the passage?~~***

The authority vested in the Apostles was not personal, but official; or rather, I would say, did not exist at all in themselves, but only as declaring the character of those whom God would accept or reject in the day of judgment. So far as this power was exercised in inflicting or removing censures from any members of the Church, it had relation only to this world. So far as it related to the eternal world, it was altogether declarative, and in no respect judicial. It accorded exactly with the authority of the priests under the law, when they were called upon to judge respecting lepers: there were given marks whereby they were to try every case that came before them: where those marks were found, they pronounced the person leprous: and where they were not found, they absolved him from the charge of leprosy, [Leviticus 13:38-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 13.38-46).

So the Apostles have laid down, with the utmost clearness, the marks whereby a child of God may be discerned, and be distinguished from an hypocritical professor. According to what they have declared, shall every case be decided in the day of judgment: those whom they have pronounced forgiven, shall be forgiven; and those to whom they have assigned a sentence of condemnation, shall assuredly be condemned.

This was the power which they exercised: and this power still resides in those who, as God's ambassadors, are authorised by him to declare his will to men. *So far as they judge according to the written word, the sins of men, as remitted or retained by them, shall be remitted or retained in Heaven*.

***~~That we may bring this subject home for more general use, I would call you to notice from it,~~***

***~~1. What aid is reserved for you in the discharge of your duties—~~***

You need, in your respective callings, the influence of the Holy Spirit, as much as ever the Apostles did. And to you shall it be given, as freely as ever it was conferred on them. The Lord Jesus Christ has "the fullness of the Spirit" still abiding in him, [Malachi 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.15); and if you pray, "Lord Jesus, breathe on me!" he will never refuse your request, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13).

***~~2. How to judge of your state before God—~~***

Men will pretend to declare, with great confidence, that such and such characters, which they account good, have nothing to fear. You yourselves, too, may have formed a strong opinion on such points. But I warn you, that whatever you or the world may think, *God's judgment shall stand; and his final sentence shall be in exact accordance with his written word*. Your one inquiry therefore must be, "What says the Scripture?" for assuredly *those whom the Scripture acquits, shall be acquitted; and those whom the Scripture condemns, shall be condemned*. "To the word, therefore, and to the testimony. Whoever they be that speak not according to this word, there is no light in them."

***~~[John 20:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.27-28)~~***

***~~#1732~~***

***~~Thomas' Unbelief Reproved~~***

[John 20:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.27-28).

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

IT is worthy of observation, that *the inspired writers show no solicitude to conceal their own faults, or the faults of each other; but that they relate everything with artless simplicity, precisely as it occurred*. The disciples were all, without exception, reproved as "fools, and slow of heart to believe what had been written by the prophets" of old. But Thomas in particular gave way to unbelief, and would not credit the resurrection of his Lord, even after all the others were convinced of it. This, however, was overruled by his Divine Master, for the good of the Church in all ages: for, while it was an occasion of a particular manifestation of Christ to him, it brought forth from him as glorious a confession of Christ, as any we find in the inspired volume.

From that manifestation, and that confession, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. The evidence we have of the truth of Christianity—~~***

Of course we cannot enter now into the consideration of the evidences at large; we must confine our attention to the two which are mentioned in the passage before us:

***~~1. The testimony of the Apostles in general—~~***

They had no expectation that their Lord and Master would rise again: and when they were informed that he was risen, they knew not how to believe it. However, the numerous proofs which they had of it on the very day on which he arose, and particularly his presence with them all on the close of that day, convinced them fully that he was indeed risen, and that the same body which had been crucified was restored to life, [Luke 24:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.39-40). From that time they entertained no doubt respecting this fundamental article of their faith. On the contrary, as soon as ever the Holy Spirit had descended on them on the day of Pentecost, they spoke of it with great boldness, and urged it as a decisive proof that Jesus was the true Messiah. In this testimony they all concurred; nor could the most cruel threats or persecutions at all abate their confidence in maintaining it.

Having themselves had such abundant opportunities of ascertaining the truth of his resurrection during the forty days that he continued upon earth, they were ready to seal their testimony with their own blood, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of it.

To this conduct they had no temptation whatever; for they knew that nothing but trials and persecutions, imprisonments and death, would be their portion in this world. With what confidence they themselves relied upon this truth, may be seen from their writings, [Acts 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.3); [Acts 10:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.41). [1 Corinthians 15:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.3-8). [1 John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.1-3); and, if we receive not their testimony, there must be an end of all testimony whatever; since *nothing ever was, or can be, so incontrovertibly established, as this fact*.

***~~2. The testimony of Thomas in particular—~~***

His doubts might seem to justify a suspicion of the veracity, or at least of the judgment, of all the other Apostles: but it rather adds weight to their testimony; since it shows his absolute determination never to acknowledge that fact to have taken place, until it would be proved to him by such evidence as it would be impossible to withstand. Indeed the proof which he required was most unreasonable; for, if our Lord was to submit his wounds to be inspected by all mankind, in order to gain their assent to the truth of his resurrection, he could never go up to Heaven at all, but continue on earth to the very end of the world, in order that every person in every successive generation might have the evidence here required. For, if Thomas could not credit the other Apostles who had touched and handled their Lord's body, why would he expect others to credit him? And why would not every one to the end of time demand for himself the same evidence that he did? But our Lord was pleased to gratify his unreasonable desire; and by thus extorting from him an acknowledgment of his resurrection, he has given to the world such a proof of it as incredulity itself can now no longer withstand.

Thomas, overcome by this evidence, shows in his acknowledgment,

***~~II. The faith it should produce in us—~~***

It is not an assent to the mere fact of Christ's resurrection that is required of us, but,

***~~1. An assent to all those truths which the resurrection of Christ was intended to confirm—~~***

Our Lord referred men to his resurrection as the proof of his Messiahship, and as the evidence that the religion which he established was of God. Accordingly, we must consider every word of Christ as confirmed beyond all doubt, the very moment we acknowledge the truth of his resurrection.

The divinity of his person, as "Emmanuel, God with us;"  
the nature of his death, as "a atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world;"  
the certainty of acceptance to all that would believe in him;  
together with the whole plan of the Gospel salvation;  
must be regarded as inseparably connected with that event, and infallibly established by it.

***~~2. A cordial approbation of them—~~***

To suppose that the words of Thomas were a mere exclamation, only shows to what miserable shifts Socinians are reduced, in order to maintain their views of Christianity. For, not to mention that such a horrible profanation of God's holy name could not be supposed to issue from an Apostle, in the very presence of his Lord, under such peculiar circumstances, we are expressly told that Thomas addressed those words to our Lord himself; and consequently they can be interpreted in no other way than an acknowledgment of Christ as "his Lord and his God."

Here we may observe, that Thomas does not merely acknowledge Christ from the conviction of his mind, in the same way as the worshipers of Baal acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God! 1 Kings 18:39;" but with most affectionate endearment claims him as his Lord, and his God. Thus must we do: we must receive him as our God and Savior, determining:  
to rely on him alone,  
to confess him before the whole world,  
to consecrate to him all our powers both of body and soul,  
to glory in him as "all our salvation and all our desire."

The language of our hearts must be, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you! [Song of Solomon 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.16). [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

***~~From a more particular view of this narrative, we may learn—~~***

***~~1. The evil of unbelief—~~***

*Infidels pretend that their doubts arise from a lack of evidence: but they in reality arise from an indisposition of heart to weigh with fairness the evidence before them*. This was the fault which Thomas now committed. He did not dispassionately consider the testimony of the other Apostles, but determinately set himself against it; and would admit of no proof, except such as he himself would presume to dictate. Justly might he have been left for ever to perish in his unbelief, because he would not receive a testimony that was decisive of the point.

It is precisely thus also with *nominal*Christians, who, while they admit the truth of Christianity in general, deny every truth that presses on their consciences, and will receive nothing that does not accord with their own preconceived notions. But, as those who came out of Egypt, as the Lord's people, perished in the wilderness through their unbelief, so will these never enter into the heavenly Canaan, unless they receive, and act upon, the whole "truth as it is in Christ Jesus." There is quite evidence enough to satisfy the humble inquirer: there is no real ground for doubt, either respecting the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, or respecting that holiness of heart and life which he requires. If men will not "receive the truth in the love of it," they must expect that "God will give them up to believe a lie," to the everlasting ruin of their souls! [2 Thessalonians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11-12).

***~~2. The folly of neglecting ordinances—~~***

Thomas was not with the other Apostles on the evening when our Lord first appeared to them; if he had been, there is reason to suppose that he would have been satisfied of the truth of Christ's resurrection, as well as they. But, through his absence, he lost that opportunity of beholding his risen Lord; and thus continued in a state of anxious suspense for a whole week, after the rest were "filled with joy and peace in believing."

As we know not the reason of his absence, we do not condemn him for it: but his loss was the same, by whatever it might be occasioned.

Have not many of us suffered loss through our absence from the house of God, or the neglect of private ordinances? It is highly probable that the doubts and fears of many are to be traced to this source: they live without the light of God's countenance, because they are not careful "to walk with God:" they neglect him; and then he hides himself from them, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2). We can scarcely doubt but that all of us might have enjoyed far richer manifestations of the Savior's love, if we had been more diligent and watchful in our performance of religious duties. "Let us not then forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," or intermit our exertions in our secret chamber: but, if we would even wait without a blessing as long as the cripple waited at Bethesda's pool, let us at least secure this consolation, that we have not lost it through our own neglect; and expect assuredly, that, if we are "steadfast and immoveable in waiting upon God, our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

***~~3. The wonderful condescension of the Lord Jesus—~~***

Notwithstanding the obstinate unbelief of Thomas, our Lord did not cast him off, but even appeared a second time to his disciples, on purpose to grant him the evidence he desired. What amazing condescension was this! Yet it is precisely such as all of us experience at his hands. "He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss" by any of us. He bears with our infirmities, "not breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax, but bringing forth judgment unto truth."

We, alas! are too often unreasonably dictating to him, when we should rather be meekly submitting to his providence and grace: we refuse to rest upon his promises, unless they be applied to us in such a particular way, or we are enabled to find in ourselves some particular warrant for our faith. But we should take his promises simply as they are given; and expect the accomplishment of them, not because we are worthy, but "because He is faithful who has promised." We do not mean that we are to expect him to save us while we are living in sin; for he has not anywhere promised any such thing: but we would have all to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" for it is still as true as ever, that "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

***~~#1733~~***

***~~The Use and Intent of Our Lord's Miracles~~***

***~~[John 20:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.30-31).~~***

"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

THOUGH the miracles which are recorded in the Gospel are very numerous—yet are they few in comparison with those which were wrought by our blessed Lord. If all that he performed were distinctly related with all their attendant circumstances, John tells us, in the hyperbolical language of the east, that the whole world would scarcely be able to contain the books that would be written, [John 21:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.25). Some however are transmitted to posterity as a specimen of the rest, in order that we may be assured of Christ's divine mission, and be led to believe in him to the salvation of our souls.

The evangelist, stating both the *immediate*and the *ultimate*end for which his Gospel was written, declares, that the assuring us of Christ's divine mission was,

***~~I. The immediate end—~~***

***~~Our blessed Lord declared himself to be "the Christ, the Son of God"—~~***

It was not in the character of a common prophet that our Lord appeared; he assumed to himself titles to which no human being had aspired, and declared himself to be the Son of God, the incarnate Deity, the Savior of the world. His enemies themselves accused him of affecting equality with God: and finding, from the very defense that he made, that they were right in their conjecture, they again sought to put him to death as a blasphemer, [John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.18); [John 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.33); [John 10:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.37-39).

***~~For the conviction of the people of that day he wrought unnumbered miracles—~~***

*Miracles are works contrary to the common course of nature, works which God alone is able to perform*. Hence, when wrought in confirmation of any point, they are justly considered as authenticating that which they are intended to support; because they prove a divine concurrence; and we cannot suppose that God would enable any man to work miracles merely to establish falsehood, and to deceive his people.

There have indeed been sorceries and enchantments practiced, perhaps also miracles, in support of error, [Exodus 7:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.10-11). But, in the case alluded to, God allowed Satan to exercise extraordinary powers in order to harden him who obstinately opposed his will, and to confirm him in the delusions which he had chosen for himself, Isaiah, 66:4. [Psalm 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.16). [Exodus 7:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.3); [Exodus 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.13-14).

Yet in those instances did he give abundant proof of his own superiority, and leave the confounded monarch without excuse. Aaron's rod swallowed up all the rods of the sorcerers, [Exodus 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.12). The sorcerers were permitted to bring calamities on the land, but not to remove them, [Exodus 7:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 7.21-22); [Exodus 8:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.6-7). And they themselves were constrained to acknowledge a divine power working by Moses and Aaron, when they could no longer imitate the miracles wrought by them, [Exodus 8:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 8.18-19).

That the miracles which Jesus did were intended to convince the Jews of his Divine mission, and that they were sufficient for that end, is manifest from the appeal which he himself repeatedly made to them in this very view, [John 5:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.36); [John 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.11). The completion of prophecy was indeed a decisive proof of his Messiahship to those who could compare the prophecies with the outcomes; but that was a long and arduous process; a work which but few were competent to undertake. Whereas *the working of miracles afforded a short, compendious, and incontestible evidence to the eyes of all who beheld them*.

***~~For the conviction of future ages these miracles were recorded—~~***

If there had been no written documents of the things that were transacted, we could not have been sure that our information respecting them was correct; seeing that many variations must inevitably happen in traditions handed down through so many succeeding ages. But when the miracles of our Lord were recorded by persons who were eye-witnesses of the same, and these records were speedily circulated among myriads who also had been spectators of them; and when in these very writings an appeal was made to the bitterest enemies of our Lord, who would have been glad enough to contradict the assertions of the Evangelists on a supposition that they could have been disproved; these records come down to us with an evidence not at all inferior to ocular demonstration: and if any man rejects the testimony which is thus sanctioned both by friends and enemies, he is willfully blind, and would reject any other evidence that could be given to him, [Luke 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.31).

But though this was the immediate intent of these written memorials, *the salvation of our souls was,*

***~~II. The ultimate end—~~***

Merely to prove to us that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, would have been a fruitless task—unless our believing of that record would conduce to our benefit. But the Apostle knew that our whole salvation depends upon it; and therefore, in transmitting an account of our Savior's miracles, he sought to bring us to the enjoyment of life:

***~~1. Of spiritual life—~~***

The unbeliever is "dead in trespasses and sins, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1);" he is as incapable of spiritual exertion, as dry bones that have been entombed for many years, are of exercising the functions belonging to the body, [Ezekiel 37:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.4). Nor is it by working, that he is to obtain life (for he must have life before he can work aright) but by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. By believing, he becomes united to Christ, as a scion that is grafted into a new stock; and he derives life from him, as a branch does from the tree, or as a member from the head, 1 Corinthians 6:17. [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16). No sooner is that union formed, than he becomes a new creature, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17); "he has passed from death unto life, [John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.24);" and is "purged from dead works to serve the living God." For the sake of Christ he is made "a partaker of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" "Christ himself lives in him," and "is that very life whereby he is enabled to live to God, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)."

***~~2. Of eternal life—~~***

The life begun on earth, is not like the natural life that shall soon expire; it is an incorruptible seed, an immortal principle, which, when watered and invigorated by continued supplies of grace, shall flourish in Heaven for evermore. The soul that is quickened by faith in the Lord Jesus, has also its iniquities forgiven. It stands immediately in the nearest relation to the Deity. The believer is a child of God, an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). A throne is prepared for him in Heaven: and, on his dismissal from the body, he shall be exalted to an eternal participation of the Divine glory.

Now this is the object which the Evangelists had in view, when they recorded the miracles of our Lord. They endeavored to convince us that Jesus was the Christ; yet not merely to extort from us a *speculative assent*to this truth, but to make us rely on him as our Savior, that we might experience the true "end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls." This was an end worthy of the inspired writers, an end, which has in myriads of instances already been accomplished, though its success hitherto has been only as the drop before the shower.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How should we value the Holy Scriptures!~~***

All the books that ever were written are of no value, when compared with the sacred volume. In the Scriptures, we not only think, but know, that we have eternal life, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39). They testify of Christ; they declare him to be:  
our incarnate God,  
our all-sufficient sin-atoning sacrifice,  
our ever-living advocate,  
our Almighty friend.

*He is no longer sojourning with us on earth; but we may see him, hear him, converse with him, and enjoy the most intimate fellowship with him, in his word*. In that word we may find abundance:  
to confirm our faith,  
to enliven our hope,  
to direct our feet,  
to answer every purpose which our hearts can wish.

Let us then "*search*the Scriptures:" let our *meditation*be upon them: let them be "sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb:" let them be "esteemed by us more than our necessary food."

***~~2. How careful should we be to exercise faith in Christ!~~***

All our knowledge even of the Scriptures themselves will be of little use to us, unless we are possessed of a living faith: they will indeed "make us wise unto salvation;" but then it is "through faith in Christ Jesus, [2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15)." More can not be said, and less must not, respecting the excellency of faith, than what is spoken in the words of our text.

*Everything relating to spiritual or eternal life must be received by faith, and maintained by faith*. In Heaven this principle will be superseded; but until we arrive at those happy mansions, we must "walk by faith," and "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us."

Let us then read the Scriptures, in order to increase and confirm our faith: let even the strongest believer improve them to this end, [1 John 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.13); and in due time he shall be where faith is lost in sight, and hope in enjoyment!

***~~#1734~~***

***~~Inquiries about Love to Christ~~***

***~~[John 21:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 21.17).~~***

The third time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

IT requires much wisdom to discharge the office of a proper reprover. We have a duty to the Church, not to countenance sin in anyone, and least of all in a person professing godliness. On the other hand, we have a duty to our offending brother, not to wound his feelings by a needless severity. If his fault has been private, a private admonition will suffice; but if his sin has given open offence, we must bear a public testimony against him, and require a public acknowledgment of his fault.

Our blessed Lord was full of compassion towards Peter, after his shameful dereliction of duty: he looked upon him with pity; he appeared to him before any other of his Apostles; and restored him publicly to his office from which he had fallen. But in what manner did he restore him? He drew forth from him, in the presence of all the Apostles, repeated confessions of his faith and love; and re-invested him with his Apostolic commission, precisely as often as Peter had publicly renounced it.

The questions put to Peter on this occasion, and the answers he gave to them, will naturally furnish us with the following remarks:

***~~I. That repeated violations of duty are a just ground for questioning our love to Christ—~~***

***~~There is no surer test of our love to Christ, than our obedience to his commands—~~***

This is what our blessed Lord himself requires as the fruit and evidence of our love; "If you love me, you will keep my commandments, [John 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.15)." And certainly a more unexceptionable test cannot be conceived. Had he required only some particular *feelings*, a person of a hopeful disposition might easily have wrought up himself to those frames which he supposed to be indications of love to Christ: and many, on the contrary, might have been discouraged, under the idea that they never had experienced what was necessary to their salvation.

But *the evidence of an obedient life*is such as no man can have who does not love the Lord, [John 14:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.24), and as every man will have who does love the Lord, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23); so that it is less likely to be mistaken than any other evidence, and carries stronger conviction with it. It enables us to determine with certainty, who does love him, and who does not, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21) with 2 Corinthians 8:8.

John, who was, beyond all others, the loving, and beloved Disciple, not only establishes this as the most unequivocal test of our love, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3) and [2 John 6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 John 6), but without hesitation pronounces him a "liar," who pretends to have any knowledge of the Savior, without justifying his pretensions by this mark, [1 John 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.3-4). We may therefore assume this as an infallible distinction between those who are sincere followers of Christ, and those who are only hypocrites and dissemblers with God.

***~~In proportion as this evidence of obedience is lacking, doubts must be entertained of our love to Christ—~~***

We speak not now of *a course of open sin, which would at once brand us as enemies of Christ*. Nor, on the other hand, do we speak of those infirmities which are found in the best of men. We refer rather to those habitual deviations from duty which afford us just reason to doubt of our spiritual state.

We know that, among men, there is always a desire to please those whom we love. The "loving one another in word and in tongue, is contrasted with the loving in deed and in truth, [1 John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18)." And supposing the fact to be true, that was an unanswerable question which Delilah put to Sampson; "How can you say 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? [Judges 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.15)." If then our heart be not with Christ, if we seek not after him in earnest prayer, if we feel no desire to do his will, if we live in a way which is displeasing to him, if we indulge dispositions and habits which are directly opposite to those which he himself cultivated—then how can we imagine that we love him? Such a life is rather characteristic of his enemies than of his friends: and, while we live in such a state, we have far greater reason to suspect our love to him, than to indulge any confidence respecting it.

We wonder not that "Peter was grieved" at being a third time questioned about the sincerity of his love, for we cannot but feel,

***~~II. That the very existence of a doubt respecting the sincerity of our love to Jesus, ought to fill us with deep concern—~~***

Let it only be considered, what such a doubt implies: it involves a doubt,

***~~1. Respecting our saving interest in God's favor—~~***

*There is no medium between a state of acceptance with God, and of obnoxiousness to his wrath and indignation.* We must either be his friends or his enemies: we must either be his children, or "the children of the wicked one." Now our blessed Lord has said, "If God were your father, you would love me, [John 8:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.42);" and consequently, if there is room for questioning our love to him, there is room also for questioning our relation to God. And is it not a solemn thing to doubt, whether we are children of God, or children of the devil? Is it a light matter, to whom we belong? Would any man feel composed or satisfied, until he has ascertained this point on sure and scriptural grounds?

***~~2. Respecting our prospects in the eternal world—~~***

***~~There are only two eternal states, in one or other of which all will be placed as soon as they die. To some will be assigned a state of happiness in Heaven; to others a state of misery in Hell: and whichever is our lot, it will be eternal!~~***

Now that Heaven cannot be the receptacle of those who love not the Lord Jesus, is evident: for what would they do there, or how could they be happy if they were there? We are not happy even here among those whom we do not love; notwithstanding we may manage to conceal our aversion, and to put on a cheerful countenance before them. But in Heaven there can be no concealment: our real dispositions will all be manifest; and if we cannot cordially unite in the exercises of those around us, we shall find nothing to amuse or divert our minds.

In other words, if our whole delight be not in singing "praises, to God and to the Lamb," we shall find no congeniality of sentiment with those around us, nor any occupation suited to our taste: and the very consciousness of our unfitness for the place, will render the place dreary, the company odious, the employment irksome.

And must it not be inexpressibly painful to be left in suspense; to see time running away, and eternity fast approaching, and not to know whether we shall spend that eternity in Heaven or in Hell? If we were not ourselves melancholy examples of the same obduracy, we would wonder how anyone could give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eye-lids, until he had attained some solution of this doubt.

Were he only in suspense about the outcome of a trial for life and death, it would create considerable anxiety: how much more then should it, when it respects everlasting happiness or everlasting misery! Well indeed may that man be grieved, who is in the least doubt what answer he shall give to the question in our text, "Do you love me?"

We cannot however but take occasion from the instance before us to observe,

***~~III. That notwithstanding we have deviated for a time from the path of duty, we may be so far recovered as to warrant an appeal to Christ, that we do indeed love him—~~***

God forbid that we would encourage any man to think lightly of sin; or that anything we speak for the comfort of true penitents would have such a construction put upon it. Yet we must not conceal the truth, for fear it would be perverted; nor must we forbear to magnify the grace of God, lest someone would abuse it. Our position, properly understood, will not sanction false confidence by any man. We concede that a man may have fallen as grossly as ever Peter did—yet may he afterwards recover his confidence towards God, provided, like Peter, he,

***~~1. Bitterly bewails his sin—~~***

Peter, after his fall, "went out and wept bitterly:" and as our Lord had particularly "prayed for him, that his faith might not fail," we can have no doubt but that he sought for mercy in God's appointed way. Now let this be done in sincerity and truth, and we do not hesitate to declare, that it shall not be done in vain: whether the guilt be contracted by an ignorant opposer of the Gospel, or a backslidden professor of it, and whether it be more or less heinous—it shall certainly be forgiven, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7); [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9), and peace shall be again restored to his wounded conscience.

"God will heal his backslidings, and love him freely," yes, and seal a sense of his pardoning love upon his soul. Upon his confessing with David, "I have sinned against the Lord," the Lord will say to him, "I have put away your sin—you shall not die!" But besides this he must,

***~~2. Take occasion from his fall to search out and mortify his besetting sin—~~***

Peter's besetting sins were self-preference, and self-confidence. He had such a proud conceit of his own strength, that he engaged, that "though all the other Apostles would forsake their Lord, he never would. No; he would rather die with him than deny him." To this our Lord alludes in his first question, "Do you love me more than these?" To that part of the question Peter made no reply: he would no more boast of his superiority to others; but was contented with affirming what from his inmost soul he knew to be true.

Moreover, he seems many years afterwards to have had in view his own fatal miscarriage, when he gave that advice to the Church at large; "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; resist, steadfast in the faith." Thus *he learned both humility and caution from his past experience*.

A similar effect in us will warrant a similar assurance of our love to Christ. It is often a long time before our besetting sin is even known to us. For sin has such a bewitching power, that it makes us frequently admire as a virtue, what others see and know to be a weakness and a sin. *Pride, envy, covetousness, and a variety of other evils, often lurk and reign in us, while we are scarcely sensible of their existence in our hearts*. Now if we have been led to search out these hidden abominations, to mourn over them, to subdue and mortify them, and maintain a spirit directly opposed to them, we can scarcely wish for a clearer evidence of our sincerity. The very fruit we produce, indisputably proves our union with Christ; and consequently justifies an assured conviction of our love to him. Thus humbling himself for his iniquity, he must yet further,

***~~3. Be determined, through grace, to live and die for Christ—~~***

If sin is unrepented of, or self-confidence be indulged, our resolutions, like Peter's, may prove fallacious: but if formed with a humble dependence upon Divine grace, and with a penitent sense of our former miscarriages, they afford a strong additional testimony on our behalf.

Peter speedily evinced the renovation of his soul, when with undaunted courage he charged home upon all the Jewish Sanhedrin the murder of his Lord, and set at nothing all their threatenings against him. And if we also are enabled boldly to confess Christ, and cheerfully to suffer for him, and unreservedly to devote ourselves unto him, the matter is clear; we do indeed love him; and we may appeal to the heart-searching God that we "love him in sincerity" and truth.

Let us now institute the same all-important inquiry, and address to every one of you the question in the text. Let each one put his own name in the place of Peter's, and conceive the Lord Jesus Christ saying to him, "Do you love me?"

Perhaps all of you, except a few humble and contrite souls, will be ready to answer this question in the affirmative: but if you would enter more dispassionately into it, some of you might possibly apply to yourselves what was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, "I know you, that you have not the love of God in you! [John 5:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.42)." Others of you might be in doubt what answer to make; while others might be able to adopt the language of Peter, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you!"

***~~Taking for granted that there are these three descriptions of persons here present, we shall address ourselves,~~***

***~~1. To those who manifestly do not love the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

How surprising is it that there would be such persons in the world! yet this is the state of the generality even of those who live in this Christian land. And what shall I say to them? Are you not yourselves amazed at your own wickedness? Do you not appear to yourselves to be even monsters in impiety? Not to love Him, who is infinitely lovely! Not to love Him, who is so beloved of God, and of the holy angels, and of all the saints both in Heaven and earth! Not to love Him, who has so loved you as to give himself for you, and to lay down his own life a ransom for sin!

How astonishing is it that his wrath has not long since broken forth against you to the uttermost to consume you! Must you not assent to the justice of that denunciation, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! Corinthians 16:22." And do you not tremble lest the curse of God would come upon you? O rest not in a state of such dreadful guilt and danger: but contemplate Him; and turn unto Him; and make Him "the only beloved of your souls."

***~~2. To those who are in doubt whether they love him or not—~~***

Do not leave this matter any longer in suspense. Search your own hearts, and beg of God to search and try you. Indulge not a needless scrupulosity on the one hand, neither "speak peace unto your souls lightly" on the other hand. Of the two, it were better to be distressed by raising the standard too high, than to deceive yourselves by putting it too low; because, in the one case, your pain will be only small and transient; whereas, in the other, it will be unspeakable and eternal.

Not that it is at all needful to err on either side: the marks and evidences of true love to Christ are laid down with the utmost precision in the Holy Scriptures; and if you read the Scriptures with earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, "He will guide you into all truth." If you are destitute of true love, he will convince you of sin; and if you are possessed of it, he will shine upon his own work, and give you the witness of his Spirit that you are his. Your Lord and Judge "knows all things:" him therefore you cannot deceive: O pray that you may not deceive yourselves.

***~~3. To those who can truly say, "Lord, I do indeed love you!"—~~***

How sweet to you must be those words of our Lord, "If any man loves me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." You may rest assured, that these words shall be fulfilled to you. There is not any mercy which God will not grant to those who make Christ their all in all. While you have a scriptural evidence that you do this, you have a right to rejoice: and your joy is a pledge of that everlasting blessedness which you shall possess in his immediate presence.

Be careful then to "*abide*in his love." Guard against everything that may impeach the sincerity of your affections. "Keep yourselves diligently in his love;" and be attentive to the duties of your calling, whatever they may be.

To Peter, who was a minister of his Gospel, our Lord said, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs; feed my sheep." This he required of him as the best testimony of his love. To you he says, "Finish the work which God has given you to do." Can you instruct others, whether adults or children? Embrace every opportunity with joy. Can you do anything whereby your Lord may be glorified? Do it: and "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."

***~~Another Exordium.~~***

It is universally acknowledged, that men ought to inquire into their actions, so far at least as to ascertain that they are just and honorable: but few are aware of the obligation which they lie under, to examine the dispositions of their minds towards God. Yet this is of prime importance. We should ask ourselves frequently, Do I love God? Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior?

***~~The ACTS of the Apostles~~***

***~~#1735~~***

***~~CHRIST'S ASCENSION~~***

***~~[Acts 1:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.9-11).~~***

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven."

WE are surprised to see how slow of heart the Apostles were to receive and understand the instructions given them from time to time by their Divine Master. If he spoke to them of his *death*, they could not endure the thought of such an outcome to his ministrations. If he spoke of his *resurrection*, they could not at all apprehend his meaning, or conceive to what he could refer.

In like manner, when he spoke of his returning to his Father in Heaven, and declared to them the special ends of his ascension, and of the deep interest which they themselves had in it, (since he was going to prepare a place for them, and to send them another Comforter, who would far more than compensate them for the loss of his bodily presence,) they could not enter into the subject. They thought, indeed, that they understood him, and said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech, [John 16:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.28-29)."

They showed, even after his resurrection, how ignorant they were; since they still dreamed of his establishing a temporal kingdom, and asked, in reference to it, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel, verse 6." It was thus that they surveyed the ascension of their Lord at this time. Instead of being prepared for it, and expecting the completion of his work on earth, they stood and gazed at him, with a kind of stupid amazement; until two Angels, in the form of men, reproved their stupidity: and assured them, that, at a future period, their Divine Master would again return to earth, in a way similar to that of his departure from it.

The points for our present consideration are,

***~~I. The ends of his ascension to Heaven—~~***

These are fully declared in the Holy Scriptures. He ascended,

***~~1. To receive a recompense for himself—~~***

The Father had engaged in covenant with him, that, "if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed, and prolong his days; and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hands, [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10)." In this compact, his human nature was ordained to have a full participation of his glory, being enthroned at the right hand of God, and, by its union with the Godhead, invested with all the honors due to the Most High God. "All the angels in Heaven," no less than his redeemed saints, were "bidden to worship him, [Psalm 97:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.7) with [Hebrews 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.6)." And to this, in part at least, he looked forward, as to "the joy that was set before him;" in consideration of which "he endured the cross, and despised the shame, until he sat down on the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." All this was conferred on him as the recompense of his humiliation and sin atoning death: for so says the holy Apostle: He, "being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, [Philippians 2:6-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-11)."

In his ascension was in some degree fulfilled that vision of the prophet Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of Heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, would serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed! [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14).

***~~2. To carry on and perfect his work for us—~~***

As our great **High-Priest**, he offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross. But, in order to execute the whole of that sacred office, he must carry that blood within the veil, and offer incense also before the mercy-seat: nor, until he would have done this, would he have any authority to bless his people. Accordingly, in his ascension he performed this remaining part of his priestly office: entering into Heaven with his own blood, and offering before God the incense of his continual intercession, [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12); [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24).

But his **kingly**office also was now to be executed, in a fuller manner than it had yet been. David had said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool, [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1)." And again; "The stone which the builders refused, the same is made the cornerstone, [Psalm 118:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22)." This, therefore, now remained to be fulfilled: and for the accomplishment of it, Christ was now exalted to glory. And this accords with the account given to us by Peter: "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has shed forth this, which you now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he says himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make your foes your footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ, [Acts 2:32-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.32-36)."

To the same effect Paul also speaks: "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore he says, When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men: he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: until we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [Ephesians 4:7-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7-14)."

This then, I say, was the end of his ascension; and in this way was fulfilled what Paul had spoken respecting him: "God raised him up, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all, [Ephesians 1:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-23)."

In connection with this, we are of necessity led to consider,

***~~II. The time and manner of his future advent—~~***

There are two periods at which the Lord Jesus Christ may certainly be expected to come again, after the manner of his departure from this lower world.

***~~1. At the period of the Millennium, to establish his kingdom—~~***

Christ laid the foundation of his kingdom in the Apostolic age: and it has been maintained and carried forward, even to the present day. But there is a time coming, when all the kingdoms of the world shall be subdued unto him, and he alone shall reign over the face of the whole earth, [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44). That I apprehend to be the season called, in Scripture, "the times of the restitution of all things;" until which period the heavens have received him: but when that period shall have arrived, "he will again be sent after the manner of his departure hence, [Acts 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.20-21)," in power and great glory. And it seems, from prophecy, that, as he ascended from the mount of Olives, so on that very mount will he again appear, [Zechariah 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.4), and not improbably as he did once on Mount Tabor; but certainly to establish his empire over the face of the whole earth, [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9).

Then will take place what is called in Scripture the first resurrection, when, it is said, all his saints shall rise, in order to reign with him. Whether this shall be spiritually accomplished, as beyond all doubt the resurrection of God's ancient people, spoken of by the Prophet Ezekiel will be, [Ezekiel 37:1-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-14); or whether any, or all, of them will be summoned to meet him, as Moses and Elijah were on the Mount of Transfiguration; I will not take upon me to determine. But I must enter my protest against that bold, confident obtrusion of this matter upon the Church of Christ, which we have witnessed of late, and which *has tended exceedingly to draw away the minds of many pious people from the more sober and serious contemplation of matters of far deeper interest, and of incomparably greater certainty*. I object not to the consideration of any point contained in holy writ: but I deprecate the giving of such extraordinary and almost paramount importance to things which, to say the least, are extremely questionable, and which, if ever so fully established, would tend in no degree to quicken the soul in the service of its God. For, whether we are to enjoy the presence of our God and Savior in Heaven or on earth, it can make no difference in our present duties, nor can it add one jot or tittle to our present encouragements. And the grievous errors which have been broached by some who have been most zealous in propagating their Millenarian notions, are abundantly sufficient to keep all prudent persons from being drawn into their vortex.

The sleep of the soul, for instance: the worshiping of idols not being idolatry, provided the worshiper believe them to be God: and other things, which have been stated in conversation to the Author, too horrible to be mentioned; but which, it is hoped, are peculiar to the individual who stated them, and not common to those who maintain the other sentiments.

God alone knows to what all this extravagance may lead. Of this however we are certain, that "all the ends of the earth are given to the Lord Jesus for his possession," and that in the appointed season, which we hope is now fast approaching, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Yes, whether by his personal appearance, or by the operations of his Holy Spirit, "he shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his Ancients gloriously, [Isaiah 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 24.23)."

***~~2. At the last day to judge the world—~~***

Of this our blessed Lord himself has spoken fully. "The Son of man shall be seen coming in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory." "He shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him: then he shall sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, [Matthew 24:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.30); [Matthew 25:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31-32)."

This is the advent spoken of also by Paul, who says, "The Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God." "He shall be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire; taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power! [1 Thessalonians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.16) and [2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.7-9)." "In that day every eye shall see him, [Revelation 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.7)," and every soul receive from him his everlasting doom, [2 Corinthians 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.10).

This being universally acknowledged among us, I will wave any further discussion of it as a fact to be established, and call your attention to it only as a truth to be improved.

A mere vacant gaze, like that of the Apostles, or, what I would consider as equally worthless, a mere speculative acknowledgment, I would join with the holy angels in reproving, as altogether unsuitable to the occasion. But I would say: *Direct your eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven, and prepare for his future appearance in the clouds of Heaven. You cannot have your eyes too earnestly fixed upon him*.

Look at him as "your Forerunner," "gone thither to prepare a place for you."

Look at him as your Head, that insures to all his members a participation of his glory.

Look at him as your Advocate and Intercessor, who maintains continually your peace with God, and secures to you all needful supplies of grace and strength.

Look to him as "possessing in himself all fullness for you," that "out of his fullness you may receive all that you can ever stand in need of."

Look at him as "your very life:" and let your soul rejoice in the assurance, that, "when he shall appear, you also shall appear with him," as "the fruit of his travail," the trophies of his victory, "the jewels of his crown."

And, while looking for his advent, keep "your loins girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as servants waiting for the coming of their Lord." *This is the proper posture of his people, to be "waiting for his appearing," "loving it," delighting in it, and "hastening it forward*, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8). [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28). [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12)." By all possible means; that, at whatever hour he shall come, you may enter with him into his presence-chamber, and be for ever happy in the fruition of his love.

***~~#1736~~***

***~~OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT~~***

***~~[Acts 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.1-4).~~***

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

It was not long after the Flood, that man lost the knowledge of the true God. No sooner did the posterity of Noah begin to multiply upon earth, than they conceived an idea of counteracting the intentions of their Maker in relation to their dispersion over the world, and actually began to build a *city*sufficiently large for their accommodation, and a *tower*which might place them out of the reach of any future deluge.

When they had made considerable progress in the work, God was pleased to inflict upon them a judgment, which instantly put a stop to the building, and compelled them to separate themselves to different and distant places. They had hitherto been "all of one language and one speech:" but now "God confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another." This introduced such confusion, that they could not prosecute their purpose, but were necessitated to form themselves into distinct societies, each uniting with the party whose speech he understood.

From hence the knowledge of the true God was speedily lost; until in a few generations it seemed to have vanished from among men. This knowledge however was revived in Abraham, and continued in a part of his posterity, until the time came that God had fixed for the diffusion of it over the face of the whole earth.

The time so fixed was after the ascension of our blessed Lord: then was his Gospel to be preached to all nations: and, in order that it might be so, God reversed, as it were, the judgment he had before inflicted; not indeed by restoring a unity of language among all nations, but by enabling his chosen servants to address all people in their native tongue. This miracle is to be the subject of our present lesson, and we shall,

***~~I. Make some observations for the illustration of it—~~***

The miracle itself was the enabling of the Apostles, without any previous study, to speak with propriety and fluency whatever language was most familiar to their respective hearers; and to communicate unerring information on the great subject of religion, which, until that hour, they very imperfectly understood. If we reflect how difficult it is even for men of learning to attain a new language, and how much time and study are necessary to acquire any proficiency in speaking it, we shall see how stupendous a miracle this was, which enabled a number of illiterate fishermen to address foreigners of different nations, whose language they had never so much as heard. But there are some peculiar circumstances respecting this miracle, to which we would call your more particular attention:

***~~1. The time when it was wrought—~~***

There were in the year three great feasts, at which all the males in Israel were required to go up to Jerusalem, namely:  
the *Passover*, or feast of unleavened bread;  
the *Pentecost*, or feast of weeks;  
and the feast of *tabernacles*.

The first was appointed in commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt.

The the second (the period referred to in our text) was held in remembrance of the giving the law from Mount Sinai, fifty days after their departure from Egypt, [Exodus 19:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.1); [Exodus 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.11). Now God was pleased to make that very day on which he had proclaimed his *law*, the day for publishing his *Gospel*also: so that their connection might the more plainly appear, and the one might be the more fully acknowledged as introductory to the other.

It is further to be remarked, that on the day of Pentecost, "the first-fruits" of the wheat harvest were offered unto God, as the first-fruits of the barley harvest had been seven weeks before, [Leviticus 23:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 23.15-17). This also, no doubt, was designed of God to typify the first-fruits of the Jewish Church, which were now presented unto him. It is certain that converts, whether from among Jews or Gentiles, were so designated, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18). [Revelation 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.4), and especially the first in any place, [Romans 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.5); and consequently, the typical offering was, as it were, completed on this day, in the conversion of three thousand persons unto Christ.

Moreover, it is probable that the anointing of the first-fruits also had respect to the out-pouring of the Spirit upon the converts on this day, [Leviticus 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.1); for that very idea is distinctly suggested by Paul in reference to the Gentile converts, who were brought by him as "an offering in a clean vessel unto the Lord, [Isaiah 66:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.20)," and were accepted of the Lord, "being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)."

***~~2. The manner in which it was wrought—~~***

As in the time of working the miracle we see types fulfilled, so in the manner of its being wrought, we behold emblems illustrated and realized. The attention of the whole multitude was fixed by an appeal both to their eyes and ears. "They heard a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind." Our Lord compares the influences of the Spirit to wind, "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it comes and where it goes: so is every one who is born of the Spirit, [John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.8)." Who then must not recognize in this tempest the inexplicable, but effectual, operations of the Spirit on the minds of men?

At the same time "cloven tongues, like as of fire, appeared," and abode visibly on the head of all who were then assembled. Now we know, it is the property of *fire*to enlighten, to warm, to purify: and such were to be the effects of the Spirit which was poured out upon them; for while, by the diversity of tongues in which they spoke, they communicated light and understanding to the world; they inflamed them with love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and transformed them into the very image of their God: and thus was the prophecy of John the Baptist accomplished; "I baptize you with water; but He who comes after me shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire! [Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11)."

Such was the miracle, which, however interesting in itself, derives a still greater interest from the circumstances before referred to. We now proceed to,

***~~II. Suggest some reflections for the improvement of it—~~***

The decided proof which it gave of Christ's Messiahship, and of the power and glory to which he is exalted, must naturally suggest itself to every mind. We therefore wave the consideration of the miracle in that view, (more especially as we propose to notice it in the following discourse;) and confine our attention to other reflections less obvious, but equally important:

***~~1. What rich provision has God made for the salvation of the world!~~***

Was the gift of his only dear Son necessary to redeem us from death and Hell? He so loved the world as to give his Son for us.

Was *more*necessary? Was it necessary that the third Person of the blessed Trinity would bear testimony to Christ, and qualify persons to make him known to the world, and actually render their labors effectual for that end? Behold, God sent his Holy Spirit to work this stupendous miracle in confirmation of Christ's Messiahship, and to endue his servants with such powers as were necessary for the preaching of his Gospel to every creature, and to convert to the faith of Christ thousands who but lately had crucified him as a malefactor.

What then will he not do for those who desire to be saved? What will he refuse us, who has, unsought and unsolicited, done such great things for us? Let us bear in mind that we are as much interested in these things as those who lived in the apostolic age; for "the promise is to us, and to our children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call".

***~~2. What a striking resemblance appears between the events of that day, and the period wherein we live!~~***

We confess that miracles have ceased, and that the operations of the Spirit are no longer audible in sounds, or visible in tongues of fire: but have they therefore ceased? No! we affirm that they yet exist; and that too in no common measure or degree.

Persons, it is true, are not enabled to address themselves successively, without any previous study, to foreigners of every country in their own vernacular tongue; but persons are stirred up to study different languages, and to translate the Scriptures into those languages, so that persons of every country may adopt the same acknowledgment as was used on the day of Pentecost; "We do, every man in his own tongue, hear spoken to us the wonderful works of God, verse 6, 8, 11."

Nor is this effect produced in any slight or partial degree; for persons of every rank, and almost of every nation, are contributing to this blessed end. In our own nation, such an attention has been excited to this work as has never been known since the apostolic age. Nobles, as well as others, have united in disseminating the Holy Scriptures, and in spreading the knowledge of them to the ends of the earth. Is not this work of God? Yes; and, by whoever it be opposed, it shall stand; nor shall all the powers of Hell prevail against it!

***~~3. How certainly may we expect, before long, a yet greater work!~~***

God has reserved in his own power the times and the seasons wherein he will work: but he has assured us, that in due time "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea:" and we have reason to believe that that time is fast approaching. Behold with what astonishing rapidity the work has been carried forward of late! In this land, *schools*have been set on foot for the education of the poor; so that in a little time we may hope they will be established in almost every town and village in the kingdom. At the same time, *Bibles*have been so liberally dispersed, that no poor person who desires to possess that heavenly treasure, needs to continue destitute of it. A similar kind of spirit has been diffused through other countries, where even crowned heads: the Emperor of Russia, and the Kings of Prussia, Sweden, etc. are contributing to advance the glorious cause.

Above all, the very same means as Providence used for the speedy establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman empire, are at this moment provided against the time that the Spirit shall be poured out to convert the world. At the *Passover*, the Jews throughout divers countries assembled at Jerusalem, and went home to report what they had seen and heard respecting the death and resurrection of Christ. At the day of Pentecost they did the same, in reference to the ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the instantaneous conversion of thousands to the faith of Christ. Reporting these things in their respective cities, they prepared the way for the ministry of the Apostle, and excited the greatest attention to them.

Thus at this day, Jews are spread over all the earth, and for their use the New Testament is translated into Hebrew, at the same time that translations are going forward into all the languages of the world; insomuch that we may hope, in the space of twenty or thirty years, there will be scarcely a nation that shall not possess the Scriptures, or at least a considerable portion of them, in their own language. Moreover, there is a society formed for the express purpose of converting the Jews, and of educating their children in the Christian faith. If then God is pleased to send forth his Spirit upon the Jews by means of the Scriptures which are translated into their language, there will be missionaries without number already found in every country under Heaven, conversant with the habits and languages of the people among whom they dwell, and able to explain to them the Scriptures which have been previously translated into their respective tongues. What a glorious prospect does this open to us! O that God would even now pour forth his Spirit upon all flesh, that "his word might run and be glorified throughout the earth!"

***~~#1737~~***

***~~SENDING FORTH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT~~***

***~~[Acts 2:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.32-33).~~***

"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

MARVELOUS, beyond conception, was the miracle wrought on the day of Pentecost; when a company of illiterate fishermen were enabled, in one moment, to speak a great diversity of languages, with as much ease and fluency and propriety as their own native tongue.

Some, who were of a more than ordinary profane character, when they heard foreigners of different nations addressed in languages which they themselves could not understand, said, that the Apostles were drunk with new wine. But the Apostle Peter, repelling the accusation as both unmerited and absurd, showed that this very miracle had been foretold, as ordained to mark the days of the Messiah, and as intended to introduce that new dispensation to which the descendants of Abraham had looked forward for two thousand years. That we may see the full scope of his argument, I will show,

***~~I. In what light we should view the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit—~~***

This stupendous miracle had an especial respect to the Lord Jesus Christ,

***~~1. As an evidence of his mission—~~***

It had been foretold by the Prophet Joel, whose words are cited by the Apostle Peter, and declared to have been accomplished in that event. Compare [Joel 2:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.28-32) with [Acts 2:16-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.16-21). The testimony of the Apostles, relative to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, on which all his claims to the Messiahship were founded, might be supposed to have been the result of a deeply-laid plot: but, in the miraculous powers imparted, there could be no conspiracy; since persons of all the different nations then present at Jerusalem could not but attest the truth of the miracle then wrought. Of this the most inveterate enemies were made the judges: and therefore, if they were convinced by it, even three thousand of them in one single hour, we may be sure that the evidence was clear and irresistible. If "by his resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus was proved to be the Son of God with power," much more was he by his visible ascension to Heaven, and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit according to his word.

***~~2. As the reward of his sufferings—~~***

The Father had engaged in covenant with the Lord Jesus, that if he would "make his soul an offering for sin, he would see a seed who would prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord would prosper in his hands: yes, that he would see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, [Isaiah 53:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-11)." And now this promise was fulfilled. By the sending down of the Holy Spirit, the recompense was accorded to him: "the great were divided to him for a portion, and the strong for a spoil, because he had poured out his soul unto death, and been numbered with transgressors, and bore the sins of many, and made intercession for transgressors, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12)." It was in the prospect of this that he had "endured the cross, and despised the shame, and had sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2);" it had been declared unto him, that "he would receive gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them:" and his being empowered to "confer these gifts" was, on the Father's part, a fulfillment of the engagement he had entered into, compare [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18) with [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8), and a bestowment of "the benefits which he had purchased with his own blood, [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28)."

***~~3. As the pledge of his glory—~~***

"The prophets, speaking by the Spirit of Christ, had from the beginning testified respecting the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow, [1 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-11)."

Now, this sending forth of the Holy Spirit was the commencement of the Savior's glory, both among Jews and Gentiles, [Acts 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.15); and to this had John the Baptist and our Lord himself referred, as the pledge of his triumphs, [Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11). [Acts 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.4-5). Our blessed Lord, previous to his ascension, had taught his disciples to expect this: but it was not until the renewal of this miracle to the Gentile converts, six years afterwards, that Peter recollected his words; and then they were brought most forcibly to his remembrance: "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 11:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.16)."

In all subsequent effusions of the Holy Spirit has the glory of Christ been advancing, even unto this time, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14); and by this, at a future period, will his kingdom be extended over the face of the whole earth: "when the Spirit will be poured out from on high, the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest, [Isaiah 32:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.15)." The request for that effusion of the Spirit needs only to be made by him; and "the heathen shall instantly be given to him for an inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession, [Psalm 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.8)."

Nor is this a mere *speculative*subject. It has a great *practical*tendency; as will be seen, while I show,

***~~II. What we may learn from it—~~***

Some idea may be formed of the immense importance of this subject, by the mention of two things only, to which I will confine your attention. We may see, then, from hence,

***~~1. What we ourselves, if we believe in Christ, may expect—~~***

Our blessed Lord, in the days of his flesh, stood in a place of public concourse, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This he spoke of the Spirit, which they that believe in him would receive, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39)."

True, in his miraculous powers we are no longer to hope for the Holy Spirit's operations: but,*as our Teacher, our Comforter, our Sanctifier, we may expect his influences now*, no less than in the apostolic age: for the Lord has promised, saying, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world, [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20)." See his discourses just previous to his departure from this world, how full they are of this subject, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17); [John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.26); [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26); [John 16:7-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7-13). What assurance he has given us that we shall not seek the Spirit's influence in vain, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13).

To every one of you, then, I say: Enlarge your expectations, to the full extent of your necessities: for God the Father will save you by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he will shed forth on you abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior, [Titus 3:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.4-6). Indeed I must not content myself with saying that this great gift shall be given unto you, if you will believe in Christ; for it is the express declaration of Almighty God, that, "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9)."

***~~2. In what respects we may ourselves confirm the testimony here given—~~***

The Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, were witnesses for Christ, not only in a way of oral testimony, but especially in the miraculous powers which they exercised. And though these miraculous powers have ceased—yet are there spiritual influences, by which the agency of the Holy Spirit is no less displayed.

What if we saw, "in the whole valley of vision, the dead bones resume their former vitality, and rise upon the earth a large army," would that not display the operation of a divine power? [Ezekiel 37:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-10). Behold, such a witness for the Lord is every soul that is "quickened from its death in trespasses and sins, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1)." Not less power is exerted in the salvation of every lost soul, than in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and his investiture with divine authority over all the principalities and powers both of Heaven and Hell, [Ephesians 1:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-23).

Be then, my brethren, witnesses for the Lord, by showing forth the power of his grace, [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9), and bringing forth in rich abundance the fruits of his Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-24). Especially bear in your conduct, a resemblance to the Lord Jesus Christ, in all his holy tempers and dispositions under his unparalleled afflictions; and then "the life of that blessed Savior will be made manifest in your bodies, 2 Corinthians 4:11." Be "planted in the likeness of his death and resurrection;" and you will be witnesses for him, that he is possessed of all power in Heaven and in earth, and that in due season every enemy shall be put under his feet.

***~~#1738~~***

***~~JESUS IS THE CHRIST~~***

***~~[Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36).~~***

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!"

WHEN we consider the advantages possessed by the Apostles, we are astonished to find how slow of heart they were to receive and understand the great mystery of the Gospel salvation. Not only before the death of their Lord, but after his resurrection, yes, and after all his appearances to them, and the fresh instructions given them during the space of forty days, they could not divest themselves of the idea of a temporal kingdom. Not an hour before his ascension to Heaven, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" But *from the day of Pentecost there was no more of doubt upon their minds respecting any fundamental point of our religion.* For some years indeed they retained their prejudices about the Gentiles, not conceiving that they were to be admitted to a full participation of the blessings of the Gospel: but, respecting Christ, and his salvation, they were fully instructed, and never spoke but with the most unshaken confidence. This appears from the very first sermon which was delivered by any of them. Peter argued with as strong a persuasion of mind as he possessed at any future period; and without hesitation affirmed, in the presence of thousands of his countrymen, that Jesus, even the very person whom they had crucified, was indeed the Christ, the true Messiah! The order of the words in the Greek makes the expression very emphatic.

His words are evidently the close of an argument: and, as they are delivered with peculiar confidence, it will be proper to consider,

***~~I. The force of his reasoning—~~***

Our Lord, according to his promise, had poured out the Spirit in a visible manner on his disciples, whereby they were enabled to speak a great variety of languages, which gift was emblematically represented by the appearance of cloven tongues, as of fire. The circumstance of their immediately addressing all persons in their native tongues, excited the greatest astonishment: but those who understood not the particular language which they spoke, represented them as in a state of intoxication. In vindication of himself and his associates, the Apostle justly observes, that such an imputation was absurd, since none but the most abandoned of men could have been drinking to intoxication so early as nine o'clock in the morning, and that upon a solemn feast-day, when they were about to worship God in his temple; and then proceeds to argue with them respecting the Messiahship of Christ, as proved by this event. He states,

***~~1. That this miraculous gift was foretold by the Prophet Joel, as to be conferred by the Messiah—~~***

The passage cited from the prophet Joel undoubtedly refers to the times of the Messiah. Compare verse 16-21 with [Joel 2:28-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.28-32). Previous to that time the Holy Spirit had been given only in a very partial way to a few: but, when Christ would be glorified, he was to be poured out, as it were, upon multitudes, both of men and women, that by his miraculous operations he might testify of Christ, and by his efficacious grace he might bring men to Christ.

After this would have been done for a space of time sufficient to evince the distinguished kindness of God towards his ancient people, and their incorrigible obstinacy towards him, God would give them signs of a very different kind; even such terrible signs, as would be like "turning the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood;" and then would destruction come upon them to the uttermost. But as, previously to that period, all who would believe in Christ would be saved from the condemnation in which all others would be involved, so, at that period, all his believing people would escape the miseries which would overwhelm the residue of that devoted nation.

This was the plain meaning of the prophecy, which at this time began to be fulfilled; and which in due season would receive a perfect accomplishment.

***~~2. That this gift was actually conferred by Jesus—~~***

It was known to all of them, that Jesus, during his ministry on earth, had wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his word and doctrine: and though the nation had put him to an ignominious death—yet had God raised him from the dead, and empowered him to send forth the Spirit in the manner he had done.

With respect to the truth of his resurrection, it had been foretold in terms that could be applicable to him alone. Compare verse 23-28 with [Psalm 16:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.8-11). It could not be of himself that David spoke those words; for he did die, and see corruption; and his tomb remained even to the Apostles' days. But Jesus saw no corruption: his soul was not left in the place of departed spirits, nor was his body permitted to continue in the grave long enough to undergo any change: he rose on the third day, as all his disciples could testify, because they had themselves seen him on that day, and occasionally conversed familiarly with him for forty days afterwards, even to the very hour when in their presence he ascended up to Heaven. Moreover he had expressly told them that he would send down the Holy Spirit upon them, in the manner he had done: and therefore it must be HE, and none other but HE, that had wrought the miracles which they now saw and heard, verse 29-33.

If they would still be inclined to think that David had had any concern in this miracle, the Apostle called their attention to another prophecy of his, wherein David himself declared, that the person who would be thus invested with power at the right hand of God, was his Lord; and that the person so exalted, would "make all his foes his footstool. Compare verse 34, 35 with [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1)."

It was evident therefore, that, as the Messiah was to rise from the dead, and ascend up to Heaven for the purpose of establishing his kingdom upon earth; and as Jesus had risen and ascended agreeably to those predictions; there could be no doubt but that it was he who had now sent down the Spirit, according to the promise which he had given them. He had told them, but a few days before, that he would send forth upon them the promise of the Father, and baptize them with the Holy Spirit, [Acts 1:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.4-5); and he had now done it in a way which commended itself to the eyes and ears of all the people.

***~~3. That therefore Jesus must unquestionably be the true Messiah—~~***

It was not in the power of any creature to work the miracles now wrought: nor would the Father work them in order to confirm the claims of an impostor. They must of necessity therefore have been wrought by Jesus, who had thereby proved himself to be the true Messiah.

On these grounds Peter declared to them, that, as they could not doubt the existence of those prophecies, or the application of them to the Messiah, or the miracle now wrought by Jesus in confirmation of his claim to that office, "the whole house of Israel might know assuredly, that God had made that very Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Such was the Apostle's reasoning: and from the confident manner in which he expressed himself, we are led to notice,

***~~II. The importance of his conclusion—~~***

If *God*has constituted Jesus both Lord and Christ, then we may know assuredly,

***~~1. That Christ is our only Lord and Savior—~~***

The force of this was felt by Peter's audience, insomuch that three thousand of them instantly obeyed the heavenly mandate, and surrendered up themselves to be saved and governed by him alone.

Precisely in this manner must we devote ourselves to him: we must not be contented with "calling him *Lord, Lord*," but must feel the same need of him as they did, and cast ourselves upon him for mercy, and consecrate ourselves entirely to his service, verse 37, 38. We must admit no other ground of hope but his obedience unto death: we must suffer no "other Lord to have dominion over us:" but, having been bought by him with his most precious blood, we must "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."

***~~2. That he is an all-sufficient Savior—~~***

Whatever we can want, he is exalted to bestow. Do we need forgiveness of sins? He is empowered to grant it. Do we need repentance? He can impart that also. This we are assured of, on the testimony of Peter and all the other Apostles. What joyful tidings are these! Hear them, all you who are laboring under a sense of guilt; and know, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse you from all sin." And you, who mourn on account of the hardness of your hearts, know that he can "take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh." If God the Father has constituted him "Head over all things to the Church," you need not fear, but that there shall be found in his fullness an ample supply for all your necessities. Paul pursues the same line of argument as Peter, and founds upon it this consolatory truth. [Acts 13:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.35-39). See also [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).

***~~3. That none shall ever look to him in vain—~~***

"Him that comes unto me," says Christ, "I will never cast out" What then have we to do with desponding thoughts? Has God thus exalted his Son, and will he disappoint those who trust in him? No! it cannot be: "he never did," nor ever will, "say to the seed of Jacob, Seek my face in vain." Did the vilest person in the universe only desire mercy as much as God delights to exercise it, he would in one instant be purged from all his sin! We need only look to the effect of Peter's sermon on the murderous Jews, and we shall see a perfect pattern of what God is ready to do for us, the very instant we believe in Jesus. "Know this," my brethren; know it "every one of you;" know it "most assuredly;" know it for your inexpressible comfort: and may God make this another Pentecost to our souls, for his mercy's sake! Amen.

***~~#1739~~***

***~~REPENTANCE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE FIRST CONVERTS~~***

***~~[Acts 2:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37-39).~~***

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

THE doctrine of a crucified Savior is that which God has exclusively honored in converting sinners to himself. The terrors of Mount Sinai are often used by him to awaken men from their slumbers; but it is "the law of faith," as published from Mount Zion, that alone captivates the souls of men. It was this, which, when exhibited in types and shadows, overcame the saints under the Jewish dispensation: and no sooner was it plainly preached by the Apostles, than thousands yielded to its all-powerful influence.

The manner in which it operated we may see in the text. Peter had charged home upon his hearers the guilt of crucifying the Lord Jesus; and had declared that God had exalted that very Jesus to be the Sovereign "Lord" of all, and to be the "Christ," the anointed Savior of the world, verse 36. Instantly was a wonderful effect produced on the whole assembly: in order to illustrate which, we shall notice,

***~~I. The penitent's inquiry—~~***

In the question which these first converts put each to the Apostle who stood nearest to him, we may observe,

***~~1. Deep contrition—~~***

They were "cut to the heart" with a sense of all their sins, and especially the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus. And we also must be humbled in like manner; seeing that our sins were the procuring cause of Christ's death, [Isaiah 53:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-5); yes, and we have crucified him afresh ten thousand times by our continuance in sin, [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6).

***~~2. Extreme earnestness—~~***

Nothing lay so near their hearts, as to obtain the knowledge of salvation. Thus must we also feel our whole souls engaged in this great concern.

***~~3. A determination to comply with God's terms, whatever they would be—~~***

This is one of the strongest and most unequivocal marks of true penitence. And it must show itself in us, as well as in them. *We must not dispute about the terms, as too humiliating, or too strict, but be willing to be saved on the conditions prescribed in the Gospel.*

***~~4. A respectful regard for those whom they once hated for their attachment to Christ—~~***

The Apostles had addressed them in these respectful and affectionate terms, "Men and Brethren." They now, in their turn, use the same language towards the Apostles; though but one hour before, no words would have been too harsh to use in invectives against them. Thus must our hearts also be turned towards the ministers and the disciples of Christ, however much we may have before hated and despised them. Nor are our inquiries after salvation such as they ought to be, if they are not accompanied with all these marks of penitence and contrition.

This inquiry was not in vain, as we may see from,

***~~II. God's answer to it—~~***

The reply given by God's ambassador, contains,

***~~1. A plain direction—~~***

The term "repent" imports in this place, a change of mind: and it refers to their former apprehensions of Christ: they had lately crucified him as an impostor; now they must be persuaded that he was the true Messiah; yes, they must rely on his death as an atonement offered for them, and seek the remission of their sins through him alone. They must moreover "be baptized in his name," and become his avowed, his faithful disciples.

Such is the direction given to every one of us. We have scarcely thought Christ at all worthy of our regard; now he must be "precious to us", "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

We must renounce every self-righteous method of seeking acceptance with God, and believe in him for the remission of our sins.

We must give up ourselves to Christ in a perpetual covenant; we must join ourselves to his Church and people; we must confess him openly in the midst of a persecuting and ungodly world.

***~~2. A rich encouragement—~~***

The Apostle told them that "they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." We do not apprehend that this promise extended solely, or even primarily, to the miraculous powers with which the Apostles were invested; for it was made to all believers who would ever be called into the Church of God. We apprehend it referred chiefly to *those saving and sanctifying operations of the Spirit which are necessary for all people in every age*. All need the Holy Spirit:  
to instruct and guide them into all truth,  
to strengthen them for their spiritual warfare,  
to comfort them under their afflictions,  
to renew them after the Divine image, and  
to make them "fit for their heavenly inheritance."

For these ends and purposes did the Apostle engage that they would experience his operations.

He assured them that the promise of the Spirit for these ends and purposes was given to all who would believe in Christ. Accordingly we find that that promise was made, [Isaiah 44:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.3); that it was a part of the covenant of grace, [Isaiah 59:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.21); and that Jesus Christ himself referred to it as made in the Old Testament, and as to be fulfilled under the Christian dispensation, to all who would believe in him, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39); and Paul also mentions it as included in the promise made to Abraham, to be purchased by Christ for his believing seed, and to be conferred upon them all without distinction, [Galatians 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.14).

What further encouragement could they need?

Were they *guilty?* the blood of Christ would cleanse them?

Were they *polluted?* the Holy Spirit would sanctify them. He would come and dwell in them as in his temples, and perfect in them the good work that was now begun. The same promise is now made to us; and shall be fulfilled to all who seek for mercy through Christ alone.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Some possibly may be led to question whether this subject is properly addressed to them: since, having never crucified Christ, as the Jews did, they need not "repent;" and having been "baptized in the name of Christ," they have "received the remission of their sins," and "the gift of the Holy Spirit:" they have also been taught in their catechism, "What they must do to be saved;" and therefore need not, like those in our text, to make that inquiry.

But who among us has not "crucified the Son of God afresh," by a continuance in sin? Who has not, in numberless instances, done what he ought not, and left undone what he ought to have done? Consequently, we need to repent as much as they: and need also, as much as they, to apply to Christ for the remission of our sins.

Moreover, let any man look at his indwelling *corruptions*, and say, whether he does not need the influences of the Spirit, to mortify and subdue them.

Let him also look at his *duties*, and say, whether he does not need the Spirit to strengthen him for a more suitable performance of them.

Brethren, the name of Christians, or a form of godliness, will profit us little. Religion must be taken up by us, as it was by those Jews, as a matter of infinite importance, and of indispensable necessity.

Like them we must he humbled,

like them must we flee to Christ for mercy,

like them must we become his faithful followers.

Let all of us then "look to Him, as pierced" for our sins; and expect from him that divine Comforter, who "shall teach us all things, and work in us as effectually for our salvation, as he wrought in Christ for his exaltation to glory, [Ephesians 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-21)."

***~~#1740~~***

***~~SEPARATION FROM THE UNGODLY RECOMMENDED~~***

**[Acts 2:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.40).**

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!"

IT is in many respects a great advantage to us that we have the Holy Scriptures comprised in so small a space: for if they had been very voluminous, they would have been far less accessible to the poor, and few even of the rich would have found leisure or inclination to peruse them. One cannot however but feel a kind of regret that some particular parts have not been more copiously transmitted to us. What an inestimable treasure, for instance, would we have possessed, if the whole of our Lord's discourse with the two disciples in their way to Emmaus had been preserved, [Luke 24:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.27). So it would, doubtless, have been a rich feast to our souls, if every part of Peter's first sermon, whereby three thousand sinners were converted to God, had been recorded.

***~~But we must be contented to gather up the fragments which are left us in the inspired volume, and study with the more diligence those records which God has deemed sufficient for us.~~***

The substance of the Apostle's sermon we have in the foregoing context; and the application of it, in the words of our text. It is with the latter that we are at present concerned: and for a just improvement of it, we shall consider,

***~~I. Peter's testimony—~~***

We cannot doubt but that Peter testified of Christ as the true Messiah, and showed from the Scriptures that his death and resurrection were the means which God had appointed for the salvation of a ruined world. But it is evident, that, as he testified for Christ—so he testified against that generation, whom he reproved as an "corrupt generation." But what ground was there for ascribing to them this character? Surely there was abundant reason fur the appellation, even though it had been still more severe, for they were,

***~~1. An impenitent generation—~~***

John the Baptist, our Lord himself, and all his Apostles, had, for the space of four years, preached among them, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand! [Matthew 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.2). [Mark 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.15); [Mark 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.12)." Yet, like their forefathers, they would not hear, [Jeremiah 7:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.23-24). [Zechariah 7:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.11-12). They were even more obdurate than the heathen: for the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah; and even the Sodomites themselves would have repented, had they heard such preaching as our Lord's; but the people of that generation would "not regard the voice of the charmer, though he charmed them ever so wisely, [Matthew 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.20); [Matthew 12:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.41) and [Psalm 58:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 58.5)."

They were satisfied with their descent from Abraham, and thought that their relation to him was a certain pledge of their acceptance with God, [Matthew 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.8-9). [John 8:33-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.33-41). These things were subjects of complaint against them, and strongly characterized the people at large, [Matthew 21:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.31-32).

And do we see here no resemblance to our present generation? The people of this land have thousands of monitors, who call them to repentance. Yet whom do we see smiting on their bosoms and imploring mercy? Who calls himself to account, "saying, What have I done?" "Who asks, Where is God, my Maker?" Because we are *called*Christians, we imagine ourselves to *be*Christians, even though we could not mention one single particular wherein we resemble Christ. *All that die are, as a matter of course, supposed to go to Heaven, even though they never took one step in the way that leads thither.*Say then, whether the appellation given to them, be not suitable to us also?

***~~2. An unbelieving generation—~~***

The Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in their synagogues every Sabbath-day. To them also our blessed Lord appealed as testifying of him, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39); and he confirmed his word with unnumbered miracles. Yet did the whole nation, except a few individuals, reject him: so that the complaint which had many hundred years before been uttered against them by the prophet, was abundantly verified, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1) with [John 12:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.38) and [Romans 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.16).

Would to God there were less occasion to involve the present generation also in the same condemnation! We have the Scriptures, which are appealed to by every faithful minister of Christ. But who believes what we say? Who believes the necessity of conversion to God? Who believes, that, "unless he be born again he can never enter into the kingdom of God?" and that "without real, universal holiness, no man can see the Lord?" That men *profess*to believe these things, we acknowledge: but who follows after the attainment of them, and *evinces the sincerity of his faith by the earnestness of his exertions?*A little gleaning of believers may be found; but the harvest is borne away by unbelief.

***~~3. A persecuting generation—~~***

In every age the Jews had persecuted their prophets unto death: and that generation filled up the measure of their fathers' iniquities, by "crucifying the Lord of Glory." Against the Apostles also they raged with insatiable fury, and against all that called upon the name of Christ.

It is true, we do not, in this age, see crosses erected, and fires kindled, for the destruction of the Lord's people: but has persecution ceased?*Is not a life of real godliness still hated by the world?*Does it not invariably become an object of reproach; and do not the opprobrious names given to religious people lower them in the estimation of others, insomuch that all their good qualities are lost sight of, and they are deemed worthy only of pity and contempt?

No thanks to the world, then, that fires are not kindled as much as ever: it is to our laws, and to the providence of our God, we owe it, that bounds are prescribed, beyond which the enmity of men is no longer allowed to exert itself. But *it is still as true as ever, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution!*[2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

But let us pass on to,

***~~II. His exhortation—~~***

Peter well knew, that all who retained their enmity against God and his Christ, must soon perish: he therefore exhorted his hearers to save themselves from the impending ruin. The same exhortation befits us also. Is it asked, How are we to save ourselves from this untoward generation?

We answer,

***~~1. We must renounce our sinful ways—~~***

You judge where such sinful ways must lead. Need you be told, that, "except you repent, you must all perish!" Or that, "if you believe not, you cannot see life, but the wrath of God abides on you!" Or, that all who make Christ "a stumbling-stone, will be broken in pieces?" Deceive not yourselves: do not think that the number of your associates will afford you any security: numbers did not protect the inhabitants of the plain, or the antediluvian world; nor shall you find the termination of the broad road any other than you have been forewarned concerning it. Of this you may rest assured, that "whatever you sow, you shall also reap: if you sow to the flesh, you shall, from the flesh, reap corruption: you must sow to the Spirit, if you would, from the Spirit, reap life everlasting."

***~~2. We must forsake our sinful company—~~***

We know that you cannot entirely separate from the ungodly; for then, as the Apostle says, "you must need go out of the world." But you are not to choose them as your companions; for, "what communion has light with darkness, and Christ with Belial?" It is not sufficient that you "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; you must also *reprove*them, [Ephesians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.11)." Need you be told what even a heathen writer could declare, that "evil communications corrupt good manners, 1 Corinthians 15:33.

This is a quotation from Menander, "Do you not know, that men insensibly imbibe the spirit of their associates; and that you must "come out from Babylon, if you would not be partakers of her sins and of her plagues, [Revelation 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.4)." Know assuredly, that "a companion of fools will be destroyed, [Proverbs 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 13.20);" and that, if you belong to Christ, "you will not be of the world, even as he was not of the world, [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16)." I say to you, therefore, in the words of the great Apostle, "Come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty! [2 Corinthians 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.17-18)."

***~~3. We must devote ourselves entirely to the Lord—~~***

The conduct of those whom the Apostle addressed, will form the best comment on his exhortation. *His converts instantly applied to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and devoted themselves unreservedly to his service: and from that day "continued*in the Apostles' fellowship," (not the fellowship of their former companions,) and in the unremitted exercise of piety and love, verse 41-47.

We do not say that you are to neglect your worldly callings; (nothing can be further from our wishes, or from your duty than this:) but you must begin from this time to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him who died for you, and rose again." "Instead of being any longer conformed to this world, you must be transformed in the renewing of your minds, proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

To all of you then I say, Save yourselves in this manner—escape thus from the contagion and ruin of this untoward generation. Give yourselves up to God, as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus: do it without fear: do it without reserve: do it without delay. Then, when the impenitent and unbelieving part of this generation shall eat the bitter fruit of their doings, you shall be numbered with "the generation of the righteous," even of those who sought and served their God! [Psalm 14:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.5); [Psalm 24:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 24.6); [Psalm 112:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.2).

***~~#1741~~***

***~~THE STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS~~***

***~~[Acts 2:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-47).~~***

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

THE true nature of Christianity would be very imperfectly discovered by any one who would look for it in the conduct of the Christian world. The generality of those who name the name of Christ, differ but little from those who never heard of his name. And even among those who profess a regard for religion, there is but a small measure of that spirit which may be discerned among the early converts. In the Churches of this day will be found a *form*of godliness, but very little of its *power*. We must go to the Scriptures, and to the accounts given to us of the first Christians, to see what vital religion is. There we behold it in all its purity. Let us contemplate it as exhibited by those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. In our text we may behold,

***~~I. Their charity towards others—~~***

This was more extensive than any that can be found on record in the annals of the world. A few individuals perhaps may be found, who have evinced an unbounded love towards those who had long been connected with them in the ties of friendship: but here the whole body of believers were animated by the same spirit towards each other, even towards those whom they had never so much as seen until that hour. All were divested of every selfish feeling, and sacrificed their own personal interests for the good of the whole.

But here arises an important question; *"Is their conduct in this particular a model for our imitation?"*I answer,

***~~We certainly are not called to perform the same specific act—~~***

That act arose out of the circumstances of the Church at that time. Some indeed have suggested, that they acted thus from an assured expectation that either they would be speedily dispossessed of their property by the violence of persecution, or that they would before long suffer the loss of it in the general destruction of the Jewish polity. But such an idea as this divests their conduct of all its excellence; since it would have been no virtue at all to sell what they knew would soon be taken from them, and to give away what they could not retain.

They proceeded on far different grounds from these. Of the multitude who were converted, great numbers came from a distance to the feast, not expecting to continue at Jerusalem more than a few days: but now that they were led to just views of Christianity, they would on no account lose the opportunities they enjoyed of obtaining further instruction from their inspired teachers. Of course therefore, unless assisted by others, they must be left destitute of necessary food: and, if necessitated to depend on others who were enemies to this new religion, they could expect but little aid, and would therefore be under a strong temptation to renounce Christianity as soon as they had embraced it. Besides, of those who lived at Jerusalem, many would probably become objects of virulent persecution, so as to be deprived of all that they possessed; and therefore that none might be reduced to abject poverty, the whole body formed one common stock for the supply of all; the richer making their abundance a supply for the necessities of the more indigent. Compare [Acts 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32); [Acts 4:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.34-35). This however was perfectly voluntary on their part; for Peter told Ananias that he was under no obligation to part with his property, [Acts 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.4); and the whole tenor of Scripture supposes that there must be different ranks and orders of men, who are called to the performance of distinct and appropriate duties The command given to the Rich Youth was also peculiar to him, [Luke 18:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.22).

***~~But the principle from which they acted is of universal and unalterable obligation—~~***

Love was the principle by which they were actuated: and it is characteristic of love, that "it seeks not its own, [1 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.5);" it puts off selfishness, and seeks its happiness in contributing to the happiness of others. A person under the influence of this principle considers all that he possesses as belonging to God, and as a talent with which he is entrusted for the benefit of mankind. Hence he is "glad to distribute, and willing to give," whenever a just occasion for liberality presents itself, and "especially towards the household of faith." If the particular circumstances of the Church call for such a sacrifice, he is ready, as far as the occasion requires it, to comply literally with that command of Christ, "Sell what you have, and give alms;" for whatever treasure he may possess on earth, his chief desire is to "have treasure in Heaven, [Luke 12:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.33-34)." True indeed it is, that there are not many who, like the Macedonians, "give according to their ability, yes and beyond their ability, [2 Corinthians 8:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.3-4);" and fewer still who, like the poor widow, give their *last mite*unto the Lord. But in too many instances there is rather reason to complain with Paul, that "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ:" but still the injunction, "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others, [1 Corinthians 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.24)" is as much in force as ever; and we ought, if called to it, to "lay down," not our property only, but even "our own lives for the brethren."

Of an equally exalted kind was,

**II. Their piety** **towards God—**

They gave up themselves wholly, as it were, to the exercises of religion. But here the same question, as before, recurs: How far was their conduct in this respect a model for our imitation? And the same answer must be returned to it:

***~~We are not called to follow them in the particular act—~~***

The occasion was so peculiar, as to justify, and even require, a peculiar mode of acting. Our circumstances are extremely different from theirs. We have duties which cannot be neglected without great injury to society, and dishonor to God: and, if every one, from the moment that he was converted, were to lay aside all his worldly business, he would place in the way of the ungodly such a stumbling-block as would prove almost subversive of Christianity itself. "To do our own business," and "not to be slothful in business," are as much commanded, as to "be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." *We therefore cannot be called to such a line of conduct as is incompatible with the discharge of all our social duties.*

***~~But in principle we must resemble them—~~***

They gave themselves up wholly unto God: and so "must it also be our food and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father." We must "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" and "yield up to him our bodies and our souls as a living sacrifice," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Whatever be our calling in life, there can be no reason why we should not "delight ourselves in God," and "live, not to ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again." Why would not every one of us have the same frame of mind as David, whose duties must certainly have been as numerous and important as any that we are called to perform, [Psalm 63:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.1-5); [Psalm 84:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.1-4); [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10). We cannot, as has before been observed, be constantly engaged in religious duties; but we may have our hearts always disposed for the enjoyment of them, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; and it is certainly incumbent on us to embrace all seasonable opportunities of waiting upon God in the Church, and at his table, and in our families and the closet.

Our daily fellowship with our friends should also be improved for the advancement of true religion, and every returning meal would afford us an occasion of enjoying and glorifying our heavenly Benefactor, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3). It is our privilege, as much as that of the primitive Christians, to "eat our food with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God."

With such knowledge of their conduct we may expect to hear of,

***~~III. Their increase—~~***

***~~Their conduct conciliated the regard of all the people—~~***

Doubtless the natural man hates the light, because the evil of his own ways is exposed by it. Yet there is something in true religion which approves its excellence, even to the very people who hate it. Herod, from a full conviction that "John was a just and holy man, feared him," and complied with his advice in many particulars; though afterwards he imprisoned him and put him to death.

Thus the wonderful change that was wrought upon the first converts, from selfishness to charity, and from irreligion to the most exalted piety, excited the admiration and the love of all!

How blessed is it, where the conduct of professors is so exemplary, as "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and to engage the esteem of those who are condemned by it! We must not indeed expect always to secure the favor of men; but we should endeavor so to act as to deserve it.

***~~Their numbers also were increased from day to day—~~***

Doubtless, conversion is the fruit of divine grace alone: "Whether Paul plants, or Apollos waters—it is God alone who can give the increase." Yet God uses various means to accomplish this work; and one of peculiar efficacy is, the conduct of his people: by that he "puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrains them to "glorify him in the day of visitation." It is highly probable that the exalted piety and unbounded charity of the first converts were greatly instrumental to the conversion of those around them. Every one of them was a preacher in his own house, by his actions at least, if not by words.

O! what might not be hoped for, if all who profess religion, breathed the spirit that displayed itself at that period of the Church? Truly, many might be awakened to a concern for their souls, and be constrained to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is truly with you." Let this be borne in mind, as an incentive to a continual progress in holiness; and let us strive "to make our light shine before men, that others, beholding our good works, may glorify our Father who is in Heaven."

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. At what a low ebb religion is among us!~~***

If we compare our attainments with those recorded in our text, what reason shall we see to blush and be ashamed! How has selfishness triumphed over charity, and lukewarmness assumed the place of piety! But let us not imagine that religion is different now from what it was in that day. Some difference in our mode of exercising religion may justly be admitted: but in our spirit there would be no difference at all:

God is the same gracious God as ever;

his Gospel is as worthy of all acceptance as ever;

and the blessings we receive by means of it are as great as ever.

Therefore we ought to feel its power and evince its efficacy, as much as others have done at any period of the Church. Let us then set this example before our eyes, and endeavor to walk even as they walked.

***~~2. How we may be instrumental to the increase of the Church—~~***

Much may be done, very much, by every member of the Church of Christ. The influence of a bright example is still as great as ever. As any instance of misconduct in professors, hardens others against the truth, so the beauty of holiness exhibited by them has a powerful tendency to win the souls of adversaries. If, on the one hand, by an uncharitable or impious deportment, we may "destroy many souls for whom Christ died," so, by a life befitting the Gospel, we may "win many who never would have obeyed the preached word." Let us then attend to our conduct in every state and circumstance of life: let us look well to the whole of our spirit and temper, that we may not even in the smallest matter "cause the enemy to speak reproachfully," but rather may "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

***~~#1742~~***

***~~THE CRIPPLE HEALED~~***

***~~[Acts 3:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6-8).~~***

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

IT is justly said, that "we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." Nothing under Heaven was further from the expectations of this poor cripple, or of the friends who brought him to "the beautiful gate of the temple," than that he would obtain such a mercy as that which was now given unto him. Possibly he might hope to receive some larger donation than any he had ever yet been favored with; but, to obtain a perfect cure of his malady, with all the attendant benefits of it to his body and his soul—he had not the slightest hope. Nor indeed had Peter and John any thoughts of conferring such a benefit, until God, by his Spirit, put it into their hearts to impart it. But the miracle here wrought is of standing use to the Church in all ages. We see in it,

***~~I. A divine attestation to the Messiahship of Jesus—~~***

***~~For this end it was wrought by the Apostles—~~***

When they were first sent forth by our Lord, soon after the commencement of their call to his service, he gave them this command: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely you have received, freely give, [Matthew 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.8)." The same command was in force during the whole of their ministry; because it was by working miracles that they were to convince men that they were messengers from the Most High God, [John 14:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.12). [Mark 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.17-18), who alone could so confirm their word, or give such testimony to the truths they proclaimed.

In the miracle now wrought, they did not merely think of conferring a blessing, as if they had given to the man a piece of silver or of gold. Of such gifts they had none to bestow: but an infinitely higher gift, which not all the silver and gold in the universe could purchase, they were empowered to bestow, for the purpose of leading his mind, and the minds of the nation at large, to the Lord Jesus. The very words by which they conveyed the blessing, showed this: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

When the spectators of the miracle were struck with admiration of them, as the authors of it, they utterly disclaimed all honor arising from it, as though they had either wrought it by their own power, or merited it at the hands of God by their own holiness: they declare that God himself had wrought it, for the purpose of "glorifying his Son Jesus," whom the Jews had so lately crucified, but whom he had raised from the dead, and whom all the prophets had referred to as the Prophet like unto Moses, that was to be received by them at the peril of their souls, verse 12-15.

Thus the Apostles themselves appeal to the miracle, as demonstrative of Christ's Messiahship: "His name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know; yes, the faith that is in him has given him this perfect soundness, in the presence of you all, verse 16."

In the miracle there were two things which must carry conviction to every dispassionate mind; namely, the *suddenness*, and the *perfection*of it. No natural means could have effected the cure so instantaneously; nor, considering that he had been a cripple from his birth, and was now forty years of age, could the cure have been so effected as to leave no measure of weakness and languor in the person healed.

But here he, in the first instance, showed himself as strong and vigorous as it he had never been diseased at all: from whence it was evident that God had wrought it in the name of Jesus Christ, and had by this act set his seal to the truth of Christ's Messiahship.

***~~2. In this light it was regarded by the enemies of our Lord—~~***

They had long known the man; and seeing him now, a totally altered man, present in the midst of them—they knew what conviction the miracle must carry to the minds of all. Reduced to great difficulties, they thus argued among themselves: "What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle has been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But, that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name, [Acts 4:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.14-18)."

Here it is clear that they thought the evidence arising from this miracle fully conclusive; and that, if those who had wrought it were allowed to testify of Jesus, they must carry all before them. At the raising of Lazarus by our blessed Lord, the chief priests and elders argued, "If we let the man (Jesus) alone, all men will believe on him:" so did the elders at this time, in reference to the Apostles; "If we do not silence them, they will soon fill the whole land with their doctrine, and establish the faith they profess on an immoveable basis."

Thus clear was it, as an attestation to Christ's Messiahship. But it was also,

***~~II. A characteristic emblem of his salvation—~~***

*All the miracles shadowed forth some part of the Gospel salvation.* But this gave a peculiarly instructive view of it. It showed,

***~~1. Its operation on the soul—~~***

In this view it was explained by the Apostles themselves: "Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nothing of you builders, which is become the cornerstone. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name given under Heaven whereby we can be saved." The import of which is simply this: 'You have seen how this man's body has been healed, even by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is in this way that your souls must be saved: for there is no other power that can effect such a change within you; a change from weakness to strength, from death to life, [Acts 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10); [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12) with [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26).

Hence it appears that the state of this poor cripple exhibits a just view of every man that is born into the world. He from the very womb was incapable of those exertions for which the limbs were originally designed. And so it is with fallen man, in reference to the powers of his soul. He cannot walk before God as Adam did in Paradise, nor as God's saints and servants do even in their fallen state.

But, by the name of Jesus Christ, who is there that may not be healed? Who is there, however deplorable his state, whom the power of Divine grace cannot renovate, so as to make him altogether a new creature? Can anything be conceived more effectually changed than the converts on the day of Pentecost? *From blood-thirsty lions, they at once became meek and patient lambs*.

So it was with the jailer, who, but a few hours before had thrust Paul and Silas into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks; yet, at the instant of his conversion, administers to them with all the tenderness of the most endeared brother.

Thus it is, wherever the grace of God is received in truth. There is "a new creation, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17), a resurrection from the dead, like unto that which was effected in the Lord Jesus Christ, when he was raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, far above all the principalities and powers, whether of Heaven or Hell, [Ephesians 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-21)." Great wonder was excited by the change wrought on this poor man; yet was that but a very faint shadow of what is wrought on all, by the converting grace of God, through faith in the name of Christ.

***~~2. Its effects upon the heart and life—~~***

See this man, when begging an alms of Peter and John, a poor miserable suppliant for the smallest dole of charity! Behold him, the very instant Peter stretched out the hand of faith and love to raise him up! See how upright he stands, how firmly he walks, how exultingly he leaps for joy! See him entering with his benefactors into the temple of the Lord, pouring forth his praises and thanksgivings to God for the astonishing mercy given unto him! Nor will he let go his hold on those who had been the instruments of conveying this mercy to him. No! he would never lose sight of them more, if he could help it; so ardent was his gratitude, so abundant his love.

Now, then, this shows what the healing grace of God effects in the heart of man. O the joy which a sense of God's pardoning love kindles in the soul! Once the man attended the house of God in a formal customary way, without any delight in the duties there performed: but now the ordinances of divine worship are sources of the sublimest enjoyment. His addresses to God now come from the heart: and he scarcely knows how to restrain his emotions; such a fire is kindled within him, and such exquisite joy stimulates his whole frame. And to the instruments of his conversion he feels a love altogether different from any which mere nature had ever excited in his bosom. Paul says of the Galatian converts, that "they would have even plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him." The whole life and conduct is from that hour altogether changed. He begins to live, not to himself, as formerly, but unto God. He desires to show to the whole world what a Savior Christ is; so that in his deportment they may have an undeniable evidence of the excellency and blessedness of the Gospel salvation.

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

***~~1. What it is we aim at in all our Ministrations—~~***

We find you all in the sad predicament of this poor cripple. But, because the weakness is in your souls, and not in your bodies, you are not conscious of it: whereas you may see in one moment, *if you would candidly examine your state, that you have been from your very birth, as destitute of all spiritual energy in your souls*, as that poor man was of activity in the use of his limbs.

And hither we see you brought, some perhaps by a formal regard to the habits of your country, and others by mere curiosity, and none of you expecting to receive more than some customary gratification: but we come (to work a miracle, shall I say?—that would be deemed presumptuous; but we do come) to convey a benefit which not all the angels in Heaven could confer, even the renovation of your souls in the name of Jesus Christ.

We do say to you, and you, and you, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, arise and walk;" and if only you can receive that word in faith, and look to the Lord Jesus Christ for his blessing, a healing operation shall go forth with the word, and salvation come to your souls this very day. It is thought by many, that we would make you melancholy. Yes, as melancholy as was that healed cripple in the first hour of his deliverance.

Dear brethren, search the Scriptures, and see what the effects of the Gospel were in the days of old. And such they are at this hour; and we account not ourselves to have ministered it to any good effect, any further than we see realized in you the blessed miracle which has been this day set before your eyes.

O that not only one or two of you might experience it this day, but all of you together; so that you might all be "filled with peace and joy in believing;" yes, and all be transported with a "joy that is unspeakable and and full of glory!"

***~~2. What it is that we expect from you, if you "receive not the grace of God in vain"—~~***

We expect you no longer continue be the poor, low, groveling creatures that you have been; but to show to all around you, that you are endued with power from on high, and enabled to "walk even as Christ himself walked." We expect you to shine as lights in the world: yes, the world itself expects this of you. If you profess to have experienced the converting grace of God, the world will ask you, and with reason too, "What do you more than others?"

And they would be made to see, that there is in divine grace an energy and a power, to which they are utter strangers; and an efficacy, for which they know not how to account.

Dear brethren, you must live above the world: you must delight yourselves in God. You must not be afraid of man: nor, if man ridicule and revile your devotion to God, must you regard it as of the smallest consequence. Gratitude to the Savior must fill your souls. To him you must consecrate all the powers he has renewed; and the whole of your life must henceforth be devoted to the praise of his grace, and to the glory of his name. And never must you return to your former state.

Think, I beg you, how the enemies of Christ would have triumphed, if this cripple had relapsed into his former state of impotence, and had again been necessitated to be carried, as before, to the temple-gate, to beg for alms. Will not the world triumph, if they ever behold you again returning to the state in which you were, previous to your reception of the Gospel?

O! remember that the honor of your Lord and Savior is bound up, as it were, in you and your conduct: if you walk uprightly, he will be glorified; but if you turn back, he will be dishonored, and his very name be blasphemed.

O! beg of God that you may never give occasion to the enemies of your Lord to speak reproachfully, but that, both in time and in eternity, you may be distinguished monuments of his power and grace.

***~~#1743~~***

***~~CHRIST REJECTED~~***

***~~[Acts 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.14-15).~~***

"You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."

IN the Apostles of our Lord we behold an admirable mixture of wisdom and firmness. On no occasion did they withhold the truth from their most powerful opponents: and on no occasion did they excite needless prejudice, in their manner of declaring it. It was necessary that they would assert the honor of their Lord, by whose Almighty power they had been enabled to work a most stupendous miracle. But, in doing this, they would appear to many, to be setting up the Lord Jesus against Moses, and to be detracting from the honor of Jehovah.

To obviate this misconception, they profess at once the greatest reverence for the religion of their forefathers; and proclaim, that "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob," had wrought this miracle for the express purpose of "glorifying his Son Jesus," whom they had treated with all imaginable ignominy, "denying him in the presence of Pilate, and preferring a murderer before him."

Here, you will perceive, while they are careful to give no needless offense, they boldly charge upon their hearers the guilt they had contracted in crucifying their Messiah. And somewhat of a similar charge must this day be brought against you, my brethren. But, that I may not overload you with too aggravated an accusation,

I propose to show,

***~~I. How far the charge exhibited against the Jews attaches to us—~~***

Against the Lord Jesus Christ personally it is impossible that we would ever have committed any offense; because he has never corporeally been within our reach. The charge therefore, so far as relates to personal injury, must be confined to those among whom he sojourned in the days of his flesh. But against him, as revealed in his Gospel, we have shown the same hostility as they. For,

***~~1. We have refused to acknowledge him in his proper character—~~***

He professed himself to be the King, of whom the prophets had spoken, [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6). [Daniel 2:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.44); [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14) with [John 18:33-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.33-37), and whose kingdom the Jews themselves expected to be established in the midst of them, [Matthew 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.2); [Matthew 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.6); [Matthew 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 2.11); [Matthew 21:4-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.4-9). But when Pilate announced him under that character, and offered to release him, they refused to acknowledge him, and demanded his crucifixion, [Mark 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.9); [Mark 15:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 15.12-14). They had abundant evidence that he was not only a just and holy person, but "the Just and Holy One, [Acts 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.27); [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52); [Acts 22:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.14)," the Son of the living God: yet they would not believe in him, or receive him as their King.

And have not we the same evidence of his character? Were not all his miracles sufficient proofs of his Messiahship? Yet, who among us has submitted himself to him? Who has not, in fact, said concerning him, "We will not have this man to reign over us! [Luke 19:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.14)." God has "sworn that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, [Romans 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.11);" but who has obeyed his mandate? Many will superstitiously bow their *heads*at the mention of the name of Jesus, in the Creed—but who will bow down their *hearts*before him? In that respect, the most of us, alas! are as stubborn and inflexible as stones or iron. Let us look back upon our past lives; and we shall see, that in no one respect have we truly taken his yoke upon us, and never for a single hour been truly obedient to his will.

***~~2. We have rejected him, with a scornful preference of our most deadly lusts—~~***

The Jews had the alternative given to them, to save Barabbas, or the Lord Jesus. But they, with one voice, cried out, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" thus deliberately preferring one who had destroyed life, to him who was "the Prince and Author of life" to a ruined world.

And have not we resembled them in this? The Lord Jesus Christ is still "the Prince of life;" possessing "life in, and of, himself, [John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.4); [John 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.26);" and ready to confer life on all who seek it at his hands, [John 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.25-26); [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2). Yet whom have we chosen for our friends? Have not those who would destroy our souls, as well as their own, been sought by us as our counselors and companions, rather than He who came down from Heaven to seek and save us? Yes, we have preferred also our most deadly lusts before Him; and, rather than "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)," we have, times without number, "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)."

And let it not be thought that I speak here of open transgressors only: for the more sober and moral of mankind differ not a whit in this respect from those who are more openly licentious: for the hearts of all are alike alienated from the Lord Jesus; and all, without exception, agree in saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us! [Psalm 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2-3)."

Let us then consider,

***~~II. What the guilt we have contracted calls for at our hands—~~***

The Apostle's address to his hearers is precisely that which befits our state also:

***~~1. "Repent!"—~~***

Well might the Jews, who had "crucified the Lord of glory," be called on to repent. But I think that this duty is yet more justly required at *our*hands: for the evidence which Jesus had given of his Messiahship, previous to his crucifixion, is not to be compared with that which his Resurrection and ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit, have afforded unto us. Besides, his lowly appearance was to the nation at large a matter of offense, which they knew not how to reconcile with their expectations: whereas to us, who are able to compare it with the prophecies respecting him, it is a confirmation rather than a stumbling-block—a proof of his Messiahship rather than a ground of doubt and suspicion.

The people at large were led by their superiors, and had but little opportunity of judging for themselves; but *we*can dispassionately view every part of Sacred Writ, and calmly judge between the prophecies and events. Moreover, they were apprehensive that, by receiving Jesus, they would be led to sacrifice their allegiance to Moses: but we profess not only to believe in Moses, but to have received the Lord Jesus also, and to be his disciples. *We therefore, in denying the Lord Jesus, are more criminal than they; and, in preferring every base lust before him, are guilty of a conduct which calls for the deepest humiliation and contrition.*

To every one of you, therefore, I say, with the Apostle, "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, if ever you would that he would lift you up! [James 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.9-10)."

***~~2. "Be converted!"—~~***

Your sentiments and conduct respecting the Lord Jesus need to be changed, as much as ever those of the Jews did, whom the Apostle addressed. *Professedly*, indeed, you regard him as your Savior; but in *practice*you "deny him," even as they did, and postpone his interests to those of the most depraved competitor. Let an entire change, then, be wrought in you, in relation to him. Confess him now; yes, confess him openly before the whole world; and receive him in that entire character which he bears in the Sacred Writings. Receive him as your *Prophet*, *Priest*, and *King*; and look for everything from him, as your only Lord and Savior! As for every person, and everything, that would stand in competition with Him, let them all be sacrificed, without hesitation or exception; that He alone may live in your hearts, and be glorified in your lives.

Bring forth your lusts, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and crucify them all! Let "the right hand be cut off, and the right eye be plucked out!" Plead not for any one of them; nor listen to a plea, by whoever it may be preferred. Let the Lord Jesus Christ be to you your one Friend, your only Savior, your "all in all."

***~~3. Expect from Christ all that your necessities can require—~~***

The forgiveness of all your sins shall surely be accorded to you, the instant you believe in him. "Repent, and be converted," says the Apostle, "that your sins may be blotted out verse 19." But this is only one part of the blessing which shall be given to you. If you would see at once the full change that would be wrought in you, look to the man whose restoration to health was the occasion of this address: he had been "lame from his mother's womb," and incapable of moving himself from place to place; but, through the mercy given to him in Jesus' name, he was so strengthened, that "he leaped up, and stood, and walked, and entered into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God! verse 6-8." And is not "the name of Jesus" now as operative as then? or has "faith in his name" lost any of its power "His name, through faith in his name, has made this man strong." verse 16.

I tell you, that though miracles shall not now be wrought upon your *bodies*, wonders shall still be accomplished on your *souls*; and not one atom of what was wrought in that man corporeally, shall be lacking in you spiritually, if only you will look to the Lord Jesus Christ as "the Prince of life." Yes, truly, "God has sent his Son to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities, verse 26;" and through the mighty working of his power shall you be raised to newness of life.

The astonishment of all was excited by a view of that restored cripple: nor shall it be less drawn forth in reference to you: for your whole life shall testify the power of his grace; and in his temple above shall you adore and magnify his name to all eternity!

***~~#1744~~***

***~~REPENTANCE ENCOURAGED~~***

***~~[Acts 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.19).~~***

"Repent, then, and be converted, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord!"

REPENTANCE is thought, by many, to be a *legal*rather than an *evangelical*duty. But it belongs properly to the Gospel: and our chief encouragements to it are derived from the Gospel. The Forerunner of our Lord, and our Lord himself, exhorted men to repentance, from the consideration, that "the kingdom of Heaven was at hand, [Matthew 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.2); [Matthew 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.17)." The Apostles, too, considered repentance as enjoined on all, [Acts 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.20); and they preached it to all, without exception, [Acts 20:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.21); [Acts 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.20). In considering the words before us, I shall not enter into any methodical discussion of them; but take them as they lie, and endeavor to impress upon your minds the duty contained in them.

***~~"Repent," then, my beloved Brethren—~~***

That you all need repentance, you cannot doubt. If you had never transgressed the law of God but in *one*single instance, it would be necessary for you to repent of it; and much more when you have violated God's law every day and hour of your lives. Call your ways to remembrance, in order to search out your multiplied transgressions; and confess them humbly to the Lord, saying, 'Thus and thus have I done'. Let your sorrow for them be deep: It is "the broken and contrite heart alone which God will not despise." And flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of them.

No repentance can be genuine, if it is not accompanied with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have not such a sense of your guilt and helplessness as brings you to the foot of the cross, you cannot see them aright. The penitent under the law confessed his sins over his offering, and at the same time transferred them to the head of his victim. Just so, will you transfer your own sins to Christ, if you know his willingness and sufficiency to save.

***~~"Be converted" also—~~***

Repentance is of no avail, if it stop short of this. There must be a thorough conversion of your souls to God. His will must be your will, and his glory the one end for which you live. Do not mistake, as though it were sufficient for you to be sorry for your sins. *Your sorrow may arise, not from any hatred of sin itself, or any sense of the dishonor it has done to God—but simply from a dread of the punishment denounced against it. With your grief for past sin, there must be blended a love of universal holiness, and an entire dedication of yourselves to God*. See to it, then, that this be found in you; and that you live henceforth entirely to Him who died for you and rose again.

***~~Then may you know that "your sins shall be blotted out"—~~***

You shall certainly never turn to God in vain: for he has said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Not that your repentance will wash away sin, or your conversion purchase Heaven. It is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse even from the smallest sin: but if, with a penitent and contrite heart, you turn unto him, your sins, however *numerous*they may have been, shall all be blotted out; and however *heinous*they may have been, they shall be made white as snow.

***~~And then shall "seasons of refreshing, also, come to you from the presence of your Lord"—~~***

I understand this expression as implying that peace and joy which shall flow into the soul of every true convert. See the change wrought in the minds of the three thousand, on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. See the promise made to all who shall "truly believe in Christ, [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3)." This shall be your experience, if, with penitential sorrow, and in newness of heart and life, you turn unto the Lord. You shall be filled with a "peace that passes all understanding," and "a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." No tongue can declare the blessedness of that soul which has "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon it," and "his love shed abroad within it".

***~~Let me, then, once more say to every one of you: Repent deeply of all your sins, and seek, without delay, to be truly converted unto God—~~***

Without this there can be no remission of your sins—not one can ever be blotted out of the book of God's remembrance; but all will be brought forth against you in judgment, to the utter confusion and condemnation of your souls. And what season of refreshment, do you suppose, will you ever experience? Have you any now? You know you have not. Will you have any in a dying hour? Alas! insensibility is the best that you can hope for then. And what will you have in the eternal world? Alas! not "a drop of water to cool your tongues!" What I say, then, to one, I say to all, "Repent, and be converted, before it be too late, and before the wrath of God falls upon you to the uttermost!"

***~~#1745~~***

***~~MOSES AND CHRIST COMPARED IN THEIR PROPHETIC OFFICE~~***

***~~[Acts 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.22-23).~~***

"For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'"

*THERE are innumerable beauties in the Holy Scriptures which escape the notice of the superficial observer, but which, when discovered, abundantly compensate all the labor that can attend the minutest investigation*. Critics have bestowed much pains in searching out the beauties of heathen authors, and have often given them credit for excellencies, that were neither designed, nor manifested, by the authors themselves. But we need never be afraid of ascribing too much to him who delivered to us the sacred oracles. If time would permit, we might point out a great variety of passages that would illustrate this remark. But that before us may stand as a specimen of the rest.

Peter had exhorted the Jews to believe in Christ, that their sins might be blotted out by his blood. The Jews imagined, that a compliance with this exhortation would be a defection from Moses. Peter therefore obviated this objection by an appeal to the writings of Moses; and showed them that Moses himself not only foretold the advent of this new prophet, but enjoined an unreserved obedience to him under the severest penalties. Thus he turned their regard for Moses into an argument in support of that very doctrine which for the sake of Moses they were inclined to reject. His words naturally lead us to set before you,

***~~I. The character of Christ—~~***

The words of the text are twice mentioned in [Deuteronomy 18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18), and twice mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, [Acts 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.37). They may well therefore be considered as deserving peculiar attention.

***~~They set forth the character of Christ literally—~~***

When God had spoken to the Jews in thunderings and lightnings, they entreated that he would, in future, communicate his mind and will to them through a mediator. He, approving their request, promised them a prophet raised up from among themselves, who would fully reveal to them his most secret counsels, [Deuteronomy 18:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.16-18). Such a prophet was Jesus. He was raised up in a most extraordinary way, being the son of a pure virgin. He was taken from among their brethren, being of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David. "Though he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, he took upon him the form of a servant;" yes, "became a worm and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people." He revealed all that it was needful for men to know, and "opened their understandings that they might understand it." To him did the Father himself, by an audible voice from Heaven, apply this prophecy, [Matthew 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.5). And Jesus thus literally executed the commission given him of the Father.

***~~But it is in a typical view that the text is principally to be considered—~~***

*Our Lord resembled Moses in the offices of a lawgiver, a Savior, an intercessor.*But, waving all observations respecting these, let us trace the resemblance which subsisted between them, as "prophets" of the Most High God.

Both of them received their doctrines in the same way. Moses was not merely instructed, like other prophets, by visions, or dreams, or by the "still small voice" of inspiration, but was admitted to converse with God as a man talks with his friend, and received the law from the hands of God, engraved upon stones by God himself. In this he differed from all the other prophets that ever existed in the world, until this new Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, arose. But Christ had been from all eternity "in the bosom of the Father, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18);" and he taught the very truths which he had heard, and learned, of the Father [John 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.28).

Both of them also taught the very same doctrine. Moses gave the law to be a "ministration of death," and a rule of life; and our Lord explained, and enforced it, for the very same ends. Moses also pointed the people to the *sacrifices*as the only means of expiating their offenses: our Lord also declared that he "gave his life a ransom for many;" and that it was by the shedding of his blood alone, that any could obtain the remission of their sins, [Matthew 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.28).

Moreover, both of them taught in the same manner. Moses spoke, not as one giving advice, but with authority, "Thus says the Lord!" yet he instructed the people with astonishing meekness and forbearance: and when they, in direct opposition to what he had taught them, revolted from God, and set up a golden calf, he was so filled with compassion towards them, as to pray that he himself might be blotted out of the book of God, rather than that they would suffer the punishment due to their transgressions.

Thus did Jesus preface his instructions with that authoritative declaration, "I say unto you:" yet so mild was he, that he made his meekness a plea with persons, to encourage them to learn of him: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart:" and to such a degree did he compassionate the obstinate refusers of his law, that he wept over them, and with his dying breath pleaded their ignorance in extenuation of their guilt, [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41); [Luke 23:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.34).

While Moses thus explicitly foretold the prophetic character of our Lord, he declared to us also,

***~~II. Our duty resulting from it—~~***

As all the *offices*of Christ are replete with benefits to our souls, so each lays upon us some correspondent duties and obligations. While we rely on him as our *Priest*, and obey him as our *King*, we must regard him as our *Prophet*, by attending to his instructions—

***~~This is plainly declared in the text—~~***

"Him shall you hear," is the command of God. But it is not in a careless manner that we are to regard his voice; we must incline our ear to him, and hear him with fixed attention. We must so consider the *dignity of his person*, and the *importance of his message*, as to receive his word with the deepest reverence; not gainsaying it, and sitting in judgment upon it, but bringing every high thought and every proud reasoning into subjection to it, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5). It befits us also to listen to it with lively joy, as to the voice of our Beloved; knowing that *there is not a word of his lips in which there are not treasures of knowledge*, and inexhaustible fountains of salvation, [Isaiah 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 12.3). Above all, we must *attend to it with unreserved submission to his will*; we must *obey*it "in all things, whatever he shall say unto us:" whatever he may enjoin or forbid, we must never reply, "This is a hard saying;" but we must instantly "pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand, that has caused us to offend."

***~~Nor is this merely declared; it is enforced also by the most solemn sanctions—~~***

God will put a difference between his friends and his enemies, in the last day. They shall all indeed appear before his tribunal; but "he will separate the goats from the sheep." Those who hear not this great Prophet, shall be taken from among those who have obeyed his voice; "they shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." As Korah and his company were destroyed from among Israel, so shall the disobedient from among the just. It will be of little avail for them to say, 'I was sober, charitable, devout" if they did not hear that Prophet with attention, reverence, joy, and an unreserved submission to his will, their destruction is sure, their doom is sealed.

Nor will there be any exception to it in favor of the great and learned: every soul is alike included. Let none reply, God forbid: for God says, "It shall come to pass;" and "he is not a man that he would lie, or the son of man that he would repent." What madness then is it for any person whatever to persist in a neglect of the words of Christ! O, let us turn to him. Let us sit, with Mary, at his feet! [Luke 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.39). Let us hear him, and him only. Let us believe on him as "the way, the truth, and the life." Let us "deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him." "So shall we be his true disciples," and, in due season, experience the accomplishment of that promise, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be! [John 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.26)."

***~~In this threatening, however, there is a blessed promise implied—~~***

If the disobedient be destroyed from among the Lord's people, it follows, that the obedient shall not be destroyed; the humble, and sincere follower of Jesus shall never perish. This also extends to all; "every soul" that shall sincerely obey his voice, whatever his past life may have been, shall most assuredly be saved. Unbelief may be ready to make exceptions; but God says, "It shall come to pass." Nor is this merely an uncertain inference from the text, but an express promise from God himself, "Hear, and your soul shall live! [Isaiah 55:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.3)." Let this encourage us to listen more than ever to the voice of Jesus in his word. Let us read, and meditate, and pray. Let us get our souls cast, as it were, into the mold of the Gospel, that, being altogether formed and fashioned by it, we may be "fit for the inheritance" reserved for us. Thus will this Prophet be glorified in us; and we receive the full benefit of his instructions.

***~~#1746~~***

***~~HOLINESS THE GREATEST BLESSING~~***

***~~[Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26).~~***

"When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

THE ground on which the Jews rejected our blessed Lord was, that, in their estimation, he opposed Moses. The Apostle Peter therefore referred to Moses and the prophets, to show that Jesus was the very person whose advent they had all predicted: and that Moses, in particular, had required them to believe in Him, as the only possible means of ever obtaining acceptance with God: "A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: Him shall you hear, in all that he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people."

Then, in my text, he tells them, that "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, had sent him to them first, in order to bless them, in turning away every one of them from their iniquities." In opening these words, I will show,

***~~I. Why Christ was preached first to the Jews—~~***

This was done by a special appointment of Almighty God,

***~~1. Because with them primarily was the covenant made—~~***

To Abraham and his seed were the promises given: and the covenant was renewed with Isaac and with Jacob, his lineal descendants. From these the whole Jewish nation sprang; and consequently they were regarded as heirs of the blessings which had been so limited. To them this privilege had been confined for two thousand years. The law of Moses, which forbade all unnecessary fellowship with the Gentiles, tended to confirm them in the idea that the blessings belonged exclusively to them. Our Lord's own declaration, that he was "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and his directions to his disciples, "not to go into the way of the Gentiles, or into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," yet further established this sentiment in their minds; and that so strongly, that they could not divest themselves of the idea that they were to confine their ministrations to the Jews.

Hence we find, six years after the day of Pentecost, the Apostle *Peter*needed repeated visions, and an express revelation from Heaven, to remove his prejudices, and to prevail on him to preach the Gospel to Cornelius. And so strong was the same prejudice on the minds of all the Apostles, that in full conclave, as it were, they called him to account for going to a Gentile; and were with difficulty persuaded that, in so doing, he had not sinned against God, [Acts 10:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.15-16); [Acts 11:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.17-18).

Even *Paul*, until the Jews were incurably obstinate in their rejection of his message, always addressed himself in the first instance to the Jews, [Acts 13:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.46); and in this he conformed to that express command, to "preach the Gospel unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47)." The reason for this preference being shown to them, is assigned by the Apostle in the verse before my text: "You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers; and therefore unto you, first, has God sent his Son to bless you."

***~~2. Because the offer of the Gospel to them, in the first instance, would show that Christianity could stand the test of the severest examination—~~***

Had it been made to the Gentiles first, the hearers would naturally have said. "These preachers are vile impostors and deceivers. Their Head and Leader has been put to death by the laws of his own country; and they come and persuade us that he was a divine person, dying for the sins of men. If they could bring any proof of what they say, why do they not persuade their own people first, and establish their religion in the place where these transactions came to pass? The reason is obvious: they know that their assertions will not stand the test of inquiry: and therefore they come to palm their falsehoods upon us, who cannot so easily detect them."

This would be a reasonable ground for rejecting all that they said. But, when they first of all addressed themselves to the Jews, who knew all that had taken place, and therefore were good judges of the question before them, it seems at least that the preachers of this strange doctrine defied detection as impostors, and were persuaded of the truth of their own assertions. Had they not fully believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that they could prove it beyond contradiction, they would never have thought of attempting to convince the very persons who had so lately put him to death, and the very persons to whom their statements must of necessity be so galling and offensive. As far as their judgment went, it is clear they must have thought their ground tenable against the whole world.

***~~3. Because the reception of it among the Jews would stamp its truth beyond contradiction—~~***

Within fifty days of our Savior's crucifixion, thousands were, by one single address, converted to his religion; and from that day forward were multitudes overpowered by a conviction that was irresistible. At last, even their most bitter enemy, who had sought and labored to extirpate Christianity, embraced it, and became the most zealous, active, and successful of all its advocates.

Could this religion, established as it was without human power, and in the face of the most bitter persecution, be false? Had the powers of this world been engaged in its favor, or had force been used for the propagation of it, or had its doctrines sanctioned the indulgence of our corrupt appetites—it might possibly have succeeded, as the Mohammedan delusion afterwards did. But it opposed all the sinful passions and prejudices of mankind, and yet prevailed over them by the mere force of truth and the weight of evidence; and that not only over the poor and ignorant, but over multitudes who were fully competent to the task of examining its claims. The reception of it therefore, by them, was a public seal to its truth, and a recommendation of it to the very ends of the earth,

***~~4. Because the rejection of it justified the Apostles in offering it to the Gentiles—~~***

The Apostles, as we have seen, felt a backwardness to go to the Gentiles: but the obstinacy of the Jews compelled them: and this was their apology for so doing, [Acts 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.6); [Acts 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.28). No doubt, if it had so pleased God, both Jews and Gentiles might have grown to any extent upon the same stock. But God, in his inscrutable wisdom, had determined otherwise: and therefore "the Jews were broken off, that we Gentiles might be engrafted in, [Romans 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.19);" and in this was God's righteous dealing manifest. As many as would walk in the steps of Abraham, were received to mercy: but when the offered mercy was rejected and despised, the day of mercy closed upon them, and they were left to reap the fruit of their impenitence and unbelief.

Our next inquiry must be,

***~~II. What was the blessing which he was sent to impart?~~***

The Jews expected a temporal Messiah, who would deliver them out of the hands of all their enemies, and exalt them to a state of unrivaled power upon earth. And, no doubt, to those who could see nothing beyond the literal sense of prophecy, the prophetic writings appeared strongly to justify this expectation. But this was not God's purpose respecting them. *It was a spiritual, and not a temporal kingdom, that Christ came to establish.*Sin and Satan were the enemies that were to be subdued: and a kingdom of righteousness was to be established throughout the world. Holiness was the blessing which Christ was sent to impart:

***~~Holiness, I say, was that which Christ was sent to bestow—~~***

He was not only to "make reconciliation for iniquity, but to make an end of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24)." "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us, not merely from perdition, but from all iniquity also, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." In truth, his very name was intended to designate this special appointment: "He shall be called *Jesus*, for he shall save his people from their sins, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21)." And the whole Scriptures bear witness to this, as the great object which he came to accomplish, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27). [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27).

**And, as it was the *end*** **of the Gospel, so has it also invariably been the *effect* of the Gospel—**

There can scarcely be conceived a more just representation of the Gospel and its blessings than that which the miracle in the preceding context affords us. A man was lame from his birth. By the Apostle Peter he was healed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And immediately you find the use which be made of the mercy given unto him: "He, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple; walking, and leaping, and praising God! verse 8."

Here you see a man previous to his reception of the Gospel: never has he stirred one step in the ways of God. Here also you behold him as soon as the word came with power to his soul: in the sight of all, he rises to newness of life. The House of God is the first place that he affects, in order that he may honor his heavenly Benefactor; and there, with a joy unknown before, he puts forth all his energies in the service of his God. Thus it was in the day of Pentecost: and thus it will be, though in different degrees, in all who truly believe in Christ.

And what is blessedness, if this is not?

If the healing of the man's *body*was such a source of joy, what must the healing of the *soul*be? The truth is, that sin is the one source of all the misery that is upon earth: and the restoration of men to a measure of their pristine holiness in Paradise will restore them also, in the same proportion, to their pristine happiness. *Holiness, in so far as it is wrought in the soul, is the commencement of Heaven upon earth*.

***~~See then here,~~***

***~~1. What Christianity really is—~~***

It is thought, by the generality, to be plan devised and executed for the salvation of men from destruction. But this is a very low and contracted view of Christianity. It is a plan for the remedying of all the evil which sin has done: for restoring the Divine image to the soul, as well as for rescuing it from perdition. I beg you, brethren, to view it in this light; and to remember, that Heaven itself would be no blessing to you, if sin had possession of your soul.

***~~2. What is the blessing now offered unto you—~~***

If Jesus was sent, in the first place, to the Jews, he is now sent to you: and the blessing which he first offered to them, he now offers to you. It is in this sense that "men are to be blessed in him; and for this shall all nations call him blessed, [Psalm 72:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.17)."

Do not, I entreat you, allow your minds to be drawn aside by earthly vanities. What have they ever done for you? or what can they do? *If you were elevated to the highest rank, and put into possession of all that the world could give you, what would it all effect in a way of permanent and solid happiness?*You would soon be forced to give the same testimony respecting it as Solomon did, that it is all "vanity and vexation of spirit." But where did you ever find a person give such a testimony respecting holiness? Where did you ever find a man who was not happy in proportion as his indwelling sins were mortified, and all heavenly graces were exercised in his soul? O that you could be prevailed upon to try what this blessedness is! You would soon find that "the peace flowing from religion surpasses all understanding," and that "its joys are unspeakable and full of glory!"

***~~#1747~~***

***~~THE CRIPPLE HEALED BY PETER~~***

***~~[Acts 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.8-10).~~***

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed!"

PERSECUTION for righteousness' sake was foretold by Christ as the portion of all his people: and accordingly we find that no sooner did his Apostles begin to publish the glad tidings of salvation, than they were arrested as criminals, and brought into a court of justice to answer for their conduct. Peter and John had healed a man who had been "lame from his mother's womb." In consequence of this, multitudes were gathered together, to inquire into this miracle, and to learn by what means it had been wrought. Peter declared to them all, that it had been wrought by that very Jesus, who had so recently been crucified by them, but who was risen from the dead, and possessed of all power in Heaven and in earth, [Acts 3:1-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.1-16). This testimony was the means of converting an immense number of persons to faith in Christ, verse 4. But it grieved and incensed the rulers, who immediately adopted measures to crush the rising sect; apprehending and imprisoning the two Apostles, and on the very next day bringing them to trial as disturbers of the public peace. Peter renewed the testimony he had before given, and persisted in declaring, that the miracle had been wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, in proof that he was risen from the dead, and was the true Messiah, the Savior of the world.

In considering this miracle, we shall notice it,

***~~I. As a ground of conviction to the Jews—~~***

That a great miracle had been wrought, was manifest to all, insomuch that the rulers themselves were constrained to acknowledge it, verse 14, 16. Hence Peter took occasion to show them,

***~~1. That Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah—~~***

It was obviously beyond the power of man to effect so great a work, as that of restoring in a moment to the perfect use of his limbs "a man who was forty years of age," and had been a cripple from the womb. Whence then did Peter and John obtain the power to effect it? This was the point which the rulers desired to ascertain verse 7; and this could be learned only from the Apostles themselves. Peter boldly answered the interrogatories which were put to him; and declared that the lately-crucified, and now exalted, Jesus had empowered them to communicate this blessing to the man, [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16). But how could he convey to them this power, if he were not himself alive? or how could he enable them to do what nothing but Omnipotence could effect, if he himself were not omnipotent?

This argument was addressed to the very people who had bribed the soldiers a few weeks before to say that the disciples had come, while they were asleep, and had stolen the body of Jesus from the tomb. But though the rulers had satisfied their nation by accounting in that manner for the supposed resurrection of Jesus, they did not now dare to bring forward such an absurdity in answer to the Apostles: for of what use would the dead body of Jesus be? Could that enable the Apostles to work a miracle? or would God communicate miraculous powers to them for the express purpose of sanctioning the most wicked falsehood that could be fabricated?

Here then the argument was incontrovertible: a miracle had been wrought: the persons who had been the instruments of effecting it, ascribed the power to Jesus, who, agreeably to the prophecies concerning him, had been "set at nothing by the builders, and was become the Head of the corner, verse 11;" there was therefore no alternative left, but to acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah. How deceived must they be, who could withhold their assent from so plain a truth!

***~~2. That they in God's sight were the worst of murderers—~~***

They had not been able to fix any charge of guilt upon him: seeing that he had in all things approved himself "The Holy One and the Just:" yet had they insisted on his crucifixion, when Pilate, convinced of his innocence, had "determined to let him go:" yes, though he was "the Prince and Author of life," they had preferred "a murderer" and destroyer of life before him, [Acts 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.13-15). It was true, they had acted "ignorantly," blinded by their own prejudices and passions, [Acts 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.17); but still they were highly criminal in the sight of God; and must perish to all eternity, if they did not look to Him as their Savior, whom they had crucified as a malefactor.

What a tremendous charge was this! To be accused of murder! of murdering the Prince of life, and "crucifying the Lord of glory!" But the charge was undeniable: and no hope of mercy remained to them, but by repenting of their guilt, and seeking to be cleansed from it in that very blood which they themselves had shed.

But, as the miracle in this view is profitable chiefly to the Jews, we shall proceed to consider it,

***~~II. As a ground of consolation to us—~~***

While we enter into all the feelings of the man that was restored, and are ready, as it were, to unite with him in all the expressions of his joy, we cannot but regard his miraculous restoration as calculated,

***~~1. To confirm our faith—~~***

What can the Lord Jesus Christ not effect?*Whose soul can he not heal as easily, and as effectually, as he healed the body of that poor man?*"Is there anything too hard for him?".

***~~2. To encourage our hope—~~***

Long had that man neglected the opportunities which the presence of Jesus at Jerusalem afforded him: for we cannot doubt, but that if he had applied to Jesus for relief, as myriads of others did, he would not have applied in vain. But now the mercy which he had never thought of seeking, was conferred upon him unsolicited, [Acts 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6-7). What then will not Jesus do for those who ask him? What though we have slighted him all our days, and have never so much as thought of him until this present hour; will he spurn us from his footstool? Has he not said that "Whoever comes to him, he will never cast out?"

***~~3. To inflame our love—~~***

We wonder not at the ecstasies of the restored man: we would rather wonder if he had not so expressed his joy and gratitude. But have not we also cause for joy? *Does not every recovery from sickness, or every continuance of health, proceed from the same source? and is it not equally a ground of praise and thanksgiving?*The circumstance of his cure being miraculous, attracted more attention, it is true; but it added nothing to the value of the blessing bestowed: and if we were duly sensible of the benefits we enjoy, we would glorify our God even as he did.

But what if the Lord Jesus Christ has healed our souls? What if, by his life-giving word, he has quickened us from the dead? Would not we praise and magnify his name? Would not "even the stones cry out against us, if we held our peace?" See what the prophet foretold as the effect of the preached Gospel, "Then shall the lame man leap as an deer, and the tongue of the mute shall sing, [Isaiah 35:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.6)." See what David experienced as the result of this mercy to his own soul, [Psalm 103:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.1); [Psalm 103:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.3); and know, that if the same external demonstrations of joy be not called for, the same internal frame of mind as the healed cripple possessed, would distinguish every one that professes to believe in Christ: *"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" is surely as proper to be asked on account of spiritual blessings, as of any mercies that can be given to our poor perishing bodies.*

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. Let us seek ourselves to be living witnesses for Christ—~~***

Little did this healed cripple imagine what weight he added to the Apostles' testimony, or how the sight of him confounded all the enemies of the Lord Jesus. And little does the consistent Christian imagine to what a degree he strengthens the hands of those who preach the Gospel. Truly we take courage when we can appeal to the effects of our ministry on the hearts and lives of our hearers. O let those who profess to have received the truth, show that the *grace of Christ has wrought as effectually on them for the renovation of their souls, as it wrought on the cripple for the restoration of his limbs*. Let every temper and disposition of our minds constrain our enemies to acknowledge that "we have been with Jesus," and are blessed monuments of his transforming power! See [Isaiah 43:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.11-12). Such an exhibition of his power and grace will glorify him more than all the bodily cures he ever wrought, [2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11-12) with [Isaiah 62:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.3).

***~~2. Let us never be afraid to vindicate his cause—~~***

It was but lately that Peter was intimidated by the voice of a servant-maid; but now he boldly confronted the whole Sanhedrin, and charged them all with the murder of their Messiah. Thus, if the whole world were to rise against us for our attachment to Christ, we would not give way to any unworthy fears, or be deterred from confessing him openly before men. We must indeed look well to our own spirit, and guard against the intemperate sallies of an angry or vindictive mind: the apostolic rule would be rigidly adhered to, "Be ready always to give an answer to every one that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear, 1 Peter 3:15;" but still we must never be ashamed of Christ, but "be faithful unto death, if ever we would receive from him a crown of life".

***~~#1748~~***

***~~SALVATION BY CHRIST ALONE~~***

***~~[Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).~~***

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

FROM the account given us of the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord, we would be led, not only to acknowledge him as the true Messiah, but to consider what we ourselves may expect at his hands. His Apostles, Peter and John, had healed a man who had been lame from his birth. The spectators, filled with astonishment, were ready to ascribe the honor of this miracle to them: but they told them by whom it had been effected, even by Jesus, whom they had rejected; but who, notwithstanding their contempt of him, was, and by this miracle had proved himself to be, "the head-stone of the corner, verse 11."

They then directed the attention of their auditors to their own eternal interests, and assured them, that as Jesus alone restored the cripple to the use of his limbs, so Jesus alone could save them from everlasting perdition. It is evident that the text refers, not to bodily healing, but to a salvation which the Apostles themselves, and all their hearers, stood in need of.

In discoursing upon the words before us, it will be proper to notice,

***~~I. What is implied—~~***

Nothing can be more clearly implied than that there is salvation for us only in Christ. It may be thought that it is unnecessary to insist upon so plain and obvious a truth, more especially among those who call themselves Christians: but this truth is far from being universally known; and the grounds on which it stands are very little considered: and, if it were as well understood as we are apt to imagine, still there would be a necessity for dwelling frequently upon it, on account of its vast importance, and of "determining with Paul to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

In confirmation of it, we shall appeal,

***~~1. To the typical representations of Christ—~~***

There were a great variety of sacrifices under the law, which typified the Lord Jesus Christ. The lamb that was offered every morning and evening, fore-showed "the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world:" and the*scape-goat, which bore the iniquities of all Israel into an uninhabited wilderness, exhibited in yet more striking colors the removal of our guilt by a transfer of it to the head of Jesus*. To dwell on all the ceremonies that were appointed on different occasions for the expiation of sin, is needless: suffice it to observe, that "the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin;" and that if those offerings had not respect to Christ, they were altogether unworthy, either to be prescribed to man, or to be accepted for him. But the efficacy of those sacrifices for the ends for which they were instituted, proves, beyond a doubt, the infinitely greater efficacy of that sacrifice which Christ in due time offered on the cross, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14).

***~~2. To the positive declarations concerning him—~~***

Nothing can be conceived more clear and strong than the Scripture declarations of Christ's sufficiency to save. How forcibly has the prophet marked:  
the *extent*of his salvation, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22),  
the *fullness*of his salvation, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18),  
the *freeness*of his salvation, [Isaiah 55:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-2)!

He invites "all the ends of the earth," even persons defiled "with crimson sins," to accept all the benefits of the Gospel, "without money and without price." In the New Testament the same things are spoken with all the energy that language can afford. All, without exception, are exhorted to come to Christ, [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.28). [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37), with all assurance that he will cleanse them from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7) [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39), and bestow upon them freely all the blessings of grace and glory, [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10); [John 7:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37); [John 7:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.28). Is all this a mere mockery and delusion? It surely is so, if Christ is not "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

***~~3. To matter of fact—~~***

We can draw aside the veil of Heaven, and point to some before the throne of God, who are such monuments of grace as leave no doubt respecting the sufficiency of Christ to save any others whatever. Behold that man, a murderer; a murderer of no common stamp: he was not satisfied with shedding the blood of a few of his fellow-creatures, or of those who were deserving of death; but he "made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with blood, and that with the blood of innocents." Moreover, this was but a small part of the guilt he had contracted; so various and so enormous were his crimes. Yet is he, even Manasseh, a chosen vessel, in whom God is, and for ever will be, glorified.

See that woman also? We know not the particulars of her conduct; but she was so vile and notorious a sinner, that it was a disgrace to notice her, yes, our Lord's condescending to notice her was made a ground of doubting his divine mission: nevertheless she also, though once possessed by seven devils, is now in glory. She received, while yet upon earth, an assured testimony, from our Lord himself, that her sins, as numerous as they were, were all forgiven, [Luke 7:47-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.47-48); and now is she singing the triumphs of redeeming love, as loud as any in Heaven!

We could easily refer to a multitude of others, whose enormities were beyond all measure great, who nevertheless were "washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11)." But enough has been said to put out of all question the blessed truth we are insisting on, namely, that Jesus is a Savior, and a great one, and able to deliver all who trust in him! [Isaiah 19:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 19.20).

Let us now turn our attention to,

***~~II. What is expressed—~~***

What solemn asseverations are these in the text! One would have supposed that the former of them would have been quite sufficient: but the Apostle thought no superfluous repetitions, nor any accumulation of words too strong, on such a subject as this. Indeed, it is of infinite importance to every one of us to know, that, as there is salvation for us in Christ, so "there is no salvation in any other."

***~~1. There is not—~~***

In whom else can we find the requisites of a Savior? In whom can we find a sufficiency, either of merit to justify, or of power to renew, a sinner? If we would apply to the highest angel in Heaven to give us of his merit, he would tell us that "he himself is only an unprofitable servant; for that he does no more than is his duty to do, [Luke 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.10)." If we would entreat him to change our hearts, he would confess his utter inability to effect so great a work. Shall we then look to ourselves?

We are full of sin. Our recompense is found—where? not in Heaven truly, but in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, [Romans 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.19). "Nor have we in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5);" much less to renew ourselves after the Divine image. None but Jesus could atone for sin: none but Jesus could yield such an obedience to the law as would be capable of being imputed to others: none but Jesus can send down the Holy Spirit into the souls of men, or say to them, "My grace is sufficient for you! [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9);" and therefore "there is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved."

If there were any other Savior, the most eminent of God's servants would have had some intimation of it. Abraham, the friend of God, and the father of the faithful, would probably have heard of him: but he knew of none other; for he sought acceptance through Christ alone, and was justified solely through faith in him, [Romans 4:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3-5). David too, the man after God's own heart, who was inspired to write so much respecting Christ, would probably have been acquainted with such an important fact in order to his own salvation; but he sought refuge in none but Christ, "Purge me with hyssop," says he, "and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7)."

We might hope at least that some information of this kind would have been given to the Apostle Paul, who was more fully instructed in the mind and will of God than any other person: yet he knew of no other name but that of Jesus. He renounced all hope "in his own righteousness, that he might be found in Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9);" and "he determined to insist on nothing, in all his ministrations, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2."

Whether therefore we consider the insufficiency of all the creatures to stand in the place of a Savior to us, or the utter ignorance of all the Prophets and Apostles respecting the appointment of any creature to sustain that office, we may be sure that there is none other than the Person mentioned in the text, who is a man indeed, but is, at the same time, "God over all blessed for evermore."

***~~2. There cannot be—~~***

We presume not to be wise above what is written; or to say what God might have done if he had pleased: but we are fully warranted by the Scriptures to say, that, *consistently with God's honor as the Moral Governor of the universe, man could not have been saved without a Mediator: nor could any mediator besides Jesus have been found to execute all that was necessary for our salvation.*It was necessary:  
that the *justice*of God would be satisfied for the violations of his law;  
that his *holiness*would be displayed in a marked abhorrence of sin;  
that his *truth*would be kept inviolate by the execution of his threatenings; and  
that his *law*would be honored, as well by an obedience to its precepts, as by an enduring of its penalties.

Now none but Jesus, who was God as well as man, could effect all these things, and therefore none but he could save us.

But there is yet another ground on which we may deny that any other could save us; namely, that if we were indebted to any other, either for righteousness or strength—we could not join in the songs of the redeemed in Heaven, but must separate from the heavenly choir, [Revelation 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-10), and ascribe to ourselves, or to some other (inasmuch as we were indebted to ourselves or them,) the honor of our salvation. And how would this comport with the dignity of Jehovah, who has determined "that no flesh would glory in his presence?" It is in vain to say that the glory would ultimately accrue to him: for if we are saved by, or for, anything of our own, we may, and must, so far take the glory to ourselves, [Romans 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.2); and that would create discord in Heaven, and be irreconcilable with the honor of the Divine Majesty.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The careless—~~***

Why are men so indifferent about their spiritual concerns? Is it that they are in no danger of perishing? If that were the case, why is so much said respecting salvation? and why are we cautioned so strongly against relying on any but Jesus Christ? Surely the very circumstance of Christ being sent down from Heaven to die for us, is enough to alarm all our fears, and to convince us, that, if the salvation offered us could be procured by none but him, the danger of those who are not savingly interested in him must be inexpressibly great. Let the careless then consider this; and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them.

***~~2. The self-righteous—~~***

It is difficult to convince those who are looking to Christ in part, that they are really renouncing Christ altogether. But the Scriptures are so plain on this point, that there cannot be the smallest doubt respecting it. Salvation is "of faith, on purpose that it may be by grace, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16);" and if it be, whether in whole or in part, by our own works—then it ceases to be of grace: it must be wholly of grace, or wholly of works, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6); it must exclude boasting altogether, or else admit it. But boasting must be wholly excluded, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27); and therefore all dependence whatever on our own works must be wholly and for ever renounced, [Romans 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.8). If we will not accept salvation on these terms, "Christ shall profit us nothing, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4)."

***~~3. The desponding—~~***

The person healed by Peter and John was a very fit emblem of our state by nature and practice. "We are transgressors from the womb." But, as desperate as in appearance our condition is, there is in Jesus a sufficiency of power and grace to make us whole: "his name, through faith in his name, shall give us a perfect soundness in the presence" of God and man, [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16); [Acts 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.10). Let none complain as though they were beyond the reach of mercy: for there is nothing impossible with Jesus: "with him there is mercy; with him is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem his people from all his sins! [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21), [Psalm 130:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 130.7-8)."

***~~#1749~~***

***~~CONTEST BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND RELIGION~~***

**[Acts 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.18-20).**

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." [Acts 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.18-20)

WHEN we see the enmity of the human heart against religion in these days, we are ready to impute some blame to the persons in whom that religion is displayed: it scarcely seems possible that a thing so excellent and beautiful as true religion would be an object of offense. But if we look back to the first establishment of Christianity, we find that the same aversion to it was then manifested by ungodly men, even though it was exhibited in the purest form, and was recommended by the most beneficent and stupendous miracles. In the history before us we see in a very striking view,

***~~I. The force of prejudice—~~***

***~~Nothing can be conceived more unreasonable than the conduct of the Jewish Rulers towards the Apostles—~~***

They saw that an astonishing miracle had been wrought in confirmation of the doctrine which the Apostles preached, verse 16. Now what line of conduct would candor have prescribed? Would not any person under its influence have inquired about the doctrine, and compared it with the Holy Scriptures? Would he not have examined carefully whether there was any real connection between the miracle and the doctrine, and whether it was indeed a testimony from Heaven to the truth of Christianity?

But behold how the Jewish rulers acted on that occasion: they imprisoned the Apostles, tried them as criminals, disregarded all evidence in their favor, and, when they could not subvert the doctrine by argument, determined to suppress it by authority. They would have proceeded even to punish the preachers of it, if they had not been afraid of exciting discontent among the people: it was fear alone, and not equity, that prevented them from proceeding to yet severer measures. Their language, in effect, was this: 'A great miracle has been wrought indeed; but we will not have it mentioned. The doctrine which it was intended to confirm, appears to be from God; but we will not have it mentioned. The tendency of the doctrine, as far as we can judge from the miracle, is most beneficial; but we will not have it mentioned. The preachers of that doctrine profess to have received a commission from God himself; but we will not allow them to execute it. They tell us that they open to men the only possible way of salvation; but we care not for the salvation of men, nor will we suffer any further attempts to promote it. They tell us, that it is at the peril of their own souls to decline the office assigned to them; but what care we about their souls? they shall not execute their office, though they, and the whole world, would perish through their neglect. They tell us that they must obey God; but we care not for God: they shall obey us, and not God; and if they do not regard us more than God, we will make them feel the weight of our heaviest displeasure.'

***~~But unreasonable as this was, it shows, as in a looking-glass, the precise manner in which the enemies of religion act at this day—~~***

The truth and excellence of Christianity are universally acknowledged, together with the obligation of all persons to obey it: yet no sooner does any one begin to obey it from the heart, than his friends and relatives endeavor to check his progress. In vain does he bring his sentiments to the test of Scripture; or urge the commands of God, and the solemn judgments that will await him if unfaithful to his God. *Human authority*, as in the case before us, usurps the place of reason, and the will of man is put in opposition to the will of God. Unreasonable and impious as this is, it is the practice of parents, of masters, of all that are in authority, as far as the laws of the land, or the liberal spirit of the times, will admit. And wherever religion most flourishes, there will this conduct most openly prevail. The terms "unreasonable and wicked" are still applicable to the generality of unbelievers. [2 Thessalonians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.2).

This however, for the most part, serves only to call forth,

***~~II. The power of religion—~~***

Beautifully was it exemplified on the occasion before us. Behold the Apostles;

***~~1. How firm their conduct!~~***

Lately had they all fled from their Master through fear of participating his troubles; but now they face the whole Sanhedrin, undaunted, undismayed. They knew that God was on their side; and therefore they "feared not what man could do unto them." This was, and ever will be, the effect of true religion: "the righteous are as bold as a lion!" Those who truly fear God, will cast off every other fear.

***~~2. How forcible their appeal!~~***

Their words were few, but unanswerable: for who can doubt whether man would rule, or God? Who can hesitate to determine the question in general, or how to act upon it in his own case? If man can do more for us than God, or prove a more formidable enemy than God, then may we prefer his favor before God's, and have a greater dread of his displeasure. But if man is so weak as to be crushed before the moth, then may we set at nothing all his threatenings, and persist without fear in the service of our God. Indeed, if "we have seen, and heard" aright the blessed truths of the Gospel, we shall so feel their constraining influence, as to defy every effort of men or devils to counteract them.

***~~From this history then we may learn,~~***

***~~1. What is that doctrine we are concerned to hear—~~***

That is the true doctrine which proclaims salvation in "the name of Jesus." This it was which the Apostles preached; and which every minister must preach. There is indeed "salvation in no other name;" and therefore all who desire salvation should embrace it with their whole hearts.

***~~2. What is the treatment we must expect to meet with—~~***

If we either preach or profess the foregoing doctrine, we must expect the same scenes to be again realized as were exhibited in the Apostles' days. *The enmity of the human heart against God is still the same as ever*; and "those who are born after the flesh will still, as much as ever, persecute those who are born after the Spirit." "Let none then think it strange, if a fiery trial is sent to try them".

***~~3. What is that conduct we are bound to observe—~~***

Amidst all the injuries they sustained, the Apostles yielded not either to invective or complaint. But they were immoveable as rocks! Thus must we possess our souls in patience, and maintain our profession steadfast unto the end.

***~~#1750~~***

***~~CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS DECREED AND FORE-ORDAINED~~***

***~~[Acts 4:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.27-28).~~***

"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."

A comparison of prophecies with their fulfillments is a source of the strongest conviction and consolation to the mind. So the Apostles found it in the hour of trial, when, for the Gospel's sake, they had been imprisoned, and menaced with the severest punishment that could be inflicted on them. They saw that the prophecies relating to their Divine Master had all been unwittingly fulfilled, even by his bitterest enemies: and they comforted themselves with the thought, that the same God who had so accomplished his own gracious purposes in relation to him, would in like manner bring glory to himself out of the sufferings which they also were called to endure. They cite before God the prediction brought to their minds; and they declare, that, in all which had been done to the holy child Jesus, they saw nothing less than *a complete accomplishment of God's eternal counsels and decrees*.

In discoursing on these words, I will,

***~~I. Confirm their assertion—~~***

The assertion is made in the form of an appeal to God: and it relates to the sufferings of Christ,

***~~1. As fore-ordained by God—~~***

All of the sufferings of Christ were fore-ordained, when God determined to give up his only dear Son to die for the sins of men. Man had merited condemnation: and Jesus must be condemned by a legal process, and be "numbered with transgressors." Man had incurred the penalty of God's law, and was to be accursed from God: and Christ must die a death which God's law pronounced accursed, even the death of the cross [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13). In executing this judgment, there must be a concurrence of all orders of men, Jews and Gentiles, the highest rulers and the lowest populace: *Jews*, to accuse him according to their law; and *Gentiles*, to adjudge him to a death which was not recognized by the Jewish law, and which could be inflicted by Gentiles only.

Man had deserved the utmost shame and contempt: and to these must Jesus be exposed, even as one "worthy to be abhorred" by all mankind, [Isaiah 49:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.7). He must be *scourged*also, [Psalm 129:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 129.3), though that was no part of the punishment connected with crucifixion.

A vast number of very *minute circumstances*, also, were to attend his crucifixion. He was to be betrayed by one of his own disciples; sold for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave; and, while yet upon the cross, to be taunted by the populace, and challenged, if he were not an impostor, to save himself. Vinegar was to be offered to him, instead of a draught that would assuage his anguish: lots were to be cast for his vesture; and though no bone of his was to be broken, he was to be pierced in his hands and feet, and in his side even to the heart, [John 19:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.36-37). Together with these, and a multitude of other minute circumstances which were ordained by God to be attendant on his death, it was appointed that he would "make his grave with the rich."

And all these things the Apostles speak of,

***~~2. As executed by man—~~***

The Psalmist clearly predicts the union of all manner of persons, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, in the execution of this bloody tragedy. And the Apostles call God to witness, that the prophecy adduced had been literally fulfilled in Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentile soldiers and the people of Israel, [Psalm 2:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.2-3) with verse 25, 26.

Yes, so exactly had every prophecy been fulfilled, that it seemed as if all the different classes had been called together, to examine carefully into the predictions; and each person had had his part assigned him, so that not one jot or tittle of them might remain unfulfilled!

Judas shall betray him.

The chief priests, unable, by reason of their subjection to the Romans, to execute their own law, shall deliver him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate, willing to pacify them, shall have him scourged; but afterwards shall be constrained, by their clamor, to give orders for his crucifixion. The populace shall be ready enough, each in his place, to fulfill the rest.

And the Roman soldier, to ascertain, or complete, his death, shall pierce him with the spear.

*All shall be as active as if they had conspired together to perform their respective parts, and to accomplish every prediction respecting him*. Thus it had been ordained by God that it would be: and thus, in fact, it was; every one acting an independent part, as occasion called for it, and as his situation enabled him to act: and thus was there as complete an agreement between the predictions and the fulfillments, as between a seal with ten thousand lines and the impression taken from it.

Their assertion being thus confirmed, I will proceed to,

***~~II. Show the proper and legitimate consequences to be deduced from it—~~***

If we mark only the expressions in my text, we shall be ready to draw from them very erroneous inferences and deductions. We shall be ready to say, 'If what these people did was only "what God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done," we must not condemn them: they were only instruments in the hand of God: and if there be any evil in what they did, it must be traced to Jehovah himself, whose counsel had decreed it, and who, by his power, stimulated them to the commission of it.'

But all this is quite erroneous. Though God had ordained these things, he never instigated any man to the commission of them; he only elevated men to situations, where they might execute all the evil that was in their hearts, and left them at liberty to follow their own will.

It was thus that God elevated Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt, and gave him up to the hardness of his own heart: and Pharaoh, of his own mind and will, persisted in his opposition, until the Jews were irrecoverably delivered, and he with all his army were destroyed.

Thus Peter told the Jews, that though Jesus had been "delivered according to the determinate counsel of God, they with wicked hands had crucified and slain him! [Acts 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.23)." "As for God, he cannot be tempted by evil; neither does he tempt any man [James 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.13)."

In all that those murderers did, they were voluntary agents, and put forth only the evil that was in their own hearts. Therefore to them, and to them alone, must be imputed all the evil which they respectively committed.

***~~But if we look to the facts, they will afford very rich and useful instruction. From them may be deduced the following most important consequences:~~***

***~~1. That Christ is assuredly the true Messiah—~~***

If there had been but few predictions relative to the Messiah's death, and they such as admitted of being carried into effect by a well-concerted conspiracy, the fulfillment of them would have had comparatively but little weight in a subject of such importance. But they were so numerous, so minute, and, if I may so express myself, so contradictory, that it was not possible for his *friends*to form a conspiracy equal to the occasion. Besides, there were many of the predictions which could not be carried into effect, but by *enemies*. Who but enemies could deliver him up to the Gentiles? Who but enemies could nail him to the cross, and load him with such contempt, and pierce him to the heart with the spear? But *when we see so many prophecies fulfilled by people wholly unconnected with each other, yes, and hostile to each other, as Herod and Pilate were, and Jews and Gentiles were, the conviction is irresistible*: He is, and must be, the predicted Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

***~~2. That no opposition, however sanctioned by the great and learned, would at all weaken our conviction of the truths we have received—~~***

Against the Lord Jesus Christ were engaged all the great and learned of the land. But was his religion, therefore, the more questionable? No! if there had not been one added to his Apostles as a witness for him, he would still have been the same Almighty Savior, worthy of all possible honor and trust. So I may say with respect to us at this day. Many will urge, as they did, in reference to our Savior, "Have any of the rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him? But this poor people are cursed."

Yes, many will ask, with a kind of confidence, 'What do your governors in Church and State think of your opinions? Do you find them walking in the same strict and self-denying ways that you do?'

I grant, there are not many rich, or mighty, or noble, or wise, that are called: and that, for the most part, it is to the poor that the Lord Jesus Christ is preached; and that by them, almost alone, is he received. But, if this did not invalidate in any degree the testimony of the Apostles, neither does it weaken our testimony respecting the Gospel of Christ. "It is to the word and to the testimony" that we make our appeal; and by that must all sentiments be tried and judged. If we speak according to the Scriptures, we would not regard it, even though, like Elijah, we, in appearance, stood alone in the midst of the land. I grant that *singularity will not prove us to be right: but neither will it prove us to be wrong*. Christ's have ever been a "little flock," and his way "a narrow way:" and if ever we would be saved, we must come forth, like Lot, from Sodom; and be saved, like Noah, in the Ark prepared for us.

***~~3. That no trial shall come upon us beyond what our all-wise God shall see fit to permit, and what our infinitely gracious God will overrule for our good—~~***

*Of all the heavy trials which our blessed Lord sustained, there was not so much as one which was not allotted to him by infinite Wisdom, and rendered subservient to the great ends of his mission.* No one could seize him before his time: and though they drove nails through parts full of small bones, and pierced his side with a spear, no one was permitted to break so much as one of his bones.

Now, thus will God take care of *us*, both in our individual and collective capacity. The attempts to destroy his Church have been numerous and sanguinary: but the gates of Hell have never been able to prevail against it. Our *trials*, also, may be heavy; but God has engaged, that "they shall all work together for our spiritual and eternal good." We may well, therefore, adopt the language of the Psalmist; and say, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah! [Psalm 46:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.1-3)"

Behold the Lord Jesus Christ as enthroned in glory, and see in what his troubles have issued! Or behold Joseph, when at the highest post of honor in Egypt, and his parents and his brethren were bowing down to him. There you see in what his successive trials issued; and how *every trial was but as a link in the chain of God's eternal purposes; a link without which, humanly speaking, all God's purposes respecting him had failed.*

Be not then cast down, because your troubles are numerous and heavy, and because you cannot yet discern what the end of them will be; but commit yourselves to God, in the assured expectation, that "if you suffer with your adorable Lord, you shall also reign with him in due time, and be eternally glorified together."

***~~#1751~~***

***~~THE BENEFIT OF UNITED PRAYER~~***

***~~[Acts 4:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.31-32).~~***

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."

WHETHER, as has been said by many, *the blood of the Martyrs has been the seed of the Church*, we will not undertake to determine. But we have no doubt but that *persecution has greatly tended to benefit the Church in all ages*: it has produced a greater degree of separation between the Church and the world, and has thereby contributed very essentially to keep the saints from much contamination, which from a closer union with the world they would of necessity have contracted. It has also driven them to prayer, and brought them help from above: and further, it has united them more with each other, and stirred them up to a greater measure of zeal in strengthening and encouraging one another to fight the good fight of faith. The very unreasonableness of the persecutors has in many instances confirmed the saints in their determination to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, [Philippians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.14). Certainly if ever persecution was unreasonable, it was so in the instance before us.

A most benevolent miracle had been wrought by the Apostles, who took occasion to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name they had wrought it, as the only Savior of the world. To prevent the extension of their influence, the rulers and elders laid hands upon them and imprisoned them, and with many threats commanded them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. But, behold the effect that was produced, both on the Apostles, and on the whole infant Church! The Apostles were no sooner liberated, than they "went to their own company and reported all that had been said unto them:" and the consequence was that they all betook themselves to prayer, and obtained help from God to prosecute their work with augmented energy and effect.

The points to which we would call your attention are,

***~~I. The prayer they offered—~~***

The particular point of view in which I wish this to be noticed is, as illustrating the holy superiority to all personal considerations, which the first Christians manifested in the midst of their deepest trials: they disdained to think of their own ease or interests, in comparison with God's honor, and the welfare of mankind. Yet so far were they from ostentation, that it is from what is omitted, rather than from anything expressed, that we collect this exalted sentiment. In their prayer:

***~~1. They view the hand of God himself in their trials—~~***

They address Jehovah as the Creator, and consequently the Governor, of all things both in Heaven and earth. They bring to mind a prophecy of David, wherein it was foretold, that all the powers of the world would combine against the Lord and his Christ. They acknowledge that this prediction had been verified in the opposition which had been made to their Divine Master, by all, whether Jews or Gentiles. But *in all this they see and confess the hand of God, ordering and directing all things in such a way that his own decrees and purposes would be all fulfilled,*verses 24-28.

Now all this may at first sight appear to have been irrelevant to their case: for, what reference had it at all to their sufferings? The connection between the two must, as I have said, be found in that which is *implied*, rather than in that which is *expressed*. It is as though they had said, 'You, Lord, have foretold that your Church and people shall be persecuted: you have shown us, in the person of your dear Son, what we are to expect at the hands of ungodly men: but, as in his case, so in ours, *nothing can be done but what you yourself have ordained; nor can the bitterest foe upon earth exceed the commission which you, for wise and gracious ends, have given him*. We therefore bow not our knees to deprecate any trials, which you may see fit to send, but only to ask of you such a measure of grace, as shall enable us to sustain them, and such manifestations of your power as shall carry conviction to the minds of our most obdurate enemies.' Thus,

***~~2. They desire only that God may be glorified in them—~~***

They desire to rise to the occasion, and to have their energy increased in proportion to the difficulties which they have to contend with. *Their own concerns are swallowed up, as it were, in the honor of their God*. Happy attainment! How surely must those supplications prosper, which are dictated by such a principle, and proceed from such hallowed lips!

The *acceptableness*of their prayer will be best seen in,

***~~II. The answer they received—~~***

"The house was shaken wherein they were assembled," in token that God had heard them, and that he was able to effect whatever would most conduce to their welfare. The Holy Spirit also was poured out upon them in a more abundant measure, not in his miraculous powers, but in his gracious and sanctifying influences: so that the effect was immediately visible in all. Observe the effect which was instantly produced:

***~~1. On the Apostles—~~***

In them we see an immediate increase of zeal and constancy: "They spoke the word of God with boldness; not only not intimidated by the threats of their enemies, but greatly strengthened to execute their office with energy and effect; insomuch that "with greater power than ever, they gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, verse 33." Mark the connection of this with their persecution; and see *how influential their trials were to render their ministry more extensively beneficial*. Their own souls were quickened by the opposition which they met with; they were strengthened from on high in answer to their prayers: every word they uttered was attended with unction and with power. Having within themselves the fruits and evidences of Christ's tender care, they could not but commend him to others, as an able and all-sufficient Savior, and urge all to seek the blessings which they themselves so richly enjoyed.

Now it is thus that ministers are formed at the present day. If they have experienced but few trials, they possess, for the most part, but little energy. It is only when, under difficult and trying circumstances, "their eyes have seen, their ears heard, and their hands handled the word of life," that they can speak of Christ with a feeling sense of his excellency.

Without trials, in *speculative knowledge*they may be complete; but in *divine unction*they will be very defective; and their words, from the lack of that unction, will never reach the heart.

Hence God generally permits his most faithful servants to be severely tried, in order that from their own experience they may be able to instruct and comfort the people committed to their charge, [2 Corinthians 1:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.3-6).

Next, see the effect produced,

***~~2. On the Church at large—~~***

As in the teachers there was an immediate increase of *holy zeal*, so was there in the hearers a visible augmentation of *heavenly love*. Instantly "the whole multitude of believers became of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that anything of the things that he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." They all considered themselves as one body: and exactly as the different members of a body, the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, employ their respective powers, not with a view to any separate interest of their own, but for the collective benefit of the whole, so did these Christians, as soon as ever they were "filled with the Holy Spirit;" every one selling his houses or lands to form one common stock for the support and comfort of the whole.

Mark then here also the effect of persecution: how it united the Lord's people in one common bond, and advanced their mutual love to a height, which under other circumstances it would never have attained. Doubtless the particular act of casting all their property into one common stock is to be imitated only under circumstances similar to theirs: but the Spirit who dictated that act would abound in us, as much as in them: and it will abound in us in proportion as we possess the grace of Christ.

The trials of the saints at this day being light, they know but little of sympathy, and make but little sacrifices for the good of others: but, if they were driven more to God by the sword of persecution, they would feel greater need of sympathy themselves, and would be ready to exercise it in a far larger measure towards others.

***~~From whence we may learn,~~***

***~~1. Where to go with our troubles—~~***

Where would we go, but to that *God, who has ordained them all, and promised to overrule them for our eternal good!*The Apostles indeed went first "to their own company, and reported all that had been said to them:" but this was for the purpose of comforting and encouraging them, and not with a view to obtain comfort or encouragement themselves; for that they betook themselves to prayer, having engaged all the Church to unite with them in their supplications.

The benefit of this measure to all who engaged in it, you have already heard: while they were in the very act of pouring out their souls before God, an answer was given from on high; and every soul was filled with grace and peace.

Say, brethren, has it never been so with *you?* Look back to seasons of affliction, when you could find no refuge but in God: have they not proved seasons of peculiar refreshment to your souls? Have you not received "strength according to your day," so as not only to endure your tribulations, but to glory in them? Bear in remembrance then that direction which God himself has given you, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear you, and you shall glorify me." Yes, "Cast your burden on the Lord; and he will sustain you."

***~~2. How to recommend our principles—~~***

It is to the shame of Christianity that there are so many parties among us, and that there is so little love exercised by them towards each other. Compare the Church at this time with the Church of Christ in that age: alas! at what a low ebb is vital godliness among the professors of the present day!*Instead of uniting against the common enemy, they do little but dispute with each other. Instead of every one denying himself for the good of the whole, they are all immersed in selfishness, and are intent only on their own personal ease or interest.*

But the saints of old did not do so: they constrained their very enemies to say, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" O that such seasons might speedily return, and that our eyes might witness them in this place!

But it is to be feared that we shall never learn this lesson, until we are taught it in the *school of affliction*. Yet how much better were it to learn it from the example of the primitive saints, and especially from the example of "the Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich!" Beloved brethren, set these examples before you, and implore grace from God, that you may be able to walk in these blessed paths. Then will you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrain your very enemies to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."

***~~#1752~~***

***~~ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA~~***

***~~[Acts 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3-5).~~***

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

IN contemplating the dispensations of Providence, there are some which, on a superficial view, we would be ready to accuse of severity; but, on a closer inspection of them, we shall find them to be replete with mercy. At the first establishment of the Jewish religion, Nadab and Abihu were slain for offering incense with strange fire; as Korah also and his company were for their rebellion against Moses. But such judgments, though terrible to the individuals concerned, had a direct tendency to benefit the nation at large; inasmuch as they proclaimed to all, that "God was greatly to be feared," and "to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him." Thus, at the first establishment of the Christian Church, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for endeavoring to lie on the Apostles, and for professing to give the whole produce of their estate to the Church, while they held back a part of it for their own use.

In our text, Peter shows him the enormity of his offense, and inflicts upon him the judgment which he richly merited. To make a suitable improvement of this history, we shall notice,

***~~I. The representation here given of the Holy Spirit—~~***

The falsehood uttered by Ananias and his wife seems to have been designed only to impose on the Apostles and the Church: but Peter speaks of it as "a testing of the Spirit of the Lord, verse 9," and "a lying to the Holy Spirit," or, in other words, "a lying unto God."

Now from these expressions see who the Holy Spirit is:

***~~1. He is a distinct person—~~***

It would be absurd to imagine that the Holy Spirit is a mere quality; for on such a supposition the language of the Apostle would have no meaning at all. If he is tested and deceived, he must be a person, and accordingly we find him spoken of continually as one indeed with the Father and the Son, but yet as personally distinct from them.

He possesses the *attributes* of a person: *understanding*, [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.11), *will,*[1 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.11), and,  
if not *affections*—yet a susceptibility of impression suited to the manner in which he is treated by us, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10). [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30).

He sustains the *offices* of a person, being:  
a Comforter, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17),  
an Intercessor, [Romans 8:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26-27),  
a Teacher, [John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.26),  
a Witness, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16).

He also performs the *acts* of a person:  
commanding, [Acts 13:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.2-4),  
forbidding, [Acts 16:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.6-7),  
judging, [Acts 15:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.28).

And, that we may not confound him with either of the other persons of the Godhead, he is spoken of as distinct from both, and as sent from the Father by the Son for specific ends and purposes, which, according to the plan proposed between the Sacred Three, were to be accomplished by him alone [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26).

***~~2. He is the true God—~~***

This also is declared with no less clearness than the former: for, He is called by the incommunicable *name*of Jehovah, [Isaiah 6:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.8-10) with [Acts 28:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.25).

He has all the *perfections*of the Deity:  
eternity, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14),  
omnipresence, [Psalm 139:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.7),  
omniscience, [1 Corinthians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.10).

He does the *works* that are proper to God alone:  
he formed the body of Jesus in the Virgin's womb, [Luke 1:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.35);  
he qualified him for the office he was to sustain, [Isaiah 61:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1);  
he is the author of every good work in us, [Galatians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22);  
and he inspired from the very beginning all the Prophets and Apostles, that they might communicate to us with infallible certainty the mind and will of God, [1 Peter 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.11) and [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.21).

He receives also the worship that is due to God alone, 2 Thessalonians 3:5. [Revelation 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.4).

He is joined with the Father and the Son as the glorious Being to whom we are consecrated in our baptism, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19).

He as equally with them, is the source of all spiritual blessings [2 Corinthians 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.14).

From this view of the Holy Spirit we see with what propriety the Apostle spoke of him as "God;" nor do we hesitate for a moment to proclaim him, "The Most High God! Compare [Hebrews 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.7-9) with [Psalm 78:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.56)."

The more exalted our conceptions of the Holy Spirit are, the more shall we see,

***~~II. The importance of approving ourselves to him in all things—~~***

***~~It is certain that we may commit the same sin as Ananias and Sapphira did—~~***

Let us get a precise idea of what their sin was. Many in the Church sold their possessions, and laid the whole price of them at the Apostles' feet, to make a fund for the support of the Church at large, [Acts 4:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.34-35). Barnabas in particular is mentioned as having done this, [Acts 4:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.36-37). Doubtless this generosity gained them high credit in the infant Church: and Ananias and Sapphira determined to come in for a share of this honorable distinction. They sold their estate therefore; but not being able to trust God for their future support, or not choosing to relinquish all their temporal comforts, they agreed to keep back a part of the price, and to present only a certain portion of it to the Apostles. Wishing however to appear as eminent as others, they professed to give the whole price; thus endeavoring to obtain the full credit of others, without making their sacrifice.

This was their sin: a mixture of ostentation, of covetousness, of unbelief; a seeking of credit which they did not deserve, and a pretending to virtue which they did not possess.

This the Apostle calls "a lying unto," and "a testing of, the Holy Spirit:" for it was an attempt to deceive the Apostles, whom the Holy Spirit had invested with miraculous gifts and powers; and it tempted the Holy Spirit to show whether he were an omniscient, holy, and just Being, or not.

Hence then it appears that allowed hypocrisy is the very nature of their sin. The short-comings and defects of a sincere Christian, though contrary to his profession, cannot properly be classed with their sin; but every willful deviation from duty, especially if deliberate and persevered in, is in fact a lying unto God.

What then must be said of those who *harbor any secret lust?* Or make any reserve whatever in their obedience to God? Or do even what is right in itself from any corrupt motive? A desire of man's applause will carry some to great apparent heights of virtue; it will urge them to laborious exertions, and reconcile them to painful sacrifices: but God, who sees the heart, will abhor all such offerings, and account them no better than that which Ananias and Sapphira presented to him.

***~~And it is certain also, that if we do, God will both detect and punish it—~~***

God often exposes hypocrites to shame in this world; and allows their hidden corruption to be brought to light. How often does it happen, that a person, who on the whole has maintained externally a creditable profession, is instigated by his predominant passion, whether of lust or covetousness, to an act that blasts his character for ever! But, if no such exposure takes place in this world, the *mask*will be taken off as soon as we come into the presence of our God.

Alas! what will be our sensations, and the sensations of many around us, when we are interrogated by our Judge in relation to things from which perhaps we gained the greatest credit? What must have been the surprise of Ananias and Sapphira, and of all their friends too, when the act which appeared so excellent, was proved so faulty, and was visited with so awful a judgment! Let us endeavor to realize that scene, and we shall have some faint idea of the hypocrite's feelings at the day of judgment.

We may easily deceive men; but "God will not be mocked!" To him every secret thought is open, and in the last day "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts! [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5). [Psalm 44:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 44.21)."

Then, if not before, "our sin shall find us out;" and "the Holy Spirit himself," whom we have tested and deceived, shall "be a witness" against us to our everlasting confusion! [Hebrews 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.15). [Malachi 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.5).

***~~The only improvement we would make of this subject, is that which the Church itself made of the event—~~***

We read that "great fear came on all those who heard these things." O that such a fear may come on all who hear me this day!

Tell me, O you who live in the allowed indulgence of open and known sins—have you no cause for fear? If this liberal act of Ananias was so abhorred of God, because of the insincerity that attended it, and brought such a tremendous judgment upon him, do you think that your iniquities shall pass unpunished?

And, you who profess religion, have not you cause for fear also, lest your services at last would be found to have been only *splendid sins?* Remember that "God requires truth in the inward parts." If you had the whole armor of God upon you, and it were not fastened on with the belt of truth, it would leave you exposed to all the arrows of the Almighty! [Ephesians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.14). Those who are "hypocrites in heart heap up wrath! [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13);" and "fearfulness will at last surprise them, [Isaiah 33:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.14)." Behold then, as our Lord said even to the Apostles, so say I to you, "Beware of hypocrisy! [Luke 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.1);" beware lest you profess more than you design to practice, [Jeremiah 42:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.20-21). Seek to have "your hearts right with God." Entreat him to give you "the wisdom that is from above, which is without partiality, and without hypocrisy." Then will the Spirit of God abide with you, [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17); then will the blood of Christ also cleanse you from the defilement which cleaves to your very best actions, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7); and God the Father will delight in you to all eternity! [Proverbs 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 11.20).

***~~#1753~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF MINISTERS~~***

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

"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."  
[A little sketch given extemporaneously to a young friend.]

Consider the commission,

***~~I. As given to the Apostles.~~***

***~~1. Do not allow yourselves to be intimidated—~~***

Execute the high commission you have received.

Assure yourselves of protection from on high.

Know that none can prevail against you any farther than God shall see fit: or than He can overrule for his glory, and for your good.

***~~2. Do not allow them to be robbed—~~***

The Gospel is the word of life and salvation (verses 29-32.)

It is the only means of life, and the effectual means to all who receive it.

Do not allow envious and wicked men to rob them of it.

***~~Regard not your own bodily life, if you may but advance the life of their souls—~~***

***~~II. As given to us at this hour.~~***

***~~We have the same word of life to preach to you—~~***

You hear it under far more favorable circumstances. None forbid us to preach it, or you to hear it.

***~~You are come for the very purpose that you may hear it—~~***

Lo, then I now preach it to you:

Christ has died that you may live.

Believe on him and you shall live.

This I declare to all, without hesitation and without exception.

Avail yourselves of the opportunity afforded to you.

Contemplate the sad alternative if you reject our word.

If our word is not a savor of life unto life, it will be a savor to your death and condemnation.

***~~#1754~~***

***~~THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION~~***

***~~[Acts 5:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.30-32).~~***

"The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

AMONG the various things which have weight and influence in forming decision of character, there is nothing so powerful as religion. *The fear of God operates to the dissipating of all other fear. The love of God subjugates or refines all creature attachments.* Persons actuated by any other principle, will bend to circumstances: but religion will give us a uniform direction, like that of the needle to the pole.

We see this very strongly illustrated by the conduct of Peter and the other Apostles. We acknowledge that they were not destitute of a religious principle during their Master's life: but it was not until the day of Pentecost that they fully understood the nature of Christianity, or were completely subjected to its dominion. From that time, the most timid of them were emboldened to confess Him whom they had just before forsaken and denied. They had just been imprisoned for bearing their testimony to his office and character: yet, when threatened with still heavier vengeance, they undauntedly persevered, charging the very rulers themselves with the guilt of murdering the Lord of glory, and affirming that the very person whom they had crucified as a malefactor, was exalted to be the Savior of the world.

In considering this address of theirs to the Jewish council, it will be proper to notice,

***~~I. The testimony here borne to the Lord Jesus—~~***

Observe,

***~~1. The testimony itself—~~***

The Jewish rulers conceived, that, in having crucified the Lord Jesus, they had wholly subverted his influence in the world. But the triumph was altogether on the side of Jesus, of whom the Apostle testified, that he was raised to the most exalted state in glory. Jesus had foretold that he would rise again on the third day; and that, as he had come from the Father, so in his ascension he would return to the Father. And now the Apostle declared that this was accomplished in him: and that, though "he had been crucified through weakness, he was now raised by the power of God," and seated at the right hand of his majesty on high.

He further declared that he was invested with the highest honors. He had been crucified as a malefactor who had arrogated to himself the title of "The King of the Jews;" nor had he interposed to save himself. But he was now "exalted to be a Prince and a Savior;" even the Supreme Governor of the universe, and the Savior of the world, of all at least who would believe in him. However strange such claims might appear to his murderers, they were no other than what the prophets had taught them to expect, seeing that "every knee was to bow to him, and all the ends of the earth were to be saved by him, [Isaiah 45:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22-23)."

To this he added that he was empowered to bestow the richest blessings. He was to be the one fountain of good to all his believing people, "giving repentance" to the most obdurate, and "forgiveness" to the most abandoned, the very instant that they would seek these blessings at his hands.

***~~2. The truth and certainty of this testimony—~~***

The Apostles all professed themselves "witnesses of these things;" that is, witnesses of his resurrection and his ascension, and consequently of those things which were the special objects of his exaltation.

Now certainly they were competent witnesses, both of the resurrection and the ascension of our blessed Lord: for though they had not actually seen him rise, they had seen him frequently after he had risen, and had even eaten and drunk with him, and beheld him in the very act of ascending into Heaven. The very incredulity which they manifested in relation to these things is a strong confirmation that they did not hastily credit the report of others, or even their own senses, until they were overpowered with such evidence as was absolutely irresistible, [Mark 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.14). [Luke 24:39-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.39-43). [John 20:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 20.25-29).

They were also as unexceptionable witnesses as could possibly exist: for being poor illiterate fishermen, they could not frame an imposture that would deceive the whole world; nor had they the smallest inducement to attempt it, since they could expect nothing but contempt and persecution in this world, and eternal misery in the world to come.

They gave their testimony too in the most unexceptionable manner. If they had been impostors, they would have gone to a distance, where their conspiracy would not so easily have been detected; or, at least, have delayed until the present ferment had subsided; and have practiced their imposition first on the weak and credulous.

But instead of this, they bore their testimony without any loss of time, and in Jerusalem too, where every falsehood could be so easily detected, and before all the Jewish rulers, who were most of all interested in disproving the facts attested.

As for the testimony by which the Jewish rulers endeavored to invalidate the assertions of the Apostles, it still further established the very point which it was intended to disprove, [Matthew 28:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.11-15). For, if the guards slept, how could they tell what was done in their sleep? and why were they not punished? Why too did the rulers engage to screen them from punishment, when their disappointment and rage would rather have called forth their most vindictive efforts?

In addition to them, the Holy Spirit himself also bore witness to these things. The Lord Jesus had repeatedly declared, that, after his ascension to Heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit to testify of him. On the accomplishment of this promise depended the validity of his pretensions. At the appointed time he fulfilled his word, and sent down the Holy Spirit in a visible manner on his disciples. In this *first instance*then the Holy Spirit testified, that Jesus was indeed risen, and that he had ascended to the right hand of God. By the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were enabled to preach the Gospel in a great diversity of languages which they had never learned. They wrought also many and stupendous miracles in confirmation of their word. They were empowered also, by the imposition of their hands, to communicate the Holy Spirit to others. By all these things the Holy Spirit bore yet further testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. By his communications also, of light, and peace, and holiness—he testified in the hearts of all who received the Apostles' word: and to this hour does he continue to testify unto thousands in the same way.

Can we conceive that God the Father would have interposed in this astonishing manner to aid an imposture? Assuredly the facts so attested must be true; and Jesus is exalted for the ends and purposes which are specified in the text.

To mark the immense importance of this subject, I proceed to show,

***~~II. The interest we have in it—~~***

Of what importance this testimony was considered by the Jewish rulers we see by the effect it produced upon them: "They were cut to the heart," from a conviction that the testimony was true; and they sought to slay the witnesses, that the truths asserted by them might be no further spread among the people. Now this whole record calls on us,

***~~1. To believe in Christ ourselves—~~***

We are as much interested in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, as ever the Jews were, because by the resurrection we know him to be the Messiah; and because by the ascension we know him to be able to fulfill all that he has promised to his believing people. We are perfectly sure that he is "a SAVIOR," yes, the Savior that was to come into the world; and that he has effected all which was necessary for our salvation, making a full atonement for all our sins, and working out for us a righteousness wherein we may stand perfect before God.

We know also that he is "a PRINCE," yes, the Prince who shall rule over the whole world, and bring all things into subjection to his will.

In this double capacity we are assured that he is able to "give repentance" to our souls, by "taking away the heart of stone, and giving us a heart of flesh;" and at the same time to so blot out our iniquities, that no sin we have committed shall ever rise up in judgment against us, or be imputed to us in the last day. What can be more delightful tidings to fallen man?

Let every one of us hear them, and rejoice in them, and bless God for them. Let us renounce every kind and every degree of self-dependence, and have all our righteousness and strength in Christ alone.

Let none despond: for, if these tidings were proclaimed to those who had so recently imbrued their hands in the Savior's blood, and were at this moment seeking to slay all his chosen Apostles, to whom shall they not be proclaimed? Or to whom shall they not be available, provided a penitential frame be really desired, and forgiveness of sins be fervently implored?

At the same time let us receive Christ in his entire character, and look to him unreservedly for all his blessings. Let us not dream of "forgiveness" without "repentance," or think of calling him "Savior" without submitting to him as our Ruler and Governor. All that God has united in him for our benefit, must be united in us for his honor: nor must we presume, or even wish, to "put asunder, what God has so inseparably joined together." As we must have nothing united with Christ for the salvation of our souls, so there must be nothing in Christ which we do not actually receive from him, and manifest to be enjoyed by us as a matter of our daily experience before God.

***~~2. To make him known to others—~~***

The Apostles no sooner received the communications of God's Holy Spirit, than they preached the Savior to all around them. Nothing could deter them from this blessed work. They had all been imprisoned; but they were not intimidated. They were menaced with severer punishment; but they made no account of any sufferings that could be inflicted on them; and when they were actually beaten, "they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Lord's sake."

Now this shows us what we also are to do. We must "confess Christ" openly before all, and commend him to all, that they also may be made partakers of his salvation. True, we are not all called to minister after the manner of the Apostles: but in our life and conduct we must preach to all around us, and be "living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

At this period, through the tender mercy of God, there are greater facilities for the discharge of our duty than ever was afforded us before. There are societies without number for the diffusion of divine knowledge, both at home and abroad: and by aiding them we may all, in our respective spheres, contribute greatly to the spread of the Gospel, and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the world.

Imitate, then, the holy Apostles in their *zeal*and *love*; and, while you look to Christ for salvation yourselves, endeavor to make him known to the whole world, as their Prince, and as "the Author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him."

***~~#1755~~***

***~~THE MAGNANIMITY OF THE APOSTLES~~***

***~~[Acts 5:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41-42).~~***

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."

IN the annals of the world we find many examples of magnanimity, which excite our admiration, and shame the lowness of our attainments. But it may well be doubted whether any single instance which we read of in secular history, will stand the test of close examination. *Pride and ostentation were almost invariably the fountain from which the most magnanimous actions of heathens flowed*: and in proportion as the *principle*was bad, the *action*itself also must have been depraved. But in the passage before us, we behold a greatness of mind which was truly admirable, and in every point of view worthy of our imitation. In discoursing upon the conduct of the Apostles as it is here set forth, we shall,

***~~I. Illustrate their magnanimity—~~***

The whole of their spirit and conduct on this occasion was in the highest degree worthy of their high calling—

***~~1. They gloried in all their sufferings for Christ's sake—~~***

Poor and illiterate men are apt to be disconcerted if called into the presence of their superiors, especially if those superiors have the power and inclination to oppress them under the forms of law. But these poor fishermen, when summoned before the supreme council, pleaded their own cause with undaunted firmness, testifying against their very judges, that they had crucified the Lord, and exhorting them to believe in him as their exalted Prince and Savior.

After having been unjustly imprisoned, and miraculously delivered from their confinement, they were again summoned before their oppressors; and again, though without either invective or complaint, they vindicated their conduct in an unanswerable manner: and, notwithstanding they were beaten, and menaced with severer treatment, and might therefore have felt indignation rise in their bosoms, they lost sight of all the injuries which they themselves had sustained, and gloried in their sufferings as an honor conferred upon them—an honor of which they deemed themselves utterly unworthy.

***~~2. They persisted unalterably and indefatigably in the path of duty—~~***

Though they gloried at present in their sufferings, it might have been expected that they would be very cautious of exposing themselves to the increased resentment of their persecutors. But they well knew that Jesus Christ was the only Savior of the world, and that all must eternally perish who did not believe in him. They therefore lost no time, but instantly resumed their labors both in public and in private. They declared the death of Christ to have been an *atonement*for sin; they testified of his *resurrection*and *ascension*to carry on his work in Heaven; and they proclaimed a full, a free, an everlasting salvation to all who would believe in his name.

This was the obnoxious doctrine which they were forbidden to preach: but they proceeded on this one principle: that they were bound to "obey God rather than men," and they were determined to suffer the greatest extremities, rather than swerve from the path of duty, or relax, their exertions for the instruction and salvation of immortal souls.

But it was not their perseverance that we admire, so much as the spirit and temper with which they conducted themselves throughout the whole of their trials. They showed a firmness that was invincible; but without petulance, without anger, without ostentation, without complaint. They acted, not from self-will, but from zeal for their Lord, and love to their fellow-creatures. Their glorying was not from a proud conceit of being martyrs to their cause, but from a persuasion that to suffer anything for Christ was the greatest honor that could possibly be conferred on mortal men; since it gave them an opportunity of manifesting their love to Christ, and rendered them conformable to his blessed image.

Such being the example which they have set us, we would,

***~~II. Recommend it to your imitation—~~***

We are required to "be followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises." Therefore let me commend to your imitation:  
The principle from which they acted,  
the determination of heart with which they obeyed that principle,  
their view of the sufferings they were called to endure,  
and the manner in which they endured them.

That we may all resemble them,

***~~1. Let us get that love to Christ, which was the governing principle in their hearts—~~***

*Without a supreme love to Christ, it is in vain to hope that we shall attain to any eminence in the divine life*, or indeed to any real experience of it. We shall never be willing to endure much for him, much less be able to glory in sufferings and shame for his sake, if our hearts do not burn with love towards him from a sense of what he has done and suffered for us. This therefore is the first thing we are concerned to seek after: let us get the knowledge of Christ as our crucified, risen, and exalted Redeemer, and, *under the constraining influence of his love, let us devote ourselves entirely to his service*.

***~~2. Let us, like them, be steadfast in our obedience to the will of Christ—~~***

We shall find many things both from within and from without that will endanger our fidelity to Christ. But nothing must be allowed to divert us from the path of duty. We owe allegiance indeed to our governors in all things lawful; but if their commands be opposite to those of God, there can be no doubt whom we are to regard in preference, and to whose authority we must yield obedience. We must therefore *arm ourselves equally against the allurements of inward temptation, and the terrors of outward persecution*; and have it as an established principle in our hearts, that nothing is, on any account, to interfere with our duty to God.

***~~3. Let us, instead of dreading the cross, account it an honor to suffer for our Lord—~~***

Sooner or later we must have a cross to bear, if we will be followers of Christ. We may be screened for a time; but "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." Nor should any be ashamed of the cross; but rather, as Moses and all the saints of old, accounted the reproach of Christ to be their honor, and loss for Christ their gain [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26); [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34), so should we rejoice and leap for joy, if we are counted worthy to endure anything for our blessed Lord, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12). [1 Peter 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-16). To*suffer for him is represented as a special favor conferred on us by God for Christ's sake*; a favor equal, if not superior, to the gift of salvation itself. [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). In this light then let us view the cross; and we shall take it up with cheerfulness, and bear it with unshaken constancy.

***~~4. Let us very especially take heed to our spirit when we are under persecution—~~***

*It is no easy matter to unite firmness and constancy, with meekness and love*. We are in danger on the one hand of yielding to intimidation, or on the other hand, of indulging an angry, complaining, ostentatious, or vindictive spirit. It may be well therefore frequently to set before us the examples of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, [1 Peter 2:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.20-23). [1 Corinthians 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.12-13), that we may follow their steps, *who returned nothing but blessing for curses, and fervent prayers for despiteful persecutions*. The whole of our duty is contained in one short but comprehensive sentence—may God inscribe it on all our hearts! "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good! [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)."

***~~#1756~~***

***~~THE ZEAL OF MOSES~~***

***~~[Acts 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.22-23).~~***

"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites." [Acts 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.22-23)

IT was urged against Stephen, that he was an enemy to Moses, and to the laws delivered by him. He, in vindicating himself against this charge, exalts Moses to the uttermost, as the greatest friend of Israel, who, at the peril of his life, and with the loss of all things, effected their deliverance from their bondage in Egypt.

***~~I. The use to which Moses applied his distinguished talents—~~***

***~~Certainly his talents were of the most distinguished kind—~~***

In point of rank, he was second only to Pharaoh himself in the whole Egyptian kingdom. Whether the government itself would ever have devolved on him, we cannot say: but, next to Pharaoh, he now possessed the greatest influence, and the most enlarged authority. His acquirements were of the very first order: "he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," who were at that time the most learned people upon earth. Solomon himself, who was wiser than all the children of the east country, was commended especially by this, that "he excelled all the wisdom of Egypt, [1 Kings 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 4.30);" and, consequently, the character here given us of Moses, as "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," is as elevated as any that could be given to mortal man.

But to this was added experience in all the most arduous affairs of state. When it is said, "he was mighty in words and in deeds," we are not to understand it of what he was subsequent to his mission to redeem Israel from their bondage; but of his previous state, while he was yet in Pharaoh's court, where he must of necessity find many occasions which called for peculiar wisdom in deliberation, and energy in action.

At the same time, he was now in the very *prime of life*; not so young, as to act with thoughtless indiscretion; nor yet so old, as to be suspected of acting from a weariness of life, or a superstitious hope of meriting something at the hands of God: he was *forty*years of age; at which time his judgment was fully matured: and, if he had desired worldly pleasures, he was fully capable of enjoying them with the richest zest, and for many years.

Yet, with all these advantages, how did he employ them?

Did he enjoy himself as one intent only on his own personal gratifications? No! he felt for the miseries of his oppressed brethren; and determined to interest himself in their behalf. He was aware that such a proceeding must be attended with great sacrifices on his part, and expose him to very imminent dangers. He must of necessity lose his place and situation in the court of Pharaoh; and, *in uniting himself to the despised and persecuted Israelites, he could not fail to bring upon himself much reproach and suffering*. Yet, having weighed, as in a balance, the evils which he must endure against the benefits which he hoped to convey, "he refused to be called any longer the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)."

The benevolent desire of delivering his people from their oppression having been conceived in his mind, he instantly addressed himself to that good work: and, "seeing one of them injured by an Egyptian, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." But finding, the next day, that this action had been discovered, and knowing assuredly that, if he would be apprehended by Pharaoh, his life would be sacrificed, "he fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian, [Exodus 2:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 2.11-15)."

How far the precise mode of carrying his desires into effect was right, I presume not to judge. It is the desire of delivering his people, and not the mode of his attempting that deliverance, that is the object of my commendation: and that is held forth to us, by God himself, as worthy of our highest admiration.

And now let us consider,

***~~II. The light which his conduct reflects on the general subject of evangelism and missions—~~***

Methinks it reflects great light,

***~~1. On the need there is of evangelism and missions—~~***

*The state of the Israelites in Egypt very strongly illustrates the state of mankind at large under the bondage of sin and Satan.*Truly "the God of this world" rules over men with most tyrannic sway; "leading them captive at his will," and recompensing with nothing but evil their most laborious exertions. In one respect, the vassals of Satan are in a far worse predicament than they; for *they are unconscious of their bondage, and even love their chains*.

Not only where the darkness of heathenism prevails, but even where the light of Christianity shines, are men enslaved by their lusts and passions; and yet are ready to account their bondage as liberty, [2 Peter 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.19); unconscious, too, in what that bondage will issue.

To the miseries of oppressed Israel, so far at least as the cruel Egyptians could inflict them, death put a happy termination: but *the slavery of Satan's vassals is leading them to chains of everlasting darkness*. Say, then, whether there be not need for such to be instructed, and encouraged to cast off the yoke with which they are bound? Yes truly: and to exert ourselves for the diffusion of such light and liberty is an employment worthy of the most elevated of mankind. No talents can be improved to better purpose than in such acts of benevolence as these.

***~~2. On the spirit with which they would be undertaken—~~***

Moses regarded all the honors and riches of Egypt as nothing, when put into competition with the service of God, and the benefitting of mankind. Nay, not only did the sacrificing of all earthly comforts appear trivial in his eyes, but even life itself was judged by him as of small value, in comparison with the discharge of his duties to God and man.

Now, thus should it be with us. Whatever we possess of earthly distinctions, we should account it of no value, but as it may subserve the honor of God and the interests of our fellow-creatures. Instead of imagining that any elevation of rank exempts us from such labors, I hesitate not to say, that the possession of influence is itself a call for benevolent exertions; and the greater our talents are, the greater is the obligation upon us to improve them for our God.*For every talent we possess we are responsible to God*, and, if we are faithful in serving God to the utmost of our power, there is a glorious recompense awaiting us in the eternal world. "To this recompense we would have respect, even as Moses himself had:" and such a sense would we have of its transcendent excellency, that it would altogether swallow up all inferior considerations, and engage for God all the faculties which we possess.

These are the views with which a man would enter upon missionary labors, and the spirit with which he would pursue them: for then only can we embark in such a service with effect, when we engage in it with our whole hearts and our whole souls.

***~~3. On the success which may be hoped for by all who undertake them aright—~~***

Moses succeeded not at first. The very persons whom he sought to deliver were the first to "put him from them; saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" This was the sentiment, not of him only who addressed these words to him, but of the nation generally. Compare verse 27 with verse 35.

And afterwards, when he was sent by God to deliver them, they only complained of him as occasioning their more augmented sorrows.

And after he had succeeded in bringing them into the wilderness, he found them only a rebellious and stiff-necked people, who loaded him with reproaches, and wished to return back again into Egypt, [Exodus 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.21). Of all the adults that he brought out of Egypt, two only ever inherited the promised land. Yet did Moses account his labors well repaid, because in their posterity they enjoyed all that he had fondly hoped to confer on them.

Now, in like manner shall all who engage in missions sooner or later see their labors crowned with success. They may have many trials at first, and may appear to labor a long time in vain. And after that they have gathered a Church, they may find much discouragement arising from the adverseness of their converts. Yet, let them only wait on God, and the seed which seems long unproductive shall spring up, and bring forth an abundant harvest. And in this shall the Christian missionary succeed, far beyond all that Moses could reasonably contemplate.

The prospects of Moses chiefly terminated on the possession of the promised land, and on the prosperity to be enjoyed there: whereas the Christian missionary knows assuredly, that every true convert shall possess, in due season, all the glory and felicity of Heaven. And if his own converts be but few, still he has a consciousness that distant harvests may arise, when "the handful of grain which he cast on the top of the mountains shall shake like the woods of Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth, [Psalm 72:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.16)." And thus he has the consolation to hope that "others more successful may enter into his labors; and that he who sowed, and those who reap, shall rejoice together in Heaven for evermore."

***~~Let me now ask,~~***

***~~1. Why is it that missionaries are so greatly lacking?~~***

The principles by which Moses was actuated were faith and love. "By faith," we are told, he embarked in this sacred cause, and executed his work with such fidelity, [Hebrews 11:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24). But we are sadly defective in this grace.

We see not with sufficient clearness the perishing condition of the heathen, and their need of that remedy which God has put into our hands.

*Nor do we feel that love for souls, which would overcome our self-love, and make us willing to give up ourselves to this difficult and self-denying work*.

*We do not realize eternity as we ought!*O! if we had just views of the eternal world, how empty would all earthly distinctions appear, and how important the work of missions!

Dear brethren, we all have reason to be ashamed, and especially when we reflect on the wonders of redeeming love. How rich was the Lord Jesus Christ in the bosom of his Father—and yet, how poor did he become, that we, through his poverty, might be rich! This is the proper pattern for us to follow: and if once we be imbued with a sense of his love, we shall account it our highest honor to live and die for him.

***~~2. What is the best possible improvement of our talents—~~***

I am far from saying that all talent is to be directed in one channel. There is not any department of science wherein the most exalted talents may not be profitably employed. But, of all offices, that of a minister or a missionary is the most exalted. A minister, whether stationary, in the care of a single parish, or moving in the more extended field of a missionary, is the servant, the ambassador, the very representative of the Most High God; and, as such, has scope for all the talents that any man can possess. It is but too common among us to assign to youth of great promise, those services whereby their temporal interests may be advanced, and to reserve for those of inferior capacity the service of God's sanctuary. But this is very dishonorable to God, and very injurious to the souls of men.

Let the conduct of Moses shame us: and let us all, whatever our talents or influence may be, devote them all to the service of our God, and to the promotion of our Redeemer's kingdom.

It is not indeed necessary that we relinquish the line of life in which divine Providence has called us: on the contrary, we are told to "abide in the calling wherein God has called us," yes, "therein to abide with God:" but, whatever our peculiar talents be, and in whatever department of the state they are exercised, let us consider the service of God, and of his people, as having the *first claim*upon us; and let no personal interest be considered as worthy of a thought, in comparison with God's honor, and the eternal welfare of mankind.

***~~#1757~~***

***~~THE DEATH OF STEPHEN~~***

***~~[Acts 7:59-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.59-60).~~***

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

*OF all histories, that of the Christian Church is the most interesting, and particularly that part of it which is recorded by the inspired writers.* There we behold everything portrayed with perfect fidelity; nothing is concealed, nothing is exaggerated. The writers appear unconcerned about anything but the truth itself; from which they leave all persons to draw their own conclusions.

Large sums of money arising from the sale of different estates were lodged in the hands of the Apostles for the use of the Church; and in a very little time they began to be suspected of partiality to the natives of Judea, in preference to the Jews of foreign extraction. This they relate with perfect indifference, together with the method adopted by them to prevent the distraction arising from too great a multiplicity of concerns.

Then having told us who were chosen by the Church to superintend their temporal concerns, they proceed to detail the history of one whose piety was most distinguished, and whose end was most glorious; and who, as being the first martyr in the Christian Church, was to be an example for the imitation of Christians in all future ages.

In relation to this history of *Stephen*, there are two things which we propose to notice:

***~~I. The occasion of his death—~~***

Being endowed with very eminent gifts, he maintained a controversy with the most learned Jews of different countries; and so confounded them with his arguments, that they had no alternative, but to acknowledge their errors, or to silence him by force. To this latter method they had recourse: they seized him, and brought him before the council, and accused him of blasphemy, that he might be put to death.

In the chapter before us is contained his defense, which so irritated and inflamed them, that it stirred them up in a violent and tumultuous manner to take away his life. Let us consider distinctly its most prominent parts:

***~~1. Stephen's discourse—~~***

A superficial reader would scarcely see the scope and bearing of Stephen's argument: but the argument will be found plain and clear, if only we bear in mind what the accusation was. He was accused of blasphemy against Moses, and against the temple, and the law, because he had declared that the Lord Jesus would execute his judgments on the whole nation. For these declarations he had abundant warrant, from the prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures.

For the destruction of Jerusalem, see [Jeremiah 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.4); [Jeremiah 7:7-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 7.7-14); [Jeremiah 26:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.6-9); [Jeremiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.12); [Jeremiah 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 26.18).

And for the change of "the customs," that is, of the law itself, see [Isaiah 65:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.16); [Isaiah 66:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.19-21).

Nor can we doubt but that, if he had been permitted to proceed in his argument without interruption, he would have proved every part of his assertions in the most convincing manner. But, as soon as they discerned the precise scope of his argument, they showed such impatience as constrained him to break off abruptly in the midst of it. He had shown them that *Abraham*was chosen of God while he was yet an idolater in an idolatrous land; that he and his posterity served and enjoyed God, long before the law was given by Moses; that *Moses*himself was rejected by the people whom he was sent to deliver; that he also had directed the people to look for another Prophet who would arise after him, and whom they must obey at the peril of their souls. He then showed, that while the temple was yet in all its glory, and its services were performed with the strictest regularity, God had spoken of the temple in the most disparaging terms, as unsuitable to the majesty of Him who filled Heaven and earth, [Isaiah 66:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.1-2).

Here the drift of his discourse began to appear: the people saw that their temple and its services were not necessary to the enjoyment of God's favor, and that they could afford no security to those who were disobedient to his word. Here therefore they manifested their wrathful indignation: which obliged him to drop the prosecution of his argument, and to proceed to,

***~~2. Stephen's application of it to their hearts and consciences—~~***

Nothing could be more temperate or cautious than the foregoing discourse. But when Stephen saw the inveteracy of their prejudices, he changed his voice, and addressed them with an energy and fidelity that befit a servant of the living God. They had indeed in their flesh the seal of God's covenant; but they were "uncircumcised in heart and ears," and "resisted the Holy Spirit," who both by his word and influence strove to bring them to a better mind. They professed to venerate the prophets; but they were following the steps of their forefathers, who had uniformly persecuted those whom God had sent to instruct and warn them. Yes, they had been the betrayers and murderers of their Messiah himself: and though they pretended a great regard for the law, and professed to be actuated by a zeal for its honor, they had never been truly observant of its commands.

Such is the character of persecutors in general: they are full of pride and wrath, and are so blinded by prejudice as to be incapable of seeing the wickedness of their own hateful dispositions. Their zeal for God's honor is a mere pretense, a cover, and a plea for their own malignity. Look at them in every age, they all are actuated by the same spirit, and all tread in the same paths. Doubtless in addressing them we would first try what argument and persuasion will do; and we would exercise much patience towards them: but when we find that they shut their ears and harden their hearts against conviction, we should not be afraid to exhibit their conduct in its true light, or to set before them the judgments which they are bringing on their own souls.

***~~3. The confirmation of Stephen's discourse by an actual vision of Christ himself—~~***

They were sufficiently irritated by this reproof; "they were cut to the heart," even as if they had been sawn asunder; and "they gnashed upon him with their teeth." But the preacher, "being filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly to Heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:" and, being favored with this vision, he declared to his persecutors what he saw. One might have hoped that this at least would have made them pause; but it inflamed even unto madness: "They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him."

***~~Here we see how inveterate is that prejudice which instigates men to oppose religion: nothing can satisfy them; nothing can convince them: and the stronger the evidence adduced for their conviction, the fiercer will be their rage against their monitors and reprovers.~~***

We have here also a striking instance of that *hypocrisy*which usually characterizes the persecutors of religion. They would not stone him in the city, because God had ordered that blasphemers would be put out of the camp before they were stoned, [Leviticus 24:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.14-16); [Leviticus 24:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 24.23). See also [1 Kings 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.13); and they took care that the hands of the witnesses would be first upon him, [Deuteronomy 17:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 17.6-7). But they had not hesitated to suborn false witnesses against him; nor did they scruple to put to death a man whom, they could not convict of any crime.

Thus the murderers of our Lord would not venture to put into the treasury the money which Judas had returned, though they had been forward enough to give it to him as the price for his Masters blood. Thus also it is in every age; the haters of God will stop at nothing to accomplish their wicked purposes; but they will "strain out a gnat at the very time that they are swallowing a camel."

Here also we see how God supports his faithful servants. If he leaves them in the hands of their enemies as it respects the body, he will supply them with consolations to support the soul. Stephen knew before that Jesus was at the right hand of God: but when he saw him there, and saw him "standing" there, ready to support his oppressed servant, and to avenge his cause, his mind was fortified, and death was divested of all its terrors.

Such was the *occasion*of Stephen's death. We now proceed to notice,

***~~II. The manner of it—~~***

Violent as were the proceedings of his enemies, he was all composure. Behold,

***~~1. Stephen's faith—~~***

He "knew in whom he had believed," and that "He was able to save him to the uttermost." He knew that the soul, when liberated from the body, would continue to exist; and that its felicity consisted in communion with Christ. To Christ therefore the blessed martyr now addressed himself in prayer, and committed his soul into the Savior's hands. This was as solemn an act of worship as he could offer; for it was precisely the same as that which Christ himself had offered to his Father with his dying breath, when he said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Yet this act of worship was paid by Stephen to Christ, at the very time when he beheld the Father's glory, and at the very time that he was full of the Holy Spirit. How evident is it from hence that Christ is God equal with the Father! And how evident that a prospect of dwelling for ever in his presence will disarm death of its sting, and support the soul under the most cruel sufferings!

This is the faith which we would cultivate: *this view of Jesus as an almighty and all-sufficient Savior will quicken us to every duty, and strengthen us for every trial, and make us victorious over every enemy*. Though appointed as "sheep for the slaughter, we shall be more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

***~~2. Stephen's love—~~***

In exact conformity to his Savior's example, he died praying for his murderers; "Lord lay not this sin to their charge!" This shows how far he was from feeling anything of resentment in the rebuke which he had before given them: and it shows that *the utmost fidelity to the souls of men will consist with the most fervent love towards them*. Well had this holy man learned the precepts of his Lord. O that we also might obtain the same grace to "bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us!"

This is the test of real love. To love them that love us, is nothing: the vilest tax collectors will do that: but to love our enemies, to feel for them rather than for ourselves, to be tenderly concerned for them at the very moment that they are venting their utmost rage against us, and to be more anxious for the welfare of their souls than for the preservation of our own lives, this is Christian love; this is that love which is the fruit of the Spirit, the image of God, and the pledge of Heaven in the soul. Possessed of such a spirit, we need not fear what man can do unto us; for even the most violent death will be to us only as reclining on a bed to sleep. Stephen, with this grace in his heart, and this prayer upon his lips, "fell asleep."

***~~Here then let the world judge:~~***

***~~1. Whether there is not an excellency in true religion?~~***

We acknowledge that many heathens have shown a wonderful composure in death, yes, and a joyous exultation in it also: but then they have been borne up by pride and vanity, and the hope of man's applause. No instance ever occurred of such an end as Stephen's, except among the worshipers of Jehovah. *Nothing but divine grace can give such meekness and fortitude, such faith and love, such tranquility and joy, as Stephen manifested in that trying hour*.

On the other hand, *divine grace will produce these things wherever it reigns in the soul: in proportion to the measure of any man's grace will be his proficiency in these virtues*. Compare then the spiritual man with one who is yet under the influence of his corrupt nature; compare, for instance, the mind of Paul after his conversion to the faith of Christ, with its state while he was keeping the clothing of Stephen's murderers. Such a comparison would in one instant convince us, that there is a wonderful efficacy in the Gospel of Christ, and that a person under its full influence is as superior to others as the sunlight is to the twinkling of the obscurest star.

***~~2. Whether the true Christian is not the happiest man?~~***

On the one side are proud and persecuting zealots; on the other side are the meek followers of a crucified Savior. Look at the frame of their minds; the one all rage and violence; the other all sweetness and composure. Let any man, with the Bible in his hand, survey that scene which we have just contemplated; and say whether he would not infinitely prefer the state of Stephen with all his sufferings, to that of his persecutors satiated with his blood? A man through cowardice may draw back from sufferings; but no man can doubt which of these parties was in the more enviable state: and how much less could he doubt it if he were to survey them in their present state; the one exulting in his Savior's bosom, and the other receiving the just recompense of their sins? O let all, whether oppressors or oppressed, contemplate this, and then make their choice "Whose they will be, and whom they will serve."

***~~#1758~~***

***~~PHILIP PREACHES CHRIST IN SAMARIA~~***

***~~[Acts 8:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.4-8).~~***

"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city."

NO sooner was the Gospel preached with success, than Satan stirred up persecution against it; determined, if possible, to crush and annihilate the infant Church. But what he designed for the destruction of Christianity, God overruled for its speedier propagation, and its firmer establishment. The persecution which commenced with the death of Stephen was so bitter, that the new converts were constrained to flee from Jerusalem, in order to escape its violence; the Apostles alone daring to remain and brave the storm. But the Christians who fled to all the surrounding country, carried the Gospel along with them, and published it in every place: and the very circumstance of their being persecuted on account of it, rendered them more earnest in spreading the knowledge of it, and gave it a deeper interest among the people to whom they spoke.

Philip, who, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons, fled with the rest, and went down to Samaria: and there was made a happy instrument of diffusing widely the knowledge of his Lord and Savior.

From the account given of him in our text, we are led to notice,

***~~I. The subject of Philip's discourses—~~***

The "preaching of Christ" is a term commonly used in Scripture for the publishing of the Gospel in all its parts: it is said of the Apostles, that "daily, in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach, and preach Jesus Christ." Respecting Philip's discourses we are more fully informed; for "he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, verse 12." He showed them,

***~~1. Concerning the kingdom of God—~~***

This kingdom had been distinctly spoken of by the prophets, as to be established in due time: and the Gentiles, as well as Jews, expected the erection of it about that time. The person to whom the throne of David belonged has now come; and, though rejected and crucified by his own subjects, he had set up a kingdom which would never be moved. *His empire indeed was not like those of the world, but was altogether spiritual; it was established in the hearts of men, and was founded in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Into this kingdom all are called; and all who would be saved must become the subjects of it, giving up themselves to Christ, as their only Governor and Redeemer.

This is the instruction which ministers in every age must give to those whom they address in the name of Christ. None can properly be called the natural subjects of this kingdom: for *all people by nature are subjects of Satan's kingdom, and must be conquered by divine grace, before they will submit to the government of Christ*—as the Apostle expresses it. They are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." This then is the message, which, as God's ambassadors, we declare to you in his name: you must all throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and *submit yourselves to Christ, to be saved wholly by his grace, and to be governed wholly by his laws.*

***~~2. Concerning the name of Jesus Christ—~~***

To the Apostles this name was more precious than words can possibly express: it was the foundation of all their hopes, and the source of all their joys. They had seen the efficacy of this name produce the most astonishing effects; and they knew that "there was no other name given under Heaven whereby men could be saved." Hence they strove to commend the Lord Jesus to the whole world, proclaiming him in all his offices, and magnifying him as the Savior of a ruined world.

What other theme is there so delightful to his ministers in all ages? To honor him, and exalt him, and commend him to the world, is the great office of a minister: and then is his ministry most successful, when he can be instrumental to the making Him known and loved and honored by the world at large.

***~~3. That Christ had now established his kingdom upon earth—~~***

It was well known, from the prophetic writings, that the Messiah was to come, and to erect a universal empire in the world. This Messiah was come; and Jesus had proved, by the most unquestionable evidence, that he was the person so long foretold, and so earnestly desired, [Haggai 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Haggai 2.7). These proofs Philip doubtless set before them: and declared to them the nature of that kingdom which was now established: it was not indeed such as the carnal Jews had expected, and such as existed among the heathen; it was a spiritual kingdom erected in the hearts of men, and consisting "in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit".

***~~4. That of this kingdom they might all become the happy subjects—~~***

Satan had usurped dominion over mankind, and had held his vassals in the sorest bondage: but his power was broken: Christ had "triumphed over him upon the cross, and had spoiled all the principalities and powers" of Hell. By making atonement for sin, Christ had reconciled men to their offended God, and had obtained for them the privilege of becoming his sons. This privilege Philip held forth to them as of inestimable value, and as to be secured simply by faith in the Lord Jesus. In urging this point, no doubt he opened fully the riches of grace and love that are in Christ Jesus: and entreated all the people to embrace his offered salvation. He would expatiate largely on the privileges which all the subjects of this kingdom would enjoy; their security from all evil, their possession of all good. In a word, he magnified the Lord Jesus Christ among them, as the only, and all-sufficient Savior of a ruined world!

This testimony he confirmed by miracles, which operated strongly to the conviction of their minds; as we shall see, while we consider,

***~~II. The effect of Philip's ministrations—~~***

It is supposed by many, that the Gospel is productive only of melancholy: but far different was its fruit in Samaria; for "there was great joy," it is said, "in that city." But whence did their joy proceed? We answer,

***~~1. From the temporal benefits by which the Gospel was confirmed—~~***

These were certainly very great, and gave much occasion for joy, even among those who had no spiritual perception of its excellency. It could not fail to rejoice all who were related to the persons on whom the miraculous cures were effected, yes, and all too who had any measure of benevolence in their hearts.

And there is similar ground for joy wherever the light of the Gospel shines: for it banishes many dark and wicked superstitions, infanticide, parricide, the burning of women at the funeral of their husbands, together with innumerable other cruel and horrid practices. And still more, wherever the Gospel is preached with power, the people at large, as well as those who feel its influence, have reason to rejoice in it: for there all benevolent institutions are set on foot: the education of poor children, and their instruction in the faith of Christ, are attended to; societies are formed for the visiting of the sick, and the relief of the needy; and the general tone of morals is raised. All these are, to the ungodly, what miracles were in the days of old,) evidences of the truth and excellency of that Gospel, which produces such fruits.

We admit therefore that the miraculous cures were to them one source of joy: and we a affirm, that every city into which the Gospel now comes, has, on similar grounds, good reason for a joyful reception of it.

***~~2. From the spiritual benefits which they experienced in their own souls—~~***

Multitudes of them, who had long been "led captive by the devil at his will," now had their chains broken, and were "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." A sense of God's pardoning love was now shed abroad in their hearts: and they had "a Spirit of adoption given them, whereby they could cry, Abba, Father." Now they were brought as it were into a new world; "old things passed away, and all things were become new:" they had new *views*, new *desires*, new *pursuits*, new *joys*, even such as they never before had the least idea of.

Can we wonder then that their "joy was great?" The Gospel, when published by angels at the Savior's birth, was proclaimed as "glad tidings of great joy to all people:" and the prophets had all with one voice represented it in the same light. For the spiritual benefit see [Isaiah 35:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.1-2); [Isaiah 55:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.12-13). And for the joy excited by it see [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23) and the whole 98th Psalm. We can appeal to all who have ever tasted its sweetness, that it is indeed "a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

***~~3. From the eternal benefits which were opened to their view—~~***

The kingdom into which believers are brought, is but the commencement of that which is perfected in Heaven. The peace and holiness which are enjoyed here, are the blossom which will be brought to maturity in the eternal world.*Grace is glory begun; and glory is grace consummated.*Besides, the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom will each have a crown and kingdom of his own: "the glory which his Father has given him, he has bestowed on them:" they all without exception are "kings and priests unto God;" and "they shall reign for ever and ever."

Who must not rejoice in such a prospect as this? Truly if, with such a view of the happiness laid up for us in the eternal world, we did not rejoice, we would be more stupid than beasts, and more insensible than stones. But no one can be "begotten again to a living hope of this inheritance," without feeling in his soul a Heaven begun, and "rejoicing in Christ with a joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-5); [1 Peter 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8-9)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Who then among us desires this joy?~~***

Behold how the Samaritans obtained it: they "with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spoke:" and the same attention to the Gospel now will be productive of the same effects. The Gospel which we preach is the same as was preached by him: we "preach Christ unto you:" we preach him as "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," the "All in all" in the salvation of man. O "give earnest heed to what the Scripture declares" concerning him, [Hebrews 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1); treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it in your hearts, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2); and it shall operate, as it did in them, to your present and eternal welfare.

***~~2. Are there any among us who experience this joy?~~***

Then endeavor to "walk worthy of Him who has called you unto his kingdom and glory, [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.12)." To this we would exhort you with paternal authority and love, [1 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.11). Do you ask, How you are to walk worthy of him? We answer, By uniting closely with each other in faith and love, [Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.27), and being increasingly fruitful in every good work, [Colossians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.10). Let it be remembered, that this is the very end for which "God has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," that you would "show forth his praise," and glorify his name.

***~~#1759~~***

***~~THE STATE OF UNGODLY MEN~~***

***~~[Acts 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.23).~~***

"I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity!"

*IT is no real disparagement to the Gospel of Christ, if some hypocrites be found among the professors of religion.*This has been the case in every age of the Church, even when the temptations to hypocrisy were far less than they are at present. There was a *Judas*among the twelve Apostles, and a *Simon Magus*among the converts of Philip. Simon had appeared sincere in his professions of faith, and therefore Philip had baptized him. He had attached himself with admiration to Philip's ministry, verse 13, and therefore the true Christians regarded him as a brother: but he soon revealed the hypocrisy of his heart, and showed that notwithstanding his pretensions to conversion and grace, he was still, as much as ever, in a state of nature. Hence Peter addressed him in the words of the text. In discoursing on them we shall inquire,

***~~I. What is the state here described?~~***

The various terms here used are not infrequent in the Holy Scriptures, [Deuteronomy 29:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.18); [Deuteronomy 32:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.32). [Hebrews 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.15). [Isaiah 58:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.6). They import,

***~~1. A state of bondage to sin—~~***

Nothing can so justly be termed "gall" as sin. It is indeed the bitterest gall, and the sorest bondage. Men may "roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, but they invariably find it gall in the stomach:" it may please them for a time, but at last "it will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder." Let those whose conscience is at all awakened, testify respecting this. Whether we be penitent or not, if our sin has found us out, if will prove a bitter cup. Peter wept bitterly at the remembrance of his guilt; and Judas, who was not a real penitent, could not even endure his own existence, when his conscience upbraided him with the act he had committed. And a dreadful vassalage it is to be led captive by sin. No slave in the universe is so much an object of pity, as he who "for a morsel of food sells his birthright," and *for a momentary gratification consigns his soul over to eternal perdition.*

***~~2. A state of condemnation on account of sin—~~***

This necessarily accompanies the former. There is no freedom from condemnation where there is bondage to sin. Christ came not to save his people *in*their sins, but *from*them. The certainty of punishment is that which renders sin so bitter and so formidable. Were there no future account to be given of our actions, the bonds of iniquity would lose their terror: but *it is the thought of Hell that gives a poignancy to the accusations of conscience, and makes the sinner tremble at the prospect of death and judgment, and often wish for utter annihilation*.

We do not say that every sinner feels such anguish of soul (for many are "past feeling, having seared their consciences as with an hot iron"), but we are sure that they would do so if they knew their state, and will do so the very instant they enter into the invisible world. They are therefore in the gall of bitterness, because "the wrath of God abides on them!"

That this is the lamentable condition of many among us will appear, if we inquire,

***~~II. Who may evidently be "perceived" to be in that state?~~***

While some are manifestly in a very different state, and the condition of others is dubious, there are some who are indisputably in the state just described—

***~~1. Those who are yet under the dominion of their former lusts—~~***

Simon had lately been a sorcerer, but upon embracing Christianity had ceased from the practice of his magic arts. Nevertheless his desire of gain and his love of man's applause were altogether unmortified. Hence when a prospect of aggrandizing himself opened to his view, he was ready to return to his former course of life. Nor did he regard what means he used, provided he might but attain his end.

Are there not too many among ourselves who are yet addicted to their former lusts?

Are not many, who in the days of their ignorance were proud, passionate, unforgiving, still prone to relapse into their former sins the very instant that any temptation occurs?

Are not many as earthly, sensual, and devilish, in their tempers and dispositions as ever?

Let them then not deceive themselves; their state may be easily and clearly "perceived."

It was by such marks that Peter knew beyond a doubt the state of Simon; and by such may the state of every professor in the universe be determined. If they practice, or desire to practice, the same iniquities that they did in their unenlightened state, they are surely "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." "Whoever allowedly commits sin is most unquestionably the servant of sin," and the child "of the devil! [John 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.34); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44) and [1 John 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8)."

***~~2. Those who pursue religion for carnal ends—~~***

Simon earnestly desired the power of conferring the Holy Spirit, and would have given a sum of money to obtain it. But from what motive did this spring? Was he desirous of honoring Christ, or of benefitting his fellow-creatures? No! he only desired to advance his own reputation and interest.

Alas! how many are there who follow Christ from no better motive! They hope that by mixing with the society of God's people, that they shall promote their temporal interests. They wish to be caressed by religions persons, and to be held in reputation for their sanctity and zeal. They do not merely, as even sincere Christians too often do, feel a mixture of principle within them, which they mourn over and resist: but they act uniformly from selfish motives, and with a view to their own ease, interest, or honor. Need we ask the state of such people? It may be too easily "perceived." Like those who follow Christ for the loaves and fish, they are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.

***~~3. Those who are not attentive to their thoughts as well as their actions—~~***

Many, from the customs of the world, take care to regulate their outward actions, while their thoughts range at liberty and without control. Simon conceived the thought of purchasing the power of conferring the Holy Spirit: and, instead of mortifying, indulged it.

Peter, in his reproof, bade him particularly "pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him;" and perceived by this thought, which he had so unadvisedly divulged, that his "heart was not right in the sight of God, and that he had no part or lot in the Gospel salvation."

May not many among ourselves draw the same conclusion from the vain thoughts that lodge within them? We are well aware that *the best of men may have sinful thoughts rushing into their minds;*but will they harbor them? No! every true Christian may say as in the presence of God, "I hate vain thoughts!" But they, who "regard iniquity in their hearts," are in a state of desperate delusion. God, who searches the heart, and tries the thoughts, "will bring every secret thing into judgment," and acquit or condemn, according as he sees the prevailing bent of the heart. If then our "thoughts be not so far captivated to the obedience of Christ" that we cherish those that thoughts are holy, and mortify all thoughts that are corrupt, we may perceive beyond a doubt that we are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What need is there for the professors of religion to examine their own hearts!~~***

Simon had been approved by his fellow-creatures, and even by an inspired servant of God. From hence doubtless he would bode well respecting his own state. Yet in the midst of all he only deceived his own soul.

What need then have *we*to examine ourselves! The approbation of men is but a small matter. It is not he who commends himself, or is commended by others, but he whom the Lord commends, who shall stand before him with approbation in the last day, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18). Judge yourselves then, brethren, that you be not judged by the Lord. Examine not your *actions*only, but your *desires*, your *motives*, and your *thoughts*. By these, will God determine your state in the last day; nor shall any but the upright in heart be accepted by him.

***~~2. What reason have true Christians to rejoice—~~***

The declaration made to Simon intimated that no true Christian was in his state. Blessed thought! If we really believe in Jesus, and experience the purifying efficacy of that faith, we have nothing to fear. The bonds of sin are broken asunder. Nor shall one drop of the cup of bitterness be ever tasted by us to all eternity. Rejoice, believer, in your Deliverer: you once were in the state of Simon—a miserable, enslaved, condemned sinner; but now "the Son has made you free, and you are free indeed." "There is no condemnation to you since you are in Christ Jesus." Rejoice evermore; but endeavor still to maintain a guard over your words and thoughts. "Seek not great things for yourself," nor "the honor that comes of man." Be more solicitous about *graces*than about *gifts*. And whatever God has bestowed on you, labor to improve it, not for your own glory, but for the good of men and the glory of God. Thus shall it be evidently "perceived" that you are in the way of peace, and you shall receive the plaudit of your Lord himself in the day of judgment.

***~~#1760~~***

***~~PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH~~***

***~~[Acts 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.35).~~***

"Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus!"

*IF God has designs of saving love and mercy towards any person, he will be at no loss for means whereby to accomplish them.* We can have no doubt but that the Ethiopian Eunuch was chosen, like the Apostle Paul, even from his mother's womb; yet had he left Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were assembled, without obtaining any knowledge of Christ Jesus. Moreover, he was now going to his own country, where the light of the Gospel had never shone, and where he seemed to be altogether beyond its reach. But God, by an angel, ordered Philip to go into the desert, through which the Eunuch was traveling; and then, by his Spirit, directed him to join himself to his carriage; so that he might communicate to him the knowledge he stood in need of, and lead him to the enjoyment of everlasting life.

The Eunuch was reading an interesting portion of Scripture, which he did not understand: and Philip, at his request, went up into the chariot with him, and expounded it to him.

The points to which we would draw your attention are,

***~~I. The passage expounded—~~***

This is one of the most important passages in all the prophetic writings. The prophets indeed all speak of Christ in some measure; but Isaiah more than any other; insomuch that he has been called, The Evangelical Prophet. Of all his writings, there is not any other part so full, so plain, so rich as this: it might be rather taken for a history of past events, than a prophecy of things to come; so minute and circumstantial is it, in all that relates to the person, character, and office of Jesus Christ.

The precise words which the Eunuch was reading, are a part of a discourse or prophecy beginning at the 13th verse of the 52nd chapter of Isaiah, and extending to the close of the 53rd chapter. Some difficulty in the explanation of them arises from a difference between the Hebrew copies, and the Septuagint translation, from which the words were quoted: though in fact the sense in both is nearly the same; namely, that the person there spoken of was treated with the utmost injustice; that no one would offer a single word in his defense; and that he was cut off as a malefactor.

The main difficulty in the Eunuch's mind was, to ascertain "of whom the prophet spoke; whether of himself, or of some other person:" and this is a difficulty which the modern Jews are unable to surmount. The ancient Jews admitted that the whole discourse related to the Messiah: but since the Messiah has come and fulfilled that prophecy, the Jews interpret it as referring to their nation, who were punished for their offenses. But the most superficial reader will see in a moment the absurdity of such an interpretation: for we are told again and again, that the person who suffered, suffered for the sins of others, and not for his own; and that "by *his*stripes the people of God were healed."

So plain is the prophet's whole discourse, that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice can prevent any man from seeing its accomplishment in Jesus Christ: and we trust, that, at a future period, it will be the principal source of conviction to the whole Jewish nation, and make them, as it did the Eunuch in his own country, instrumental to the salvation of the heathen world.

Such is the passage which Philip undertook to explain. Let us next consider,

***~~II. The exposition given—~~***

"Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus!" Of course he would explain the terms, and show the perfect accomplishment of them in Jesus, together with the impossibility of referring them to any other person. This was the method which Peter adopted on the day of Pentecost, when he showed that David's prophecy relative to the resurrection of Christ could not be interpreted of David himself, but was actually fulfilled in Christ, [Acts 2:25-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25-36). Now this passage would afford him a fair opportunity of declaring everything relating to Christ, as far as the time would admit, and the occasion required.

The person of Christ, as God's Son and Servant, [Isaiah 52:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.13); [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11);"   
his unparalleled sufferings, [Isaiah 52:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14); [Isaiah 53:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.3);  
the vicarious nature of those sufferings, [Isaiah 53:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-6); (seeing that he had no sin of his own, but suffered under the load of our sins, [Isaiah 53:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.9-10);)  
his resurrection to a new and heavenly life, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12);  
his prevailing intercession for us at the right hand of God, [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12);  
all the victories of his grace in the conversion and salvation of a ruined world, [Isaiah 53:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-12);  
and lastly, the certainty of salvation to all who would know, and believe on him, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1); [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11).

These, and many other glorious truths, he would have occasion to open to him, as lying on the very surface of the prophecy he was contemplating: and these truths well understood, and received into the heart as the ground of our hopes before God, are sufficient for every end and purpose of man's salvation. What can be added to them to relieve a doubting mind?

*In the atonement and intercession of Christ there is all that is necessary to satisfy an offended God, and consequently to satisfy and heal a wounded conscience. What can be added to stimulate us to holy obedience? If the wonders of redeeming love will not operate effectually on our hearts, nothing will*. We must be "past feeling," "given over to a reprobate mind."

"From this passage then we would preach Jesus unto you." O contemplate what he has done and suffered for you! think also of what he is yet doing for you in Heaven: and let him now "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied" in the conversion and salvation of your souls.

The excellence of his instructions may be judged of by,

***~~III. The effect produced—~~***

The Eunuch's eyes were opened, and he saw "that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God." Instantly therefore did he determine to surrender up himself to him as a faithful follower and servant: and, understanding that baptism was the rite whereby he must be admitted into covenant with him, he desired to have that rite administered to him without delay: which desire Philip hesitated not to comply with, as soon as he was convinced that his views of Christ were such as qualified him for admission into the Christian Church.

Who must not admire the decision of character here manifested. The situation of the Eunuch, as a leading person in a great empire, might seem to have justified his deterring such a step, until he had viewed it in all its bearings, and formed his judgment upon the maturest consideration. But his mind and conscience were convinced; and he would not give opportunity to Satan to get advantage over him: he therefore "conferred not with flesh and blood," but gave himself up instantly and unreservedly to God.

After he was baptized, and Philip was in a miraculous manner separated from him, "he went on his way rejoicing." And well might he rejoice in having found such a Savior, and in all the rich communications of grace and peace which were now imparted to his soul!

***~~Such being the effect of this blessed interview, let us learn,~~***

***~~1. To improve our time in reading the Holy Scriptures—~~***

The Eunuch, though so great a man, thought it not unworthy of him to study the word of God; nor, though occupied with the affairs of a kingdom, did he plead a pressure of business for the neglect of it: nor, though he found it beyond the reach of his understanding, did he cast it away as unintelligible: but regarding it as inspired of God, he searched into it with humility and diligence.

Let *us*then follow his example: let us not plead, that it is the proper study of ministers only, or that we have not time to study it, or ability to understand it; but let us account it our delight to meditate on the word at all times, whenever the necessary business of our respective callings will admit of it.

***~~2. To avail ourselves of every opportunity of instruction—~~***

Philip probably appeared but in a humble garb, such as befitted his employment, and the persecuted state of the Church at that time: but the Eunuch did not disdain to ask instruction from him, or to invite him up into his chariot for the purpose of obtaining it. He wisely judged, that they are the best instructors who are themselves taught of God: and, conceiving that Philip was better acquainted with the Scripture than himself, he gladly availed himself of the opportunity which his presence afforded him.

Let us in like manner seek, whether from men or books, all possible information concerning the will of God: and let us remember, that, as the Eunuch had gained no saving knowledge at Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were—yet found it in the desert—so may we be guided into all truth by the instrumentality of persons from whom we might least expect so rich a blessing. "God will divide to every man severally as he will," and by whom he will.

***~~3. To follow the convictions of our own conscience—~~***

As soon as the Eunuch saw the path of duty, he followed it. He had before, from heathenism become a Jew; and now, from being a Jew, he embraced Christianity. Now he might well have suspected that all the courtiers in his own country would accuse him of unpardonable weakness and fickleness: but he regarded not the judgment of man: he desired and determined to approve himself to the heart-searching God: and it was in consequence of this that he went on his way rejoicing. If he had halted in his mind, or indulged the fear of man, he would not have been favored with those sublime and heavenly joys: but "those who faithfully serve God, God will honor."

Let us then, like Caleb and Joshua, "follow the Lord fully:" if we stand alone, like Elijah, let us not be ashamed; but whatever God requires us to do, let us do it instantly and without reserve.

***~~#1761~~***

***~~THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH'S CONFESSION~~***

**[Acts 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.37).**

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!"

*CIRCUMSTANCES, apparently casual, are often productive of the most important results.* The Ethiopian Eunuch, a proselyte, "had been up to Jerusalem to worship;" and, on his return homewards, was reading a portion of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Philip, who was at that time at Samaria, was ordered by an angel to go southward, towards Gaza. In this journey he saw the Eunuch, sitting in his chariot, and reading: and, being directed by the Holy Spirit to go and join himself to the chariot, he did so; and, at the Eunuch's request, went up and sat with him in his chariot, and explained to him the portion of Scripture which he was reading. *The Holy Spirit then accompanied the word with power to the Eunuch's soul*: and Philip, on the Eunuch's expressing a wish to enter into the Christian Church by baptism, admitted him to that ordinance, having first heard from him this open confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, verse 26-28."

Now, at first sight, there appears little that is interesting in this acknowledgment. But we shall find it highly instructive, if we consider it, as we ought,

***~~I. As a summary of Christian doctrines—~~***

Such it has been regarded on all occasions. Nathanael addressed our Lord in terms precisely similar: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel! [John 1:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.49)." And Peter also, in his own name and that of all the Apostles, said, "We believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God! [John 6:69](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.69)." In these expressions, all of them intended to convey a general view of their creed; and not of their speculative opinions merely, but of the most influential convictions of their souls. The avowal in my text was given in answer to that question, "Do you believe with all your heart?" It must be understood, therefore, as comprehending,

***~~1. A sincere trust in Christ—~~***

This, of necessity, is comprehended in it: for to what end would it be, to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah, if we do not rely upon him in that capacity? The devils could say of him, "We know you who you are, the Holy One of God;" but they had no hope in him, nor could they derive any benefit from him. *True faith brings us to Christ for salvation; causes us to renounce every other hope; and engages us to rely on him as our "All in all".*

***~~2. An unreserved devotion to him—~~***

If we believe in Christ as having redeemed us by his blood, we must also of necessity surrender up ourselves to him as his peculiar people. Has he offered himself a sacrifice for us; we must "offer up ourselves as living sacrifices to him! [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." To call him *Lord, Lord*, without doing his holy will, would only delude us to our ruin. If we believe that "he has bought us with a price, we must glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)."

But this confession must also be considered by us,

***~~II. As a qualification for Christian privileges—~~***

[Editor's note: Simeon's remarks in this section concerning the "infant baptism," "sponsors," "bishops," "confirmation" etc. have not a shred of foundation in Scripture.]

In this precise view it was uttered by the Eunuch. He applied for Christian baptism: and this question was put to him as a test, "Do you believe with all your heart? If so, you may." Now this is, to all, a necessary qualification,

***~~1. For baptism—~~***

Children cannot, in their own persons return an answer to this question; and therefore the question is put to their sponsors; who have no right to appear as sponsors, unless they can answer it from their hearts, as the Eunuch did. And they bind themselves to contribute, as much as in them lies, to the instilling of these principles into the minds of the children whom they thus present to the Lord. And the children themselves, when they come to an age capable of comprehending the engagements thus made for them, are bound to take them upon themselves; and, when *confirmed*by the bishop, they do actually take them upon themselves; professing, each for himself, his belief in Christ; and devoting himself entirely to the service of his Lord. And in this view, the *ordinance of confirmation*, as administered in the *Established Church*, is of the utmost importance to be well improved by ministers, for the benefit of their flocks; and by young people, for the everlasting benefit of their own souls.

***~~2. For the Lord's Supper—~~***

To come to the Lord's table, as many do, at the three great festivals of the Church, and to neglect it all the year besides, is to show at once, that they enter not into the true spirit of that ordinance. And to attend it as a test for the holding of a public office, is a horrible abuse of it: which, we thank God, is now abolished.

But, for judging of ourselves, whether we be in a state fit to attend upon that divine ordinance, we cannot conceive a better test than this, which Philip here administered. In corning to the table of the Lord, we profess to feed upon the body of Christ which was broken for us and the blood of Christ which was shed for the remission of our sins; and to dedicate ourselves to him afresh, as his devoted servants. If we do not this in reality, we only deceive our own souls.

Here, however, it may be useful to mark what the proper medium is, in the application of this test to persons as a qualification for attending upon the table of the Lord. The Church of England, in her practice at least, is too lax; while those who *dissent*from her are too rigid. That minute inquiry, into what is called the experience of individuals, and persons sitting in judgment upon it, goes far beyond what is authorized by Scripture. The Apostle says, "Let a man examine *himself*, (not stand up to be examined by others, and so let him come, [1 Corinthians 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.28)."

The true medium is that which Philip observed: and if the Eunuch had answered falsely, as Simon Magus unhappily did, verse 20, 21, the blame must have rested on himself alone. But I cannot too earnestly exhort every one of you to put the question to himself with deep sincerity; and never to approach the table of the Lord but under a sense of your entire dependence upon Christ, both for "mercy to pardon, and for grace to help you in the time of need."

In fact, this view of Christ is never duly appreciated, unless it be regarded,

***~~III. As a title to all Christian blessings—~~***

*Nothing but sincere faith in Christ is necessary for salvation.* (Of course, I speak not of it as a speculative assent, but as an operative and influential principle, such as we have represented it under our first head.) So it was declared to be by Paul, and by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6). [John 3:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-16); [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). Such it was declared to be in the commission given by him to his Apostles, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16). Such it was proclaimed to be in the answer given to the inquiring Jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved! [Acts 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.31)."

By *faith* are we made children of the Living God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). [Galatians 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.26).

By *faith* we obtain peace to our own souls, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1).

By *faith* are we sanctified from the power of sin, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9).

By *faith* are we made partakers of the kingdom of Heaven, [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5).

Without this *operative faith*, nothing under Heaven will prevail for any man's salvation. Not Paul himself, in his unconverted state, could have been saved without it, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11). On the other hand, no man, whatever he may have been or done, can perish, not even Manasseh himself, if he comes to God with a sincere faith in the Lord Jesus: for we are assured, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)," and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things! [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

***~~Now, then, permit me to inquire, brethren,~~***

**1.** What is the state of your souls in relation to this all-important matter?

Can you, in the very way that the Eunuch did, declare, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!" I ask not, Whether you approve of that as an article of your creed? but whether it forms the one ground of all your hopes, the one source of all your happiness? Dear brethren, be not satisfied with repeating it in your creed; but get it fixed as a rooted and influential principle in your hearts. *You must acquire it, even as the Eunuch did, by a diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, and by the teaching of the Spirit of God.*

***~~2. What effect does it produce on your hearts and lives?~~***

You see what effects this faith produced on the Eunuch, how he desired baptism, and devoted himself to the Lord, without ever once considering what effect this conduct might have on his earthly prospects. Like Moses, he esteemed the "reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Ethiopia," and greater honor than all Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, could confer upon him. And to him it became a source of the sublimest joy, such as he had never experienced in all his life before: "He went on his way rejoicing, verse 39."

Let me then ask, whether your faith operates in this way on you? It would so operate: it will so operate, if it your faith genuine. O that all of you might go to your respective homes this day, in the very spirit in which the Eunuch prosecuted his journey! God brought Philip to him for this end. And who can tell, but that God has brought us also together for the same blessed end at this time. Dear brethren, rest not until your faith fill you with the same heavenly joy; nor ever cease to wrestle with God in prayer, until he makes you monuments of his grace on earth, and heirs of his glory in a better word.

***~~#1762~~***

***~~THE CONVERSION OF SAUL~~***

***~~[Acts 9:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.3-6).~~***

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

IT has pleased God to give us every evidence of the truth of our religion that the most scrupulous mind could desire. The proofs arising from prophecies and miracles, are such as to carry irresistible conviction to every candid inquirer. But suppose a skeptical person to wish for further proof, and to say, 'Let me see a man, who, being fully competent to judge of the question, and decidedly hostile to Christianity in his heart, is yet convinced at last of its truth: let me see him, while yet all the opportunities of detecting imposture are open to him, embracing Christianity himself, and propagating it with all his might, and braving death in its most tremendous forms in support of it: then I shall be indeed convinced that it is of Divine original.'

I say, suppose a person unreasonable enough to desire such a proof, and determining, like Thomas, not to believe, until this evidence has been afforded him; we would meet him on his own ground, and produce precisely such an instance as he requires.

In the conversion of the Apostle Paul all these things unite: and, from the frequency with which that event is related in the Scriptures, it seems to have been intended by God as a strong confirmation of the truth of our religion. In the passage before us, it is stated by the historian Luke: but, in two other places, it is related by Paul himself; who adduces the circumstances that attended it as an unquestionable proof of his own Divine mission, and of the truth of that Gospel which he preached.

In considering Paul's conversion, we shall notice it in different points of view;

***~~I. As a record for our instruction—~~***

To enumerate the particular truths illustrated and confirmed by this event would be endless: we shall therefore wave all mention of them, and confine our attention to the two leading features contained in the history, and observe,

***~~1. How blindly man acts in the discharge of his duty—~~***

If ever there was a man that possessed advantages for the knowledge of his duty, it was Saul of Tarsus. He was educated under Gamaliel, the most eminent teacher of his day, and made a proficiency in learning beyond most of his contemporaries; and he was eminently distinguished for those moral habits which peculiarly qualify the mind for the reception of truth. Yet behold, this man conceived himself to be rendering acceptable service to his God, while persecuting His Church with the most unrelenting barbarity. Methinks, even reason itself would have taught him, that men ought not to be so treated, merely for entertaining novel sentiments, and for following the convictions of their minds.

If indeed they were violating the public peace, and destroying the welfare of the state, the ringleaders of them might well be apprehended and tried: but to seize all whom he could lay his hands upon, and to drag women as well as men to prison and to death, for no other crime than that of peaceably professing a new religion, was as contrary to humanity as to common sense.

Happy would it be if this erroneous mode of serving God had been confined to that age! But there are still many, who "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge;" many, who can see the wicked going on in their *wickedness*, and never once stretch forth their hand to turn them back; but the moment they see persons embracing and obeying the *Gospel*of Christ, are filled with alarm, and think any methods proper to be used for stopping their progress! Our Lord himself told us beforehand that it would be so, and that men would even "think they did God service in killing his devoted followers."

Were these malignant dispositions found only among the ungodly and profane, we would not so much wonder at them: but they are found equally among the wise, the moral, and the conscientious.

This teaches us, that when we see such persons opposing the Gospel, we ought to *pity*them, and to *pray*for them, and to give them credit for meaning well, even while they are fighting against God with all their might.

This may teach us at the same time, that we also are fallible, and that we may be deceiving our own souls, even while we are most confident that we are acting right. "There is a way, says Solomon, that seems right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death!"

***~~2. How sovereignly God acts in the exercise of his grace—~~***

As madly as Saul was persecuting the Church, our blessed Savior stopped him in his career, revealed to him his error, and made him a chosen vessel to propagate the faith which he had so labored to destroy. Of those that were in company with him, not one, as far as we know, was made a partaker of the same mercy. They saw the light indeed, and heard the voice; but they understood not the things that were spoken. Compare verse 7 with 22:9, nor did they experience the same effects from the vision.

Why was Saul so distinguished from the rest? What was there in that ferocious persecutor to merit such a favor? In vain shall we look for any other cause, but that which Paul himself assigns; "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, [Galatians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.15)." "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now this doctrine is offensive to many: they claim a right to dispose of their own things as they will, and yet deny the same right to God. But his grace is his own, and he will dispense it to whoever he will; "nor will he give account to us of any of his matters." "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion."

How strongly does Paul state this, in the Epistle to the Romans! "A potter has power over the clay, to make, of the same lump, vessels of honor, and vessels unto dishonor;" and such is the right which God claims. If in the pride of our hearts we reply, 'Why then does God find fault? For who has resisted his will?' the Apostle thus indignantly reproves our presumption, "Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why have you made me thus?"

Let us acknowledge what in the case before us is perfectly undeniable, that God "saves us, and calls us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began." If we will look for a reason, let this suffice us, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in your sight."

Another view in which we would contemplate the conversion of Paul, is peculiarly important, namely,

***~~II. As a model for our imitation—~~***

Conversion is as necessary for us as ever it was for him; for though we are Christians already in name, we are not living members of Christ's mystical body, until we have been born again of the Spirit of God! Compare [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3) with [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29). But here let it be distinctly noticed, that we must separate from Paul's conversion everything that was miraculous, or that was peculiar to him: we are not to expect visions, or voices, or miraculous interpositions of any kind: but that which constituted the essential part of his conversion we must expect, and must experience too, if ever we would be numbered with the saints of God. We must have, like Paul,

***~~1. An enlightened mind—~~***

For three days and nights he continued blind; and at the expiration of that time, "there fell, as it were, scales from his eyes, verse 9 and 18." This was doubtless intended as an emblematic representation to him of the blindness of his state by nature, and of the light into which he was now to be brought. Notwithstanding his great learning in the Scriptures—yet was he blind to the mysterious truths contained in them.

Just so, *we in like manner are blind to the spiritual import of the Scriptures, until God the Holy Spirit is pleased to "open the eyes of our understanding."*"The natural man, whatever advantages he may enjoy, 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."

Not that a converted person must of necessity become acquainted with new truths; but he will know them in a perfectly different manner. He may have had the whole system of religion treasured up in his mind before; but now he contemplates the Gospel, as a shipwrecked mariner regards a vessel by which he has been rescued from a watery grave. He sees, that there is in it the exact provision which his necessities required, and a merciful pledge of his safe conveyance to the "desired haven."

***~~2. A convicted conscience—~~***

Paul before his conversion thought he was certainly in a state of acceptance with God: but when he began to view his past life in the looking-glass of God's law, he saw himself a dead and condemned sinner: "I was alive without the law once," says he; "but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." As to that zeal which he had exercised in persecuting the Church, he saw that it was impious in the highest degree; and, in reference to it, he called himself "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor," yes, even "the very chief of sinners."

*Thus must we also be humbled under a sense of our lost condition*. What though we have not committed precisely the same sins as he, "we all have offended in many things," and are therefore deserving of God's everlasting wrath and indignation. *The very first effect of Divine illumination will be, to make us "smite on our bosom, and cry, God be merciful to me a sinner!"*

***~~3. A renewed will—~~***

Hitherto this furious bigot had been following his own will, and the will of the chief priests who sent him: but now he cries, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" Behold, how entirely he commits himself to the guidance of that Jesus, whom now he saw to be the only Savior! He professes himself ready to comply with any direction that shall be given him; and determines henceforth to have no other rule of conduct than his Savior's will.

Here is the crown and summit of true conversion: *we may have enlightened minds, and yet retain an unsanctified heart*. We may have somewhat of a wounded spirit, and yet hold fast our iniquities: but if our will be changed, then it is certain that we have received the grace of God in truth. This therefore we must seek after: we must say to our blessed Lord, "Other lords beside you have had dominion over me, but henceforth I will regard none but you!" 'I will search out your will, as it is revealed unto men; I will take it in all things as a light unto my feet; and I will labor, through grace, to have even the thoughts of my heart brought into an unreserved obedience to it.'

While we regard this work of divine grace as a model for our imitation, let us behold it,

***~~III. As an example for our encouragement—~~***

In this view it was particularly designed by God; as Paul himself informs us: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting, [1 Timothy 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.16)." Truly in the conversion of this bitter persecutor we see,

***~~1. How far the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ can reach—~~***

We can scarcely conceive a state more desperate than that of Saul, when "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the saints of God. Yet to him was mercy given, and that too unsought, and unsolicited. Who then has any reason to despair? Who can say, My iniquities are too great to be forgiven?

Let the weary and heavy-laden sinner, who is ready to say, "There is no hope," take courage, and lift up his soul to God in fervent prayer: for the blood of Christ is as effectual to cleanse from sin as it ever was; and its virtue shall extend as far as ever, even to the very chief of sinners. "Where *sin*has abounded, *grace*shall much more abound!" "Sins of a scarlet or a crimson dye" shall yet be washed away, so that the offender shall be made "white as snow."

***~~2. What great things the grace of Christ can effect—~~***

This man, who, previous to his conversion, was the bitterest enemy both of God and man—was transformed into a most distinguished friend of both. Of all the Apostles, not one excelled him in piety, or equaled him in laborious exertions for the cause of Christ. His besetting sins were all subdued, and his virtues were brought to the highest perfection. This change in him was, as it were, instantaneous; so that in him was fully and at once, verified that description of sound conversion, "Old things have passed away, and all things became new!"

Who then shall hereafter think himself enslaved beyond a possibility of redemption? Is not that grace which wrought effectually in Paul, sufficient for us? Can anything be too hard for the Lord? Let not any then despond under an idea that his corruptions are too deep and inveterate ever to be eradicated: for that same Jesus is yet possessed of all power in Heaven and in earth, and is still "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let me, in conclusion, remind you all, that by nature you are "alienated from God," and "enemies to him in your minds by wicked works." And more especially, you are adverse to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel. But Jesus now speaks to each of you by name, as he did to the Apostle Paul, "Why do you despise me? Why do you turn away from me?" On you he looks with the same compassion as he did on him, and warns you, that "it is in vain to kick against the goads."

The greater part of sinners, it is true, are unconscious that they are fighting against the Lord Jesus Christ: in many things they do, they really think themselves acting inoffensively, or perhaps agreeably to the will of God: but a neglect of the Gospel, no less than direct opposition to it, is an act of hostility to the Lord Jesus Christ, and must finally result in our eternal destruction. Listen then to his still small voice in his word, and accept his gracious invitations. If those around you are regardless of his call, let your minds at least be humbled, if perhaps you may be distinguished by him as *chosen vessels of his mercy*, and monuments of his saving grace.

***~~#1763~~***

***~~SAUL'S PRAYER~~***

***~~[Acts 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.11).~~***

"Behold, he is praying."

WHEN we speak of the grace of God as the free and only source of good to man, we are often misunderstood as though we affirmed that man is wholly passive in the work of salvation: whereas, the truth is, that though, in the first instance, God puts into his heart the good desire, that desire immediately exerts itself in voluntary and earnest efforts for the attainment of the thing desired.

This is seen in the conversion of Saul: in the first instance, God stopped him in his career of sin, and revealed to him his guilt and danger; but from that moment Saul gave himself to fasting and prayer, that by those means he might obtain yet further blessings from God: and God, as though he would show us in the most striking manner the necessity of our own personal exertions, expressly pointed out to Ananias the reason of his communicating further blessings to Saul through his instrumentality, "Go, and inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he is praying."

We will endeavor to point out,

***~~I. What there was in that prayer which attracted the Divine notice—~~***

We cannot doubt but that Saul, who was "touching the righteousness of the law blameless," had often bowed his knees before God in prayer: but he*had never prayed aright until now*. In this prayer of his was:

***~~1. Humility—~~***

He never could have prayed with true humility before, because he was unconscious of his lost estate. He was ignorant of the spirituality of the law, and, consequently, of his multiplied transgressions against it. He even thought himself "alive," as having never given to God any just cause to condemn him. What then must his prayers have been, but, like those of the Pharisee, "I thank you, O God, that I am not as other men are!" But *contrition is the very essence of prayer*—it is "the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise." To "smite upon our bosoms," as guilty self-condemning sinners, and to "cry for mercy," like the poor Publican, is more acceptable to God than all the sacrifices and burnt-offerings that ever were offered.

***~~2. Earnestness—~~***

It is a sense of need that must make us earnest: and, as Saul was insensible of his danger, he could not until now plead with that importunity that became him. But now he was like the manslayer fleeing from the avenger of blood! Now, like his Lord and Savior, he "made prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, [Hebrews 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.7);" and, like the patriarch Jacob, he wrestled with God, saying, "I will not let you go, except you bless me, [Hosea 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.4)." Instantly therefore did God fulfill to him that promise which Jesus has left us for the encouragement of all his people, [Matthew 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7-8).

***~~3. Faith—~~***

The prayers which Saul had offered in former times could not have had respect to a Savior, because he had not felt his need of a Savior. But now he saw that there was no hope of saving mercy, but through that very Jesus whom he had persecuted: now he thankfully embraced the salvation that Jesus offered him: he no longer "went about to establish a righteousness of his own, but gladly submitted to the righteousness of God" revealed in the Gospel. When he said, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" he cordially received Christ as "his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and redemption." No sooner did he thus desire to make Christ his all, than God expressed his acceptance of his prayers, "Behold he is praying!" God would not allow the prayer of faith to go forth in vain.

We propose, in the next place, to show,

***~~II. What we may learn from the notice which God took of his prayer—~~***

This fact is very instructive; it shows us:

***~~1. That God is observant of our frame and conduct—~~***

"The eye of God is in every place, beholding the evil and the good." But more especially does he look upon the humble suppliant; he himself declares, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at my word, [Isaiah 66:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.2)." Behold, when a holy purpose was formed in the heart of Ephraim, how attentive God was to it, "Ephraim says, What have I to do any more with idols?" Surely, says God, "I have heard him, and observed him, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8)." And when the same penitent laid his transgressions more deeply to heart, God quite exulted over him, if we may so speak: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus." And then, with a delightful regard to him, God appealed, as it were, to the whole universe: "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? [Jeremiah 31:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.18-20)."

***~~2. That mere formal services are not accounted prayer in God's sight—~~***

*All the petitions which Saul had offered in former times were a mere lip-service which God did not accept.* "God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth:" *the heart must accompany the lips, or else the worship is hypocritical and vain*,[Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9). This is strongly marked by the Prophet Jeremiah, who tells us that then, and then only, shall God be found, when we seek for him with our whole heart, [Jeremiah 29:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.13-14).

***~~3. That humble and believing prayer shall never go forth in vain—~~***

God may see fit to suspend his answer for a time: even in the case before us, he did not answer until Saul had continued in prayer three whole days and nights. But "though he tarries, he will come at last:" he has assured us, in the parable of the Importunate Widow, that the prayer of faith shall never be in vain, [Luke 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7); and in very many instances he fulfills to men that promise which he has given us by the Prophet Isaiah, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear, [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who never pray at all—~~***

Alas! how many are there of whom the All-seeing God must say: 'Behold he rises from his bed without prayer. He goes through the day, and retires to rest again, without prayer. This is his constant habit: the *sins*he commits, excite in him no compunction: and the *mercies*he receives, call forth no gratitude: he lives without God in the world: ungrateful wretch that he is, he never calls upon my name: never once in all his life could I truly say of him, "Behold, he is praying."'

Brethren, *do you know that all this neglect is recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and that it must be accounted for at last?*Do not deceive yourselves with an idea that your formal heartless services are accepted by him; for, if he who wavers in his mind through unbelieving fears shall receive nothing of the Lord, much less shall he receive anything who never asks with any real desire to obtain the blessings he asks for, [James 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.6-7).

***~~2. To those who do pray—~~***

It is a great mercy if our minds have been so far awakened to a sense of our guilt and danger, that we have been constrained to cry to God for deliverance. But we are ever prone to relapse into coldness and formality: *indeed there is nothing more difficult than to keep up a spirit of prayer, and to live near to God, in a state of habitual fellowship with him*. Any little thing, however trifling and insignificant, is sufficient to divert our attention from prayer, or to distract our minds in the performance of it. Hence we are so often exhorted to pray without ceasing, to watch unto prayer, to continue instant in prayer with all perseverance. Let us then guard against fainting or weariness in this holy duty. It will be of no benefit to us to have sought after God in former times, if we decline from him now: our former prayers will be of no service, if they are discontinued. As our former sinfulness shall not be remembered, when once we turn unto God in penitence and faith; so neither shall our past righteousness be remembered, if we depart from it.

It is possible that we may be hindered in this duty, by an apprehension that we shall not be heard: but we must guard against this temptation, by recollecting that there is no guilt so great but the prayer of faith can remove it. See the peculiar stress laid on prayer in reference to Manasseh; [2 Chronicles 33:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.12-13); [2 Chronicles 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 33.18-19), nor any state so desperate from which it shall not prevail to deliver us, [Jonah 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.1-4). "God never did, nor ever will say to any, 'Seek my face' in vain."

***~~#1764~~***

***~~DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE~~***

***~~[Acts 9:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.39-40).~~***

"Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that *Dorcas*had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up."

*HOWEVER careful the ministers of Christ may be in stating the great doctrine of salvation by faith, their adversaries will represent them as enemies to good works*. The denying to good works the office of justifying men before God, is thought to destroy every inducement to perform them. But if we look at the conduct of the first Christians, we shall see in that an ample refutation of this error. Dorcas, for instance, was "a Disciple," looking for salvation through the merits of the crucified Redeemer: but was she therefore regardless of good works? Did she not rather abound in them? and was not this the foundation of that high esteem in which she has been held by the Church of God in all ages? That we may be stirred up to follow her example, let us consider the account here given of her:

***~~I. Her character—~~***

We do not exactly know what her condition in life was; but we suppose that she was in a middle state, between poverty and riches: but of the use that she made of her time and property, we are fully informed: she employed herself much in administering to the necessities of the poor, and particularly in making garments for them. In a word, her character was,

***~~1. Most lovely in itself—~~***

The doing of good in any way is amiable; but her mode of doing it was peculiarly so; inasmuch as it argued a habit of consideration, compassion, diligence, and self-denial. The bestowing of money is a small act of love in comparison with hers: for though money will procure necessities for the poor—yet her mode of disposing of it made it go farther, if we may so speak, than if it had been expended by the poor themselves; and at the same time, it kept alive in her heart a constant principle of love. By this practice of hers the *poor*were continually, as it were, before her eyes; she thought about them, acted for them, worked for them, and sought her own happiness in contributing to theirs. As her Lord and Master "went about doing good," so she made it her daily business and occupation to diffuse blessings all around her: she not only "did good works," but was full of them, and made the exercises of benevolence her habitual practice.

***~~2. Most acceptable to God—~~***

Doubtless, if her actions had proceeded from an ostentatious or self-righteous principle, they could not have been pleasing to God; for "without faith it is impossible to please him:" but if *her actions were the fruits of faith in Christ*, they were most truly acceptable unto God. See how strongly this is declared in different parts of Holy Writ, [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16). [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18).

In speaking on this subject, many religious persons feel a very undue degree of jealousy: they are afraid of declaring all that God says respecting the value of such works in his sight, lest they would appear to countenance a self-righteous spirit: but, if only we carefully exclude the idea of their being meritorious, or availing anything for our justification before God, it is scarcely possible to state too strongly the delight which God takes in them, or the certainty of their being most richly recompensed in the eternal world, [1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19); every one of them is a loan "lent to the Lord, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17);" and he would consider himself unjust, if he would forget so much as one of them in the great day of final judgment, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10); not even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall pass unnoticed, or lose its reward, [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42).

*Her piety however did not exempt her from the common lot of mortality.* We are next called to contemplate,

***~~II. Her death—~~***

Like others, "she fell sick and died." But though disease and death were permitted to cut her off even as the wicked, and thereby to show that "all things come alike to all," yet there was an immense difference between her and others in the regret experienced for her loss—

A tear or two is all the tribute that is paid to the greater part of mankind, except by those who are their near relatives, or immediate dependents. But at the loss of her, all the Church at Joppa mourned; and the greatest solicitude was expressed to have her restored to them from the dead. They had heard of Peter healing by a word a man who had been confined to his bed for eight years, verse 33, 34; they deputed therefore two persons to go to him, (for he was only about six miles off,) to request his interposition with God in their behalf: and, when he came, they expressed their grief in the most affecting manner; showed him at the same time the fruits of her industry and benevolence, so that they might interest his feelings, and engage his prayers for her restoration to life.

What a blessed testimony was this! How much better than the fawning eulogies of the rich, or the funeral pomp of kings! Yes, *the tears of the godly, and the lamentations of the poor, are the noblest monuments that departed worth can have*. O that we may all so live, as to be thus regretted by the Lord's people, and to have our memory engraved in the hearts of all who knew us! And let us take care that the survivors may have substantial proofs of our piety to exhibit. We are not all able to do good in the same way, or to the same extent: but we may all have some "works to praise us in the gates, [Proverbs 31:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 31.31)," and some fruits "to evince the sincerity of our faith" and love.

The success of their application to Peter leads us to notice,

***~~III. Her restoration to life—~~***

Peter having been introduced into the chamber where the corpse lay, desired all to depart, that he might not be interrupted in his supplications to the Father: and, when he had obtained his request, he presented her alive again to her friends.

***~~What an unspeakable benefit was this to the world—~~***

While her own immediate friends had the comfort of her society, and the poor enjoyed the benefit of her pious labors, *the whole Church of God were edified with her bright example*. *It is astonishing what one person may do, by the mere influence of his own example*; how many he may stimulate, how many he may encourage. We may well suppose, that, where her conduct was so highly admired, she was the means of promoting many acts of benevolence in others, who without such an example would either never have exerted themselves at all, or never to so great an extent. Even to the ungodly world her restoration to life was an unspeakable blessing; since many, by means of it, were stirred up to inquire into the truth of Christianity, and to believe in that Jesus whom they had before despised, verse 42.

***~~Nor was it any other than a blessing to herself—~~***

We cannot suppose that there was left in her mind any remembrance of her felicity in her disembodied state, at least any such remembrance as would cause regret: we take for granted that she was restored to all her former habits of mind, with the same disposition to enjoy the society of her friends, and to abound in every good work. What a comfort then must it be to her to behold those who had so bitterly bewailed her loss! With what redoubled energy would she betake herself to her former labors of love; knowing now, from experience, how short her time might be either for the benefitting of the poor or the glorifying of her God! And these renewed labors would of necessity be recorded, like all her former works, and would follow her when she would rest from them, and augment her weight of glory to all eternity.

Surely all this must be considered as a blessing to her soul. As Paul, though desirous to die and be with Christ, was yet content to live that he might serve and honor God in the work of the ministry; so might she be well content to live on earth again, seeing that her opportunities of benefitting the poor, and honoring God, and advancing her own eternal welfare, would be thus prolonged.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are living for themselves—~~***

This is the state of mankind at large; "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.21)." But this is highly criminal: *our time, our talents, our very bodies and souls, are the Lord's, and must be altogether employed for his glory*, [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20). All profession of religion unaccompanied with activity in good works, is vain, [James 2:13-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.13-17), [Matthew 7:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21). The very intent of the Gospel is to make us diligent in the performance of them, [Titus 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.8-9); [Titus 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.14). Nor can we ever answer the design of our Lord's sufferings, if we live only for ourselves, and not for Him who died for us and rose again, [2 Corinthians 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.15) and [Romans 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-9)."

***~~2. Those who profess to be living unto God—~~***

Study, like Dorcas, how you can be most useful to the poor: consider their needs, and how you may most effectually relieve them. In "bearing the burdens of others, you fulfill the law of Christ;" and, in truth, you best consult your own happiness. Who that reads the character of Job; [Job 29:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-13), must not envy his happiness, as well as admire his piety? Truly there is a delight in acts of benevolence, which cannot be procured by any other means. *Let all then who profess religion, show forth their faith by their works*. The poor may do their part, as well as the rich, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28); and shall "be accepted" according to their respective abilities, [2 Corinthians 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.12).

***~~#1765~~***

***~~HOW TO ATTEND ORDINANCES~~***

***~~[Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33).~~***

"Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

*HERE we see the door of salvation opened to the Gentiles*, and it is a sight in which we are deeply interested; for it is in virtue of the commission then given, and then executed, that you are assembled and addressed on this day. And O what a blessing it would be, if you all possessed the frame of mind then manifested by Cornelius and his company! Surely we might hope, in that case, that there would be somewhat of a similar blessing upon us, to the edification and salvation of all our souls.

Let us particularly notice,

***~~I. What they expected Peter to declare unto them—~~***

Cornelius had had a special intimation that Peter was ordained of God to be his instructor in the way of life, verse 5, 6, 32. Peter, therefore, he regarded as God's Ambassador to his soul, verse 25; and from him he hoped to hear, without any reserve, all that God had commissioned him to declare. Now,

***~~This is the light in which every minister of Christ should be viewed—~~***

Though we are not Apostles—yet we are ambassadors of God to the people of our charge, and have the same message to deliver now as the Apostles had in their day, [2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-20). We are to "preach peace by Jesus Christ, verse 36." We are to declare the sufficiency of Christ to "save all who come unto God by him, verse 43 with [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)." And this salvation we are to proclaim indiscriminately to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, verse 34, 35.

***~~And you have a right to expect the utmost fidelity at our hands—~~***

We are to "keep back nothing that is profitable unto you," but to "declare unto you the whole counsel of God." The express command of God to us is, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully! [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28)." We are to do this, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. God says to us, as he did to the Prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you: for to the intent that I might show them unto you are you brought hither: declare all that you see to the house of Israel, [Ezekiel 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 40.4)." And, as it is our duty, so it is also our privilege, confidently to affirm, that "what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled, of the word of life, the same declare we unto you, [1 John 1:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.1-3)."

But it is of peculiar importance that we would observe,

***~~II. In what frame of mind they were prepared to receive it—~~***

We see in that assembly of heathens,

***~~1. A reverential sense of the Divine presence—~~***

"Now," said Cornelius, "we are all here *in the presence of God*." And should it not be so with us, whenever we come up to the house of God? As for that irreverent spirit which many demonstrate in the house of God, yes, and which many manifest also when crowding to hear some popular preacher—we cannot but greatly disapprove of it, and bear our decided testimony against it. We should rather resemble the Israelites, when convened to hear Jehovah himself addressing them from Mount Sinai. Surely "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." And then only are we likely to profit from what we hear, when we conceive of God himself as speaking to us; and can adopt the words of Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!"

***~~2. A readiness to receive the word without disputing—~~***

We cannot conceive of one single person in that assembly as disposed to sit in judgment upon Peter's word. They would all receive it with the utmost readiness of mind. And it is in that way that the Gospel should be heard by all. We should "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21)." We see how submissive, so to speak, the tree is to him that engrafts upon it a scion of any kind: so, with entire submission, should we suffer the word of truth to be engrafted on our hearts, in order to its most perfect union with us, and its future production of the desired fruit.

Paul's representation of this matter is peculiarly instructive. He represents the Gospel as a *mold*into which we are to be poured, in order that we may receive its entire character upon our souls, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17). That shows the tenderness of spirit with which we would hear the word, and the completeness of our subjection to it when so received.

***~~3. A determination of heart to obey the word without reserve—~~***

That happy company embraced the word, just as the Bereans after them embraced it, [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12). They did not dispute about the way of salvation as incredible or insufficient, but believed in Jesus as the true Messiah, the Savior of the world. Nor should anything in the Gospel prove a stumbling-block to us. Nothing should be regarded as "a hard saying." However mysterious the declarations of the Gospel may he, we should implicitly embrace it as "the wisdom of God:" and, however self-denying his precepts may be, we should obey them cheerfully, as "holy and just and good." "As new-born babes, we should desire the word" as the proper nutriment of our souls; and we should desire it, "that we may live and grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)."

Perhaps the most perfect pattern in the Scriptures is the blind man whom Jesus had restored to sight. After he had been excommunicated by the rulers of his Church, the Lord Jesus sought him out, and asked him, "Do you believe on the Son of God?" To which he replied, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him? [John 9:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.35-36)." Now here was no information sought, but in order to its practical effect. And thus should we also be ready, *not only to receive the word, but to take it as the entire rule both of our faith and practice*.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let me now suppose you, my brethren, assembled in the very spirit of Cornelius and his friends. I have the very same message to deliver to you, as Peter delivered to them; "I preach to you peace by Jesus Christ!" You need this instruction as much as ever Cornelius did; for there is no other by which you, or any man living, can be saved, [Acts 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.14). And for you it shall be as effectual as it was for him, verse 44; O that you may all receive it as he did! Let there not be among you any of that character from whom Paul was constrained to turn in utter despondency, [Acts 28:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.27). But hear and believe, to the saving of your souls.

***~~#1766~~***

***~~SALVATION OFFERED EQUALLY TO ALL~~***

***~~[Acts 10:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.34-35).~~***

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

GOD'S purpose of love towards the Gentile world had been made known even from the time that God separated Abraham and his posterity as a peculiar people unto himself. The call of Abraham in an uncircumcised state, and the justifying of him by faith while he yet continued uncircumcised, was in itself a sign that God would not ultimately limit his mercies to those of the circumcision: and his declaration that in Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, was a pledge that in due time all the nations of the earth, Gentiles as well as Jews, would be blessed in Christ.

Our Lord had repeatedly informed his disciples, that "he had other sheep, which were not of the Jewish fold;" and, that "many would come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and sit down with the Patriarchs in the kingdom of Heaven;" while the Jews, the natural "children of that kingdom, would be cast out."

He had given the express command, that "his Gospel would be preached to every creature;" and he had actually "given to Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," that he might open the gates thereof both to Jews and Gentiles. In obedience to this commission, Peter had opened the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost; but so entirely was he under the power of Jewish prejudice, that, for six years, both he, and all the other Apostles, had forborne to preach unto the Gentiles: nor, until he was overcome by the force of evidence which he could no longer doubt, would he believe that the Gentiles were to be admitted to the privileges of the Gospel. His doubts however being at last removed, he, with a mixture of surprise and joy, acknowledged his former error, and proclaimed the blessed truth which we have just read to you.

We propose to state,

***~~I. The import of his words—~~***

As plain as the words of our text appear, they have been very differently interpreted by different persons; some supposing them to be decisive upon points, with which, in the eyes of others, they have no immediate connection. We will endeavor therefore to show,

***~~1. What they do not mean—~~***

*They do not, as many imagine, restrict the Supreme Being in the exercise of his grace.* *God's grace is his own, and he dispenses it according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.*That he has done so in former times, it is impossible to deny. Was not *Abraham*an idolater in the land of Ur? yet "God called him alone, and blessed him, [Isaiah 51:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.1-2)." In blessing the seed of Abraham, did God take Ishmael, who was born according to nature? No; but gave Abraham a son in a supernatural way, even *Isaac*, and limited the blessing to his line. In the seed of Isaac, God exercised the same sovereign grace; choosing, even while they were yet in the womb together, the younger son, *Jacob*, in preference to Esau, the elder; saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated! [Romans 9:7-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.7-13)."

Now, whether we suppose these persons chosen to everlasting salvation or not, it is evident that they were chosen to enjoy the means of salvation; and consequently either God is "a respecter of persons," or 'the respecting of persons' must mean something very different from the sovereign distribution of God's favors unto men.

We all know that God did grant peculiar mercies to the Jews above the Heathens; as he still does to the Christian world. If this was not wrong formerly, it is not so now: but Christ himself made this free exercise of God's grace and mercy, a ground of praise and thanksgiving; and therefore we also may adore God for it, and say, "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)."

*Neither do these words establish the doctrine of salvation by works.*If there be anything plain in God's word, it is, that God has given us a Savior, through whose obedience unto death we are to be saved. As the whole Jewish ritual shadowed forth our acceptance through the Great Sacrifice, so the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians were written on purpose to establish this great truth, that we are to be saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not by any works of our own.

Indeed, if salvation were by works, even in any degree, Christ would so far have died in vain. Moreover, salvation could no more be of grace; because works and grace are opposite to each other; the one implying that salvation is paid to us as a debt; and the other, that it is freely and gratuitously bestowed upon us. Now this being the uniform declaration of God throughout the whole Scripture, it is manifest, that this single expression must not be so understood, as to set aside the universal testimony of the written word.

We will now proceed to state,

***~~2. What they do mean—~~***

The *Jews*imagined themselves to be the only people whom God would ever admit to his favor. As for the *Gentile*world, the Jews regarded them as dogs, and as accursed of the Lord. Some of them went so far as to think, that no Jew, however wicked, would be condemned, nor any Gentile, however righteous, would be saved. Against this kind of error both the Baptist and our Lord bore testimony, [Matthew 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.9-10). [John 8:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.39); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44). And even the Apostles themselves were far from having a correct judgment respecting it: they supposed that God would favor the Jews, because they were Jews; and that he would not look upon the Gentiles, because they were Gentiles.

But God had now shown to Peter, that this was an error: he had shown to him, that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was broken down; that no man was henceforth to be accounted unclean; that his Gospel was to be freely preached to all without any distinction; and that all, of whatever nation they might be, would be accepted with him, provided they really feared him, and wrought righteousness; that is, that God would not regard anything in man, but his moral and religious character: if any man possessed ever so many privileges, they would avail nothing to his eternal welfare, unless they were accompanied with such dispositions and actions as characterized the elect of God. But, if any man sought him humbly, and served him faithfully, he would be brought to the knowledge of salvation, and his feet be guided into the way of peace.

That this is the real meaning of the passage, appears from the whole context. Peter no sooner came to Cornelius, than he reminded him of the barrier which had been placed between Jews and Gentiles, so as to cut off all friendly fellowship between them; and told him how that barrier had been removed: and, when he found the account which the messengers had given him, confirmed by Cornelius himself, and that God had interposed as much to direct Cornelius to send for Peter, as to direct Peter to go to him, "he opened his mouth" with a solemnity suited to the occasion, and proclaimed God as the common Father of all mankind, equally accessible to all, and equally gracious unto all, who would seek and serve him in his appointed way, [Romans 10:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11-12).

The words thus explained are very instructive. Let us consider,

***~~II. The truths to be deduced from them—~~***

They show us,

***~~1. That we have nothing to hope from any worldly distinctions—~~***

The Jewish notion of God's regarding men on account of outward distinctions is generally prevalent among ourselves. Many imagine, that because we have been baptized we must of necessity be in a state of favor with God; and many who will not altogether avow that principle—yet imagine that God will not proceed with the same severity against the great and learned, as he will against the poor and ignorant. Hence, though we may be permitted to warn the poor of their guilt and danger, we must not presume to take such a liberty with the rich—we are not to suppose that any of them can perish, or that God requires from them the same homage and service as he does from the lower classes of mankind.

But to this point the text is plain and express: "God is no respecter of persons:" his law is equally obligatory on all; and his decisions in the day of judgment will be impartial, every one being adjudged to happiness or misery according to his works. See [Job 34:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.19). In the book of Revelation is a passage well deserving the notice of those who think that any regard will be shown to learning or wealth or honor in that day, [Revelation 6:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.15-17). Observe how many words are used to characterize the rich! Does not that speak loudly to them?

At the same time, the *poor*will find it equally instructive to them: for they are ready to suppose that their present trials and difficulties will procure them the same kind of favor in that day, as the rich are looking for on account of their imagined greatness. But the poor, even the poorest bond-slaves, will there be found, associates in misery with their proud oppressors, and equally "calling upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb!"

The only difference between one and another will be this: those who were the foremost in religious privileges, will be most signally visited with the Divine judgments: in that only will the Jew be distinguished from the Gentile, or the rich from the poor, [Romans 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.9-11). "To whom much has been given, of them will the more be required:" but there will be the same ground of judgment for all, [1 Peter 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.17); the image of Christ upon the soul will be the only thing that will be regarded, either as the evidence of our conversion, or as the measure of our recompense This is the true meaning of [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11).

***~~2. That we have nothing to fear from any secret decrees—~~***

That "God chooses men to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," is asserted by God himself: but that he reprobates any, and from all eternity decreed to consign them over to perdition without any offense or fault of theirs, we cannot admit: we think that oath of God's, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live," is decisive on the point; and all the reasonings of fallible men are lighter than vanity, in opposition to it.

But not to enter into dispute about these things, one thing is clear, that of whatever sect, or party, or nation we may be, if we "fear God and work righteousness, we shall be accepted." What then have we to do with the Divine decrees? What reason has any man to say, 'It is in vain for me to seek after God; because God has not elected me?' Who ever ascended to Heaven, to see whether his name was, or was not, written in the book of life? "Secret things must be left to God, to whom alone they properly belong: the things that are revealed belong to us:" and this declaration in our text is plain, and clear, and absolute. Let every one therefore put away all distressing apprehensions about the decrees of God, and seek to attain that character which shall infallibly lead to happiness and glory.

***~~3. That if we improve diligently the light we have, God will give us more light—~~***

God forbid that we would for a moment entertain the thought, that we, by any diligence of ours, can merit anything at the hands of God, or lay him under an obligation to confer upon us the blessings of salvation. We have no claim upon him, except that which his own free and gracious promises have given to us: but if, in dependence on those promises, we press forward in his appointed way, then may we expect assuredly that those promises shall be fulfilled to us. Now God has promised, that "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; etc. [Hosea 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 6.3)."

We may be confident therefore that we shall not use the means in vain. Whether Cornelius would have been saved if this fresh revelation had not been made to him, we will not take upon ourselves absolutely to determine; though Peter, and the rest of the Apostles appear to have considered his salvation as altogether effected by his conversion to Christianity, [Acts 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.14); [Acts 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.18). But throughout the whole history, frequent notice is taken of the prayers and alms of Cornelius, as approved of God, and as being the means of bringing down yet greater blessings upon him: they are represented as being accepted before God, precisely as the food-offerings were accepted from the Jews: as a memorial of the latter, when burnt upon the altar, was an offering of a sweet savor unto the Lord, [Leviticus 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.1-2); [Leviticus 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 2.9), so "the prayers and alms of Cornelius came up for a memorial before God, verse 4."

Such a memorial shall our prayers and alms-deeds be, if offered unto God with real humility of mind, and with a desire to obtain a fuller knowledge of his will. Though therefore I would not exhort any one to rest in a low state of knowledge and of grace, I would encourage the weakest person, if sincere, to expect from God still richer communications of his grace, together with the ultimate possession of his glory. God will "fulfill the desire of those who fear him, and of them that hope in his mercy." Only let us listen to the word of God with the same disposition as Cornelius and his family did, verse 33, and God will rather work miracles to save us, than allow us to "perish for lack of knowledge." I mean not that God will really work miracles for anyone; but that he will either, by his providence, bring us an instructor for the further illumination of our minds; or that, by his Spirit, he will guide us into all truth through the instrumentality of the written word: "He never said to any, 'Seek my face' in vain."

***~~#1767~~***

***~~CHRIST'S DILIGENCE IN BENEFITTING MAN~~***

***~~[Acts 10:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.37-38).~~***

"You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how **he went around doing good**and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

THERE are many principles in the human heart that are capable of calling forth all the energy of our minds, and all the exertion of our bodies: but it is to be lamented that these principles, being evil in their nature, are, for the most part, destructive in their tendency. Ambition and the love of filthy lucre have operated in every age to the production of efforts that have excited the wonder and admiration of the world. But rarely has such zeal been found on the side of virtue. One however has appeared on earth whose only object was to do good; and whose labors were never equaled by mortal man. He was steady and uniform in his course, like the sun in its orbit; and, like that bright luminary, diffused the richest blessings wherever he came. This man was Jesus of Nazareth; of whom the Apostle justly says in our text, "He went around doing good."

We shall,

***~~I. Confirm this record from the history of Jesus—~~***

That we may contract our subject within proper limits, we will confine our attention to three things that are peculiarly worthy of notice:

***~~1. His condescension—~~***

The great and mighty of the earth, however disposed to benefit mankind, are almost inaccessible to the poor; who must come often, and wait long, and get richer persons for their advocates, and, after all, be dismissed without having obtained the full object of their wishes. But Jesus gave liberty to all to come unto him: their poverty did not excite his contempt; nor the loathsomeness of their disorders his disgust. He allowed them to throng him on every side, and to touch him. Not even their moral depravity caused him to stand aloof from them. On the contrary, he sought out the poorest, the most miserable, and the most depraved; as though he had determined to honor those most, whom the rest of the world most disregarded and despised. Hence it was cast in his teeth, that he was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

***~~2. His diligence—~~***

From the time that our Lord entered on his ministry to the very hour of his crucifixion, there was not a single day wherein he was not actively engaged in doing good both to the bodies and the souls of men. "It was his very food and drink to do the will of God" in this respect. He stayed not at home that persons might come to him; but he himself went about, he "went about" through all cities, towns, and villages, in order to administer instruction and comfort to "those who lay in darkness and the shadow of death."

Sometimes when he had spent the whole night in prayer, he would return to his labors, without regarding the calls of nature for rest and refreshment; insomuch that his friends were ready to blame him as transported with zeal beyond all the bounds of reason and propriety, [Mark 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.21).

The scope of everything that he either said or did, was to benefit mankind. Whether his discourses savored of affection or severity, and whether his miracles were more or less benevolent in their immediate aspect—his design was invariably the same; namely, to prepare men for the reception of his truth, and the enjoyment of his salvation. His woes in Matthew 23 were to reclaim the Pharisees: and his allowing the devils to destroy the swine, was to show how great a mercy it was to be delivered from their power.

***~~3. His self-denial—~~***

It was no small self-denial that he exercised in undergoing so many labors, and submitting to so many privations, even of food to eat, and of "a place where to lay his head." But there was another species of self-denial, far more painful in its nature, and distressing in its operation, which yet he had to endure every day and hour. In the midst of all his exertions for the good of men, his words were made a ground of cavil and dispute; his condescension was interpreted as a participation in the vilest crimes; and his very miracles were construed into a confederacy with the devil. This was the way in which his benevolence was constantly requited.

His unwearied labors for the honor of God, and the benefit of mankind, procured him only the reputation of an impostor, a blasphemer, a demoniac. Yet under all these circumstances, and well knowing that, instead of being improved by time, they would terminate in his death, he persevered in seeking the salvation of his very enemies, and at last "gave his own life a ransom for them."

It being needless to confirm this record by any further testimonies, we shall,

***~~II. Deduce from it some important observations—~~***

Here also we must be content to notice only two or three things out of multitudes that obtrude themselves upon our minds:

***~~1. The Divine mission of Jesus is clear and indisputable—~~***

Our blessed Lord frequently appealed to his works as the clearest evidence of his Messiahship, [John 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.38); and indeed they were so in a variety of views. They were precisely such as had been predicted by the prophets as characteristic of the Messiah's reign; and therefore they must be considered as establishing his claim to that office. Besides, they were such as no man could work unless God were with him.

Can we conceive it possible that God would conspire with an impostor to deceive mankind? That he might in some particular instances permit something supernatural to be wrought for the hardening of an obstinate and incorrigible opposer, is possible enough. This was the fact with regard to Pharaoh's magicians. They could bring some plagues, but not all: nor could they remove any: so careful was God to show that "wherein soever his enemies dealt proudly he was above them." But the nature and number of Christ's miracles, together with the scope and tendency of all his discourses, shows that this idea is wholly inadmissible in the case before us. Nor indeed can it be imagined that a person whose character and conduct resembled that of Christ, would, without any other prospect than that of infamy in life, and misery in death, carry on an imposture for the sole purpose of deceiving and ruining mankind.

Let us then behold the life of Jesus, and doubt his Messiahship if we can.

***~~2. Jesus is at this instant both able and willing to "do good" to us—~~***

When Jesus left this world, he did not cease to possess almighty power: on the contrary, he began to exercise it in the most unlimited extent. He still continued to work miracles through the instrumentality of his Apostles. Was Eneas healed? "Eneas," says the Apostle, "Jesus Christ makes you whole! [Acts 9:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.34)." Jesus Christ himself, many years after his ascension, told his beloved Disciple, that he had "the keys of Hell and of death," or, in other words, the power over both the visible and invisible world. Yes, he comes among us as truly by the preaching of his Gospel, as ever he did among the Jews by his bodily presence: *he comes to seek out the most miserable and unworthy objects, that on them he may bestow all the blessings of grace and glory*. All of us may have access to him, and pour our needs into his bosom, and obtain from him the mercies we stand in need of. If only we can by faith touch, as it were, the hem of his garment, our most inveterate corruptions shall be healed. Let us but be thoroughly persuaded of this truth, and "virtue shall come forth from him to heal us all."

***~~3. Every true Christian will resemble Christ in doing good—~~***

Though some things which our Lord both said and did are not proper for our imitation, because they were peculiar to his office—yet many things were done by him on purpose that they might be imitated, [John 13:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.14-15); and, in respect of the general tenor of his conduct, it is our bounden duty to follow him, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6). A delight in doing good must above all things evidence itself in all his people. *We might as well think ourselves his disciples while committing the grossest crimes, as while living in a habitual lack of benevolent affections.* Our Lord himself has warned us, that the outcome of the final judgment will depend on this very point. If for his sake, we have abounded in every good word and work, we shall be received by him with plaudits; but if not, we shall be banished from him with tokens of his heaviest displeasure, [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46).

Let all of us then approve ourselves to be his true disciples by our resemblance to him in condescension, diligence, and self-denial. By nothing will he be so much glorified, or our sincerity evinced, as by this. O that we might all be henceforth known by this character: They go about doing good!

***~~#1768~~***

***~~THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEADING DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43).~~***

"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

FOR the space of two thousand years the knowledge of the true God was confined to one nation. But from the beginning it was God's intention in due time to reveal himself to the Gentiles also, and to incorporate them with the Jewish Church. This was frequently declared by the prophets, see [Romans 9:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.25-27); [Romans 10:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.18-20), and insisted on by our Lord, [Matthew 8:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11-12) and [John 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.16). Yet such was the force of *prejudice*, that the Apostles themselves, notwithstanding the instructions they had received from their Divine Master, and the express commission given them to preach the Gospel to every creature, [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19) and [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16), could not conceive that the partition wall was to be broken down. For six years after the day of Pentecost they continued to preach to Jews only; and, when they heard that Peter had gone to speak to a Gentile, they were filled with indignation, and called him to an account for what they deemed to be a most unwarrantable proceeding, [Matthew 16:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.19).

It had been foretold to Peter, that he would have the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, [Acts 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.2-3), or of the Gospel dispensation. He had already opened the door to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.14); [Acts 2:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38); [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41); and now he was sent of God to open it to the Gentiles. The manner in which his doubts were removed will be noticed in another place: at present we observe, that his high commission was executed in the ever-memorable words which we have just read: in elucidating which, we shall consider,

***~~I. The doctrines contained in them—~~***

The Apostle's address to his Gentile audience was concise; but it was clear and energetic. The two leading points in which all men need to be informed, were laid down with precision;

***~~1. Salvation is through Christ as the author—~~***

To see the force and propriety of the Apostle's words, we must consider the occasion of them, and the character of the person to whom they were addressed.

The person who had sent for him was "Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian regiment, [Acts 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.1-2)." He was a Gentile, but had renounced idolatry, and was a worshiper of the true God. He was singularly pious and "devout:" he was extremely liberal even to the very "people" who held him in abhorrence: and he was careful to bring up his family also in the fear of God. This man had a day that he had set apart for solemn fasting and prayer, [Acts 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.30). It is not improbable that he was engaged in prayer with his family at the very time God sent the angel to him. He was visited by an angel, who directed him to send for Peter to show him the way of salvation, [Acts 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.32).

Now it was to this man that Peter spoke, when he said, that remission of sins was to be obtained "through the name of Christ." We must therefore understand him as saying, that, however Cornelius might be a worshiper of Jehovah, and not of idols; however sincerely he might fear God, however eminent he might be in respect of abstinence and devotion, of liberality and attention to the spiritual welfare of his family, salvation was not to be obtained by any of these things under the Gospel dispensation, but was to be sought through the name and merits of Jesus Christ. Christ was sent to make atonement for our sins, and to reconcile us unto God; and through him alone, through him exclusively, we must find acceptance with God.

***~~2. Salvation is by faith as the means—~~***

Here again our best illustration of the subject will be from the context. Had Peter simply told Cornelius that he must seek remission of sins through the name of Christ, Cornelius might have thought, that he was to recommend himself to Christ by the very means which he had hitherto used to recommend himself to God, namely, by prayer, alms-deeds, etc. Peter prevents the possibility of such a mistake, by telling him, that "whoever *believes*in Christ shall receive the remission of sins;" not, whoever *obeys*him, but whoever *believes*in him. This showed Cornelius that he must come to Christ as a sinner, to obtain the remission of his sins freely through Jesus' blood and righteousness: that he must not bring his own good deeds with him to purchase this blessing, but must receive it "without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

We do not mean to say, that Cornelius could be saved if he lived in willful disobedience to God; but, that he was neither to be accepted of the Father for the merit of his obedience, nor to obtain a saving interest in Christ on account of his obedience. The *meritorious*cause of his salvation must be the death of Christ, and the *instrumental*cause, or means, of his salvation must be a reliance on Christ. His obedience must follow the remission of sins as a fruit and effect; but it must not precede the remission of sins in any wise as a cause.

In the text we may yet further notice,

***~~II. The importance of those doctrines—~~***

We can scarcely conceive anything more strongly marked than this:

***~~1. All the prophets bear witness to them—~~***

All the prophets are not equally full and explicit upon this subject; but we have the assurance of God himself that they were unanimous in their opinions upon it, and that they all bear testimony to these blessed truths. Consult Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, and ask them how we are to obtain remission of sins? they will all say: Christ must be your righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6); it is he alone that can make an end of sin, [Daniel 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.24); call therefore upon him, [Joel 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.32) with [Romans 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11); [Romans 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.13); look unto him; glory in him: there is no Savior besides him, [Isaiah 45:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22-25); [Isaiah 43:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 43.11).

What greater proof can we have of the importance of these doctrines, than that which arises from this harmony and concurrence of so many prophets, who lived at periods so distant from Christ and from each other?

***~~2. God wrought many miracles, in order to draw men's attention to them—~~***

In the first place he sent an angel to Cornelius, to inform him where he might find a minister capable of instructing him in these points. Then he had given a vision to Peter, in order to remove his scruples about going to him; and, to render it the more effectual, he renewed that vision thrice, [Acts 11:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.5-10). Then when the messengers were come from Cornelius, and Peter was yet doubting what his vision would mean, the Holy Spirit himself spoke to him, and bade him to go, doubting nothing, [Acts 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.12).

Can we suppose that all this had respect to a matter of indifference, or of trifling import? or indeed that anything but that which was essentially necessary to the salvation of every man, was the ground of such singular and repeated interpositions?

***~~3. The Holy Spirit himself set his seal to the truth of them—~~***

While Peter was delivering the very words of the text, the Holy Spirit fell on the whole company, both Jews and Gentiles, as he had done on the Apostles six years before, verse 44 and 11:15. By this he set his seal to the truth of what was delivered. And it is an indisputable fact, that no other doctrine is ever made effectual to the conversion of men; and that wherever these doctrines are preached with fidelity, there sinners are converted from the error of their ways, [Jeremiah 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.22); the Holy Spirit bears testimony to the word delivered; and, though he imparts not to any his miraculous powers, he does enlighten the minds of men, and sanctify their hearts.

What shall we say then? that the doctrines thus attested, were of small importance, and, that it is of little consequence whether we receive or reject them?

***~~4. They are declared to be the exclusive means of salvation—~~***

No man, under the Gospel dispensation, can be saved, unless he cordially receive them. What might have been the eternal state of Cornelius, if he had been out of the reach of the Gospel, it is needless for us to inquire. He lived in an age when the Gospel was preached, and might, notwithstanding the prejudices of the Apostles, have been admitted to a participation of all its blessings, by submitting to circumcision first, and afterwards to baptism, provided he had really believed in Christ. There is reason therefore to fear that, notwithstanding his eminent attainments in natural religion, he could not have been saved without faith in Christ; because the angel that bade him send for Peter, informed him, that Peter would "tell him words whereby he and all his house would be saved, [Acts 11:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.14)." And when the Apostles heard of his conversion to Christ, they exclaimed, "Then has God also granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles! [Acts 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.18)."

If one so devout, so unselfish, so charitable, so zealous a worshiper of the true God, needed to believe in Christ in order to obtain the remission of his sins—then how much more must we, who possess not half his virtues! Even the Apostle Paul, who was, "as concerning the righteousness of the law, blameless," "counted it all but loss for Christ [Philippians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.6-7);" moreover, he renounced his evangelical, no less than his legal, righteousness, that he might be accepted through Christ alone, [Philippians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8-9). We therefore may be well assured, that we must do the same: for in his conduct with respect to this, he has given us an example which all must follow, if they would obtain salvation.

On the other hand, every person who truly receives them, shall certainly be saved. The word "whoever" is of unlimited import: there is no exception: whether a man is a Jew or a heathen; whether he have been more or less wicked; whether he has a longer or a shorter time to live; whether he has a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, or be but just initiated into its fundamental truths—he shall assuredly receive through Christ the remission of his sins, the very instant he is enabled to believe in Christ.

Whoever he is that desires to obtain salvation, there is but one direction to be given to him, and that is the direction given by Peter to Cornelius, and by Paul to the affrighted jailor; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved! [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31)."

To occupy any more of your time in showing the importance of the doctrines in the text, is superfluous. If it be not demonstrated by the foregoing considerations, we despair of ever establishing the simplest truth that can be proposed.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Embrace the doctrines which are thus fully established—~~***

What is there to be placed in opposition to these testimonies? Nothing but the unfounded opinions of self-righteous Pharisees. O listen not to their delusions which will only deceive you to your ruin! Let them argue as they will, no other foundation can ever be laid for a sinner to build upon, but that which God has laid, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

***~~2. Improve them for the end for which they are delivered—~~***

God has sent them to you by my mouth, even as he did to Cornelius by Peter; and for the same ends; namely, that "you and your households would be saved by them." Consider your state as guilty and undone creatures, and as needing saving mercy at the hands of God: and lay hold upon the hope that is set before you. So shall you obtain "the remission of all your sins," and "be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!"

***~~#1769~~***

***~~NECESSITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL SALVATION~~***

***~~[Acts 11:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.13-14).~~***

"He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'"

WHILE we deny that the Apostle Peter possessed any such supremacy above the other Apostles as the Papists ascribe to him, we most willingly acknowledge that very singular honors were conferred upon him by our Lord himself; and especially that of bearing the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, or, in other words, *of opening the kingdom of Heaven both to Jews and Gentiles*.

We all know, that, on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter's sermon which was made so pre-eminently useful for the converting of three thousand souls at once: nor can we doubt but that his ministry continued to be crowned with very abundant success. But, for the space of six years, he did not discern the proper extent of the commission that had been given to the Apostles generally; namely, to "go into all the *world*, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" and still less did he know what authority he had himself personally received, *to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles, as he had already done to the Jews*.

Hence, when the time was come for the fuller manifestation of the truth to the Gentiles, he needed to have his prejudices removed, by a special interposition of God for that purpose; and fresh instructions given to him, as much as if the purposes of Heaven, in relation to that matter, had never been revealed to him. Indeed, all the other Apostles were in this respect as ignorant as he: for, when he had executed the divine commission, they called him to an account for it, as having been guilty of a most heinous transgression. He, however, in his vindication of his conduct, showed them that he had acted under the immediate direction of God, who had instructed Cornelius where to send for him, and had enjoined him also to comply with the request.

The particular direction given by the Angel to Cornelius, in relation to this matter, was, "Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved." In which words we may see at once both *the necessity of the Gospel for man's salvation, and its sufficiency*: and these two points it is my intention to dwell on at this time.

Let us then consider,

***~~I. The necessity of the Gospel—~~***

Perhaps, in all the Scriptures, there will not be found a passage which more strongly declares this, than that before us.

***~~The knowledge of the Gospel was necessary even for Cornelius—~~***

Cornelius was a peculiarly excellent character, even before he was acquainted with the Gospel: "He was a devout man: he feared God with all his house: though a Gentile himself, he gave much alms to the Jewish people: and he prayed to God always:" and so upright was he in his endeavors to approve himself to God, that his "prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God, [Acts 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.2); [Acts 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.4)," and "were had in remembrance in God's sight, [Acts 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.31)."

Now, if any person could be saved without the Gospel, we might well suppose that it would be Cornelius. But, now that the Gospel was fully revealed, and he was within the reach of it, a distinct knowledge of its provisions, and a cordial acceptance of its offers, were necessary for his salvation: and, rather than he would be left without a saving interest in it, God sent an angel to inform him where he might find a person who would "bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved." If the knowledge of the Gospel was necessary for Cornelius, then,

***~~The knowledge of it must be necessary for us also—~~***

We are ready to imagine that a moral and religious character will give us a title to acceptance with God. But it is not by that that any man can be saved. There is "a *message*through which you and all your household will be saved:" and what that message is, we know from the discourse of Peter on this occasion. We must be informed respecting the person, work, and office, of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know, that "He, though Lord of all," became a man for us, and died upon the cross for the effecting of "our peace" with God, and was raised from the dead by God, and is appointed both to judge the world, and to save the world, [Acts 10:36-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.36-42).

I say, to this the whole Scriptures bear witness; and this testimony we must receive as the ground of all our hopes: and by a humble trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as so revealed, we are to obtain "the remission of our sins, [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43)." There is no "other foundation than this on which any man can build, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11);" "no other way whereby any man can come unto the Father, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6);" "no other name given under Heaven whereby any man can be saved, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)." Without a distinct knowledge of the Gospel, our prayers will not avail; nor will our alms avail: nor will a devout spirit, joined to the fear of God, avail: there is away of salvation provided for us through the atoning blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and in that way alone can we ever come to God, or find acceptance with him. If we attempt to seek his favor in any other way, we shall seek it in vain! [Romans 9:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-33); [Romans 10:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3-4)."

With the *necessity*of the Gospel for our salvation, let us contemplate also,

***~~II. Its sufficiency—~~***

***~~This is fully and unequivocally declared in the history before us—~~***

The proofs of it here are manifold. Observe the declaration of the angel no doubt was expressed by him respecting the efficacy of Peter's words for the desired end: all that was lacking was, that they would be received and relied upon by Cornelius and his family; and then the whole of them would be saved.

Observe next, the actual experience of Cornelius. He received the word with all readiness, and confided in it; and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, and upon all who were with him, [Acts 10:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.44); [Acts 10:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.47); and not only sealed the blessings of salvation on their souls, but endued them with miraculous powers in token of Christ's love to them, and for the extension of his kingdom by their means.

Observe yet further, the testimony of all the Apostles. They had hitherto been utterly averse to the idea of the Gentiles being saved by the Gospel: but when they heard the account of the whole transaction as given by Peter, "they glorified God for it; saying: Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life, verse 18."

***~~The whole Scriptures also bear testimony to the same—~~***

We never find the smallest doubt expressed respecting the sufficiency of the Gospel salvation. No person is excepted from its offers, nor any sin from its absolving power: while "the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin," "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." The provision made by the Gospel is sufficient, not for the small household of Cornelius only, but for the whole family of man. Could all be prevailed upon to receive Christ into their hearts by faith, not a human being would ever perish: "All who would believe in him would be justified from all things," and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation."

Having thus proclaimed to you the same blessed tidings which were delivered by Peter to Cornelius, let me entreat you to remember,

***~~1. The honor which God puts upon the ministry of his word—~~***

God, in his mercy, determined to bring Cornelius and his family to the knowledge of the truth; and for this end he sent an angel to inform Cornelius where he might find one competent to instruct him. At the same time gave Peter repeated visions for the purpose of removing his religious scruples, and an audible voice from Heaven, also, to authorize his going to a man that was uncircumcised.

But what need was there of all these various operations? Why would not the angel declare the Gospel to Cornelius, instead of telling him where to send for a human instructor? God had revealed other things by angels—and why not this? The reason was, that, having ordained an established ministry, he would put honor on that ministry, and accomplish his purposes in that way which was best suited to the necessities of fallen man.

In the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, God did not use even his own revealed word for his conversion, without the intervention and ministry of Philip, whom he sent on purpose to instruct the inquiring student. In like manner, he sent Peter now, because he would have all to seek instruction through the instrumentality of those whom he himself had ordained to that high office.

Let none, then, despise the ministry of the word, as though it might be dispensed with, or from a conceit that they can edify themselves to more advantage at home; for "the Gospel is God's treasure, though it be in earthen vessels, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7);" and they only can hope to be enriched by it, who will receive it in God's appointed way.

The waters of Jordan had no more intrinsic power than those of Abana and Pharpar: it was God's blessing alone that rendered them available for the curing of Naaman's leprosy: and it is that blessing also, which will alone prevail for the healing of our souls. If we will not seek salvation in the channel where alone God has ordained it to flow, we shall in vain hope to obtain it through any other medium.

To confirm this truth, Cornelius was ordered to send thirty or forty miles for Peter, to instruct him: and I hesitate not to say, that, as his labor was well repaid by the ministry of that holy man, so the labor of this blessed Apostle was richly recompensed by the success with which it was attended.

I may further say, that all the labor and expense attending either the stated ministry of the word, or the establishment of missions to heathen lands, are unworthy of a thought, in comparison with the benefits obtained by them!

***~~2. The light in which ministers and hearers would regard each other—~~***

The particular process by which Peter and Cornelius were brought together were mere circumstances, with which we, in this day, have little concern. But every minister is an ambassador from God, as truly, though not in the precise sense, as Peter was: and the people to whom he is sent ought to receive his word, as far as it accords with the voice of inspiration, "as the word, not of man, but of God, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)."

The precise state in which we should all meet together in the public ordinances, cannot possibly be more justly marked than in the history before us. Peter evidently went as a special messenger from God to Cornelius and his family; and having nothing in view but "to tell them words whereby they might all be saved." (All thoughts of *self*were as far from his mind as can possibly be imagined.) As for Cornelius and his family, their views in assembling together are depicted by themselves in those memorable words: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you by God, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33)." None were brought by mere curiosity: none came for amusement: none looked to a mere man. All looked, through the man, to God; and received his message as from God himself. We wonder not at the effects which flowed from such a delivery, and such a reception, of God's blessed word.

Would not we also experience a measure of the same effects, if we met together in the same spirit? Yes, we would; and to the lack of this must be traced the inefficacy of our ordinances: we do not come together as we ought: neither minister nor hearers feel, as we ought, the importance of the occasion on which we are assembled. We come together too much in a customary way, not aware how much our eternal interests are at stake. Let us, my brethren, each in his place, endeavor to rectify our respective errors; and look up to God in future, that "the word preached may be more profitable; being more mixed with faith," both in Him who delivers, and "in those who hear it."

***~~#1770~~***

***~~LIFE GRANTED TO THE GENTILES~~***

***~~[Acts 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.18).~~***

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the *Gentiles*repentance unto life."

HERE we have an account of an event in which we all are deeply interested: The opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles. Peter was the honored instrument employed. "To him our blessed Lord had given the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," that he might open it both to Jews and Gentiles. To the *Jews*he had opened it, on the day of Pentecost: and now, after the lapse of six years, he opens it to the *Gentiles*also. In the words of my text we have,

***~~I. The fact acknowledged—~~***

A most remarkable fact it was. It was remarkable,

***~~1. In its attendant circumstances—~~***

To enter fully into this subject, the preceding chapter, together with this, should be read throughout. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a heathen, was favored by Almighty God with a vision; and an angel was sent from Heaven, to instruct him where to send for one who was able to preach unto him the way of salvation. The next morning, Peter also had a vision given to him, in order to remove his scruples about going to a heathen. And, when he was musing upon the import of this vision, the servants of Cornelius arrived, having come a day's journey to request a visit from him; and the Spirit of God expressly enjoined him to comply with their solicitations. Accordingly, he went: and, having been informed by Cornelius by what authority his presence had been desired, he preached the Gospel to him and to his friends: and the Holy Spirit descended on the whole company, in confirmation of the word delivered, and marked them out as proper subjects to be received into the Church by baptism. Accordingly, "Peter commanded them to be baptized:" and, after a few days abode with his new converts, left them, and went up to Jerusalem. Nor was the fact less remarkable,

***~~2. In its outcome—~~***

A rumor of these events had already reached Jerusalem: and the Church there, with all the Apostles at their head, being filled with indignation against Peter "for going in to one that was uncircumcised, and eating with him," demanded of him the reasons for so extraordinary a conduct. Upon this, Peter reported to them all that had occurred, both respecting the vision given to Cornelius, and that given to himself; and particularly the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them all, precisely as on the Apostles themselves on the day of Pentecost. This convinced them, that what he had done was of Divine appointment; and that "God had to the Gentiles also, no less than to the Jews, granted repentance unto life." The fact was now unquestionable; and they could not but acknowledge it.

But, to enter into the true spirit of the words, we must notice in them,

***~~II. The surprise manifested—~~***

***~~The Apostles, even after an interval of six years, had no idea of the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles—~~***

They had, by the law of Moses, been taught to regard the uncircumcised Gentiles as unclean, and to avoid all needless connection with them. The whole ceremonial law was intended as a kind of partition wall between them and the Gentiles. And even the Lord Jesus Christ himself had declared that "he was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and that "he could not take the children's bread, and cast it unto *dogs*," which was deemed the proper appellation of the *heathen*. And when he had sent out his seventy disciples, he gave them an especial commandment, "Do not enter into any city of the Samaritans."

How then could Peter, with any propriety, go to a heathen family, and take up his abode with them? True, the circumstances, which he had related, justified his procedure: but still it was unaccountable, that God would so vary his dispensations, after having confined his revelation to the descendants of Abraham for two thousand years, and left all the heathen world in darkness and in the shadow of death during the whole of that period.

***~~But now, to their utter amazement, the wall of partition between them and the Gentiles was thrown down—~~***

That it was so, admitted of no doubt. But still, the reasons of this dispensation they could not yet see. True, the Lord Jesus had said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." But they supposed this could only refer to the Jews, who were dispersed among the Gentiles, it never could refer to the Gentiles themselves. They could never be placed on a level with the descendants of Abraham; or be made to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant: those who were "strangers and foreigners could never be made fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God." Yet so it was; and they could not contradict it: and therefore, in utter amazement, they cried, "Then has God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life." How it is, we know not; but that so it is, we are sure: since the account now given us has confirmed it, beyond a possibility of doubt.

We see, however—yet further, in these words,

***~~III. The approbation expressed—~~***

***~~In this light, beyond a doubt, they are to be viewed—~~***

The prejudices, which had so long blinded their eyes, were now removed; and a new principle of love sprung up in their hearts; so that they could welcome the accession of the Gentiles to their community, and the participation of the whole heathen world in the privileges which they themselves had so long exclusively enjoyed. Hence we are told, that they not only "held their peace," but "glorified God, saying: Then has God has also granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles!"

And in what light should they be viewed by us?

Cornelius himself was not more interested in this event than we. To this event we look, as the period from whence to date all our privileges. From this time the Gospel was freely preached to the Gentiles; from among whom thousands of converts were made, yes, and millions also, insomuch that, in a few years, the whole Roman empire was filled with them. From that time has the Gospel been transmitted, until it has come even unto us: and we enjoy all its privileges and its blessings, as much as our hearts can wish. With what joy and gratitude, then, should we exclaim, "To us Gentiles has God granted repentance unto life!" Yes, in this event we would contemplate our own interests, as well as those of Cornelius; and would mark with our most distinguished approbation, the mercy thus freely given to the whole world.

But we must not confine our views of this passage to the event which then took place. We must get it repeated in our own persons, and experienced in our own souls:

***~~We need salvation no less than Cornelius and his company—~~***

Cornelius was of a most lovely character; and though not enlightened by the Gospel, was doubtless eminently distinguished by a preparatory work of God upon his soul, and admirably fitted for a reception of the Gospel by the grace of God, [Acts 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.2); [Acts 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.4). Yet it was by the Gospel alone that he was to be saved verse 14; since, whatever preparatory attainments a man may have, "there is no name given under Heaven whereby any man can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." Know then, brethren, all of you without exception, that you must know Christ, before you can be saved by his salvation.

***~~And this salvation you must seek through God's appointed ordinances—~~***

God has set apart an order of men on purpose to instruct the world. He could have communicated the knowledge of salvation to Cornelius, as easily as he could direct him where to find an instructor. But he would rather accumulate vision upon vision, and miracle upon miracle, to honor his own appointed ordinances, than convey the knowledge of eternal life in the neglect of them. Accordingly, Cornelius sent a whole day's journey to get instruction from Peter; and Peter went a whole day's journey to impart it to one single family: from whence we learn, that *no pains are to be spared, either in seeking or imparting divine knowledge*; and that the more strictly we adhere to God's appointed methods of obtaining it, the more confidently we may hope to succeed in our endeavors.

***~~But you must seek it with befitting humility—~~***

Behold the posture of Cornelius and his company: "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you by God, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33)." This is the state of mind in which you also, my brethren, are to come up to the house of God. You are not to come from mere form, or from curiosity; nor are you to come with a mind clouded by prejudices or biases. You are to come with teachable minds, ready to receive, as from God, all that God speaks to you by us, so far as it accords with his written word. You must come also with a determination, through grace, to embrace it all without disputing, and to obey it all without reserve.

***~~And we have the same instruction for you as was communicated by Peter to that assembly—~~***

We "preach peace to you by Jesus Christ, [Acts 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.36);" and declare, that, as there is no reconciliation with God but through his atoning blood, so "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things." In confirmation of this, we appeal to every part of the inspired volume, showing, that "to Him give all the prophets witness, that, through the name of Christ, whoever believes in him shall receive the remission of sins, [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43) with 13:38, 39."

***~~And to this will the Holy Spirit bear witness, as in the case before us—~~***

He will not, indeed, impart miraculous powers, as in that day; but he will give testimony to the truth that Christ is a Savior, an all-sufficient Savior, to all who call upon him Acts, 10:44; he will seal it upon the heart, and will render it the means of comforting and sanctifying the souls of all who truly receive it.

***~~But we must "repent," even as Cornelius and his associates did—~~***

Though "life" is not by repentance, but by Jesus Christ—there is no life to the impenitent. Life and repentance are never separated in the dispensations of God; nor can they be separated in our experience. Even though we have been as exemplary as ever Cornelius was, we are yet sinners; and must abase ourselves before God, as deserving of his wrath and indignation: and must "flee to Christ for refuge, as to the one hope that is set before us!"

***~~To God, however, we must look to grant us this gift—~~***

You cannot but see how it was "granted" to them, in every stage of its progress. The first intimation to Cornelius that he needed a Savior, was given him in the vision; and the direction where to send for instruction was given by an angel of God; even the name of the person, and the town where he dwelt, and the very house where he lived. All the obstacles which were in the way were removed by the vision to Peter and "the words were put into the mouth of Peter, whereby Cornelius and his house were to be saved, verse 14;" and the whole was applied by the Holy Spirit to their soul?

Thus, then, must *you*also look unto God, to instruct your minds, and to impress the truth with effectual energy upon your souls. Do but this, my brethren; and, as it was said with rapture by the Church at Jerusalem, "Behold, God has unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!" so shall it now be said among the angels of God in Heaven: "Behold, God has to that assembly granted repentance unto life!" Yes, those benevolent beings, though in the very presence of God, "rejoice over one sinner who repents." O that they may have joy over you, my brethren, this day! And may "God be glorified" in every one of you, to all eternity, for Christ's sake! Amen, and Amen.

***~~#1771~~***

***~~DUTY OF CLEAVING TO THE LORD~~***

***~~ACTS 11:22-23.~~***

"News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to cleave to the Lord with all their hearts."

TO see men converted unto God is a source of very exalted joy: still, however, that joy is by no means unmixed. In viewing a tree full of blossoms, we almost irresistibly contemplate the dangers to which they are exposed, and the probability there is that many of them at least will never come to maturity.

Our blessed Lord, in the parable of the Sower, has taught us to expect a similar outcome in relation to the fruits produced by the Gospel: and experience confirms the truth of his representations. Hence, while we rejoice over young converts, we are constrained to "rejoice with trembling." Agreeably to this observation, we find the Apostles invariably laboring "to confirm the souls of the disciples, [Acts 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.21-22)," and "persuading them to continue in the grace of God, [Acts 13:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.43)."

Such was the conduct of Barnabas towards the disciples at Antioch: "He was glad when he saw the grace of God" manifested in their conversion; but, being "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," he "exhorted them all, without any distinction, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." This exhortation of his leads us to *contemplate the dangers and the duties of the Lord's people*:

***~~I. The dangers—~~***

Had the new converts been in no danger of departing from the Lord, they had not needed such a pledge exhortation to cleave unto him. But the truth is, that all Christians are in danger.

***~~1. From the ungodly world—~~***

*It is not easy to say which are more replete with danger to the Christian, the frowns or the smiles of the ungodly world.* Their hatred is often difficult to be borne. When persecution arises from those who are nearly related to us, or invested with authority over us, or on whom our temporal interests materially depend; and more especially when it rages to such an extent that we must forsake all to follow Christ—it requires much grace to meet the trial aright, and much strength to maintain our steadfastness in the Lord's ways. We are apt to give way to that "fear of man which brings a snare." On one occasion, Paul was forsaken by all the Church at Rome, through a fear of participating in his trials, [2 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16); nor can any man tell how he shall conduct himself under such circumstances, until he is actually placed in them.

Sometimes it happens that our friends, instead of using violence, endeavor to divert us from our purpose by kindness. And then we feel it ten times more difficult to oppose their wishes: we begin to think that it is better to make compliances, and not adhere too strictly to the requisitions of the Gospel. We flatter ourselves, that by such means we shall soften their prejudices against religion, and perhaps win them to Christ: but in this way we are in danger of wounding our own consciences, and of relapsing altogether into the ways and spirit of the world.

A measure of tenderness and conciliation we highly approve; but it may easily be carried too far, and bring us to seek that "friendship of the world which is enmity with God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4)."

***~~2. From our own corrupt hearts—~~***

The heart is naturally carnal; and it is but in part renewed even in the best of men: "the flesh still lusts against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17)." Paul himself complained that he had "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members, [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23)." Hence*the cares or pleasures of life soon regain an ascendant over us, if we in the least relax our watchfulness against them*; or perhaps, like *David*, we fall into the grossest crimes. *Demas*has shown us how awfully the most distinguished professors of religion may depart from God, [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10). In the *thorny-ground hearers*, we see how all the life of religion may be lost, while the outward form of it remains unaltered, [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22). After our Lord's exhortation to his own Apostles, we may see that there is no sin whatever into which we may not fall, if we be for one moment left to the workings of our own evil hearts [Luke 21:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.34).

Indeed, independent of any gross sin to which we may be allured, the heart is of itself so indisposed to spiritual exercises, that it will soon faint and be weary in them, if its strength is not daily renewed by the Spirit of God. Hence that direction of the Apostle, "Be not weary in well-doing, [Galatians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.9)."

***~~3. From the temptations of Satan—~~***

One of the first devices of Satan is to persuade men that so much exertion in the divine life is not necessary; and, as he did respecting our Lord, he will instigate some friend to whisper in our ear, "Spare yourself." If he does not succeed in this way, he will suggest to us that our efforts are in vain; that we never were truly converted unto God; that we are not in the number of God's elect; that we have committed the unpardonable sin; and we had better secure the happiness that is within our reach, than labor for that which we can never obtain.

Alas! how many has he deceived by these wiles, and ruined by these devices! Well then may we be on our guard against him, since we are told that "he is always walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." There had not been such armor provided for our use, if we had not a very arduous conflict to maintain, [Ephesians 6:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11-12).

***~~4. From the very members of the Church itself—~~***

Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that they were in great "peril from false brethren;" and that not only from other quarters, but "even from among their own selves, some would arise, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them, [Acts 20:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-30)." And who that is conversant with the sacred writings, or with the state of the Christian Church at this day, need be told what havoc *false brethren*have made, sometimes "subverting whole houses," and "bringing in damnable heresies, whereby they bring destruction both on themselves and multitudes of unsuspecting followers, [2 Peter 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1); [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)."

Even where persons do not go to these extremes, they may diffuse a vain, conceited and contentious spirit, and beguile the simple-minded to an awful extent. We all know how easy it is to receive bad impressions; and how difficult to get rid of them, when once received. There is, if I may so call it, a virgin simplicity, which is the chief beauty and excellence of a Christian, and which, if once lost, is very hardly recovered; and to preserve it among a people, requires all the vigilance of the most active minister, as well as all the caution of the people themselves, [2 Corinthians 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2-3).

From contemplating the *dangers*of the Lord's people, we are naturally led to consider also,

***~~II. The duties—~~***

These are manifestly contained in the words of our text, partly by implication, and partly as directly expressed:

***~~1. We should be aware of our danger—~~***

There is not anything more harmful to the Christian than a presumptuous security—yet how extremely common is it in the Church of God! The professors of religion see, and condemn, this evil among their less-enlightened neighbors, and yet are unconscious of its existence in themselves! They even see it in each other; but almost every one conceives himself to be an exception from the rest. Others may be ensnared by the world, or deceived by their own corrupt hearts, or beguiled by Satan, or drawn aside into some wrong sentiments or habits by their brethren—but I am clear; I am right; I am in no danger.

Let all of us look back, and trace the workings of our own hearts, and we shall find reason to acknowledge either that we have already, on many occasions, been impeded in our Christian course, or that, if we have not, it has been owing to the exceeding and abundant grace of God towards us.

We should be deeply sensible of our own frailty; and should shun the means and occasions of sin, as much as sin itself. We should "not be high-minded, but fear:" and, "while we most think that we stand, we would take heed lest we fall." Not that it is desirable for any one to be brought into bondage, or to live under the influence of slavish fear—but, a humble filial fear is desirable at all times: such a fear, I mean, as drives us to the Lord for safety, and leads us to put our whole trust in him. In this sense, "blessed is the man who fears always."

***~~2. We should have a fixed and determined purpose to cleave unto the Lord—~~***

Let me not be misunderstood, as if I would recommend anyone to make resolutions in his own strength. The example of Peter may show us the folly of such confidence: he who one hour declared that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, denied him the next hour with oaths and curses. But in the Lord's strength we may, and must resolve. "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise unto the Lord," was a resolution worthy to be formed: as was that also of Joshua, that though all Israel would depart from God, "he and his house would serve the Lord."

Indeed *without such a fixed purpose of heart, we shall become the sport of every temptation.*We must determine, through grace, that we will be faithful to our God; that neither the allurements of life, nor the terrors of death, shall induce us to turn aside from following him. We must keep our eye single in this respect: we must have one object, and one alone, in view: to honor God must be the one aim of our lives. In relation to this, we must maintain with equal firmness the principles and the practice of Christianity: we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," and "be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."

"Allow then a word of exhortation." That the subject is deserving of your deepest attention, cannot be doubted. The character given of Barnabas, in the words following our text, is a pledge of it; "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." He was "a son of consolation;" and therefore we may be sure he did not needlessly endeavor to distress the souls of any: yet he exhorted all without exception, because all are in danger of falling, and of "making shipwreck of the faith."

Consider then, beloved, what obligations you are under to cleave unto the Lord.

Has he so highly favored you with tokens of his love and mercy, that you would forsake him at last?

Has our blessed Savior shed his blood for you, that you would "tread him under your feet" by relapsing into sin?

Has the Holy Spirit enlightened, quickened, sanctified you, that you would "do despite to him," and "quench "his sacred motions?

Have you "found God a wilderness to you," that you would desert him, and go back again to the world for happiness?

Is it wise to "leave the fountain for broken cisterns?" Is it likely to make you happier even in this world; and, if not, how much less will it do so in the world to come?

Did you ever read that those who turn back, "turn back unto perdition;" and that "God's soul can have no pleasure in them?"

Be on your guard then, before it is too late. But if any will not take warning, I shall conclude my address to them with the solemn declaration of Moses, just before his death, "I call Heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that you may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, and cleave unto him; for he is your life, and the length of your days, [Deuteronomy 30:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 30.19-20).

***~~#1772~~***

***~~BENEVOLENCE OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH~~***

***~~[Acts 11:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.29-30).~~***

"The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."

GOD is love; and all who have been truly taught of God, are transformed into his image: their selfish passions are in a good measure subdued; and their delight is in the exercise of the most benevolent affections. To such an extent was the principle of love carried by the first converts, that the rich parted with their estates and goods, to form one common stock for the subsistence of the whole Church, thereby reducing themselves to a level with the poorest of their brethren. The Church of Antioch also were very exemplary in their exercise of this grace. They were informed by prophecy, that there would, before long, be a famine throughout all the Roman empire: and therefore, concluding that the pressure would be particularly felt by their brethren at Jerusalem, where there were none able to support their distressed neighbors, on account of the voluntary poverty they had brought upon themselves, they raised a collection, and sent it to the elders of that Church, who, from their knowledge of the various individuals, might dispose of their alms to the greatest possible advantage.

This benevolence of theirs shall be the subject of our present discourse. We will,

***~~I. Contemplate it for your instruction—~~***

In the account of it which is here given us, there are two things to be noticed:

***~~1. The occasion that called it forth—~~***

A prophet, named Agabus, foretold a famine which would involve the whole Roman empire in extreme distress: and, as he had recently come from Jerusalem, it is probable that he stated some circumstances in relation to the Church in that place, which would occasion the affliction to be felt there with more than ordinary severity. Immediately the Church at Antioch, feeling their obligations to those at Jerusalem, to whom they were indebted for all the spiritual benefits they enjoyed, and justly conceiving that this was a peculiarly proper season for requiting them with temporal benefits, which on account of their comparative opulence they were able to do, immediately raised a collection among themselves, for the relief of their brethren at Jerusalem when the season of their trial would arrive.

Now from hence we learn some very important lessons:

The first of which is, That every word of God should be regarded by us as a ground of action. The event predicted did not come to pass for some time: yet was the provision made for it instantaneously, as much as if it had existed at that very moment. The prediction itself was to them a sufficient pledge that the season would arrive, whether at an earlier or more remote period: the times and seasons were in God's hands; but their duty was to provide for the occasion beforehand; and therefore they exerted themselves without delay.

How happy would it be for us, if we regarded every declaration of God with similar awe and reverence! O let us not think that remoteness of time will make any difference as to the certainty of future events; for everything that God has spoken in reference to the eternal world, will as certainly take place, as if the events were close at hand; and it is our duty now to act, as if we were assured that a few hours only would intervene between the prediction and the accomplishment.

Another lesson which their conduct teaches us is, That *benevolence is essential to the Christian character*. Their benevolence was altogether spontaneous, the effect of a principle universally operative among them. That principle is altogether inseparable from the Christian character; for, "if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" We should consider "all, but especially the household of faith," as "brethren;" and *should regard our property as a talent committed to us by our common Father, for the benefit of the whole family.*"We should not seek our own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's".

***~~2. The manner in which it was exercised—~~***

Behold their **zeal**! all were animated by the same spirit; and "every one" exerted himself "according to his ability." Had they been disposed to indulge a selfish spirit, they might have found excuses enough for withholding present supplies. "The occasion had not yet arrived: they themselves would be subject to the same calamity, and were more bound to provide for their immediate neighbors than for others at the distance of several hundred miles."

But they listened not to any such suggestions: it was sufficient for them that an opportunity had occurred for the exercise of love, and for the honoring of their Lord; and therefore they improved it instantly to the utmost of their power.

Thus also should we: "Whatever our hand finds to do, we should do it with our might:" and especially in administering relief to the Lord's people, we should not estimate our liberality by the mere amount of our donations, so much as by our *ability*to give; since in God's sight the widow, with her two mites, gave more than all the rich, who, out of their abundance, had cast large sums into the treasury.

We admire too their **prudence**. They could not themselves go to Jerusalem to inspect the state of the Church, and administer relief with their own hands; they therefore sent their money to the elders of that Church, who, by their local knowledge, were qualified, and by their exalted piety were disposed—to dispense the alms in the most equitable and effectual manner.

In this also they have left us a very instructive lesson, to attend with the utmost care to the manner in which we dispose of our alms: for, as the withholding of alms is sinful stinginess, so indiscreet charity is criminal profuseness.

Without stopping to multiply lessons of instruction from their benevolence, we will now,

***~~II. Propose it for your imitation—~~***

We have at this time,

***~~1. A similar occasion for benevolence—~~***

Namely, the pressure of the times, the want especially in time of sickness, and, above all, the need of spiritual instruction and consolation, which are of infinitely greater value than any temporal benefits whatever.

***~~2. Similar means of exercising it—~~***

They committed to the elders of the Church at Jerusalem the task of selecting the objects, and apportioning the alms; and thankfully availed themselves of the labors of others, to carry into effect their benevolent designs.

Now among us there are many united into a society, for the express purpose of finding out the needs of the poor, and of administering also to their spiritual necessities Here state how they conduct their affairs. Whatever, therefore, your liberality shall contribute, will be disposed of by them to much better effect than if you were to bestow your alms upon the poor with your own hands, unless you could at the same time inquire into all the circumstances of their different cases, and stop to unite spiritual instruction with your temporal relief.

These persons, like the elders at Jerusalem, cannot, out of their own funds, do good to any great extent; nor would their visits be well received by the poor, if they offered nothing but good advice: but, when they can impart also some relief for the body, they are more kindly welcomed as instructors for the soul. The hearts, as well as the houses, of the poor are easier of access, when the way is smoothed by "a gift in the bosom."

***~~3. Similar obligations to exercise it—~~***

They felt the force of redeeming love; and judged that *they ministered to Christ himself, while they relieved him in his distressed members*. Are these motives to benevolence lessened by the lapse of time? Are not we as much bound to devote ourselves, and all that we have, to Christ, as they could be? In some respects, our obligations to exert ourselves are greater than theirs: for the sole object of their benevolence was to bestow temporal relief; whereas that, though an important, is a subordinate, consideration with us, who aim principally at promoting the *eternal welfare*of our fellow-creatures. If then we profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, let us now approve our love to him, by our zealous exertions, and liberal contributions

**1.** We have a similar occasion for benevolence.

**2.** Let us exercise it in the same manner with readiness, with generosity—with a special regard to Christ as our common Head and Savior.

***~~#1773~~***

***~~PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON~~***

**[Acts 12:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5).**

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him."

THE Scriptures inform us, that "God's counsel shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure." Let the combinations against him be ever so formidable, the ultimate outcome of the contest is certain, [Psalm 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.4-6). Whatever circumstances therefore we may be in, we may safely commit our cause to him with confidence and composure, [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4). We cannot conceive a finer illustration of this subject, than that which is contained in the account of Peter's deliverance from prison.

Let us make some observations upon,

***~~I. His danger—~~***

This was imminent indeed, whether we consider,

***~~1. The crime of which he was accused—~~***

Had he been guilty of sedition or murder? No. What then had he done that had incensed Herod, and rendered his apprehension and death a subject of universal satisfaction? He had preached the Gospel with indefatigable zeal, and had labored to convert both Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of Christ. This was an offense that could not be expiated, but by his blood. All that had preceded him in the same path from the beginning of the world, had incurred the resentment of their contemporaries; and, almost without exception, had suffered death for their fidelity; as Abel, and all the prophets, abundantly testify. And we cannot but wonder, that, when persons are hated, reviled, and persecuted, simply for righteousness' sake, (as thousands in this day are, as well as in former times,) it does not immediately occur to their persecutors, that these very sufferings are a testimony in their favor, [Luke 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.13); inasmuch as they mark a close resemblance between them, and the persecuted saints of old. But*as long as "men love darkness rather than light," they will hate, and extinguish too if they can, the light that shines around them*.

***~~2. The state to which he was reduced—~~***

He was in prison, chained to two soldiers, (one on either hand,) and guarded by sixteen, four of them at a time. His friends, though numerous, had no power to rescue him; nor had he any in Herod's court to intercede for him. Nor was there now time for any favorable occurrences to arise; for this was his very last night; and on the morrow he was to be brought forth for public execution: and all his own country-men were anxiously waiting for the last tragic scene, and hoping within a few hours to feast their eyes with his blood. What hope then remained for him? Die he must: nor did there appear the smallest prospect, but that the fate which had already removed James, awaited him.

But "what is impossible with man, is possible with God;" as we see in,

***~~II. His deliverance—~~***

***~~Mark the means used for his deliverance—~~***

From human intervention there was no hope: but the poor trembling disciples did not yet despair: they knew that wherever the enemies of the Church might deal wickedly, God was above them. To God therefore they addressed themselves with redoubled importunity: and continued all night in unceasing prayer for him. What foolish means would these appear to those who knew how closely he was guarded, and how determinately both Herod and the Jews were bent upon his death!

But, if God is omnipotent, then prayer, which interests God for us, may be called omnipotent also. What has it not done? It has opened and shut the heavens; vanquished armies; saved kingdoms; raised the dead; and it has an express promise from God, that, whatever the subject of it is, (provided it is agreeable to his will,) the requests urged by two or three, with united faith and fervor, shall certainly be granted.

O that we, as individuals, as a Church, as a nation, did but justly appreciate the power of prayer! How safe would we be from enemies, and how happy under the protection of our God!

***~~See also the manner in which he was delivered—~~***

God heard the supplications of his people; and marked, by the very time and manner of his interposition, what it was that prevailed for his deliverance. Access to Peter, though barred with respect to men, was as open as ever to God, and to angels as his ministering servants. God therefore sent an angel to effect his deliverance: and behold, how speedily the work was done! The chains fell off his hands; the keepers and soldiers were constrained in some way or other, so that they could make no resistance; and the iron gate that entered into the city, opened to them of its own accord. So surprising was this deliverance, that Peter himself could not conceive it to be true, but thought it was all passing in a mere vision. And when he went to the house where the people were praying for him, and the damsel who kept the door, affirmed that it was Peter who stood knocking at the door, and that she knew his voice, they told her she was mad: and when they could not silence her positive assertions, they said, "It must be his angel." Had they duly considered, they would have seen that he was expressly given in answer to their prayers; and that God had fulfilled to them his own gracious promise, that "before they called he would answer, and, while they were yet speaking, he would hear! [Isaiah 65:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.24). See a similar instance in [Daniel 9:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.20-21); [Daniel 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.23)."

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. The blessedness of serving God—~~***

It may appear at first, that there is no inference less deducible from the subject than this: for, is there any blessedness in imprisonment, and bonds, and death? But look at Peter on the very night previous to his intended execution: he is sleeping as soundly as if no evil whatever awaited him; insomuch that the extraordinary light which shone into the prison did not interrupt his slumbers; nor did he awake, until "the angel smote him on the side."

Behold too, the interposition of God for him! Was an angel needed to liberate him from prison? An angel is sent from Heaven on purpose; and soldiers, chains, bars, gates, have no longer any power to confine him.

Surely then, if to enjoy such composure in the immediate prospect of death, and such protection from God when all human help has failed, be blessed, it is blessed to serve our God, who promises such mercies to his faithful people. Do not be afraid then of the frowns of men: but fear God, who is alike able to save or to destroy. Seek your happiness in doing the Divine will; and then you may safely commit your every concern to him, knowing, that if God is for you, none can, with any effect, exert themselves against you.

***~~2. The efficacy of united prayer—~~***

Prayer may appear for a time to be offered in vain: "God may bear long with his people," even when they are most importunate. But *we must not mistake delays for denials*. "God has never said to any, 'Seek my face' in vain." Circumstances may arise, wherein it will be more for the good even of the Church itself that prayer would not be answered precisely in the way that we might wish. This doubtless was the case with respect to James, whose fortitude in suffering martyrdom was more useful to the Church than his continued labors would have been. But where any matter will really issue in God's glory and the Church's good, we may ask for it with an absolute assurance that it shall be granted.

No nation since the establishment of Christianity ever enjoyed greater mercies from God than ours; and if we knew the history of it as it is recorded in Heaven, I doubt not but that the prayers of God's people would be found to have wrought more for us, than all our fleets and armies have ever done.

Let all of us then give ourselves unto prayer in our secret chambers. Let societies for prayer be established; and those which already exist carry on their united efforts with unceasing ardor. Let us not be contented with a brief mention of our necessities to God, but plead earnestly with him for the relief of them, and "give him no rest, until he arises and makes our Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

***~~#1774~~***

***~~THE EVIL OF PRIDE~~***

***~~[Acts 12:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.21-23).~~***

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died!

IN almost all the instances of judicial punishment recorded in Scripture, we see a remarkable correspondence between the punishment, and the sin on account of which it was inflicted: and it seems to be especially designed by God, in order that he might be the more manifestly "known in the judgments which he executes."

In the passage before us, we are informed that Herod was greatly offended with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but, at the intercession of his own servant, he forgave them. On this occasion he delivered to them an oration, probably in part at least on the subject of his own clemency: and they, struck with the splendor of his appearance, and perhaps with the force of his eloquence, or, more probably, desiring to conciliate him by flattery, exclaimed that the voice which they heard, was the voice of a God, rather than a man.

With these plaudits Herod was highly gratified: and instantly God, by the instrumentality of an angel smote him, and he was eaten by worms, so acute and terrible, that, as the Jewish historian informs us, he was constrained to acknowledge before that very assembly, that God had punished him for not rejecting with abhorrence their impious acclamations, and that they would soon see an end of their God. Accordingly, the worms that were thus formed in his body, preyed upon his vitals, and devoured him in the space of about five days: so that his degradation was as manifest as his pride had been presumptuous.

We propose to consider more fully,

***~~I. His sin—~~***

Whether the excellence of his oration was real or imaginary, his crime was the same: "He did not give God the glory for it." Now this is, in truth, as common a sin as any that can be named: for where is there a person possessed of either natural endowments, or acquired distinctions, who does not pride himself in them, instead of giving the glory to the Lord for them? The *woman*thinks but little of God, when her beauty is admired; or the *man*, when he is celebrated for his strength and valor. The man of learning, or of skill in arts, or who has advanced himself by successful industry to great opulence, readily accepts the adulation paid to his talents and success; little thinking that it is "God alone who has made him to differ" from others, or "given him the power to get wealth." Perhaps the generality will think this to be *a mere infirmity*incident to our nature; but few, if any, conceive of it as *a heinous sin*; whereas it is, in reality, a sin of awful magnitude. It is,

***~~1. A denial of God's goodness—~~***

God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," in creation, in providence, and in grace. Whatever we possess, we must say with the Apostle, "Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, 2 Corinthians 5:5." If any person has a right to ascribe glory to himself, methinks it is the conqueror, whose valor overcomes his enemy: but God in a particular manner charged his people, when they would be brought into the quiet possession of the land of Canaan, not to imagine that "their power, or the might of their hand, had gotten them that wealth," but to acknowledge it all as given them by their God, [Deuteronomy 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.7); [Deuteronomy 8:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.11-14); [Deuteronomy 8:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.18-19).

When therefore we withhold these acknowledgments, we do, in fact, deny that they are due to God, and *impiously assume to ourselves the honor that is due to him alone. In a word, we tread in the very steps of Herod, and commit the sin which brought on him such tokens of God's displeasure!*

***~~2. An invasion of God's prerogative—~~***

"God has made all things for himself;" and "he will not give his glory to another." But, if we take to ourselves the glory which is due to him, we put ourselves, as it were, into his place, and become a God unto ourselves. This may appear too strong a representation; but it is the very construction which Jehovah himself puts upon such conduct.

The city of *Tyre*was greatly enriched, and raised to a high rank among the surrounding nations: and the governors, instead of acknowledging the providence of God in their elevation, ascribed it wholly to themselves, and confided in it as a source of continued security. Hear now how God speaks to them respecting it: "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "'In the pride of your heart you say, "I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas." But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god, [Ezekiel 28:2-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 28.2-10). Compare also [Habakkuk 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.15-16)."

Nor let it be imagined that this is done only by an actual assumption of these honors to ourselves. Herod did not *claim*the honors that were ascribed to him, but he was *pleased*with them; and acquiesced in the judgment of his admirers, instead of reproving it.

Paul and Barnabas, when divine honors were offered to them, rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, and expostulated with them in the strongest terms, [Acts 14:9-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.9-15); and *it was Herod's sin that he accepted the flattery, instead of rejecting it with indignation*. In like manner *the receiving with delight the flattering unction of human applause, as trifling as it may appear to us, is a very heinous sin in the sight of God*.

The evil of his sin may be further seen in the greatness of,

***~~II. His punishment—~~***

Pride, above all things, provokes "a jealous God;" and the whole creation is ready to vindicate the honor of his injured Majesty. As, in the plagues of Egypt, frogs and lice were ready to inflict punishment on the hardened monarch, so, in Herod's case, "worms" sprang forth, as it were, into existence, to avenge the quarrel of Jehovah! Nor shall such an impious disposition ever pass unpunished.

***~~1. God has punished pride in many instances—~~***

See where man has made himself the author of the great things which have been wrought by him—how strongly has God resented it, [Isaiah 10:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.12-15); [Isaiah 37:23-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.23-29).

See where man has made himself the end of his own actions—how fearfully has God manifested his indignation against the offending person, [Daniel 4:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.30-33).

See where only an undue delight has been felt, as arising from the possession of the things which God himself has given—even that has excited great displeasure in the bosom of the Almighty, and caused him to inflict the heaviest judgments, [Isaiah 39:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 39.3-7) with [2 Chronicles 32:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25-26).

***~~2. He will punish pride wherever it is indulged—~~***

If such a disposition be habitually indulged, God regards it as a proof of hypocrisy, [Habakkuk 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.4); and, though he is ever ready to give grace to the humble, he will assuredly resist, and abase, the proud, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6). [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.37). *Though pride does not break forth into gross inconsistencies of conduct, yet if it is harbored in the heart, we shall be held in utter abomination in the sight of God!*[Proverbs 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.5).

***~~Reflections—~~***

***~~1. What need have we to watch the motions of our hearts!~~***

God looks at the heart, and "searches it," and sees every thought of it, [Ezekiel 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 11.5), and puts the true construction upon every motion of it, and will call us into judgment for all its most secret imaginations! [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5). Alas! how many proud, conceited, self-delighting thoughts has he there beheld! Do we not then need to humble ourselves before him, and to "pray, that the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven! [Acts 8:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.22)."

***~~2. How careful should we be of using any flattering words!~~***

Men flatter others because they know that flattery is pleasant to the carnal mind—but it is that very pleasure which offends God, and brings down his judgments on the soul. How cruel then is it to expose a brother to such a danger! Would we put poison into his hands just to gratify his palate, when we knew that it would speedily put an end to his existence? How then can we seek to gratify his mind, at the expense of his soul?

This is a thought peculiarly important for those who hear the Gospel faithfully administered: they are apt to forget that ministers are men of like passions with themselves; and that God particularly forbad that a novice would be admitted into the ministry, "lest being lifted up with pride, he would fall into the condemnation of the devil." Bear in mind, brethren, that *flattery is a temptation which few can withstand*, and that he who makes use of it, "spreads a net for his brother's feet! [Proverbs 29:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.5)."

***~~#1775~~***

***~~ELYMAS THE SORCERER STRUCK BLIND~~***

***~~[Acts 13:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.9-11).~~***

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

IN general, the duty of ministers is to "have compassion on those who are ignorant and out of the way," and to "instruct in meekness those who oppose themselves:" but there are occasions whereon it is necessary for them to "rebuke men sharply," and with all authority. We do not indeed think that it would be proper for an uninspired minister to use exactly the language of our text, because he could not tell what measure of impiety existed in the mind of the person reproved: but, whether inspired or not inspired, it befits every servant of God to make a firm stand against infidelity and impiety, and to declare without reserve the judgments of God against the enemies of his Gospel.

Paul was certainly under no bad impression when he addressed Elymas; for, it is said, he was "filled with the Holy Spirit:" and *under the influence of that same blessed Spirit we may speak with all boldness, and yet not violate, in any degree, the decorum or the charity which our Christian profession requires*.

In the address before us, we notice,

***~~I. The true character of the Gospel—~~***

None of the inspired writers ever spoke in a doubting manner respecting the truth or excellence of the Gospel: convinced in their own minds, they uniformly spoke with the decision that befit them. Paul here calls the Gospel "the right ways of the Lord:" and this is indeed its proper character; for it contains the only right way,

***~~1. Of seeking his favor—~~***

It offers salvation freely through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It requires nothing in those to whom it is offered, but a humble sense of their own guilt and misery, and an entire surrender of themselves to him, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his grace.

This is the "right way" of seeking favor with God. All the ways of man's devising are delusory. Not only is all hope of "establishing a righteousness of our own "vain, but even the smallest attempt to blend anything of our own with his meritorious death and sacrifice, will deceive us, [Romans 10:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3-4); Salvation must be of grace, from first to last! [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-9).

***~~2. Of glorifying his name—~~***

The Gospel calls us to a life of universal holiness, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12); and requires us to "live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again! [Romans 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-9)."

And this also is exclusively the "right way" of serving God. If we imagine that a barren unproductive faith will suffice, we shall find ourselves fatally mistaken. Nor will a partial obedience to God's will be accepted: his law, his whole law, must be written in our hearts, and exemplified in our lives. A willful retaining of a single lust would prove as fatal to us, as a rejection of his Gospel altogether, [Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30).

The attempts of Elymas to "pervert" the Gospel lead us to consider,

***~~II. The opposition it meets with—~~***

We are not now called to speak of persecution, but only of those arts which were used by this malignant sorcerer. We doubt not then but that he withstood the Apostles,

***~~1. By subtle disputations—~~***

As a Jew, he would bring forward all the arguments he could, against Christianity itself. And such opposers are still found among those who "name the name of Christ." There are infidels who deride Christianity as much as the most inveterate Jew could do. But where the Gospel is admitted as true, the fundamental doctrines of it are commonly assailed with all the powers of reason.

The total depravity of our nature,

the truth and efficacy of Christ's atonement,

the influences of the Holy Spirit, and

the necessity of an entire surrender of ourselves to God

—are all denied; and a religion little better than heathen morality is substituted in the place of that which Christ has revealed. He must be a stranger indeed in our Jerusalem, who does not know how fiercely even the first principle of the Gospel, the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, is decried. The *sons*of Jannes and Jambres, and of Alexander the coppersmith, are as subtle and malignant as their fathers were, [2 Timothy 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.8); [2 Timothy 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.14-15).

***~~2. By base calumnies—~~***

We can have no doubt but that Elymas would endeavor to discredit the testimony of Paul and Barnabas by evil insinuations against their character and designs; nor would he fail to load their doctrine also with all the reproaches which Jewish malignity could suggest. And are not these weapons still used against the Gospel? Are not the preachers of it represented as "the troublers of Israel," as "deceivers," as "turning the world upside down?" Are they not often spoken of as crafty men, who in their hearts are adverse to the civil and ecclesiastical establishments of the land wherein they dwell? Is not their doctrine traduced precisely as in the days of old? Paul's complaint was, "We are slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come:" and for the same complaint there is abundant occasion, wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached. Nor can any better answer be made to our accusers than Paul himself made, namely, that "their damnation is just! [Romans 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.8)."

Indeed it is not possible for any one to embrace the truth in sincerity, without becoming an object for the envenomed shafts of slander! And it is worthy of observation, that, as this treatment is experienced by those universally who preach or profess the Gospel, so it is experienced by them exclusively: a man may preach or profess what else he will, and yet be at peace with the world: but the moment he becomes a decided follower of Christ, a warfare is commenced against him, even by his nearest relatives; yes "his greatest foes are generally those of his own household."

In the Apostle's answer, however, we observe,

***~~III. The evil and danger of opposing it—~~***

***~~The evil of it is marked in the terms which the Apostle used—~~***

We will grant that there was in Elymas a peculiar malignity of character, which justified the severity of Paul's address; and that the same severity would not be just, if used against many who oppose the Gospel. But still, in proportion as our character or conduct resembles that of Elymas, the terms in which he was addressed may be applied to us.

It is a fact, that the greater part of those who raise up opposition to the Gospel, are men of a subtle and mischievous disposition: and it is equally true that they act under the immediate influence of Satan, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2). Now the great employment of Satan is to blind men's eyes, so that they may not see the Gospel; precisely as the great office of the Holy Spirit is, to open men's eyes, that they may behold it, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4); 2 Corinthians 4:6. Consequently, in doing Satan's work, they prove themselves to be his children, [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44). And are they not in this, enemies of all righteousness?

Where is there any true righteousness to be found, but among those who embrace the Gospel. Look at the life of Christ and his Apostles, and see, if anything like it ever was produced under the influence of false religion? It is a curious fact, that those who are most adverse to the principles of the Gospel, are always complaining that its friends are too strict, and too precise, and "righteous over-much;" and thus they show themselves enemies no less to the holiness of the Gospel, than to its free and full salvation.

How great then must be the evil of a conduct which entails on men such epithets as these!

***~~The danger of it is marked in the judgment he denounced—~~***

God smote this malicious adversary with blindness, agreeably to the declaration of Paul: and *this blindness was a solemn emblem of the blindness of his soul*. We do not indeed expect that the enemies of the Gospel shall now receive such open demonstrations of God's displeasure; (though we are far from thinking that such judgments are never executed,) but we are sure that *spiritual blindness is the common fruit of hostility to the Gospel*; and that those who labor to blind others, can expect nothing but to be blinded themselves, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10) with [Mark 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.11-12).

The blindness of Elymas was inflicted only "for a season," that he might repent, and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he was led captive at his will:" and in like manner there is yet space given for repentance, even to the most inveterate opposers of the Gospel: but if they do not speedily acknowledge their guilt, they have reason to fear that before long they will be given over to final impenitence, and their present blindness be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness for ever! [Isaiah 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.22) and Jude, verse 11, 13."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are inquiring after truth—~~***

Of *Sergius Paulus*it is said, "He was a prudent man;" and "he called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." Moreover, when he had heard it, he disregarded all the attempts of Elymas to pervert it, and himself became an avowed disciple of Christ. This was a conduct worthy of him, and worthy to be pursued by every wise and prudent man. We earnestly recommend it then, to all to follow his example. Be diligent in inquiring, and avail yourselves of every opportunity of gaining instruction in the religion of Christ. Be candid in judging, and do not allow yourselves to be prejudiced by the scoffs or calumnies of the unbelieving world. Be firm also in acting: do not be afraid of following the convictions of your own conscience; or think, that your being in a place of great power and authority will be any excuse for not obeying its voice—it is rather a reason why you would be the more bold for the Lord, because you may influence so many more by your example. Had this Roman governor put off his convictions, like Felix, he would probably have been left to perish in his sins: but now he enjoys, in all its richness, the truth he embraced.

Know then, that you likewise will soon receive the final recompense of your conduct; in eternal happiness, if faithful to your convictions; but in inexpressible misery, if you dissemble with God.

***~~2. Those who are opposing it—~~***

Greatly is it to be regretted that the Gospel has still its adversaries, and that persons in authority are peculiarly beset with them. Satan knows how extensive is the influence of the great: and therefore he sends forth his emissaries to encompass them around, and to prejudice their minds against the faith of Christ. But be it known to all, that Christ will triumph at last, and that "his enemies before long shall surely become his footstool."

By some it may be thought a light matter to dispute against the Gospel, and to obstruct its influence on the minds of men: but our Lord has told us, that "it were better for us that a millstone would be put around our necks, and that we would be cast into the midst of the sea, than cause one of these little ones to sin!" Let those then who will not embrace the Gospel, beware how they labor to pervert the faith of others: if they must perish, they had better perish alone, than under the guilt of destroying the souls of others.

But let us hope, that those who have acted thus as Satan's instruments, will do so no more; but that rather their own eyes shall be opened, and that they will embrace the faith which they have endeavored to destroy. If however any will persist in their impiety, let them tell us what are those ways which they call "right;" and let their principles be compared with those of the Apostle. We fear not the outcome, if only this comparison be made: we have no doubt but that the Gospel alone contains the "right ways of the Lord," and that those only who embrace and walk in them will ever enter into eternal life.

***~~#1776~~***

***~~THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION DELIVERED~~***

***~~[Acts 13:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.26).~~***

"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent."

IN tracing the steps of the Apostle Paul, I see exactly what every minister of Christ should be. He should live but for one end—to save the souls of men: and, for the attainment of that end, he would account no labor too great, no sufferings too intense. He would live for it altogether, and, if need be, die for it also.

Methinks I here see a minister addressing his stated congregation. He comes to them as an ambassador from God; bringing salvation, as it were, along with him, and declaring to every one of them, "To you, and to you—is the word of this salvation sent!"

Sustaining, through grace, this blessed office, I will now, in God's name,

***~~I. Unfold to you the true character of the Gospel which we preach—~~***

It is nothing more nor less than this, "The message of salvation!" This admirably describes the Gospel, of which it may be truly said,

***~~1. It reveals salvation clearly—~~***

No other book under Heaven can tell us how a sinner may be saved. But Scripture reveals to us the plan which God the Father *devised*, and God the Son *executed*, and God the Spirit *applies*to the souls of men. It opens to us all the wonders of redemption, through the incarnation and death of God's only dear Son. It sets him forth, as making an atonement for the sins of men, and as working out a righteousness wherein they may stand before God, and as imparting out of his own inexhaustible fullness whatever is necessary for every individual of mankind.

All this it states with a clearness and precision which no man can mistake, unless Satan, the God of this world, has blinded his eyes.

***~~2. It offers salvation freely—~~***

It calls on no man to purchase salvation by any merits of his own; but offers it "freely to all, without money and without price, [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." The light of the sun is not more freely given than this, provided we be willing to accept it. We may see how free it was in its first offer to man in Paradise. Our first parents even fled from their Maker, instead of imploring mercy at his hands; and God followed them, and, without any solicitation on their part, promised them that "the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15)." Thus it is in every instance that occurs; "He is found of those who sought him not, and made known to those who inquired not after him, [Isaiah 65:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.1)."

***~~3. It actually confers salvation on all who sincerely receive its inspired declarations—~~***

The instant the word is received in faith, it becomes "effectual to turn you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The sins of him who receives it are "blotted out as a morning cloud," and his soul is "made a partaker of a divine nature:" he is also admitted into the number of God's children, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12), and "his name is written in Heaven." Say, brethren, whether this is not true? Say whether some of you, at least, cannot attest it by your own blessed experience? Then you see how justly that Gospel which we preach unto you is called "The message of salvation." There is no other message whereby any man can be saved: nor does any man truly receive this, without being saved by it. Hence, then, if you would understand it aright, and appreciate it aright, you must view it in this light, and receive it for the end for which alone it is revealed.

Having stated the true nature of the Gospel, I now proceed to,

***~~II. Execute the commission which we bear in relation to it—~~***

Paul had a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. The former he addressed as "the stock of Abraham;" the latter he included under those who "fear God, compare the text with verse 42 and with [Acts 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.35)." Now, though we have not exactly the same description of persons here, we have others who very nearly correspond with them; whom, therefore, we will distinctly address.

***~~1. Those who, on account of their morality, suppose that they do not need Gospel salvation—~~***

There doubtless are here many moral, and, in a qualified sense, religious persons, who think by their own repentance and good works to save themselves. But, beloved, the very best of you are sinners, and stand in need of mercy at the hands of God; as well as of a new nature, which God alone can create within you. "Your Father Abraham had this Gospel preached to him, [Galatians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.8)." Moses also preached it, both in the ceremonial and moral law, [Hebrews 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1). [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4). [Galatians 3:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.24). And if the Apostle Paul, who was, "concerning the righteousness of the law, blameless," was constrained to "renounce all hope in his own righteousness, that he might be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9)," then so must you do: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. "To you, then, is the message of this salvation sent;" and if you accept it as God's word to you, it shall prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."

***~~2. Those who, through their heinous lives, suppose that they are beyond the reach of salvation—~~***

Dear brethren, there is no limit, either to the mercy of God, or to the efficacy of his Gospel. "The blood of Jesus Christ, sprinkled on the soul, cleanses from all sin!" "Nor shall any one who comes to God in his name ever be cast out." Remember, then, that to you, even to every one of you, however far you may have gone from God, is "the word of salvation now sent:" nor is there one of you that shall ever perish, if only you truly and sincerely embrace it.

***~~Behold now the effect of proclaiming this word, in the case of the Apostle Paul:~~***

***~~1. Some desired to hear more of it—~~***

They desired that "the same words might be preached to them again the next Sabbath," and on the intervening days before it. See verse 42. Let it have the same effect upon you, my brethren; and allow no means of instruction henceforth to pass away unimproved.

***~~2. Others, on the other hand, "contradicted and blasphemed" the word, verse 45.~~***

So you must expect to find it at this day. But be not stumbled at it. If, when delivered by the Apostle Paul, and by our blessed Savior himself, the Gospel was in many cases rejected, wonder not if it is so when delivered by us. But shall the unbelief of some make the faith of God of no effect? God forbid. "Let God be true, but every man a liar, [Romans 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.3-4)."

***~~3. Others were effectually saved by it—~~***

Yes, some "honored the word of life; and, having been ordained to eternal life, believed it, verse 48," and were saved by it. Thus let it be honored by you. It is worthy of all your submission, and all your trust, and all your confidence: and if you will "honored it" by faith and obedience, it shall surely "honor you" with everlasting life! 2 Thessalonians 3:1. From this moment, therefore, let nothing divert you from it, but "continue steadfastly in the grace of God, verse 43."

***~~#1777~~***

***~~THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, GLAD TIDINGS~~***

***~~[Acts 13:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.32-33).~~***

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'".

THE resurrection of Christ was the foundation whereon the whole edifice of our religion was built. To that, Jesus himself directed his disciples to look forward as the evidence of his Messiahship; and, after he had risen, he appeared to them repeatedly for the space of forty days, that they might be enabled to testify of it with the fullest assurance. A select number were chosen by him for the very purpose of bearing witness to this wonderful event: and because Paul had not enjoyed the same advantage as the other Apostles, he was favored with a vision of his Lord long after his removal from the sight of all other mortals, in order that he, as well as the others, might be able to testify of it from ocular demonstration.

In the words before us he speaks of Christ's resurrection,

***~~I. As an accomplishment of prophecy—~~***

***~~The passage quoted by the Apostle is very properly applied to this subject—~~***

The Psalms were in the Apostle's days arranged in the same order as they now stand. And the scope of the second Psalm is to declare the triumph of Jesus over all his enemies by means of his resurrection from the grave, and of his consequent exaltation to the right hand of God. And he might well be said to be "begotten" in the day of his resurrection, because he was then formed anew, as it were, from the earth.

***~~It is confirmed also by many other passages that predict the same truth—~~***

As it was fore-ordained by God, so it was foretold in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was exhibited in types:

*Isaac*, being put to death, as it were, by his own father, was received again from the dead in a figure, [Hebrews 11:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.19).

*Jonah*was raised again on the third day from the belly of a fish, [Matthew 12:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.39-40).

The living bird that was let loose after having been dipped in the blood of the bird that had been slain, represented Jesus as ascending to Heaven with his own blood, [Leviticus 14:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.51); [Leviticus 14:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.53) with [Hebrews 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.12), and sometimes in prophecies verse 34, 35 with [Isaiah 55:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.3), which certainly must include the resurrection of him that was to be "the leader and commander;" and [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10), which is so largely commented upon by Peter, [Acts 2:25-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.25-31).

In one Scripture, not quoted indeed in this place, but cited no less than six times in the New Testament, this marvelous event was predicted in terms so plain that none could misunderstand it, who did not obstinately shut their eyes against the truth, [Psalm 118:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.22) with [Luke 20:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 20.17).

We must not however suppose this to be an uninteresting fact: for the Apostle further speaks of it,

***~~II. As glad tidings to the soul—~~***

To the disconsolate disciples the tidings of Christ's resurrection were doubtless exceedingly joyful. But they ought to be no less so to us, since that event ascertains,

***~~1. The virtue of his sacrifice—~~***

Had he not risen, his death would have been in vain, 1 Corinthians 15:14; [1 Corinthians 15:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.17-18). We could have had no evidence that our debt was discharged, if our Surety had not been liberated from the prison of the grave. But his resurrection clearly proved that he had satisfied the demands of law and justice, and it thereby affords us a ground of assured hope, and triumphant exultation, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25); [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34).

***~~2. The sufficiency of his power—~~***

If he were still dead, it would be in vain to look to him for help. But, when he has raised up himself, [John 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.17-18), and spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15), and been exalted on purpose that he might be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins, [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31), what may we not expect at his hands? Surely he is declared thereby to be the Son of God with power, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4), and to be able to save us to the uttermost, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25). Let us only seek to know him in the power of his resurrection, [Philippians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10), and nothing shall be impossible unto us, [Mark 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.23).

***~~3. The certainty of our own resurrection to dwell with him—~~***

Our resurrection depended altogether upon his: if he had not risen, neither would we have risen: but because he rose, we shall rise also. Christ is the first-fruits, which, while it sanctified, also assured, the whole harvest, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20). He is our forerunner, who is gone to Heaven to prepare places for us, and will come again to raise us to the possession of them, [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20). [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3). We therefore may consider death and the grave as vanquished for us, and look forward to the complete triumph which we ourselves shall have over them in the last day, 1 Corinthians 15:53-55. Because he lives, we may be sure that we shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19).

***~~As a further improvement of this passage, permit me to observe,~~***

***~~1. How deeply we are interested in the writings of the Old Testament!~~***

In them are promises of which we receive the accomplishment. The word of God is not of private interpretation, [2 Peter 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.20), as though it belonged only to this or that individual. Many parts doubtless had a peculiar reference to those to whom they were spoken; but none had an exclusive reference. Let us then embrace the promises as spoken to ourselves. Compare [Joshua 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.5) with [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6), and expect the fulfillment of them to our own souls.

***~~2. How thankful should we be for a preached Gospel!~~***

Many, when the Gospel is preached to them, are ready to exclaim, "We beseech you, torment us not! [Matthew 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.29) and [Luke 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.28)." Yes, they look on faithful ministers as "the troublers of Israel, [1 Kings 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 18.17)." But the scope of our ministry is to "declare glad tidings," even to proclaim a crucified, and an exalted Savior.

Let any one contemplate the foregoing subject, and see whether it does not afford matter for rejoicing. Let men only forsake their sins, and we have not a word to utter which will not administer to them an occasion of joy. In this light the resurrection of our Lord was viewed by the first disciples. And are not they "our fathers, and we their children?" Yes; we are all of one family, all united to one Head, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10). [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.23), and all heirs of the same glory. If we only cleave to the Savior as they did, we may confidently expect the blessings which they enjoyed, and may look forward with joy to that time, when we shall sit down with all the patriarchs and prophets in the kingdom of our God for ever, [Matthew 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.11). [Luke 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.28).

***~~#1778~~***

***~~THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID~~***

***~~[Acts 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.34).~~***

"The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David."

IT is of the nature of prophecy to be somewhat mysterious. It was doubtless given in order to raise in men an expectation of future events; but it was not designed to declare them so fully, as to induce men to exert themselves either for the effectuating or counteracting of the things foretold. Its true use was to show that God had fore-ordained all that would come to pass; and to convince us, that nothing can occur, but according to his determinate counsel and will.

The passage cited in my text is strongly illustrative of this truth. One would not readily have imagined that so sublime a mystery as that of our Savior's resurrection had been contained in these words: but, now that we see them accomplished, we can have no doubt but that they were intended to predict that great event; since an inspired Apostle so explains them, and builds upon his explanation the most important of all truths, the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

To place the text in its true light, I will consider,

***~~I. The fact asserted—~~***

This was, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—the most important of all events; since, without it, neither the incarnation nor death of Christ would have been of any avail, [1 Corinthians 15:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.14-18). To this our blessed Lord continually referred, as the most convincing proof of his Messiahship, [John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.19). [Matthew 12:38-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.38-40); [Matthew 20:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.19). For the more full revealing of this, he abode on earth forty days after his resurrection; "showing, by many infallible proofs," that he was indeed "risen, according to the Scriptures, [Acts 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.3)." And to this event all his Apostles bore witness, as establishing, beyond all doubt or question, his divine mission. This was the point to be settled for the conviction of all, whether Jews or Gentiles: and this once clearly established, all the rest followed as a matter of course, that could not be questioned by any man, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4).

But let me direct your attention to,

***~~II. The prophecy appealed to in confirmation of it—~~***

This, we have said, was dark: but, when duly explained, it carries full conviction along with it.

***~~To this event, beyond all doubt, the prophecy referred—~~***

With his people God entered into covenant, to "give them the sure mercies of David." What these were, the Psalmist fully informs us. They were, in the first place, to establish on his throne his Promised Seed, the Messiah; and then to give to all the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom the full blessings of salvation, [Psalm 89:19-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19-36). But Messiah was to suffer, [Isaiah 53:1-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1-12); How, then, could this prophecy be fulfilled?

By the resurrection, the prophecy was fulfilled.

Christ, being raised from the dead, was empowered to carry on his work; as the high-priest did, when, after offering his sacrifice, he entered into the holy of holies. Now, too, he was seated on his throne, [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6); and all which had been engaged in covenant both to him and to his people, was put into a train of progressive and ultimate accomplishment. Thus were the mercies, which David had long since contemplated as "sure, [2 Samuel 23:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.5)," rendered "sure" to Christ and to all his believing people.

Not only was God's word verified by this; but a pledge was given that it would be fulfilled in every the minutest particular, to all who would rely upon it in deed and in truth.

And now let me call your attention to,

***~~III. The conclusion drawn—~~***

The same train of argument had been followed both by Peter and Paul. And from it their inferences were,

***~~1. That Christ was indeed the true Messiah—~~***

See the argument as stated by Peter on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:22-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.22-35). Then mark his conclusion drawn: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ! [Acts 2:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.36)." Know this, my beloved brethren: there is a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: and there is no other than He. He has died for you; and his sacrifice has been accepted of the Father in your behalf. And of this you have a certain pledge, in his resurrection from the dead. I call upon you, then, to renounce every other hope; and to look unto Him, as "all your salvation and all your desire".

***~~2. That all who believe in him shall most assuredly be saved—~~***

This is the conclusion, as drawn by the Apostle Paul. Having further prosecuted the line of argument which we have already noticed, verse 35-37, he adds, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses, verse 38, 39."

Yes, to every one of you do I this day preach the forgiveness of sins. Who among you does not need it? Who among you can obtain remission in any other way? Who among you would not account the pardon of all his sins as the richest blessing that could be conferred upon him? Behold, then, I this day offer it to every one among you; yes, I offer it simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Under the Mosaic law there were many sins for which no sacrifice was appointed. But not so under the Christian dispensation. There is no sin, whatever, nor any accumulation of sins, which may not be washed away by the Redeemer's blood: for "the blood of Jesus Christ," we are told, "cleanses from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7)." To every one of you, therefore, do I offer, in his name, a free and full remission, in perfect accordance with God's covenant, ratified as it has been by the Redeemer's blood, and confirmed as it is by his predicted resurrection and his glorious ascension.

Behold, then, how certain are God's promises to those who rely upon them!

If any promise could have failed, methinks it was that which related to the exaltation of the Messiah. See him dying on the cross, and sealed up in the grave—what is now become of all God's promised mercies? Wait but a little, and they shall be acknowledged to be sure and certain. Just so your case, brethren, may appear as desperate as his: yet, in the appointed hour, shall you surmount your every difficulty, and be glorified with your Messiah at the right hand of God!

***~~#1779~~***

***~~DANGER OF DESPISING THE GOSPEL SALVATION~~***

***~~[Acts 13:38-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.38-41).~~***

"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: "'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"

NO one can read the New Testament with attention, without seeing that there is one point to which all the discourses of the Apostles tend, namely, the exhibition of Christ as the only Savior of sinners. In Him all the lines meet, as in their common center. The discourses of Paul embraced the whole circle of divine truth; yet he justly says, that "he determined to know nothing among his converts but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

In the chapter before us is contained his address to the Jews in a synagogue at Antioch. He begins with a subject ever gratifying to a Jewish ear, a rehearsal of the distinguished mercies given to that nation from the time of their departure out of Egypt to the time of David, from whose seed they all acknowledged that their Messiah would spring. He then declares, that that Messiah was come, even Jesus, in whom the prophecies had been literally fulfilled, both in the peculiar manner of his death, and in his resurrection from the dead. He then comes to apply the subject to their hearts and consciences, combining all the tenderness of a brother with all the fidelity of an Apostle. In opening to you that part which we have just read, we shall notice,

***~~I. The declaration made—~~***

It had been said by our Lord after his resurrection, that "repentance and remission of sins would be preached in his name among all nations, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47)." And here Paul, executing his commission, declares that this way of salvation was,

***~~1. Divinely appointed—~~***

There is no doubt or hesitation to be seen in his mode of expressing this truth: on the contrary, he speaks with most assured confidence, "My brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you:" I want you to know, that his death was an atoning sacrifice for sin—that by that sacrifice, Divine justice has been satisfied—that through it God is reconciled to a guilty world—and that he has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, and sent us on purpose to preach to you the forgiveness of sins in his name, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. These are truths of infinite importance to every child of man: and we declare them without even a shadow of doubt upon our own minds; and desire that they may be embraced by you with the fullest assurance of your minds, and the liveliest gratitude of your souls, 1 Timothy 1:15.

Beloved brethren, we announce the same glorious truths to you. Who among you is not a sinner before God? Who does not need such a Savior? Who has not reason to leap for joy at having such a method of forgiveness proposed to him? "I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, verse 26;" and "we, as God's ambassadors, beseech you in Christ's stead—be reconciled to God, 2 Corinthians 5:20."

***~~2. Universally effectual—~~***

There is no distinction now made between Jews and Gentiles: the word is no longer confined to one age or country; "it is gone forth unto the ends of the world." Nor is there now any distinction of sins, as far as relates to the forgiveness of them through the blood of Christ. Under the law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be accepted. The adulterer and the murderer, for instance, were left without any means of pardon provided for them by the law: nor was any presumptuous sin to be reckoned among those for which sacrifices were appointed, [Numbers 15:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 15.30) with verse 39 of the text. But under the Gospel there is no exception whatever: "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men," provided they repent of it, and believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of it. If the sin against the Holy Spirit be excepted, it is not because the blood of Christ would not cleanse from that, as well as from every other, but because the man who has committed it must have arrived at such a degree of blindness and obduracy, that he never will repent of his iniquity, nor ever look to Christ with sincerity of heart for the remission of it.

We confidently declare, that sins even of a scarlet or crimson dye shall be forgiven, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18). [Psalm 51:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.7); yes, *we declare that every sin we have ever committed is actually forgiven, the very instant we truly believe in Christ*. Even "the little children in Christ" may glory in this, as a truth on which they may most confidently rely, that on their believing in Christ, they not only shall be, but actually, as our text expresses it, "are justified from all things, [Colossians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.13). [1 John 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12)."

To impress this blessed truth the more deeply on your minds, let us consider,

***~~II. The admonition with which it is enforced—~~***

***~~As glorious as this salvation is, it is too generally despised—~~***

All the prophets prophesied respecting it with more or less clearness, [Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.43); but all had reason to complain, "Who has believed our report, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1)." In the days of the Apostles the same complaint was made, [Romans 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.16); and it may but too justly be repeated by us at this day. If this be doubted, let any man tell us, where "has the offense of the cross ceased?" Where is not the faithful exhibition of a crucified Savior derided as enthusiasm? In what place are not the followers of Christ gazed upon "as signs and wonders?"

But it is not the infidel only or the scoffer that despises Christ: for every man is guilty of despising him, who complies not with the invitations of his Gospel, and withholds from him the affections of his heart. O let us examine ourselves carefully on this head, and see whether the warning in our text may not justly be applied to us.

***~~If we are found among the number of his despisers, woe be to us—~~***

The Jews of old despised both the mercies and the judgments of their God. The Prophet Habakkuk, expostulating with them, declared, that God would inflict on them such judgments by the hands of the Chaldeans, as they would not believe, however strongly his determination would be announced, [Habakkuk 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.5).

Paul declares, that similar judgments awaited the Jews of his day; and warns them against bringing on themselves such heavy calamities. But what are the calamities inflicted by the Chaldeans or Romans—in comparison with those which await unbelievers in the eternal world? We declare to men, that God has wrought the most stupendous work of mercy in the redemption of the world by his dear Son, and that he will consign over to everlasting misery all who reject his Gospel: but men will not believe either the one or the other of these things. They will not so believe his *promises*as to seek a saving interest in them; nor will they so believe his *threatenings*as to endeavor to escape them. But as the judgments denounced against the Jews in former ages have come upon them, so will the judgments denounced against us.

Methinks it were sufficient to hear God so strongly assert this, as he does in many places, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16). [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36); but God condescends to appeal to us, and to make us judges in our own cause: "What shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of Christ?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God?"

Can we hear such appeals, and not see the need of attending to the admonition in the test? O let us "beware," how we reject or slight the salvation now offered us. Let us "beware" lest we bring upon ourselves that "wrath and fiery indignation which await the adversaries" of the Lord Jesus: and what I say unto one, I say unto all, "Beware!"

***~~#1780~~***

***~~THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[Acts 13:46-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.46-48).~~***

"Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

WHEREVER the word of God has been faithfully dispensed, it has created a diversity of sentiment among the hearers; some receiving it with gratitude, and others rejecting it with disdain. Even when our Lord himself preached, "some said he was a good man; while others said, No, but he deceives the people." Such also was the reception which the Gospel met with when ministered by the Apostles: "The multitude was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles, [Acts 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.4)." Our blessed Lord foretold this, and declared, that the effect of his Gospel would be, "not to bring peace on earth, but a sword;" and "to set even the nearest relatives against each other, [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36)."

The division occasioned by it at Antioch was exceeding great; the Jews, almost universally, "rejecting it," while the Gentiles, in vast multitudes, took the liveliest interest in it; insomuch that the Apostle now for the first time made the instruction and conversion of the Gentiles the great object of his ministrations.

In the words which we have now read, we see,

***~~I. The necessity to which he was reduced—~~***

The obstinacy of the Jews was attended with the most distressing consequences. They, in the first instance, disregarded the Gospel; but, "when they saw almost the whole city come together to hear it," they set themselves against it, with the utmost violence, "contradicting" it as false, and "blaspheming" it as wicked. With such inveteracy did they put it away from them, that they pronounced sentence, as it were, against themselves, as altogether unworthy of eternal life. On this account, the Apostles, without any further delay, put into execution the commission they had received, and made a free offer to the Gentiles of the blessings which were thus despised by the Jews.

Now it is a fact which cannot be dissembled, that circumstances not very dissimilar are found, wherever a Christian of a courageous spirit is called to labor: multitudes of those to whom he has been primarily and more particularly sent, not only despise his message; but, when others in the neighborhood flock to hear his word, "are filled with envy," and complain of the inconvenience they sustain by having their churches so crowded. They also "contradict and blaspheme" both the testimony that is borne, and the minister who bears it. Thus in effect they "put away the word of God from them," and declare, by their conduct, that they neither value nor desire that salvation, which Christ has purchased for them.

Thus, with the most earnest desire to promote the salvation of those whom he regards as his immediate charge, a minister is often constrained, by the obstinacy of those who will not hear, to be content with addressing himself to those who will; and to regard those as the most endeared objects of his attention, who are not, except by their own voluntary act, contained within the proper sphere of his commission. This is greatly to be regretted, because such *despisers of the Gospel both harden themselves, and excite prejudice in others*: nevertheless it is a comfort to the faithful minister to find, that, if rejected by some, there are others who hear him gladly, and know how to appreciate his labors.

In turning to the Gentiles, he declared,

***~~II. The authority under which he acted—~~***

He might have mentioned the express injunctions of his Lord, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47). [Acts 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.8); but he knew that his word would have no weight with the Jews; and therefore he cited a passage of the Old Testament, which the Jews themselves understood as referring to the Messiah, [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6). The passage he has quoted contains a promise of the Father to the Son, that he would not have the Jews only for a portion, but would be set for light and salvation to the ends of the earth.

Under this authority we now speak—and under this warrant we offer salvation to every man. Behold then, Christ is given for a light to the whole world; and all of you who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" may "come to the brightness of his light." He is given also "for salvation" to the ends of the earth: and every one who is sensible of his lost estate, may "be saved from wrath through him!" He is God's salvation; provided by him, qualified by him, upheld by him, accepted by him: and every sinner in the universe is not only authorized to trust in him, but is commanded so to do; and is assured by God himself that he shall never be ashamed of his hope This we are commissioned to declare: and if ten thousand bigoted or self-righteous people would reject it with disdain, we trust that we shall never lack some contrite hearers, who shall receive it with gratitude and joy.

In the sequel, we are informed of,

***~~III. The success he obtained—~~***

The self-condemned Gentiles heard these tidings with joy; and vast multitudes of them "glorified the word of the Lord," receiving it as "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." On some indeed the effect was only transient; but as many as were appointed to, and disposed for, eternal life, believed. Believers are thus called and appointed of God; they "received the word into an honest and good heart," and "brought forth fruit unto perfection."

This is the effect which we hope to see produced in our ministrations. Despisers we expect to meet with, but we expect to find also many in whom our message shall be the power of God unto salvation. Who then among you has his heart, like Lydia's, "opened by the Lord?" Who among you feels the attractions of God's love, and the constraining influences of his grace? You, we trust, will be the better for the message we deliver: you will become the followers of Christ: you will embrace him, and honor him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart".

***~~In the passage we have been considering are two opposite characters, whom it will now be proper to address:~~***

***~~1. Those who reject the Gospel—~~***

Such characters exist as much among those who call themselves Christians, as among the Jews themselves. Think then what you do: "You judge yourselves," that is, you pass sentence on yourselves as "unworthy of everlasting life." Your lack of humility betrays your total unfitness for Heaven, or even for the offer of the Gospel salvation. Your contempt of the most stupendous effort of God's love that ever men or angels beheld, betrays the same. If you look into the Scripture, you cannot find any resemblance between yourselves and the saints of old: and, if you could go up to Heaven, you would not find one of your spirit there. Are you then willing to continue in a state, wherein *your whole spirit and conduct declares that you are daily ripening for destruction!*O think of it while yet your errors may be rectified, and your iniquities forgiven.

***~~2. Those who are made willing to embrace it—~~***

Think who it is that has disposed your minds to the attainment of everlasting life: and give him the glory due unto his name. It is God alone who "has made you to differ" from the unbelieving world; and therefore to him alone must be all the praise.

Now then, if you really profess to have experienced the grace of God, we call upon you to "glorify his word:" show that you believe it to be true: let it be seen that you love it, and trust in it, and obey it; and that you "esteem it more than your necessary food."

Attend the ministration of it as the Gentiles did, not with vain curiosity, but with the deepest reverence and most lively gratitude. *Hear it as the word of God to your souls*. Hear it as glad tidings of great joy; and let every succeeding Sabbath bring you into a closer acquaintance with it, and a more entire conformity to its dictates. Above all things, attend to what it says of Christ; and receive him as your all-sufficient light, and your complete salvation.

***~~#1781~~***

***~~TRIBULATION THE WAY TO HEAVEN~~***

***~~[Acts 14:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.22).~~***

"We must go through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

REAL fortitude is shown, not more in overcoming difficulties which unexpectedly occur, than in encountering firmly those which are foreseen. In order to meet trials aright, we must be armed with a heavenly principle: and hence arises the need of a fixed principle in the heart of a Christian; since he is assured, that he shall have many enemies to conflict with, and that his way to Heaven lies through much tribulation. This is declared to us by an inspired Apostle; who himself experienced the truth of it, and has forewarned us to expect that it shall also be fulfilled in us.

Let us consider his testimony,

***~~I. As confirmed in himself—~~***

The whole life of the Apostle, after he embraced the faith of Christ, was an illustration and proof of this truth. View him—

***~~1. On this occasion—~~***

If ever he might have hoped to escape persecution, it was at this time. Consider what he had done in restoring a man who had been a cripple from the womb; and what a spirit the people had manifested towards him, in ascribing to him divine honor, and bringing sacrifices to him as unto a God. Could it be thought that he was in any danger at that place? Yet, behold, no sooner did Jews come from Antioch and Iconium to stir up the people against him, than their minds were changed, and they stoned him as an impostor, whom they had just before proposed to worship as a God—so rapid was the transition from one extreme to another.

Just as, in the case of our blessed Lord, there was but an interval of three days between the acclamations of the populace, and the universal cry of "Crucify him, crucify him!" so there was but a step between the deification and destruction of this blessed man.

***~~2. Through the whole course of his ministry—~~***

Like his adorable Master, the Lord Jesus, he was truly "a man of sorrows." Indeed he expected that he would be so, and forewarned his converts respecting it, lest, when they saw the treatment he received, they would be discouraged, [1 Thessalonians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.3-4). When speaking of his sufferings some years afterwards, he especially referred to this particular occasion, 2 Timothy 3:10-11; but, in fact, it made only a single article out of a long catalogue of trials which attended him through life, [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28).

We are apt to think that persecution was the lot of Christians only in the first ages of the Church: but the Apostle's testimony relates to all Christians of every age; and must therefore be considered,

***~~II. As to be realized in us—~~***

It is a fact that all zealous Christians are persecuted—

We do not say that persecution rages equally at all times; but we affirm, that lively and zealous Christians are hated by the world, [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22). [John 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-19); that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit, [Galatians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.29)." "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)"

There are seasons indeed when the world may seem to favor a servant of God; but, in the midst of all their seeming kindness, there is in their hearts a rooted enmity against him, which, like sediment in clear water, will show itself, the very instant it is stirred. It needs but little to inflame a whole community against him. They can hear unkind reports respecting others, and disregard them; but in everything that leads to the disadvantage of a child of God, they take an interest; and, like inflammable matter, easily communicate the malignant fire to each other, so as rapidly to produce a general conflagration, [Psalm 57:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 57.4); [Psalm 64:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 64.3-6). And hence *every believer is fore-warned to expect persecution as his proper and certain lot*, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12).

***~~And God has graciously ordained, that trials shall attend us for our good—~~***

Our blessed Lord "learned obedience by the things that he suffered," and "was made perfect by sufferings:" and we are to be conformed to him in these respects: we must "suffer with him, in order that we may be glorified together, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21). [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17); [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29). *There is in us a great deal of "dross" which, in the furnace of affliction, must be purged away*, [Isaiah 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.25). Our graces also must be exercised and confirmed by means of trials, which are altogether necessary to call them forth, [Romans 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-4); and to the graces so exercised will our eternal weight of glory be proportioned, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who are the friends of this world—~~***

This is a state, which, though greatly desired by men in general, is not by any means to be coveted; for it proves infallibly that we are not faithful to our God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). It is not possible for light and darkness to coalesce, or for Christ and Belial to agree together, 2 Corinthians 6:15-16. It were far better to be hated of all men for the Lord's sake, than to incur his displeasure for the sake of retaining their good opinion.

***~~2. Those who suffer for the Lord's sake—~~***

Be not surprised at anything that you suffer, [1 Peter 4:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-16), nor be grieved at it. The inspired writers speak of your trials as a just occasion of joy, [James 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2-3); [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12). Only endeavor to improve them aright, [1 Corinthians 4:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.9-13); and you will never complain of the difficulties of the way, when you have reached your journey's end, [Romans 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.14).

***~~#1782~~***

***~~SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL A GROUND OF JOY~~***

***~~[Acts 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.27).~~***

"On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

A VERY distinguishing feature of primitive Christianity was that, while it filled all its votaries with a concern for their own souls, it inspired them also with a love to the souls of others, and with a zeal for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom through the world. True it is, indeed, that, on the occasion before us, the separating of Paul and Barnabas to the work of preaching to the Gentiles originated, not with the people of Antioch, but with God himself, who gave a special command respecting it, [Acts 13:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.2-4). Yet it is evident, that the whole Church took a lively interest in it; and came together afterwards, with great delight, to hear all that had occurred during this benevolent, but arduous, excursion.

Through the tender mercy of our God, somewhat of a similar spirit has arisen in our day: so that I can scarcely enter on a more gratifying subject with you, than to show,

***~~I. The interest which the primitive Church took in the work of God—~~***

***~~The people expressed no reluctance at parting with Paul and Barnabas—~~***

We cannot doubt but that the ministry of these two men at Antioch was most beneficial to the people's souls: yet we read of no reluctance on the part of the Church in surrendering up their own personal benefit for the good of others. They resembled the Apostle Paul, who, in all such cases, "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved, [1 Corinthians 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.33)."

***~~Nor did the Apostles manifest any backwardness to undertake this dangerous enterprise—~~***

We can have no doubt, but that, however much they might delight in their stated labors among a people united to them in the bonds of Christian love, they gladly addressed themselves to the work assigned them, where they would find little but incessant labor, amidst the fiercest opposition. And from their perseverance in it under such circumstances, and from the pleasure which they expressed afterwards in recording all the dealings of God with them, and the happy effects of their ministrations, it is clear that one feeling pervaded the whole body; and that all, both ministers and people, found their chief happiness in the service of their God. Nor can we doubt but that they all rejoiced in the sacrifices they had made, when they saw what benefits had resulted from them to the Gentile world. They had fasted and prayed when these two Apostles were separated to their work: and, that they abounded in praises and thanksgivings after their return, we may be well assured.

Such being the habit of Christians in the first age, let us consider,

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it—~~***

We are well aware, that the call of men to special labors, in this day, is not by any means so clear and determinate as in the case before us: nor do we intend to place any events of the present time on a footing with those which took place under the particular direction of God in the apostolic age. Yet, from the dispositions evinced by the primitive Church, we may clearly see,

***~~1. That the work of God is confessedly the greatest of all concerns—~~***

What is there that can be compared with it? The government of kingdoms is little in comparison. The rise and fall of the four great empires would scarcely have been deemed worthy of notice, but for the influence they had in introducing the Messiah's kingdom, which was to supersede and survive them all. It is the establishment of this kingdom which God has had in view, from before the foundation of the world. All his eternal counsels have had respect to it: all his dispensations towards the whole world have been ordered in subserviency to it: all his perfections are displayed in it, and all his purposes completed: and everyone that labors for the advancement of it is "a worker together with God." The first archangel in Heaven cannot find a more honorable employment than that of helping forward God's designs in reference to it: much more, therefore, may man account it the only object worthy of his pursuit.

***~~2. That it is an object for which we all, according to our ability, should labor—~~***

The advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom is not the work of ministers only, but of the people also. It can scarcely be imagined how much an efficient ministry is aided by the cooperation of private Christians, in all the different works and labors of love. Many will listen to them, who would regard the admonition of pastors as a mere official ceremony, or an impertinent intrusion.

Indeed, it is not possible for ministers to do everything: even a Moses required seventy elders to assist him: and, at this day, it is only by the united exertions of many, that the work of God in general, and that of missions in particular, can be carried forward. Nor let it be imagined that the poor are incapable of affording aid to the common cause: for they, if they cannot assist materially either by intellectual efforts or financial contributions, may, by their prayers for the Divine blessing, effect more than the whole world combined could by their own personal exertions.

***~~3. That the success of it should be to us a source of the sublimest joy—~~***

With what raised expectations did the Church of Antioch meet together; and with what joy did they hear that "God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles!" Methinks the whole assembly lost, for the time, all thought of their own personal welfare, being swallowed up with the delightful contemplation of the welfare of others. Surely, with one heart and one voice they glorified God for the mercy he had given to a sinful and idolatrous world. And would not a similar feeling pervade us Gentiles, in relation to the Jews, if there be any awakening among them? Truly, if there be, as in Ezekiel's vision, any stir among "the dry bones," whether they be those of Jews or Gentiles, or of persons bearing the Christian name, it would fill our souls with gratitude, and our lips with praise.

***~~Let us now improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. In a way of inquiry—~~***

What is the state of God's work among you? "The door of faith," as you well know, "has been long opened to you." Have you entered in? Or, are you yet but on the threshold, or perhaps yet standing afar off? Think with yourselves: have you truly come to Christ, and believed in Christ as the only Savior of your souls? And, supposing you to have entered the vestibule of God's temple, have you advanced into the sanctuary? We read of those "whose faith and love grew exceedingly;" and so should yours grow: nor should you ever cease to press forward, until you are come into the holy of holies, even into the immediate presence of your God.

***~~2. In a way of information—~~***

God's work, I trust, is really going forward in the world. And this at least I can say, that, whether we have labored and suffered for the Lord, or only followed with our prayers those who have labored, we have no cause to complain that we have either labored in vain, or prayed in vain.

***~~3. In a way of excitement—~~***

All of us have a work to do; a work to which God himself has called us, and to which at the baptismal font we were set apart. Let me ask, then, whether we have engaged heartily in it? and whether, if we were called to give an account of it at this moment, we could say, "Father, I have finished the work which you have given me to do!" Know assuredly, that the whole Church will speedily be convened before the Judge of the living and the dead: and "then must every one of us give account of himself to God." Say, brethren, whether, if called to that account, we would now "give it up with joy," or whether it would be "given up with grief." Let us think, also, what account we shall give of the efforts we have made in behalf of others. Have we "minded, not our own things only, but the things of others also?" Have we ourselves labored, or have we, with prayer and fasting, co-operated, to the utmost of our power, with those who have gone forth to labor, in the cause of God? Do not think that this was the duty of the primitive Christians only: it is no less ours than it was theirs. The cause of God ought to be dear to us; and the souls of our fellow-sinners should be precious in our eyes. Our charity, indeed, must begin at home: but it must not end there: it should be extended to the whole world: nor should we relax our efforts for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, until "all the kingdoms of the world shall have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ!"

***~~#1783~~***

***~~THE QUESTION ABOUT THE OBLIGATION OF THE CEREMONIAL LAW DECIDED~~***

**[Acts 15:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.10-11).**

"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

IT is a favorite idea with many, that the Gospels contain all that is needful for us to know, and that it would have been better for the Church if they only had been given to us. But this is indeed to make ourselves wiser than God: for if God had not judged that the other parts of the New Testament would be useful to his Church, he would not have inspired men to write them, nor would he have preserved them for us with such peculiar care.

We acknowledge that in the Gospels there are intimations of everything which we need to know: but will anyone say, that in the other parts of the New Testament there are not clearer explanations of them, or that the Gospels are not rendered far more intelligible by the light reflected upon them in the Epistles? Will anyone say, that the purposes of God towards his Church, in the call of the Gentiles, the rejection of the Jews, and the future union of both Jews and Gentiles under one Head, are not more fully understood, than they would have been if the Acts of the Apostles had not been recorded? Or that the relationship between the law and the Gospel would have been so manifest, if it had not been pointed out to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? We have now the advantage of knowing what objections were urged against the Gospel, and how those objections were obviated.

To go no further than the passage before us: There was a controversy which agitated the whole Christian Church, insomuch that not all the authority of Barnabas or Paul were able to settle it: and a reference was made to the whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem for their decision of the point. That we may have a just view of it, we shall consider,

***~~I. The subject in dispute—~~***

The question was, *Whether the Jewish law was obligatory on the Gentiles?*

This I say, was the original question; but it involved much more, even the whole plan of the Gospel salvation.

Many insisted that circumcision, verse 1, and the observance of the whole Mosaic law, verse 5, were necessary to salvation. They contended that these were of Divine institution; that the observance of them constituted the grand line of distinction between the Lord's people, and all the rest of mankind; and that the severest judgments were threatened for a willful neglect of them: and consequently, that they must be obligatory on the Lord's people to the end of time. (It must be remembered that the advocates of these opinions were not Jews, but Jewish Christians.)

On the other hand, it was maintained, that these laws were never imposed with a view to men's justification by them; (for that Abraham was justified before even circumcision itself was ordained, [Romans 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.10-11))—that to require the observance of them from the Gentiles was contrary to God's avowed design; (since he had manifested his acceptance of them in their uncircumcised state, precisely in the same way as he had of the Jews who were circumcised, [Acts 11:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.15-18))—that it was impossible for any man to be justified by the observance of them; (since one single deviation from them would utterly condemn him, [James 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.10))—and that to blend the observance of them with the merits of Christ as a joint ground of our hope, was to invalidate the whole Gospel, and to make Christ himself of no effect to us [Romans 9:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-32).

***~~A question precisely similar is agitated among us at this day—~~***

Circumcision and the Jewish law are indeed, by common consent, rejected by us. But many among us proceed on the very same principle as those Judaizing Christians did, and make *works*, either ceremonial or moral, the ground of their hope before God.

Some, and some of great name, have gone so far as to assert, that the very act of *baptism*saves us. Truly, if such sentiments were not expressed in terms which cannot be mistaken, we would think it a libel to impute them to any man who calls himself a Christian, and much more to any one who would make his sentiments in theology a standard for the Church of Christ. It seems incredible that such Jewish blindness would exist at this day in the Christian Church.

***~~Others, even the great mass of nominal Christians, imagine that the attending of the house of God and the Lord's supper, together with common honesty, is sufficient to procure us acceptance with God; or that, if a little more be lacking, the merits of Christ will turn the scale.~~***

Others, who come nearer to the Judaizing Christians of old, maintain, that though our hope is certainly in the Lord Jesus Christ—yet some works of ours are necessary to make his merits effectual for our salvation. This is a principle so generally avowed, that to controvert it would be called by many a heresy.

But (not to notice the two former opinions, which need only to be stated, and they will carry their own condemnation along with them,) this more specious principle is in reality founded on an ignorance of both Law and Gospel. For,

**1.** The moral law was not, any more than the ceremonial, given with a view to *justify*men: it was given rather to *condemn*them, and, as a ministration of death, to shut them up that they might receive life by the Gospel, [2 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.7); [2 Corinthians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9). [Galatians 3:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.21-24).

**2.** It is impossible that any man can be saved by his obedience to the law, because *the law requires perfect obedience*; which never has been, nor ever can be, rendered to it by fallen man, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10).

**3.** To blend our obedience to the law with the merits of Christ, is to establish a ground for boasting; which it is the main scope and tendency of the Gospel to destroy, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27). [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-9).

**4.** Such a union of our works with the faith of Christ is declared to be an utter "subversion of men's souls, verse 24," and a superseding of all that Christ has done or suffered for us, [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-4).

Here then the question, whether as debated formerly, or as existing at this hour, is fairly stated.

We now come to,

***~~II. The apostolic decision of it—~~***

And here we will view,

***~~1. The Apostle Peter's judgment respecting it—~~***

After the point had been long debated, Peter rose to give his opinion. His argument was extremely plain and simple. He reminded the Church, that the Lord Jesus had given to him the keys of the Gospel kingdom, and had commissioned him to open that kingdom both to Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews he had opened it on the day of Pentecost; and to the Gentiles about six years afterwards, when he preached to Cornelius and his friends: and on both occasions God had given the same testimony of his acceptance to the people, pouring out upon the uncircumcised Gentiles, precisely as he had done on the circumcised Jews, his Holy Spirit, both in his miraculous and sanctifying operations. Compare [Acts 11:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.15-18) with verse 7-9. From hence he inferred, that God had unequivocally declared his mind and will, and had shown, beyond all controversy, that in his eyes "neither circumcision was anything, nor uncircumcision was anything; but faith, that works by love," was all that he required. To require therefore from the Gentiles an observance of the Mosaic law was to "tempt God, and to put on their necks a yoke," which God had never intended to impose.

Having stated thus the grounds of his judgment, he proceeded to give, what we may call, his confession of faith. He viewed salvation as a free gift of God to man, for the sake, and through the merits, of the Lord Jesus Christ. This salvation he regarded as wholly gratuitous in all its parts, and as equally so both to Jews and Gentiles: to the Jews it was not given because they were circumcised: nor would it be withheld from the Gentiles because they were uncircumcised: both to the one and the other it would be freely given, the very instant they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Compare the text with [Romans 3:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.29-30). No good works were required to merit it; nor was anything required to make the merits of Christ more effectual: it was given freely, without money and without price; and from first to last must be wholly of grace.

***~~2. The sentence of the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem—~~***

After Peter's sentiments were delivered, Paul and Barnabas confirmed his argument, by stating what God had done among the Gentiles by them; and, by thus uniting their testimony to his, they convinced at once the whole assembly. James, who appears to have presided in the council, drew up the sentence in which the whole Church concurred. He appealed to Peter's, testimony, as exactly according with the words of prophecy: and then declared that no such yoke was to be imposed on the converted Gentiles.

There were indeed some things which, under existing circumstances, it would be necessary for the *Gentiles*to forbear. They in their unconverted state had not merely regarded fornication as lawful, but had actually practiced it in their idolatrous worship: they must therefore be especially on their guard against this, not only because it was sinful in itself, and therefore to be shunned by all, but because any approaches towards it would appear like a return to their former idolatry.

On the other hand, there were some things forbidden to the *Jews*, such as "eating of things offered to idols, or things strangled, or the blood" of any animal; and it was necessary that the Gentiles would abstain from these things, lest they would put a stumbling-block in the way of the Jews, or cause disunion in the Church.

But, as to their submitting to any rites, or their performing of any works, in order to obtain justification by them, no such thing was required, nor ought any such thing to be required: for, in fact, the requiring of them would only "subvert their souls," and ruin them for ever.

Now this decision goes to the whole question as it now exists: for, if the performing of any act in order to obtain salvation by it, either in whole or in part, was unlawful then, it is unlawful now; and if it would subvert their souls, it will equally subvert and destroy ours, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6). [Galatians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16).

***~~We shall conclude with,~~***

***~~1. Some cautions respecting yourselves—~~***

In maintaining this doctrine, there are two cautions especially to be attended to: the one is, that you do not abuse it; and the other, that you do not ever lose sight of it.

**Do not abuse it.** If, by an indiscreet statement of it, you give reason to think that you despise morality, you will do incalculable injury to the souls of men. On the one hand, *we must never be afraid to assert the doctrine of salvation by faith alone*: but, on the other hand, *we must show the necessity of good works as fruits and evidences of our faith, and must declare in the strongest terms, that an unproductive faith is no better than "the faith of devils*,[James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19-20)."

We have only to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure of a building. Everyone can see that they are both necessary, though not necessary for the same ends: so they may see that both faith and works are necessary, though for different ends: both are good in their proper place: but they are good only for the ends and purposes for which they are required, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11).

**Do not ever lose sight of it.** We see how even Peter himself was, not long after this, turned from the principles he had so firmly maintained, [Galatians 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.11-14). So there is in us an astonishing tendency to lean to legal views, and self-righteous principles. Remember how jealous Paul was on this subject, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9); and "stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made you free, [Galatians 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.1)."

***~~2. Some directions respecting others—~~***

As the opposers of our principles are apt to be intolerant towards us, so it sometimes is found that we speak too contemptuously of them. Now it is certain, that many who have an sincere zeal for God, have very imperfect views of this subject, [Romans 10:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2-3); and they ought to be regarded by us with love, and be treated by us with the greatest tenderness. See how the whole Church met together to deliberate on this point for the satisfaction of their weaker brethren: and should not we exercise forbearance towards them, and labor with patience to lead them to clearer views of the subject? If God has given you a more just conception of this great mystery, be thankful for it; but make use of your knowledge, not for the indulgence of vain conceit, but for the edification of men, and the glory of God.

And while you seek the benefit of your fellow-Christians, do not forget your elder brethren, the Jews. "They have been broken off from their own stock on account of their unbelief; and we have been engrafted in upon it:" remember them with pity, and strive by all possible means to promote their welfare. You see that the blending of their law with the Gospel was destructive to those among them who embraced Christianity. What then must be the state of those who reject Christianity altogether, and have no hope but in their law, which yet it is impossible for them, under their present circumstances, to obey? It is a shame to the Christian world, that we take so little pains to enlighten their minds, and to bring them to the knowledge of the truth.

Consider then with yourselves what can be done for them, and how you yourselves in your respective stations may contribute to their good. And pray to God, that he will bring them back to his fold, and unite them with us under one Head, that "through the whole world there may be but one Lord, and his name one, [Zechariah 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 14.9)."

***~~#1784~~***

***~~INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF THE CHURCH~~***

***~~[Acts 15:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.36).~~***

"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

IT is of the nature of divine grace to be always operative, and never to remit its exertions, while there is any good to be done. Under its superabundant influence, Paul and Barnabas were carried through all the labors and difficulties to which they had been expressly called by the Holy Spirit, and for which they had been set apart by the Church at Antioch, [Acts 13:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.2-3) with [Acts 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.26). But Paul, not content with having executed the work assigned him, desired to renew his labors, in order to the further advancement of it in all the Churches which he had planted: and for this end he proposed to Barnabas to go and visit all the Churches again, and see in what state they were: "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

We will,

***~~I. Consider this proposal, in reference to the Churches then formed—~~***

It is impossible not to admire the spirit by which it was dictated, or to withhold our approbation from the proposal itself. It was,

***~~1. A desirable proposal—~~***

Churches, like plantations in the natural world, are liable to great variations: they may thrive and flourish, or they may be blighted and wither. If we examine all the Churches founded by the Apostles, we shall find that in some there were abuses, in others errors, in others divisions; and in all there were many things which needed to be checked by apostolic wisdom, and to be rectified by apostolic authority.

But in Churches planted by these two Apostles, it might well be expected, that they would possess peculiar influence; because, in addition to the respect with which they would be regarded as Apostles of Christ, they would be considered by every one as standing to him in the relation of a father: and hence there would be in all places a ready acquiescence in their wishes, and a willing obedience to their injunctions. This was the effect which the Apostle expected to be produced at Corinth, when he said, "I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills; and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power, [1 Corinthians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.19);" and again, "The rest will I set in order when I come, [1 Corinthians 11:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.34)."

Such, we doubt not, was the original design of episcopal visitations: and, if this great end were kept more in view, we have reason to think that the greatest possible good would result from them: what inquiries would be made as to the spiritual state of the different churches, and the effects produced by the ministry of the word, in awakening the careless, in comforting the afflicted, in sanctifying the corrupt.

***~~2. A benevolent proposal—~~***

This was not a proposal for an excursion of pleasure, but for a service of great difficulty and danger. Conspiracies were often formed against their lives; and at one place Paul had been stoned, and left for dead, [Acts 14:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.5-6); [Acts 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.19). In this respect Paul trod in the steps of his Divine Master, who, to the utter amazement of his disciples, proposed to go up again to Judea, where his adversaries had just before sought to stone him, [John 11:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.7-8). Like him he "counted not his life dear unto him, so that he might but fulfill the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus." "He willingly endured all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Even where his labors were less acceptable, he willingly devoted himself to the service of his fellow-creatures, and would "gladly spend, and be spent, for them; though the more abundantly he loved them, the less he were loved."

O that such benevolence were more common in the Church! O that every minister could appeal unto God, "how greatly he longed after his people with the affections of Christ," and even "travailed in birth with them, as it were, again and again, until Christ would be manifestly formed in them, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19)."

***~~3. A beneficial proposal—~~***

Unhappily the proposal was an occasion of a very fierce contention between the two apostles. Not that Barnabas was less delighted to accept the proposal, than Paul was to make it: but Barnabas wished "to take John with them, whose surname was Mark;" which Paul could never consent to do. Mark had accompanied them for some time in their former journey; but had forsaken them when he found that their work was attended with so much difficulty and danger: and on this account Paul thought him unfit for the labor, and unworthy of the honor of attending them again, [Acts 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.2); [Acts 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.5); [Acts 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.13) with [Acts 15:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.38). In this matter neither of the Apostles would give way; so that they separated from each other, and, as far as we know, never saw each other again in this world, [Acts 15:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.39).

To decide between the two, where God himself has not decided, is difficult: yet we apprehend that Barnabas was the more blameable of the two; first, because he seems to have been too much actuated by partiality for his nephew, [Colossians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.10); and next, because the Church at Antioch appear to have sided with the Apostle Paul; "commending him with renewed earnestness to the grace of God," while Barnabas was allowed to depart without any such expressions of their regard, [Acts 15:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.40).

Still it seems as if Paul himself was not wholly blameless, in allowing the contention to rise to such a pitch; when, if he had proposed to refer the matter to God with solemn fasting and prayer, we can have no doubt but that God would have made known to them his will respecting it.

The separation however was overruled for good: for Paul went with Silas, and Barnabas with Mark, each to his native country, [Acts 4:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.36); [Acts 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.29), where they hoped to labor with most effect; and thus "confirmed and established more Churches, [Acts 15:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.41) and [Acts 16:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.5)," than they could have done, if they had executed the plan that was at first proposed.

We will now endeavor to,

***~~II. Fulfill the design in reference to the Church here present—~~***

The design of their projected journey was, to inquire into the state of the different Churches which they had planted: "Let us go and see how they do." Now if such an inquiry was necessary among the apostolic Churches, doubtless it cannot be superfluous among us. We will direct our inquiry then,

***~~1. Generally, to the Church at large—~~***

We are called a Christian Church: but are there not many among us who have no more of Christianity than the name? In the Church of Philadelphia there were some who "said they were Jews, and were not, but lied, [Revelation 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.9);" and so it is among us: there are many who "name the name of Christ," without ever once endeavoring "to depart from iniquity," or truly to give up themselves to him as his disciples.

But, to speak rather of those who profess a love for the Gospel, and who therefore more resemble the primitive Church; are there not many who "have a name that they live, and yet are dead;" or, at least, "the gracious dispositions that remain in them are so weak, that they are ready to die, [Revelation 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1-2)." Are there not many who "have left their first love, [Revelation 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.4)," and are relapsed into such a lukewarm state, (neither cold nor hot,) that they are as hateful to God as if they made no profession at all, [Revelation 3:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.15-16). And are there not many also of whom it must be said, that "their works are not perfect before God, [Revelation 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.2);" and that, instead of having "their last works more than their first, [Revelation 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.19)," they have lost much of their spirituality and devotion to God?

Truly, if we were to address you all, as John did Gaius, and "wish your bodies to be in health, and prosper as your souls prosper," we fear that we would be wishing the greater part of you either sick or dead, [3 John 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/3 John 1.2).

***~~2. Particularly, to different classes of Christians in the Church—~~***

John divides the members of Christ's mystical body into three classes, "little children, young men, and fathers."

We ask then of the "little children," in what state are you? Are you "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?" and, in order to the promotion of that growth, are you "desiring and delighting in the sincere milk of the word? [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)." Are you sensible of your weakness and sinfulness; and looking to the Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse you daily in his blood, and to uphold you by his Spirit? And are you so diligent in every good work, as to "make your profiting appear unto all?"

To the *young men*, of whom it is said that "the word of God abides in them, and that they overcome the wicked one, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14)," we next address ourselves: Do you indeed find that "the word of Christ dwells richly in you in all wisdom?" that the *precepts*are your guide, and the *promises*your support? Do you go forth with that "word as the sword of the Spirit," to fight with all your spiritual enemies?*Do you show from day to day, that you are gaining fresh victories over the flesh and all its lusts, the world and all its vanities, and the devil and all his temptations?*

If there are any among us who, on account of their long standing and their high attainments in the divine life, are worthy of the name of *fathers*, we would ask of them, are you increasingly growing in an acquaintance with God, so as to "walk with him," like Enoch? and are you "forgetting all that you have attained, and reaching forth to still higher attainments, and pressing forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"

Let all of every class search and try themselves, that they may know what answer to give to such inquiries as these. The great High-Priest walks among the seven golden candlesticks, and observes infallibly the state of every lamp, whether it is burning dimly, or its light is bright, [Revelation 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.14); [Revelation 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.20); and to every one will he give according to his state before God, [Revelation 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.23). Let this inquiry then lead you all to diligent examination, and redoubled earnestness in the ways of God: for "we have no greater joy, than that our children walk in truth! [3 John 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/3 John 1.4);" and "then we live, if you stand fast in the Lord! 1 Thessalonians 3:8."

***~~#1785~~***

***~~THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA~~***

***~~[Acts 16:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14-15).~~***

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

IN preaching the Gospel to mankind, every minister will not be alike successful; though every one may expect such a measure of success, as shall be a testimony from God to the truth of his declarations, and a seal to the commission with which he has been charged, [Jeremiah 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.22). More especially may we hope to convert sinners unto God, if we are attentive to the calls of his providence, respecting the proper sphere of our labors. We may, like the Apostles, spread our net wide, and "toil all the night, and catch nothing:" but, if our Lord instructs us where to cast the net, we may hope to enclose a multitude of fish.

The commission given to the Apostles was, to "go and preach the Gospel to every creature:" yet there were particular places to which, at particular times, their attention was more especially directed. Paul, after going through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, would have gone into Asia and Bithynia; but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go there, verse 6, 7; and was instructed by a vision to go over rather into Macedonia verse 9, 10. There therefore he went; and there he met with the woman of whom our text speaks; and was the happy instrument of saving her soul alive.

Her name, her occupation, her character, and the place of her nativity, are all distinctly noticed: she was called "Lydia;" and was of the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple clothes; and a worshiper of the true God. We forbear, however, to dwell on these circumstances, in order that we may consider more fully the *means*and *evidences*of her conversion—

***~~I. The means of her conversion—~~***

Lydia was, by nature, like all the rest of mankind: her heart was shut against the truths of the Gospel: nor could she either receive or know them, because she possessed not a spiritual discernment. But the Lord "knocked, as it were, at the door" of her heart, and constrained her to open to him: he fixed her attention to the subject which Paul insisted on; gave her an insight into it; inclined her cordially to embrace the truth; and thus "subdued her to the obedience of faith."

***~~Now this is the way in which the work of conversion is always effected—~~***

We do not say that every person is wrought upon as suddenly as she was; or that there are not many subordinate points in which the conversion of others may differ from hers: but we are sure:  
that *every natural man is blind to the Gospel of Christ*, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14);  
that *both the sublimity of its doctrines and the purity of its precepts is offensive to him*;  
that an*effort of omnipotence also is exerted to overcome the reluctance of his soul*;  
and that, *until that influence is felt, he will hold fast to his delusions*, "confounding good and evil, sweet and bitter, light and darkness."

***~~Nor can it be effected by any other means whatever—~~***

*If good dispositions would effect it, or if human eloquence could effect it, she might have been converted without any such exercise of the Divine power*; seeing that she was already "a worshiper" of the true God, and had Paul for her instructor. But we are expressly told, that *the work of conversion depends not on any such circumstances, but that it is altogether the effect of a divine operation on the soul*, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13).

The disciples, who had the peculiar advantage of our Lord's instructions for above three years together, and that in private as well as in public, could not understand the most important parts of Scripture, until "he opened their understandings, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)."

In like manner, there is yet a veil on the hearts of men while they read and hear the Scriptures; nor can any but God remove it, 2 Corinthians 3:13-16. Hence it is plainly declared by our Lord himself, that "no man can come unto him, unless he is drawn of the Father, [John 6:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.44-45)." However humiliating therefore the truth may be, we are constrained to say, in relation to every man that is converted, that the work "is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy! [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16)."

That a great and effectual work was wrought upon her will appear, while we consider,

***~~II. The evidences of her conversion—~~***

Here we are called to notice,

***~~1. Her public profession of faith in Christ—~~***

She was not ashamed to acknowledge the conviction that had been wrought on her mind; nor was she afraid to confess her faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly, she was, together with all her household, baptized immediately, in token that she had embraced the Christian covenant, and was become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This, it is true, was not a decisive proof of sound conversion; because some submitted to the rite of baptism who had not received the grace of God in truth, [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13); but it was a strong presumptive evidence of her sincerity, inasmuch as it exposed her to all the obloquy and persecution, which were the common lot of Christians at that day. The insincere were deterred by these considerations from acting according to the dictates of their conscience, [John 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42-43); but the upright uniformly and universally complied with them.

In this, her example deserves particular attention: for we are to maintain the same fidelity as she did, and to show, by the whole of our conduct, whose we are, and whom we have engaged to serve, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10).

***~~2. Her zealous attachment to the cause of Christ—~~***

She felt an ardent love towards him who had been the *instrument*of her conversion; and a most sincere desire to glorify her God, to whose grace alone she was indebted for all the blessings she had received. Hence she desired, and urged the Apostles, if they accounted her sincere, to come and take up their abode under her roof. This was attended, not only with expense, but with considerable danger too, [Acts 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.22); [Acts 17:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.6-9); but she had counted the cost in every way, and was well content to pay it.

This was an excellent evidence in her favor: for this kind of love is particularly specified by God himself as one of those "things which accompany salvation, [Hebrews 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9-10);" and in a very eminent degree it may be considered as "fulfilling the law of Christ, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2); [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10)." Respecting the exercise of such dispositions under the Christian dispensation, and the consecration of all our wealth to the service of our God, the Prophet Isaiah spoke repeatedly, [Isaiah 23:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 23.18); [Isaiah 60:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.9); and *wherever the grace of God reigns in the heart, it will produce these effects in the life and conduct*, [2 Corinthians 8:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.7-8).

***~~We shall conclude this subject with some reflections naturally arising from it:~~***

***~~1. How necessary is the Lord's working in preaching!~~***

Of all the women who heard the Apostle at that time, we hear only of *one*who gave due attention to the things that were spoken by him: and the source of the difference between her and the others was, that "the Lord opened her heart." To the Lord's working must we trace all the good that is done by the ministration of the Gospel, [Isaiah 53:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.1). [Acts 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.21). [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5). Whoever may be the preacher, God alone is the author of the blessing, [2 Corinthians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.6-7).

***~~2. How great are the obligations of those whose eyes are opened!~~***

Consider the change wrought on her at the time, and the effect of it on her everlasting state—what cause had she to adore and magnify the grace of God! So it is with all who are made *monuments of Divine grace*—they are indeed "brands plucked out of the burning;" and to all eternity must they ascribe their happiness, not to themselves, but unto Him who "chose them from before the foundation of the world," and gave them to his dear Son, to be the trophies of his redeeming love! [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16). [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16). [Ephesians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-6).

***~~3. How anxious should we be to adorn the doctrine we have received!~~***

Lydia sought this honor of Christian hospitality and fellowship with great earnestness; yes, she accounted it an honor and a joy. Thus it was with the Christians in the Churches of Macedonia, [2 Corinthians 8:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.1-4); and thus should it be with us also. We should long and pant after opportunities of honoring our God: we should value nothing any further than it may be subservient to that end: we should account ourselves, and all that we possess, as the Lord's property, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20); and we would make it the one labor of our lives to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his!"

***~~#1786~~***

***~~A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION CAST OUT~~***

***~~[Acts 16:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.16-18).~~***

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

IT has been thought by many, that all which the Scriptures speak respecting the possession of men by Satan, is merely figurative; and that the effects ascribed to such possessions must be referred to other causes. Accordingly, the expulsion of evil spirits from men by Jesus Christ is considered by them as only a cure of some particular disorders. But, if there are some passages which may possibly admit of such an interpretation, there are others that cannot be so explained. The damsel of whom our text speaks, is represented as having "a spirit of divination;" which, according to the opinion of the fore-mentioned persons, was a mere fiction only, to impose upon the credulity of the weak. Her artifice is regarded as nothing more than a conspiracy between her and her masters to deceive the world by juggling and imposture. But, if this was the case, how could the command given by Paul to the spirit that was in her, prevent her from practicing the same deceits in the future! Yet it did dispossess her of talents with which she had before been endowed, and deprived her masters of all hope of further gain from the exercise of those talents, verse 19. This is a clear proof, that she had really been possessed by an evil spirit; and that that spirit had imparted to her powers, different from any that are common to the rest of mankind.

Without stopping to enter into the general question of Satanic possessions, which we consider as sufficiently determined by the fact recorded in our text, we shall confine our attention to the account here given of the damsel that was possessed; and shall notice,

***~~I. The testimony she bore respecting them—~~***

In considering her testimony, we notice,

***~~1. The design of it—~~***

We doubt not but that it was intended to bring the Apostles into disrepute, and to induce a suspicion that they were in confederacy with the devil. This was a scheme which Satan had long before practiced in relation to our Lord himself, who, knowing his subtle intentions, repeatedly interposed with authority to prevent his further exercise of this device, [Luke 4:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.33-35); [Luke 4:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.41).

***~~2. The substance was perfectly correct—~~***

The testimony itself; the Apostles were "the servants of the Most High God;" and their one employment was, "to show unto men the way of salvation." The same is true also respecting us: for though we are not called precisely in the same way as the Apostles were, nor have we precisely the same commission given to us—yet we are truly "servants of God," sent by him, as his ambassadors, to bring men into a state of reconciliation with him; and we trust that, as it is our office, so it is our delight, "to show unto men the way of salvation."

"We come, preaching peace by Jesus Christ." We declare that "Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; and that no man comes unto the Father but by him." On the other hand, we declare, that God "will cast out none who come to him" in that way; and that "Christ will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him!"

However gratifying we might suppose such a testimony to be, it was far from being acceptable to the Apostles; as we see by,

***~~II. The conduct they observed respecting her—~~***

***~~1. For many days they waited, to see what God might do by her means: but at last they commiserated her state—~~***

Paul was "grieved" at her, as well he might be: for, while she was bearing this testimony from day to day, she sought not the way of salvation for her own soul, and obstructed, rather than promoted, the salvation of others.

And have not we similar cause for grief on account of multitudes around us? Yes truly. There are many who espouse the cause of faithful ministers, and profess to believe the truths they preach, while yet they are altogether slaves of sin and Satan! Now such are greatly to be pitied, both on account of the state of their own souls, and on account of the injury they do to the souls of others. As it respects themselves, their knowledge only aggravates their guilt, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19); and their casting a stumbling-block before others involves them in a heavier condemnation, [Matthew 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.7).

***~~2. They exerted themselves for her relief—~~***

Being endued with the power of working miracles, they commanded the evil spirit to come out of her: and that command, issued as it was in the name of Jesus Christ, instantly liberated her from her sore bondage.

To effect similar wonders is not in our power: but yet we are authorized to declare to men how they may obtain a similar deliverance. A believing application to Jesus will bring Omnipotence to their aid: and "the strong man armed" can no longer retain possession of their souls, when "the stronger than he," even the Lord Jesus Christ, comes forth to cast him out!

*Are there any then among you who know the truths of the Gospel without experiencing their sanctifying and saving efficacy?*Cry mightily to the Lord; and he will work effectually in your behalf: yes, he will make use of the words which you now hear, to "turn you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God".

***~~Now this subject opens the way to some important distinctions—~~***

Let us learn from hence,

***~~1. To distinguish between the advocates of the Gospel, and the Gospel itself—~~***

If any were hardened in their infidelity by means of that damsel, they were exceeding blameable; for her testimony did not at all affect either the persons respecting whom it was borne, or the Gospel itself. The adversaries of the Gospel are very fond of referring to the characters of its advocates; and if they can find that any of its professors have dishonored it by their conduct, they will bring that as an argument against the Gospel itself.

But was Jesus an impostor, because demoniacs confessed him to be the Christ? Were the Apostles less to be regarded as servants of the Most High God, because this damsel, by Satanic agency, bore testimony to them under that character? Or was the path, which they pointed out to men as the way of salvation, less worthy to be trodden, because it received her sanction?

So then, neither is the Gospel less worthy of acceptance because some dishonor it by their conduct; nor are we the more to be considered as deceivers, because there may be among our hearers some who "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The Gospel is wholly independent both of those who preach it and those who profess it: we call upon you therefore to receive it with all humility of mind. Whatever be the character of its advocates or its opponents, it declares the only way in which a sinner can be saved: and to those who cordially embrace it, it shall be the power of God unto salvation.

***~~2. To distinguish between an approbation of the Gospel, and the actual experience of it in our own souls—~~***

Men, if they change their sentiments, and especially if they show an attachment to the truths of the Gospel, are apt to think that they are truly converted unto God. But conversion is a change of heart, and not of sentiment only: it is "a renewing in the spirit of our mind." Let us inquire then, not merely whether we are "turned from darkness unto light," but whether we are "turned from the power of Satan unto God."*If we are still habitually under the power of Satan in anything, we have no part nor lot in Gospel salvation*. Let us then search and try our hearts; and beg of God also to search and try us, lest we deceive our own souls, and perish in our sins.

True it is, that if we receive the Gospel aright, we shall, like Lydia, show a cordial attachment to those who are sent by God to dispense it to us: but we shall delight also in the commandments of our God; we shall live near to God in the constant exercise of prayer and praise; we shall grow up into his image, and be advancing from day to day in righteousness and true holiness.

See to it then, brethren, that you have these evidences of conversion; for "then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all God's commandments."

***~~#1787~~***

***~~THE CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR~~***

***~~[Acts 16:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.29-31).~~***

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.

VARIOUS are the ways in which God effects the conversion of sinners to himself. Some he draws by the attractive influences of his Spirit; causing his word to distill as dew upon their souls, and imperceptibly, as it were, opening their understandings (as he did Lydia's, verse 14), and inclining their hearts to embrace his truth. With others he deals rather in a way of fear and terror; filling them with compunction (as he did the converts on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37)), and awakening them from their security by some solemn dispensation of his providence.

It was thus that he impressed the savage mind of the jailor, whose conversion we are about to consider. By an earthquake at midnight, (an earthquake that shook the very foundations of the prison, and opened all its doors,) he first rendered him sensible of his guilt and danger, and stimulated him to make the inquiries, which terminated in the conversion and salvation of his soul.

The jailor's inquiry, and the answer given to it, will form the natural division of our text.

***~~I. The jailor's inquiry—~~***

In this there are two things worthy of particular attention:

***~~1. The importance of it—~~***

There is no other concern in this world of so great, or so universal, importance. The inquiring, "What we shall eat, or drink, or be clothed with," is certainly necessary in this present state of existence: but those things are not worth a thought, in comparison with the salvation of the soul, [Matthew 6:31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.31-33). *The soul! Heaven! Hell! Eternity! What weighty considerations!*

Nor is there any human being who needs not this inquiry. All are sinners; and, as sinners, condemned: all therefore have reason to dread the wrath of God, and to ask how they may obtain mercy at his hands. Youth, learning, riches, do not at all supersede the necessity of this inquiry: all are liable to be summoned, at any moment, into the presence of their God, who is no respecter of persons, but will judge every man according to his works. Those who have embraced the salvation offered by him in the Gospel, will be saved by him: those who have slighted and neglected it, whatever be their rank or condition in life, will eternally perish.

***~~2. The manner in which it was made—~~***

Here we see a sincerity suited to the object inquired offer, and a determination of heart to follow any directions which these servants of God would give him. He did not, like Pilate, ask with indifference, "What is truth? [John 18:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.38)," and then go away without waiting for an answer: nor did he, like the Jews at Rome, ask in a mere speculative or inquisitive manner, "We desire to hear of you what you think, [Acts 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.22)."

It was with him a personal concern; a matter of the greatest importance. He had no disposition to cavil or dispute: but an ardent desire to know how he might obtain mercy at the hands of his offended God. They needed only to point out to him the way of life, and he was ready without hesitation to use the means prescribed, however difficult the task might be, or whatever sacrifices he might be called to make in the pursuit of this great object.

And now let us see what was,

***~~II. The answer given him—~~***

Behold,

***~~1. Its simplicity—~~***

Men, by cavils and disputes, have thrown obscurity over the plainest of all truths. To the proud and self-sufficient, the faith of the Gospel is made a stumbling-block: but to the humble and contrite, the light of the meridian sun is not more clear. Here are no conditions imposed, no limitations fixed. It is not said, "If you will do so many good works, Jesus Christ will accept you:" but simply, "Believe in him!" believe that he has died to save sinners; believe, that by the blood of his cross he has made reconciliation for you with God, and that he will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." Do not think to purchase the Divine favor by anything of your own, but seek it as the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

"Look" to Christ, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; and "wash" in the fountain of his blood, as Naaman did in the streams of Jordan: then shall you "be healed" from your leprosy, and "be saved" from the deadly wounds of sin! Yes, *you*, notwithstanding the treatment you have shown to us, his servants, and notwithstanding you have never thought of salvation until this moment of terror and alarm, even *you*shall surely, shall instantly, be saved by him—if only you trust in him with your whole heart. What beautiful simplicity is there in this way of salvation!

***~~2. Its efficacy—~~***

"Sharper than a two-edged sword was the word" spoken by Paul and Silas. As it suited the jailor's case, so it reached his heart, and proved "the power of God to the salvation of his soul." It instantly turned his sorrow into joy, verse 34. He was enabled to see the freeness, the suitableness, the sufficiency of the Gospel salvation, and to trust with confidence in the promises made to him in Christ Jesus. Thus were his fears dissipated, and his terrors changed into exultation and triumph!

It also with no less rapidity, changed and renewed his soul. But a few hours before, he had with unrelenting cruelty executed the commission which he had received from the persecuting magistrates; "thrusting these divine messengers into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks." But now "he took them into his own house, and washed their stripes, and set food before them." Yes, "the very same hour of the night" did he thus evince the truth of his conversion. Finally, it caused him, without hesitation, to become a determined follower of Christ. Though he saw what he was likely to suffer for the truth's sake, he did "not consult with flesh and blood," or temporize at all; but immediately, with all his household, devoted himself to God in baptism, and avowed himself a friend of this persecuted religion.

Surely the wonder-working rod of Moses did not more clearly display the power of God when it divided the Red Sea, or brought water from the rock—than this simple declaration did in the change it wrought on this ferocious jailor.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To the secure—~~***

When do you intend to begin this inquiry? Is it a fit employment for a dying hour? Will the consciousness of having neglected it excite no fears when you are just entering on eternity, or leave no room for regret when you stand at the judgment-seat of Christ? O that you were wise, and would consider your latter end!

***~~2. To the fearful—~~***

Some there are who make this inquiry, we trust, in sincerity—yet do not derive comfort from the Apostle's direction: they are so discouraged by a sense of their own unworthiness, that they are not able to lay hold on the promises of the Gospel: they are ready to think it would be presumption in them to expect mercy in so free a way. But, whatever have been their past state, they may come, yes, they must come to Christ in this way. If our unworthiness were a bar to our acceptance with God, who would ever be saved? But the fact is, that such persons do not see enough of their unworthiness; for if they did, they would immediately perceive that they must come to Christ, as the most unworthy of his creatures, or lie down in everlasting despair.

Dear brethren, do not indulge pride under the garb of humility; but be willing to come to Christ as you are. Only feel as the jailor did, and you need not fear but that you shall be accepted as readily as the jailor was.

***~~3. The believing—~~***

Doubtless some of you have been enabled to believe in Christ, and to found all your hopes on his sin-atoning sacrifice. Let me then say to you, that you must not consider the work of faith as done, but merely as begun, and as necessary to be carried on every day and hour. You must "live still from day to day by faith in the Son of God." At the same time, O let me remind you to "show forth your faith by your works." You see how the jailor honored God, by a cordial acquiescence in the terms proposed, a bold confession of the crucified Jesus, a thorough change both of heart and life, and a joyful expectation that not a tittle of God's word would fail. Go on thus, trusting in God with all your hearts, and glorifying God with all your souls!

***~~#1788~~***

***~~PROOFS THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH~~***

***~~[Acts 17:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.2-5).~~***

As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

THE dispersion of the Jews through every part of the Roman empire greatly facilitated the diffusion of the Gospel in the apostolic age: for in all the capital cities of the empire there were synagogues, to which the Apostles had access, and where on the Sabbath-days they were sure of meeting a large assembly of their countrymen. Of these advantages Paul invariably availed himself: for though he was "a minister of the uncircumcision," and was sent principally to the Gentiles—yet he in every place addressed himself in the first place to the Jews, and only turned to the Gentiles when the Jews had rejected the gracious tidings which he delivered to them. In discoursing with the Jews, he constantly appealed to the Holy Scriptures, which they themselves acknowledged to be of Divine authority; but, if in many instances he succeeded in convincing them, in many instances he failed.

In the passage which we have now read, we see,

***~~I. The means he used for the conversion of the Jews—~~***

Two things he labored to establish;

***~~1. That the Scriptures represented the Messiah as one who would die and rise again—~~***

To establish this, he adduced a multitude of passages which he knew to have been generally received, as descriptive of the Messiah. On other occasions we are informed what particular passages were cited: and from them we may guess what passages the Apostle insisted on at this time. He no doubt showed the Jews, that the death and resurrection of the Messiah were declared in the plainest prophecies, and shadowed forth in the most significant types.

In speaking of the prophecies, he might well appeal to that very first promise that was given to man, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); what could that mean, but that Satan was first to "bruise his heel," by bringing him down to the grave; and that Christ would afterwards, by his resurrection, "bruise his head," and destroy his empire in the world!

In the Psalm these truths are yet more plain and express. It was said that the potentates of the earth would combine to destroy him; but that he would be seated on God's holy hill of Zion; and, being exalted to the right hand of power, he would dash in pieces his enemies as a potter's vessel! [Psalm 2:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-9). Again, "His soul was not to be left in Hell, nor was this Holy One to see corruption, [Psalm 16:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.9-10)." Does not that clearly show that his soul was first to go into Hell, that is the place of departed spirits; that his body was to be consigned to the grave; and that he was afterwards to rise from the dead, and go into the presence of his Father, where there is a fullness of joy for evermore, [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11).

Again, his sufferings are, in the 22nd Psalm, minutely described, as preparatory to that exaltation which he was to receive, when "the kingdom would be his, and he would be the Governor among the nations, [Psalm 22:1-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.1-18); [Psalm 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.22); [Psalm 22:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 22.27-28)."

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of these things in as plain language as the New Testament itself. The Messiah, according to him, was to have his visage marred more than any man, previous to his sprinkling of many nations, and converting to himself the kings of the earth, [Isaiah 52:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14-15). See also 53:9-12.

Daniel also speaks to the same effect, saying, that the very Messiah, who was to possess an everlasting kingdom, must nevertheless be first "cut off," though not for himself, but for his people's sins, to make reconciliation for their iniquities, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14) with 9:24, 26.

Now the Apostle would ask: Are not these passages contained in your Scriptures? And have not the most pious and learned men of our own nation considered them as predictions relative to their Messiah? And do they not in that view prove indisputably, that Christ must die and rise again?

We may conceive him, then, as proceeding to the *types*, by which these things were shadowed forth.

What, he would say, meant the restoration of *Isaac*from the dead, but the restoration of God's only dear Son from the dead, after he had been offered a sacrifice for sin, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19).

What meant all the *Mosaic sacrifices*, and the carrying of their blood within the veil, but the shedding of Christ's blood, and his going afterwards, as our great High Priest, with his own blood, into the holy place not made with hands; himself being shadowed forth, both by the victim that was offered, and the priest that offered it, [Hebrews 9:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.7); [Hebrews 9:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.11-12).

What meant that peculiar offering, the *two birds*; of which one was killed, and the other, dipped in its blood, was let loose into the air, [Leviticus 14:49-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.49-53); or that of the *two goats*, whereof one was slain, and the other, with all the sins of Israel put upon its head, led into the wilderness, that it might never more be seen of men?

Were these of doubtful signification? Do they not prove clearly what the Messiah was to do and suffer; even that, for the accomplishment of our redemption, he must die, and rise again from the dead?

Did not *Jonah*too, that noted type of Christ, descend to the depths of the sea, before he was brought forth again on dry land?

Methinks he would dwell with delight on these unanswerable topics, and strive with all his might to fix conviction on their minds.

***~~2. That Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was the Messiah—~~***

That Jesus answered to all these predictions in his sufferings, they could not doubt. It was a matter of public notoriety, that he had been put to death, even the accursed death of the cross. His resurrection indeed the Jews did attempt to deny: but the Apostles, who had seen and conversed with him after his death, and were endued by him with a power of working miracles in confirmation of their word, attested, with one voice, that he was risen, and had ascended up to Heaven in their sight. This testimony they were ready to seal with their blood: and therefore they called upon all to believe in Jesus, as the person in whom the Scriptures had received their full accomplishment.

One might have hoped that all would have been convinced by such testimonies; but, alas! there was a great diversity in,

***~~II. The effects produced by them.~~***

***~~Some, we are told, believed—~~***

The word came to some of them "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." These united themselves to the Apostles, and boldly professed their faith in Christ. Among these there was "a great multitude of Grecian proselytes, (who were more open to conviction than the native Jews;) and "of the chief women also not a few." Who does not congratulate these happy converts on the change that then took place within them? Even in this world, their happiness was greatly augmented; but *what has been their state since they entered into the eternal world?*Who can reflect on that, and not rejoice on their account? or who must not wish that all who now heard the Gospel, might experience the same blessed effects upon their souls?

***~~Others opposed the truth with all their might—~~***

Here we see how "Christ came, not to give peace on earth, but rather division." As among his own hearers there were divisions, "some saying that he was a just man, and others, that he deceived the people;" so it was wherever his Gospel was preached by the Apostles; and so it is wherever it is preached at this day.

But who were his opponents? Who? They were "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." It is true that many of a different description were among the fiercest opposers of their doctrine; but the people here described were ever ready to lend themselves as instruments of persecution, and to carry into effect whatever the malice of their superiors would suggest. And such is the description of people who at this day are foremost in opposing the Gospel of Christ.

The most abandoned characters, people who neither fear God nor regard man, will unite together to disturb the worship of Christ, or to procure the intervention of the civil power to suppress it. Not that they will oppose the Gospel as good: no, they will decry it as evil: they will represent the preachers of it as "turning the world upside down," and as enemies to civil government. This has been the device of wicked men in all ages. Compare verse 7 with [Esther 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.8); and it is still the ground of accusation which they bring against the godly, wherever the Gospel is attended with success.

They are *envious*at the influence obtained by those who preach the Gospel, and at the happiness of those who embrace it; and therefore they labor to silence the one, and to turn aside the other. To effect their purposes, they raise "an uproar," and then represent the godly as the causes of that uproar: and endeavor to incense against them every one who may be able to obstruct their progress.

Let not such conduct then surprise us; for it was foretold, as soon as the Savior came into the world, that he would be a butt of contradiction, "a sign that would be spoken against," and that he would be "set, no less for the fall, than for the rising again, of many in Israel." Therefore we must expect to find, wherever he is exhibited in his true character, that he is a stumbling-block to those who will not flee to him as their sanctuary, [Isaiah 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.14) with [Luke 2:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34).

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. That the Scriptures are the only just standard of truth—~~***

It is curious to observe, how continually, and how confidently, the Apostles refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament.*"What does the Scripture say?" is the question to which they recur for the settlement of every difficulty and every dispute*, [Romans 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3); [Romans 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.2). [Galatians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.30). See also [Romans 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.17); [Romans 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11) and [1 Timothy 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.18). Happy it is for us that *we have a standard so plain, so accessible, so universally received*. Let us bring every sentiment to that test, and try it by that touchstone. "If men speak not according to the written word, there is no light in them, [Romans 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.20)."

***~~2. That the knowledge of Christ, as dying and rising again for us, is the one appointed means of salvation—~~***

It was with Jews that the Apostle argued: yet the Jews worshiped the only true God, and professed to reverence his holy law. But when the Gospel was fully preached, the Jew could no longer be saved by the observance of his own law: he must embrace the Gospel, and look to Christ as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Thus also must all act who bear the Christian name: they must not be contented with an outward conformity to the Gospel, but must embrace it as "all their salvation and all their desire." As for the opposition that is made to the life and power of the Gospel, it is rather an argument in its favor than otherwise: for thus the Gospel ever has been treated; and thus it will be, as long as there shall be an ungodly man upon earth. But, *if the whole world would rise up against it, let it be our endeavor to receive it in our hearts, to confess it with our lips, and to adorn it with our lives!*

***~~#1789~~***

***~~THE GOOD EFFECTS OF A SINCERE ATTENTION TO THE GOSPEL~~***

**[Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12).**

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men."

THE clamor often raised against the Gospel is no argument against the Gospel itself. God's messengers have in all ages been opposed by the ungodly. Even our Lord himself, who spoke as never any man spoke, was believed by very few; but there will always be found some who will give the truth a favorable reception. Different hearers are differently affected with the word they hear in these days. This however only shows that human nature is the same now that it was in Paul's time.

***~~I. Wherein the Bereans excelled the Thessalonians—~~***

The Jews in Berea had been educated in the same prejudices as those in Thessalonica: yet their conduct was in perfect contrast with that of the Thessalonians

They excelled,

***~~1. In open-mindedness—~~***

The Thessalonians would not so much as consider what they heard from the Apostle: but the Bereans "inquired whether these things were so." They did not conclude everything to be false which did not accord with their preconceived opinions. This was a noble spirit, because it showed that they were not in subjection to their prejudices.

***~~2. In fair-mindedness—~~***

The Thessalonians, not satisfied with rejecting the word, were filled with wrath against those who delivered it unto them. They misrepresented the principles of the Apostle, stirred up a tumult against him, assaulted his friends under the pretense of justice, obliged him to flee for his life, followed him with unrelenting animosity to Berea, and, notwithstanding the acceptance he met with there, drove him from thence also.

Nothing could be more contrary to equity than thus to calumniate the innocent, and persecute the messengers of Heaven. The Bereans, on the contrary, made a diligent use of the means afforded them for solving their doubts: they "searched the Scriptures," which they considered as the only standard of truth, and to which the Apostle himself had appealed; they "searched them daily," that they might form their judgment upon the surest grounds: they would neither receive nor reject anything which they had not maturely weighed.

***~~3. In a regard for truth—~~***

Truth was neither sought for, nor desired by, the Thessalonian Jews. *Loving darkness rather than light, they strove to extinguish the light which shone around them*. But the Bereans "received the word with all readiness of mind:" they were glad to get instruction in matters of such consequence: their hearts were prepared for it, as melted wax for the seal. See [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17) which, in the Greek conveys the idea of being cast into a mold. Thus they acted as beings endowed with reason, while the Thessalonians resembled irrational and ferocious beasts.

***~~II. The benefit which accrued to them by means of it—~~***

***~~Many at Berea became obedient to the faith—~~***

While the Thessalonians rejected the overtures of mercy, the Bereans thankfully embraced them. By believing in Christ they became partakers of his salvation; and now are they rejoicing before the throne of God, while the despisers of the Gospel are gnashing their teeth in Hell. Who can duly appreciate the greatness of this benefit?

***~~This benefit resulted from the noble disposition which they exercised—~~***

Faith is certainly the gift of God, [Ephesians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8). [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29); nor can any disposition that is in us merit that gift. But there is a preparation of mind requisite for a due reception of the Gospel; and where that state of mind is, there truth will make its way. This arises from the very structure of the human mind, which, like the eye, beholds things imperfectly when diseased, but clearly when free from blemish, [Matthew 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-23) with [Proverbs 2:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.10-11); and it is both illustrated and confirmed by various examples in Holy Writ. Nicodemus; [John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.2). Cornelius; [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33). Lydia; [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14). Where the "honest and good heart" is, there the seed will spring up, and bring forth fruit, [Luke 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.15).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who never have believed—~~***

Guard against the illiberal conduct of the Thessalonians. Avoid a captious, envious, persecuting spirit: cultivate the more noble spirit of the Bereans:  
take the Scriptures as the test of truth, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20);  
search them with care and diligence, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39);  
compare what you hear with them, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21);  
Pray for wisdom, that you may discern aright, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5);  
rest assured that you shall not use these means in vain, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6).

***~~2. Those who have believed—~~***

Love instruction, and improve all opportunities of gaining it, [Proverbs 4:5-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.5-9). Seek to be more established in the faith, [Colossians 2:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-8), but weigh every sentiment in the balance of the sanctuary, [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1), and let the Scripture be your study and delight! [Psalm 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2-3).

***~~#1790~~***

***~~REPENTANCE ENJOINED~~***

***~~[Acts 17:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.30).~~***

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

THIS is one of the most celebrated discourses in all the inspired volume. Being delivered to heathen philosophers, he did not make any appeal to the Jewish Scriptures, as he did whenever he addressed the Jews; but argued with them on their own principles. The drift of his argument was to show:  
that there was but one God, and not many, as they supposed;  
that all things owed their existence to him, and not to chance;  
that all things were ordered by him, and not by fate;  
that all men were bound to live to him, and not unto themselves;  
and that all would give account of themselves to him at the judgment-seat of Christ; of which event God had given them an assurance, by raising Christ from the dead.

As for all the speculations of human wisdom, in which these learned philosophers were so deeply engaged, they were all vain. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

The points for our more immediate consideration are three:

***~~I. The forbearance once exercised—~~***

We are not to imagine that God has ever *overlooked*sin: for "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" without the utmost abhorrence, [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13). But he exercised all possible *forbearance*towards those who committed it, knowing how blind and ignorant they were; and that, consequently, their iniquity, though heinous, was comparatively light. He had not sent prophets to them, as he had to his own people; except indeed to Nineveh, in the ministration of Jonah: so that they had sinned against less light and knowledge than his own people; whom, on account of their more aggravated guilt, he had visited with most signal judgments. Had he not borne with the heathen in their wickedness, he must again and again have destroyed the earth; either by water, as at the deluge, or by fire, as he had done to Sodom and Gomorrah. But he had "endured them with much long-suffering," even to that very day.

In fact, this same forbearance is yet exercised towards the heathen world, and on the very same account. Probably not so much as one-sixth part of the world has ever heard of the name of Jesus Christ: so that the times of ignorance yet continue to a most fearful extent: and, if it were not that God's mercy is infinite, his judgments must, of necessity, have long since been poured forth, to overwhelm the whole world.

Perhaps it is somewhat of the same consideration which still operates on the mind of God to withhold *his judgments, which at this moment hang, as it were, by a single thread, over the heads of millions among ourselves!*He sees how ignorant they are; and he yet bears with them, in the hope that they may yet "turn from their idols, to serve Him, the only true God."

The Apostle, however, proceeds to state to his audience,

***~~II. The injunction now given—~~***

"God now commands all men everywhere to repent." He no longer leaves men to indulge their own vain reasonings and empty speculations. He has now revealed his will, which he makes known, not as a deduction from uncertain premises, or as a recommendation of doubtful expediency, but with an authority that supersedes all reasoning, and a plainness that dispels all doubt. Nor does he address this revelation to the followers of any one particular sect, as the philosophers did with their injunctions: no; "he commands all men, everywhere, to repent."

This was the very scope of his Gospel, as introduced by *John*the Baptist and our blessed Lord; "Repent; for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" It is also the substance of the Gospel, as committed afterwards to his *Apostles*, who were ordered to "preach repentance and remission of sins, in his name, unto all nations, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47)." Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost, the address of Peter to his audience was, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out! [Acts 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.19)." In fact, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," comprehend all that we have to deliver at this day; and, as ambassadors from God, we do inculcate them, as authoritatively enjoined by God himself, and as indispensably necessary for salvation.

Having stated God's command, the Apostle proceeds to show,

***~~III. The urgent necessity which lies upon us all to comply with it—~~***

"God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness." It is not left to men's option, whether they will embrace the sentiments proposed to them in the Gospel, or obey its injunctions: they must obey them at the peril of their eternal souls. The philosophers could only advise. They knew nothing of a future state of retribution. If occasionally they hinted at such a state, it was with extreme uncertainty, and without the least idea of the rule by which they would be judged, or the person by whom their sentence would be awarded to them. But the Apostle declared to them God's determination respecting these things: and I also declare, that every soul among us shall, before long, "stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." Then will our compliance with this injunction be inquired into, and that declaration of our blessed Lord be fulfilled, "Unless you repent, you shall all perish! [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.3)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The careless—~~***

Whether you be among the number of learned philosophers, or of the illiterate poor, I must equally call upon you to repent. The injunction is universal. There is no exception, in behalf of any place, or any person, under Heaven. *The old, the young, the rich, the poor, the learned, the unlearned—must all repent, or be condemned at the tribunal of their Lord, and "take their portion for ever in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone!"*

Dream not, brethren, that, because God has borne with you hitherto, he will not visit your sins at last: for he has declared, that "his Spirit shall not always continue to strive with you;" but that, if you do not speedily return to him in penitence and faith, he will give you up to final impenitence, and leave you to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." O "let his long-suffering be accounted by you as salvation, [2 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.15)," and "let his goodness lead you to repentance, [Romans 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.4)."

***~~2. The repenting sinner—~~***

Sweet beyond description are the expressions in my text, as bearing on your state. Does God so authoritatively command repentance? then will he assuredly have respect to it, wherever he finds it: nor is there a creature in the universe so vile, but he shall obtain acceptance with his God, through the instrumentality of penitence and faith. Humble yourselves, then, before God, in dust and ashes, and plunge into "the fountain opened for sin and for impurity! [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1);" so shall all "your sins be blotted out, as a morning cloud," and you shall stand before God "without spot or blemish." So shall your "repentance be unto life," even "a repentance to salvation not to be repented of." The very Savior in whom you trust, shall be your Judge; and he will award to you the glory he has purchased for you.

***~~#1791~~***

***~~A DAY APPOINTED FOR CHRIST TO JUDGE THE WORLD~~***

***~~[Acts 17:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.31).~~***

"He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

IN order to form a just estimate of the benefits which we have received from revelation, we must not look to the sentiments of philosophers in this day, but to those which were entertained by the wisest of the heathen world. Modern philosophers, even while they pretend to despise the sacred oracles, have derived from them, either immediately or remotely, all that light which has elevated them above the heathen. We must therefore go back to the Sages of Greece and Rome, who had no other guide than unassisted reason. Among them we shall find the most astonishing ignorance respecting truths which, among us, are universally received, and familiar to the basest capacities.

Athens had been the most distinguished seat of learning in the world; and even at the time when this history was written, was still in very high repute: yet there did the most stupid idolatry prevail, insomuch that the number of idols there was greater than in any other city in the world. Their wise men, not content with deifying almost everything that could come into their minds, raised an altar 'To the Unknown God' from which circumstance Paul took occasion to "make known to them Him whom they thus ignorantly worshiped."

His address to them on the occasion forms a lively contrast with the abstruse speculations and vain reasonings which universally prevailed among them. He told them that there was one God, who was the Creator and Governor of all things, who claimed from them a spiritual worship, and whom exclusively they were bound to serve; who also had appointed a day in which he would judge the world by that Man whom he had ordained, even Jesus, whom he had raised from the dead.

We do not see in this address any just ground for those extravagant eulogies that have been passed upon it, as though it was the summit of human eloquence: but we account it a sober, judicious, luminous exposition of the first principles of true religion; well adapted to inform the minds of his audience, and to dispel the vain imaginations with which they had hitherto been blinded.

The point to which we shall direct our attention at this time, is the assurance here given us of a future judgment. The assertions contained in our text are two:

***~~I. That there is a day fixed in which the world shall be judged—~~***

***~~The day of judgment is certainly fixed—~~***

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world:" much more therefore must so important a work as that of judging the world be fixed in the Divine counsels. It is true, the period is not known to any human being, nor to any angel in Heaven; no, nor even to the Son of Man himself; at least it was not made known to him as man, for the purpose of revealing it to the world, [Mark 13:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 13.32). But it is every moment approaching; and will come as *unexpectedly*upon the world as the deluge did, or as it would do if it were to arrive at this moment, [Matthew 24:37-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.37-42).

***~~On its arrival, the whole race of mankind shall be called to judgment—~~***

All the successive generations of men, from Adam to that very hour, shall be called forth from their graves, [John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28-29). [Revelation 20:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12-13). Their respective bodies, however long ago, and in whatever various manner they may have been consumed, shall be restored to life, and be united to their souls; the personal identity of every individual being preserved, and every one answering for the things which he himself did in the body.

As to the difficulties which may be supposed to prevent the execution of this design, it is sufficient to say, that God has pledged himself to accomplish it: and *he who formed the whole creation out of nothing at first, will find no difficulty in re-uniting the scattered atoms of his creatures at the last day*.

***~~The judgment shall then be passed on them in perfect justice—~~***

The actions of all will then be weighed in a perfect balance. Everything that tended to enhance the value of them, or aggravate their malignity, shall be taken into consideration; and the quality of them will be ascertained with the utmost precision. Every *word*, every *thought*, yes, every *imagination*or counsel of the heart, shall then be brought to light, and have weight in augmenting our happiness or misery to all eternity! [Romans 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.16). [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5).

The REWARDS indeed will be *rewards of grace; but still our good works shall be the measure according to which they shall be bestowed upon us*.

Our PUNISHMENTS, on the other hand, will be proportioned exactly to our guilt and demerit: nor shall there be a creature in the universe who shall not acknowledge the equity of the Judge in these proceedings, [Revelation 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 15.3).

The foregoing truths were revealed, though with comparative obscurity, to the Jews: but in the New Testament, in addition to the fuller revelation there given of it, we are informed,

***~~II. That Christ is the person by whom that judgment will be dispensed—~~***

The Father, we are told, "has committed all judgment to the Son," and "given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man, [John 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22); [John 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.27);" and this appointment is in many respects desirable:

**It is desirable for the vindication of his honor.** Though he was the Son of God, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet was he accounted "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people." But in that day will his reproach be rolled away; and he will appear in his true character, "King of kings, and Lord of lords!"

**It is desirable also for the humiliation of his enemies.** How will they, who so triumphed in his destruction, stand appalled, when they shall see "the stone which they rejected, has become the head-stone!" when they shall behold him seated on his throne, and hear him say, "Bring hither those that were my enemies, who would not that I would reign over them, and slay them before me!"

**It is desirable also for the comfort of his people.** Unspeakable is the comfort of reflecting, that *He who was our Savior will be our Judge*. If we believe in him, and confide in his promises, will he deceive us? If we plead the merit of his blood, will he not admit that plea? Yes, will he not rather be a witness for us in that day, that, while we were in this world, we "lived by faith in the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us?".

Nor is it less **certain**, than it is desirable. "God has given us assurance of it, in that he has raised up Christ from the dead." Had Jesus not been raised, we might well have doubted all that he had spoken respecting his future advent: but this was such a confirmation of his word as did not admit a doubt: it was a proof that could not be counterfeited, and that must carry conviction to every mind. However strange, therefore, our Lord's predictions respecting his second coming must have appeared to those who saw him only as a poor despised man, [Luke 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.3). [Revelation 14:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.10-11); and however confident his judges were in pronouncing such assertions to be blasphemy, verse 32, we may be fully assured that all judgment is committed to him, and that we shall all stand at his judgment-seat, to receive from him our final doom.

***~~Since then this solemn day is fixed in the Divine counsels, and is so rapidly approaching, let us indulge the following reflections:~~***

***~~1. How earnestly should we engage in the great work of repentance!~~***

This is a work necessary for every child of man, "God has commanded all men everywhere to repent." He will no longer "overlook" our sinfulness: he has now given us the last and fullest revelation of his will; and, if we improve it not to the salvation of our souls, he will visit us with his heaviest displeasure, [2 Corinthians 5:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.10-11). Let us not, like the Apostle's auditors, "mock" at these tidings, or defer the attention they deserve, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8);" but let us "seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." We "know the terrors of the Lord; and therefore we would persuade you," by every consideration that can influence the mind of man.

***~~2. How carefully should we guard against self-deception!~~***

*We easily deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive our God!* Hence Paul gives us this solemn caution; "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap: he who sows to the flesh, shall from the flesh reap corruption; and he who sows to the Spirit, shall from the Spirit reap life everlasting. Surely, if we will investigate the point with any degree of candor, it will be no difficult matter to ascertain whether we are sowing to the flesh, or to the Spirit. Let us deal faithfully then with our own souls; and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord."

***~~3. How diligently should we maintain communion with our risen Savior!~~***

To walk with him now by faith, is the sure way to be prepared for his future advent.

He will now communicate to us of the abundance of his grace.

He will shed abroad his love in our hearts.

He will manifest himself to us as he does not unto the world.

If we belong to him, we may regard him as "our Forerunner, gone before to prepare a place for us," and coming again shortly to receive us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. The true light in which to view him is, that which is shadowed forth to us by the high-priest going into the holy place to offer incense; while the people waited for him without, until he would come forth to bless them, [Luke 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.9-10); [Luke 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.21). Let us then wait and look for him, and he will soon come the second time to our complete, our everlasting salvation! [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28).

***~~#1792~~***

***~~THE CHARACTER OF GALLIO~~***

***~~[Acts 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.17).~~***

"But Gallio paid no attention to any of these things." [Acts 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.17)

WE are assured that not one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed, or ever can fail. But for the trial of our faith, and for the more abundant manifestation of his own truth and faithfulness, God is often pleased to let events of so dark a nature arise, that it shall appear almost impossible for his word to receive its accomplishment.

Thus he did in relation to the Israelites in Egypt. He had promised to Abraham, that before the expiration of four hundred and thirty years, he would bring his posterity out of Egypt. The time appointed had just arrived, when he sent his servants, Moses and Aaron, to lead them forth; but, so far from succeeding in their efforts, they only augmented the labors and sufferings of their oppressed countrymen: and, when the very last day had arrived, they were plainly warned by Pharaoh that if they attempted to come into his presence again, they would die.

What now must become of the veracity of God? Did his word fall to the ground? No! that very night God sent a judgment, which caused the Egyptians to thrust them out.

In like manner did the Lord Jesus act towards the Apostle Paul. It would seem that Paul had felt discouraged at the little success of his labors during his long stay of a year and six months at Corinth; and that he had begun to yield to some desponding fears. Our blessed Lord, for his encouragement, appeared to him in a vision, and told him, he would be successful in planting a large Church there, and that "none would set on him to hurt him." But behold, "when Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." Here it is manifest that they did "set on him," and that too with the most brutal intents: but did they "hurt him?" No! the Governor would not listen to their complaints. This occasioned a great tumult in the court, insomuch that the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat.

Why did they not, in their rage, beat Paul? Why did they wreak their vengeance on a friend of Paul's, and not on Paul himself? God's word had been pledged for Paul; and therefore not a hair of his head could be touched. *Gallio*, who should have been Paul's protector, "paid no attention to any of these things:" but *God*cared for Paul; and it was impossible for man to "hurt him." The indifference of Gallio left Paul entirely at the mercy of his enemies: but "the word of God could not be broken;" and therefore Paul was as safe from injury, as he would have been even in Heaven itself.

The account here given of Gallio is deserving of particular consideration; and the rather, as very different opinions have been formed respecting it. We propose therefore,

***~~I. To form an estimate of his character—~~***

It is not so much from a single expression that we are to form our judgment, as from a view of all the circumstances under which he acted, and all the persons with whom he had to do. It will be proper to notice his character:

***~~1. As exhibited in his conduct on this occasion—~~***

Gallio acted in a double capacity: as a man, and as a magistrate.

In his *official character*, while we applaud his moderation, we think him highly deserving of blame. As a Governor, even if no reference had been made to him, he should have endeavored to prevent an innocent man from being oppressed by an enraged multitude, and should have required the criminality of Paul to be established before any punishment would be inflicted on him: but when a direct reference was made to him for judgment, he should on no account have left him at the mercy of his enemies. What though he did not feel himself competent to decide the points at issue between them; he might easily see whether the points at issue were of such importance to the public welfare as to demand a judicial examination: and, if necessary, he might have appointed a commission of persons qualified to examine it under his sanction and authority. At all events, he should not have left the people to take the law into their own hands.

In relation to Sosthenes also he was highly criminal: for a magistrate ought on no account to allow such an open and flagrant violation of the law, as that which took place in the very seat of judgment. A magistrate should "not bear the sword in vain: he is God's representative and viceregent upon earth; and he ought to be both "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well." In shrinking from the execution of his office, whether through indolence or fear, he violates his duty both to God and man.

Nor do we more approve of him in his *personal*conduct, as a man. He had long heard of Paul, and of the wonderful exertions he made in propagating what he professed to be a revelation from Heaven. We can make some allowance for a Governor, circumstanced as Gallio was, not sending to Paul to get information from him respecting the doctrines he preached: but now God had sent the man into his very presence; and Paul was actually about to declare those very truths, which Gallio should have earnestly desired to hear: yet when "God had given him this price to get wisdom, he knew not how to use it."

Here then we blame him exceedingly: his indifference here betrayed a total lack of all religion, and an utter disregard of all that should have been interesting to an immortal being. The historian evidently intends to fix a stigma upon him; and Gallio well deserved it; and, *as long as the world shall stand, he will be the representative of all who are regardless of their eternal interests*.

***~~2. As compared with the other characters with whom he had to do—~~***

We pass over *Sosthenes*and his persecutors, because we cannot absolutely determine who they were: but we think that Sosthenes had shown himself desirous of screening Paul; and that the Greeks were instigated by the Jews to vent their rage on him, because he, who, as ruler of their synagogue, might have been expected most warmly to espouse their cause, had now begun to take part against them.

The other two parties are the *persecuting Jews*, and the *persecuted Apostle*.

In comparison with the *persecuting Jews*, *Gallio*appears to advantage: for they were seeking to destroy a man merely for his opinions, and for endeavoring, in a peaceful way, to disseminate those opinions; whereas he was tolerant, and refused to sanction so unreasonable a proceeding. He justly distinguished between gross violations of the law, which no government would tolerate, and certain differences of opinion which might consist with the undiminished welfare of society. As a friend to toleration therefore, he merits our applause: and we regret that those who professed themselves as the people of God, were so inferior to a heathen in appreciating and upholding the rights of man.

But if we compare him with the *persecuted Apostle*, he sinks to the lowest state of degradation. Behold the Apostle! it was his "care for these things" that involved him in all his trouble: had he been content to go to Heaven alone, he might have avoided all these bitter persecutions. But *he knew the value of an immortal soul; and was "willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*." He went everywhere to find out men whom he might instruct in the way to Heaven. Whereas Gallio, with that very instructor in his presence, would not even trouble himself so much as to hear what he had to say. He accounted Christianity as no other than a strife about words, and therefore undeserving his notice. *Foolish man, to have so little concern for your immortal soul, and such a brutish indifference about your eternal welfare! The ox and the donkey will condemn you for your stupidity and folly.*

Such being our estimate of Gallio's character, we proceed,

***~~II. To deduce from it some lessons of instruction—~~***

His character not being wholly destitute of what, in a comparative view at least, may be approved, we shall deduce our lessons,

**1. From the *better*part of his character—**Two things we may learn from this:  
not to indulge a spirit of intolerance;  
not to be carried away by popular resentment.

That a political necessity may exist for withholding certain privileges from some, is beyond a doubt: but *nothing can justify the inflicting of pains and penalties upon any on account of their religious sentiments*. Man is not only at liberty, but bound to worship God according to his conscience: nor is any man in the universe authorized to obstruct him, unless there is something in his conduct contrary to good morals, or to the public peace. In the nation at large, this is well understood and practiced: but among individuals there are many who would be as intolerant as the Jews of old, if the laws did not protect the persons who differ from them. This however is a hateful spirit, and on no account to be countenanced or indulged.

On the other hand, there are many who are too easily influenced by popular opinion; and who would rather consent to the oppressing of a religious character, than withstand the public voice in his support. But if we allow the cause of Christ and his people to be run down, because we have not courage to defend it, we are far more guilty than Gallio: we are more like Pilate, who, to pacify the Jews, and save his own credit with the Roman emperor, delivered up Jesus to the will of his blood-thirsty enemies.

True indeed, we ought not to proceed in the violent and haughty manner that Gallio did: there are different ways of doing the same thing: we may act with suavity, though we comply not with the requisitions made to us: and this is the way in which we should act, whenever any attempts are made to prejudice our minds against God and his people: we should resolutely withstand the efforts of ungodly men, and maintain against all opposition the immutable laws of equity and love.

***~~2. From that part of his character which is unquestionably bad—~~***

Here also we will mention two things:  
not to be indifferent about the concerns of others,  
not to be lukewarm in the concerns of our own souls.

Doubtless we are not to be "busy-bodies in other men's matters;" but, on the other hand, we are not to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We are told "not to look every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4)."

If in *temporal*matters we can benefit our fellow-creatures, we are "debtors to them," to do them all the good in our power. And, if we may advance their *spiritual*interests, we should account no labors too great, nor any sufferings too heavy to be encountered in so good a cause.

This sentiment has of late gained a currency in this kingdom, beyond all that could ever have been expected. What exertions have not been made in sending missions to the heathen; in disseminating the Holy Scriptures throughout the world; and in educating the children of the poor, that they may be able to read the words of life!

For the children of Abraham also, that debased, but highly interesting people, are efforts now used; and, we trust, will be used to a yet greater extent among us.

The concern expressed also through the land for our fellow-subjects in India is highly creditable to the nation.

But still there is abundant room for the display of our benevolence in every place where our lot is cast: and we cannot but earnestly pray, that it may no longer be said of any among us, "Every man minds his own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's, [Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.21)."

But, in order to maintain a zeal for the good of others, we must begin at home, and cherish a concern for our own souls. To keep the garden of others will be of little avail, if we neglect to cultivate our own, [Song of Solomon 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.6). The salvation of our own souls must be our first and great concern: in comparison with this, the whole world should be of no value in our eyes. Let us then regard the Lord Jesus Christ, and a saving interest in him, as "the pearl of great price," for which we are readily to part with all that we possess. "Whatever our hand finds to do in reference to our eternal state, let us do it with all our might." Let us "*strive*to enter in at the strait gate;" remembering, that "many *seek*to enter in, but are not able."

Let us bear in mind, that no rank or station of life can exempt us from the duty of "caring for these things." About the things of this world we may relax our care: there are few who do not run into a criminal excess in their attention to them: in reference to them, we think no concern too great, no labor too abundant: while the interests of the soul are deemed unworthy of any care. We mean not that worldly things are to be neglected; but that, while we are "not slothful in business, we should be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

***~~#1793~~***

***~~CHARACTER AND MINISTRY OF APOLLOS~~***

***~~[Acts 18:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.24-28).~~***

"Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

IT is a weighty saying of our Lord, "To him that has, shall be given more; and from him that has not, shall be taken away that which he seems to have." Universal experience attests the truth of this: *the man who has talents of any kind will improve them by use, and lose them in a great measure by neglect*. In religion especially this law of our nature rules: indeed it rules in religion more than in anything else; because, in addition to the gain or loss which the cultivation or neglect of anything will of necessity occasion, God himself will interpose in the things which relate to him, either to reward the observance of them by a further communication of his blessings, or to punish the neglect of them by a withdrawment of his grace.

Of the former of these, namely, *the increase of well-employed talents*, we have an instance in the history before us. Apollos, when he began to serve the Lord, had but a very contracted view of the things which he proposed to teach: but God so ordered it, that his exertions in the cause of religion would introduce him to the acquaintance with Aquila and Priscilla, and be the means of bringing him to the full knowledge, and complete enjoyment, of the Gospel of Christ.

In the account here given of him, we notice,

***~~I. His qualifications for the ministry—~~***

These were certainly of the highest order: he possessed many qualities admirably suited to the work in which he was engaged. They were of two kinds;

**1. Intellectual** **qualities—**

He had a natural gift of eloquence; I say, a natural gift; because it was a faculty distinct from that which may be acquired by study. *Some men have in the very constitution of their minds a facility of conceiving clearly, and expressing readily, whatever they wish to impart*. Some, however learned they may be, can never acquire that which we call *eloquence*; they have some embarrassments which they cannot surmount, or some deficiencies which they cannot supply. Others, with very little learning, can talk fluently and clearly upon any subject on which they have bestowed the smallest attention.

This is a valuable talent, especially to any one who is called to instruct or persuade others: and happy was Apollos in the pre-eminent measure of it which he possessed.

But, besides this, he was well versed in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. "He was mighty in the Scriptures," being able to bring them to bear upon any point which he wished to discuss, and to show from them what was agreeable to the mind and will of God. "The word dwelt richly in him in all wisdom."

This also is of the utmost importance to one who undertakes to teach others, since *the sacred volume is the armory from whence he must take all the weapons for his warfare, and the treasury from whence alone he can procure the riches which he undertakes to dispense*.

**2. Moral** **qualities—**

He was "fervent in spirit;" glowing with **zeal**for the honor of his God, and ardently longing for the salvation of his fellow-creatures. This in a minister is indispensable: the difficulties which he will have to encounter are very great, and fervor of spirit is necessary to carry him through them; nor can he hope to be extensively useful to others, unless he lays himself out in the service of God to the utmost of his power.

To this was added that most amiable of all graces, **humility**of mind. Notwithstanding his natural talents and eminent acquirements, he was willing to be instructed by any one who could advance him in the knowledge of the Lord. Aquila was only a tentmaker, and not invested with the sacred office of a teacher: yet when he and his wife Priscilla invited Apollos to their house in order to "expound to him the way of God more perfectly," Apollos thankfully accepted their invitation, and diligently availed himself of their instructions.

This is an excellence rarely found in persons who are high in popular estimation: the admiration with which they are honored, too often puffs them up with vain conceit, and indisposes them to learn from those, whom they regard as their inferiors in station or attainments: but the more rarely such humility is found, the more highly would it be appreciated, and the more carefully would it be maintained.

Thus endowed, he greatly distinguished himself by,

***~~II. His ministerial exertions—~~***

***~~He improved for God whatever talents he possessed—~~***

When he was only partially "instructed in the way of the Lord," and knew nothing more than what he had learned from John the Baptist, he instructed others to the utmost of his power with great boldness and diligence. The doctrines which John the Baptist had preached were in direct opposition to the habits of the world, and were sure to call forth the enmity of those who would not part with their sins: but Apollos feared not the face of man; but both "spoke" in private, and "taught" in public, and that too with unremitting activity, the things which he considered as of such vital importance to the welfare of mankind.

When he himself was more fully instructed, he desired to extend the sphere of his labors, and to proceed to Corinth, to supply, as he was able, the place of Paul.

Then especially did he make Christ the one great theme of all his discourses. "The things of the Lord," as far as he understood them, he had before declared: he had warned men of the Messiah's advent, and had called them to repent, in order to get their hearts duly prepared for a suitable reception of him: but now he saw, not only that the Messiah was come, but that Jesus of Nazareth was he, and had done and suffered all those things which had been predicted of him.

Thus, in the scope of his ministrations, he determined, with the Apostle Paul, to "know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified:" and, though we have not the same occasion to prove the Messiahship of Christ, since that is universally acknowledged among us—yet are we called to magnify the importance of that truth, and to commend it to men's attention, as the source of all their happiness.

***~~In his labors he was useful to many souls—~~***

He "mightily refuted the Jews," so as to stop the mouths of some of the more obdurate, and to bring the more candid of them to the acknowledgment of the truth. Nor were his labors of little service to the Church of God: on the contrary "he helped them much, who had believed through grace." It was through the operation of divine grace alone that any had believed: "whether Paul planted, or Apollos watered, it was God alone who gave the increase:" but still, it was no slight benefit to the garden of the Lord to be watered by such a hand as his: and no doubt he contributed greatly both to the growth and fruitfulness of those trees of righteousness which God's right hand had planted.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who labor in the ministry, or are preparing for it—~~***

Let Apollos serve as a guide for you. If you possess good natural talents, account it your honor to consecrate them to the service of your God. And, in the employment of them, do not inquire where you may gain most credit to yourselves, or most consult your present ease and interests, but rather inquire where you may do most good; and be ready to exercise your ministry wherever the providence of God may call you.

Moreover, if called to labor where a more honored servant of the Lord has gone before you, do not draw back through a pretended sense of your own insufficiency; but *be willing to have your talents and services undervalued, and to be nothing yourselves, that God may be all in all*.

***~~2. To those who have received good by the ministry—~~***

To God you must ascribe the praise for all that you have received; since to whoever you are indebted as an *instrument*, the benefit proceeds from God alone, who "gives to every man" according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. It is possible that you who have long known the Lord, may be called to attend the ministry of one who may be comparatively a novice in the ways of God; and you may be tempted on that account to despise him in your hearts, and to lower him in the estimation of those around you. This, alas! is the conduct of many; but it is a most sinful conduct, and utterly unworthy of their Christian profession. Instead of indulging such a proud contemptuous spirit, you would rejoice in every appearance of good, and endeavor to impart to him a fuller knowledge of the truth. This would render good service both to God and man: and it is a service which all may render, if only with meekness and modesty they watch for an opportunity, and look up to God for his blessing on their endeavors. And who can tell how "much you yourselves may be helped" afterwards by him, to whom you have been helpful in the first instance?

It is worthy of observation, that Aquila did not commence preacher at Corinth, notwithstanding his clear knowledge of the Gospel, and notwithstanding Paul had just left the place: he did not think himself authorized to take on him an office to which he was not called: but he labored in private conversation, and was made eminently useful in that way: and we cannot but recommend to every one among you, whether male or female, to imitate this pious couple in a modest unassuming behavior, and in an affectionate concern for the best interests of mankind.

***~~#1794~~***

***~~THE POWER OF CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL~~***

**[Acts 19:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.15).**

"And the evil spirit answered and said: Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

GREAT effects are wrought by the Gospel wherever it is preached with faithfulness and zeal:  
churches are filled,  
sinners are awakened,  
saints are edified, and  
the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified.

But, in those who feel not its influence, there is an universal proneness to ascribe these effects to other causes than those from which they really proceed. Some consider them as arising from the manner in which the preacher addresses his audience; from the loudness of his voice, for instance, or from the earnestness of his gestures. Others ascribe them to the enthusiastic sentiments with which his discourses are filled, or perhaps to the terribleness of his denunciations. Any reason, however absurd, will be resorted to by them, rather than they will acknowledge the hand of God in these things.

Thus it was in the days of old: when our blessed Lord cast out devils from people who were possessed, the spectators ascribed his works to a confederacy with Satan, rather than to the agency of the Spirit of God.

In like manner, when his Apostles cast out devils in his name, many supposed that they wrought their miracles by means of magical incantations. Hence some, and, in particular, seven sons of a Jewish priest, thought by the use of the name of Jesus to produce the same effects. But Satan soon showed them their mistake; infusing a more than human strength and courage into the man whom he possessed, and falling upon the seven exorcists with such irresistible fury, as to convince all that he could be vanquished only by an almighty arm. His address of defiance, which we have just read, will lead me to set before you,

***~~I. The power of Christ and his Gospel—~~***

When Satan had prevailed over our first parents, a promise was given that the Son of God would become incarnate, and bruise the head of that serpent that had beguiled them, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). Accordingly, Christ came in due season to effect for men the promised deliverance: and he accomplished it,

***~~1. Personally—~~***

The first encounter which he had with our great adversary was in the wilderness, just previous to his entering upon his public labors; and there, after withstanding his repeated assaults, he drove him, as it were, from the field of battle, saying, "Get behind me, Satan." During the course of his ministry, he exerted an irresistible power over this wicked fiend, expelling him from multitudes whom he had possessed, and constraining him to confess himself a vanquished enemy, [Mark 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 1.27).

Towards the close of his life he experienced the yet fiercer assaults of Satan, attended by all the hosts of Hell: "This," says our Lord to the Jews, "is your hour, and the power of darkness:" but he triumphed over them, agreeably to that word, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" now shall "the prince of this world be judged! [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31); [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11)."

Upon the cross indeed he appeared to suffer a defeat: but there, and there chiefly, he gained the victory: "through death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14);" yes, upon the cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." In his resurrection and ascension he completed his triumphs, "leading captivity captive, [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8)," and "putting all his enemies under his feet, [Psalm 110:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1)."

***~~2. By the ministry of others—~~***

When first our blessed Lord sent forth his twelve Apostles, he gave them a commission, not to preach only, but to "cast out devils, [Mark 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 3.14-15);" and to such an extent did they execute this, that they were quite surprised, and said with wonder, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through your name!" to which our Lord replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven, [Luke 10:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.17-18)." We have recently seen that Paul cast out a spirit of divination, [Acts 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.18); and in the chapter from whence our text is taken, we are told, that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from the body of Paul, and were made effectual by the power of God to the casting out of many evil spirits, verse 12. In ejecting them from the souls of men he was more honored than any other of the Apostles.

When first he received a commission to preach the Gospel, it was said to him by our Lord, "I send you to turn men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18);" and how successful he was in destroying Satan's empire, and in enlarging the kingdom of Christ upon earth, his history, as recorded in the New Testament, together with his different epistles, abundantly testify. For many hundreds of years, it must be confessed, this great adversary of God and man has re-established his dominion almost over the whole world, as well where Christ is named, as in those regions where the light of his Gospel has never shined. But still the Lord Jesus has not left himself without witness, that he has vanquished Satan, and can render the weakest of his people victorious over him: "his word is yet living and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword;" and it is still as "mighty as ever to pull down the strongholds of sin, and to cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ! 2 Corinthians 10:4-5." Indeed at this very hour the Lord Jesus is "riding on in the chariot of the everlasting Gospel, conquering and to conquer;" so that Satan must still repeat his former acknowledgment, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know:" yes, he does know, that Christ is "Lord of lords and King of kings," and that "his Gospel is still the power of God unto the salvation" of men.

But though Christ and his Gospel are so powerful, experience proves,

***~~II. The insufficiency of all created power to cast out Satan—~~***

None but that stronger man, the Lord Jesus, has ever been able to prevail against "the strong man armed!" Until attacked by the Lord Jesus, "Satan keeps his goods in peace." He defies:

***~~1. All false religions—~~***

Go back to the days of old. What was effected by any of the philosophers of Greece or Rome? They did not even themselves experience a sanctifying efficacy from their own doctrines: and much less did they prevail to destroy the power of Satan in the hearts of their disciples. Look at the votaries of Pagan idolatry, or Mohammedan delusion: what evidence do they show that their principles have made them victorious over Satan? We may safely affirm, that the very means which they use for obtaining the Divine favor, serve only to rivet on them more forcibly those chains of Satan with which they are bound!

***~~2. A nominal profession of the true religion—~~***

The Lord Jesus did, for wise and gracious purposes, allow many to "cast out devils in his name," whom yet he will banish from his presence in the day of judgment, and exclude forever from his heavenly kingdom, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). But never did any person cast out Satan from his heart by merely naming the name of Christ. We need only look on the Christian world, and we shall see how little a mere profession of Christianity can effect. The generality of Christians are in reality little better than baptized heathens. There are some few points of morality in which they may differ from the heathen; but*in all the more common sins, of pride, lewdness, covetousness, together with the whole band of spiritual and fleshly lusts, they are as much enslaved by them as any heathen can be.*In proof of this, we need not cast our eyes on others: we need only inspect the workings of our own hearts, and we shall have abundant evidence of this melancholy truth.

***~~3. All self-righteousness or self-confident exertions—~~***

To these men generally resort in the first instance, when they desire to overcome this wicked fiend. But he derides their efforts as weak and vain: he well knows that human power, however strenuously exerted, will prove only like Elisha's staff, which could not re-animate the breathless corpse on which it was laid, [2 Kings 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 4.31). To all such efforts he says in his heart, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

It would seem indeed, that men, feeling the authority of God's law, and the terrors of his wrath, would be able to effect anything: but our arm is paralyzed, and we cannot stretch it forth, unless the Lord Jesus Christ himself enables us. Hence we are told, that "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent his own Son to effect, namely, to condemn sin in the flesh, and to cause that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3)." We need only call to mind the case of Peter, to convince us that *our strongest resolutions are only as wax before the fire, when we are under the influence of any violent temptation*; and that, unless the Lord Jesus strengthens our faith, Satan will sift us as wheat, and manifest us to be light as chaff.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

In this subject all are interested: for though the states of men are widely different from each other, we all have to do with this great enemy, as *captivated*by him, or *conflicting*with him, or *victorious*over him. We will address ourselves therefore to these different classes:

***~~1. To the captivated—~~***

But where shall we find any of this description? We read indeed in the Scriptures, of some who are "taken in the snare of the devil, and are led captive by him at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26);" but are there any such in our day? The idea of Satanic influence is almost expunged from modern creeds: but if we believe the Bible, we must believe that this influence still operates on the minds of men.

Would we know whether it is exerted over us? It will be no difficult matter to determine this.

Are we disobedient, willfully and habitually disobedient, to any one command of God? It is Satan that instigates us to that rebellion [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2).

Are we ignorant of the Gospel as our one source of life, and peace, and holiness? It is Satan that blinds our eyes, and keeps us from beholding the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4).

Consult then the experience of your souls on these points: inquire into the liveliness of your faith, and the conformity of your practice to the word of God; and, unless you have been truly converted by the grace of Christ, you will be constrained to acknowledge that you are under the power of that cruel adversary.

View then your state, and see how deplorable it is: the condition of that poor demoniac mentioned by Mark, is a melancholy picture of your condition, who are breaking through all the restraints of God's holy law, and inflicting the most deadly wounds upon your own souls, [Mark 5:2-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.2-5). O beg of God to show you what a miserable state you are in, and to interpose with his almighty power for your speedy deliverance.

***~~2. To the conflicting—~~***

To those among us who have commenced a warfare against sin and Satan, we would particularly say, Remember where your strength is—it is not in yourselves. You "have not in yourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" "your sufficiency is altogether in God," and in the Lord Jesus Christ, "without whom you can do nothing, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)."

Hear the voice of God to you on this subject; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty! [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6)." Be on your guard then, "lest you lean to your own understanding," or "trust," even in the smallest degree, "in an arm of flesh." You are indeed to "be strong;" but it must be "in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)." You are to go forth armed; but not in armor framed by human skill; that would be to you as useless as Saul's armor was to David: there is a whole suit of armor provided for you by God; and in that you must be clothed, [Ephesians 6:11-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11-17). Arrayed in that, and especially taking with you the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, you need not fear. Satan well "knows" the power of soldiers thus arrayed; and "he will flee from those who thus resist him, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7)."

Inquire of those who are now triumphant in Heaven; and ask them, how they gained the victory. The answer from every one of them will be, "We overcame him by the blood of the Lamb! [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11);" we trusted to that blood, to "obtain mercy for us, and grace to help us in every time of need:" and we were not disappointed of our hope: we fought; we gained the victory; and "Satan was in due time bruised under our feet!"

***~~3. To the victorious—~~***

It may seem presumptuous to speak of such in this present world; but such there are, and such, we trust, among us, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14); [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18). We do not indeed imagine that there are any, against whom Satan does not sometimes gain advantage; but we are persuaded that there are some among us who maintain a good, and a successful warfare. To such then we say, If God has made you to differ from others, give glory to that adorable Savior who has strengthened you by his Spirit, and enabled you to withstand so potent an enemy! To this you are called by the history before us.

The failure of these presumptuous exorcists served to illustrate more fully the success of the Apostle, in and by whom the Lord Jesus worked: and you are told, "The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified verse 17." Magnify then your Savior for every victory you gain, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise!" And, if you see others victorious around you, be not envious of them, because they are not of your sect or party—as the Apostles once were [Luke 9:49-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.49-50); but rejoice with them, and glorify God in their behalf.

But, however victorious you are, remember that you are still on the field of battle, and may, if off your guard, receive the most deadly wounds. We read of those, "whose hearts, once delivered from an evil spirit, were again occupied by seven other spirits more wicked than he; and whose last end was therefore worse than their beginning, [Luke 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.24-26)." O beware, lest at last it proves thus with you! *Be ever on the watch, guarding against the wiles and devices of your subtle enemy, and crying mightily to God to protect you from him.*

Learn from the people who beheld the miracles of Paul: they did not put their impious books upon a shelf, but "burned them," and that publicly too, without any regard to their great value; determining that they would never more prove a snare to themselves, or to any other persons, verse 18, 19. Deal thus with your besetting sins—spare not one of them, no, not for an hour; but cut off the offending hand, and pluck out the offending eye. Then shall you have daily fresh cause for praise and thanksgiving, [Romans 7:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24-25), and before long obtain that crown of righteousness, which God has promised to all his faithful and victorious servants! [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

***~~#1795~~***

***~~GENUINE REPENTANCE~~***

***~~[Acts 19:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.18-20).~~***

"Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."

IT seems that, in former ages, Satan had a greater power over the persons and concerns of men than we at this time imagine him to possess. That, in the days of Moses, there were persons who professed to have connection with Satan, and to cause, through his influence, effects surpassing the power of man to produce, we cannot doubt: because he says to all the people of Israel, " Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead, [Deuteronomy 18:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 18.10-11)." And it can scarcely be doubted but that superhuman powers were occasionally exercised by them. The magicians of Pharaoh, I think, gave a satisfactory evidence of this. Persons so influenced, were confederates with Satan.

But there have been others, especially in the apostolic age, possessed by him against their will; and it would seem that he was permitted to infest men in a more than ordinary degree at that time, in order to give an opportunity for the Lord Jesus Christ to manifest, in a more abundant measure, how entirely the whole creation was under his control.

A remarkable occasion had just offered itself to the notice of the people at Ephesus. Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish priest, professing themselves to be exorcists, undertook to expel a demon from a person that was possessed; and, for that end, adjured the spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to depart from him. But the spirit acknowledging his inability to withstand the command of Jesus, when uttered by one who was duly authorized to issue it in his name, stirred up the man to fall upon them with irresistible fury; and "they all fled out of the house naked and wounded," happy to escape even with their lives. This was so strong a testimony to the Lord Jesus, that it carried conviction to the minds of multitudes; and determined them instantly to renounce their confederacy with Satan, and to prove themselves in the face of the whole world, the faithful servants of Christ. Their conduct on this occasion will lead me to show,

***~~I. What effects the Gospel produced on them—~~***

Some among them had already "believed" in Christ; but not so as to come under the full influence of the Gospel. See [John 2:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.23-25). Others were wrought upon at this time; the wonder, which they beheld, impressing them with a conviction which they had not felt before. A general sentiment now pervaded the whole assembly: and "a number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly;" thus showing, that, through the grace of God, they were enabled to obtain a victory over,

***~~1. The love of this world—~~***

They had been held in high repute for their skill in magic; and probably, like Simon the Sorcerer, had induced many to regard them with the utmost veneration, "as the great power of God, [Acts 8:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.9-11)." But now they "confessed," before all, that they had been impostors: "they showed their deeds," and took shame to themselves as deceivers of the people. The very books, whereby they had been enabled to keep up the deception, they devoted to destruction: and thus gave to all a most unquestionable evidence of their shame, their sorrow, and contrition.

Thus they showed their disregard of worldly honor. And the same contempt they manifested, also, for their worldly interests. These books were numerous, and of exceeding great value. At the lowest calculation, they would have sold for fifty thousand days wages of our money: and, if the owners had been anxious about their temporal interest, they might easily have found an excuse for converting their property into money. But they preferred the honoring of God, in the destruction of property that must be so hateful to him. And in this sentiment they were all of one accord and of one mind.

***~~2. The principle of sin within them—~~***

Perhaps this was the greatest sacrifice that they could make; since, from a variety of considerations, both of honor and of financial interest, these books were regarded by them as their dearest treasure. But they were afraid lest these books, if retained by them, would become a snare to them in the future; or, if sold by them, become an occasion of sin to others: and in either case the evil would be incalculable. They now felt the bitterness of sin; and would gladly, if possible, root it out of their own hearts, and prevent its continuance in the world. Hence, so far as they could by this act effectuate that holy purpose, they determined to do it. At all events, they saw that this sacrifice would glorify their Lord and Master; and evince, to all who beheld it, that nothing hostile to his interests and his honor would be allowed to exist.

From this slight sketch of the power of the Gospel, we may see,

***~~II. What effects it may well be expected to produce on us also—~~***

The effects of the gospel are uniform in every age and every place, [Colossians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.6); in every soul where it gains a due ascendant, it will produce, so far as circumstances will admit of it, the same feelings in reference to sin; the same feelings, I say,

***~~1. Of shame and sorrow—~~***

The true penitent will call to mind the evils he has committed, and will be ready to "confess them" before God and man. The things which once contributed to the advancement of his reputation and interests in the world, he will now be ready to paint in their true colors, and to take shame to himself on account of them.

There is scarcely any sin which is not extenuated by some sophisticated appellation, if not dignified also by some honorable name. But *the true convert views everything in its reference to eternity. He tries his ways by the standard of God's word, and judges himself as he will be judged at the last day*. Nor will he now be afraid to bear his testimony before all men, both by word and deed, that God alone is to be served, and that everything contrary to His will is to be abandoned. He will not plead for sin of any kind, however fashionable, however gainful, however pleasant: he will endeavor to destroy it, root and branch; "not retaining a right hand or a right eye," that may by any means displease his God, or prove a snare to his own soul, [Matthew 5:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.29-30).

***~~2. Of indignation and abhorrence—~~***

This, in particular, was evidenced by the people at Ephesus, and is pre-eminently characteristic of real penitence. See it in the Corinthian Church, when they were made sorry after a godly manner: "Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. [2 Corinthians 7:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.9-11)."

*Thus will repentance manifest itself in every upright soul.*It will not only mourn for sin, but will put it away, and most especially the besetting sin. Has a man been addicted to worldliness, or intemperance, or impurity? if he is a true penitent, he will cut off occasion for the indulgence of his evil propensities, and shun the company, the scenes, the very thoughts, that would be likely to kindle in him a desire after his unhallowed gratifications. He will put far from him the incentives to sin; and as carefully avoid the becoming a snare to others, as the indulgence of sin in his own soul. Nor will he be content with this—no, he will enter his protest against the lusts by which he has been led captive; and will endeavor, by his public deportment, to undo all the evil which, by his example, he has countenanced in the world.

O, brethren, tell me whether this is the habit of your minds; and whether it can be said of you, that "in all things you are proving yourselves to be clear in this matter."

***~~From hence we may see,~~***

***~~1. What a blessing the Gospel is to the world—~~***

This is its true and genuine effect, wherever it comes: this is its operation on individuals and kingdoms, so far as its influence extends. Truly, it will destroy the reign of Satan, and establish the authority of Christ throughout the world. Think what it did in the apostolic age: think what it has done even in this place. Say, has it not wrought on many of you, my brethren, as it did on those at Ephesus; so that you have not only "cast your idols to the moles and to the bats;" but you would, if it were possible, annihilate the very existence of sin within you? Well, the time is coming when these effects shall be seen over the face of the whole earth; and all those nations that are now under the dominion of Satan, shall "become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."

***~~2. How to judge respecting our reception of it—~~***

The *calling*of ourselves "believers" will not prove us to belong to Christ. Of those in our text many are said to have "believed," while yet they were far from possessing saving faith. *Until their faith wrought by works, it was no better than the faith of devils*: for "faith without works is dead." Take, then, the conduct of these Ephesians as a test whereby to try yourselves.

Are you filled with the same holy zeal that animated them; the same determination to mortify sin in yourselves, to discountenance it in others, and to bear your testimony before the whole world, that Christ alone is to be served and honored and obeyed? Bring yourselves, I say, to this test; and see whether your conduct speaks for you, as theirs did for them.

Call not this enthusiasm: it is not enthusiasm, but duty, yes, and the duty of *all*that believe in Christ. Rise, then, to this, my brethren; and beg of God so to assist you by his Holy Spirit, that you may come short of it in nothing, but "be lights" to all around you, and "salt" that shall keep all, who come in contact with you, from corruption. If you profess to believe in Christ, and have a "hope in him," see that you follow him in all things, and "purify yourselves, even as He is pure."

***~~#1796~~***

***~~HEATHENISH AND CHRISTIAN ZEAL COMPARED~~***

***~~[Acts 19:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.34).~~***

"All with one voice, for about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

THE enmity of the human heart against God may sleep; but it is soon awakened, and called forth into action. Paul had continued two years at Ephesus, if not unmolested—yet protected by the power of God. But when his labors there were just finished, and he had sent away two of his attendants into Macedonia, with an intention speedily to follow them, it pleased God to withdraw from the people those restraints which he had hitherto imposed upon them, and to leave them to show what was in their hearts. Accordingly the workmen "who made silver shrines for Diana," finding their trade lessened by the prevalence of Christianity, raised a tumult throughout the whole city, and would probably have killed Paul, if they could have laid their hands on him. In opposition to him and his doctrine, they exalted the object of their own worship, crying with one voice for the space of two hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

From this circumstance we shall take occasion to notice,

***~~I. The zeal they manifested—~~***

This doubtless was great; but it was,

***~~1. Blind zeal—~~***

Who was Diana? What had she done for them? What could a senseless image do for them? Or what difference would there be in the power of that image, whether it was made with hands, or fell down (as they foolishly supposed) from Jupiter, who himself was only a creature of their vain imaginations? Yet for the honor of this idol are they transported beyond all bounds of sense and reason: and when Alexander beckoned to them with his hand, in order to engage their attention to what he had to say to them on the subject, they would not listen to him for a moment, but for the space of two hours cried out all together, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" *We wonder at the extreme blindness of these benighted heathens*: but among professing Christians there are very many who can give no better reason for the hope that is in them, or for the religion they profess, than those could who were so zealous for the honor of Diana.

***~~2. Self-interested zeal—~~***

Demetrius, and the workmen of the like occupation with himself, pretended not to regard their gains, or at least not to account them as anything in comparison with their religion: but it is manifest, that a concern for their temporal interest was the real source of all their disquiet: and, had their gains been increased by the introduction of Christianity, instead of being diminished, they would have left to others the task of vindicating the honor of their goddess. See verse 25, 27.

Now this gives us an insight into all the different religions in the world, not excepting even Christianity itself, as it has been debased by the great majority of its adherents. They are all founded in priestcraft. Men, with a view of exalting themselves, and advancing their own interests, have invented gods and goddesses, and ceremonies by which they were to be worshiped; and have prevailed upon their fellow-countrymen to adopt their cunningly-devised fables: and, having once gained an ascendant over the minds of others, they have contrived to inspire them with reverence and zeal for the systems thus promulgated, and to secure to themselves thereby a permanent support. Hence the priests have uniformly opposed all who have attempted to rectify the errors of the people: and this is the true reason of Popery having taken so deep a root in the minds of men: the Pope and the subordinate priests find their goal in upholding all the superstitions with which they have obscured the Christian faith; and the people, deluded and kept in bondage by them, are as zealous for those superstitions, as for the most important doctrines of their religion.

Happy would it be if Protestant Churches also were not chargeable with the same evils: but truth compels us to acknowledge, that the fire which burns upon our Christian altars would soon languish, if it were not supplied with fuel by temporal honors and emoluments. It must be remembered, however, that the zeal which is founded in self-interest, is worthless, and even hateful in the sight of God!

***~~3. Infuriated zeal—~~***

The people were "full of wrath," and acted more like maniacs than rational beings. "The whole city was filled with confusion;" "some cried one thing, and some another;" and "the greater part of the assembly knew not why they were come together." In what a ferment must their minds be that they could continue for two hours that senseless cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We read of the worshipers of Baal crying from the morning to the evening sacrifice, "O Baal, hear us!" and because he gave them no answer, "they cut themselves with knives until the blood gushed out." In such instances as these we see. in most striking colors, the*nature and effects of superstition: it debases men almost to a level with the beasts, in the ferocity of their dispositions and the absurdity of their actions*: so justly does the Apostle designate its votaries "as unreasonable and wicked men."

In perfect contrast with this is,

***~~II. The zeal which Christianity requires—~~***

True religion must be accompanied with zeal; with a zeal proportioned, in some measure, to its supreme excellence. But Christian zeal must be,

***~~1. Zeal founded in knowledge—~~***

We should know wherein the superiority of our religion consists: we should be acquainted with its mysterious truths, and, above all, with that which constitutes its peculiar excellence—the mystery of redemption. We should see the wisdom and goodness, the love and mercy, yes, and every perfection, of the Deity, as displayed in that stupendous mystery. We should see its suitableness to our wants, and its sufficiency for our necessities: It is from such views of it alone that true zeal will spring; or that we shall ever be led to "count all things but rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of it."

***~~2. Zeal regulated by love—~~***

*True zeal should have respect only to the good of men, and the glory of God*. It should be divested of all selfish interests, and carnal passions. *Self*should have no concern whatever in it, any farther than the advancement of our own spiritual and eternal welfare may be comprehended under that term. In all its actings it must be regulated by a tender regard to the weaknesses and prejudices of men. It is by no means sufficient that we endeavor to approve ourselves zealous for God, unless we approve ourselves at the same time patient and forbearing towards men; proportioning our exertions for their welfare to their capacity for receiving our instructions; or, in other words, being content to administer *milk*alone to those who are not able to digest strong meat; and, like Moses, to put a veil upon our face, when the luster of our countenance would be too strong for those who look to us for the words of life.

Never should we needlessly cast a stumbling-block in the way of any, or use our own liberty in such a way as to offend our weaker brethren. Our aim should be, to "win souls" to Christ: and for that end we would, as far as we conscientiously can, "become all things to all men, that by all means we may save some."

***~~3. Zeal tempered with discretion—~~***

"It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always:" but there is "a zeal which is not according to knowledge." To exercise zeal aright, we should consider with care and circumspection the following things:

First, Our own office and character; not invading the provinces of others, or assuming to ourselves a character which belongs not to us. It is not every one that has a right to act as Phinehas did, in executing vengeance upon offenders with his own hand: (Phinehas was himself a ruler, and acted under the orders of the supreme magistrate: and he is commended, not so much for punishing the offenders, as for daring to punish them in the face of all Israel, while thousands of others were guilty of the same offense.)

Nor can I conceive it at all right for persons uneducated and uncalled, to invade the ministerial office, (as is so common in this day,) when we are expressly told, that "no man should take this honor unto himself, but he who is called of God," [Hebrews 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.4), and [James 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.1).

Next, we should consider the nature of the thing about which our zeal is exercised. We should distinguish between things essential and non-essential. It should be a sad perversion of zeal to show the same earnestness about "tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, as about the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth." We mean not to say, that any truth, or any duty, is of small importance; but we affirm, that there is a vast distance between some truths or duties, and others; and that consequently there should be a proportionate difference between the zeal we exercise in relation to them. Paul "became to the weak, as weak; and to those who were without law as without law:" he even circumcised Timothy, though he knew that the rite of circumcision was abrogated: but when the circumcision of Titus was required as necessary, he would not give place, no, not for an hour; but declared, that if even an angel from Heaven would insist upon the works of the law as necessary to salvation, he would, and must, be accursed.

The same sentiment applies to those doctrines of our religion which are less clearly revealed, and about which the best of men may differ; as also to those matters which relate to Church government, respecting which there is a great diversity of opinion among men of equal piety and learning. *We should insist upon them, not in proportion to the interests or prejudices of any particular party, but according to the stress laid upon them in the Holy Scriptures; always distinguishing between what is clear or doubtful, essential or non-essential.*

There is yet another thing proper for us to consider, namely, the best means of attaining our end. Nothing is further from Christian sincerity than *artifice*of any kind. We must never attempt to "catch any man with deceit." But there is an address, "a becoming all things to all men," which we shall do well to cultivate. As in warfare it often happens that an enemy is induced by the skillful motions of his adversary to relinquish a post from which he could not have been driven by a direct attack, so, in*seeking to benefit mankind, much may depend on the manner in which our efforts are conducted*.

We know full well, that success is of God alone; but we know also that he makes use of means suited to the end, and that he requires us to "walk in wisdom toward those who are without," and to "give no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed."

***~~We will conclude this subject with one or two directions proper for the occasion:~~***

***~~1. Let your zeal begin at home—~~***

A man's own heart is the first sphere for the exercise of zeal. To get a deeply penitent and contrite heart is an object worthy of our utmost exertions. Zeal in relation to this is expressly enjoined by our Lord himself, who could not endure the lukewarmness of the Laodicean Church, [Revelation 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.19); and the diversified actings of that zeal are accurately described in the account given us of the Corinthian Church, [2 Corinthians 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.11).

To devote ourselves also unreservedly to God is another exercise of zeal which deserves our earliest attention. The *mortifying*of every lust, the *cultivating*of every gracious affection, and the getting of "our whole man, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified unto the Lord, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1); [Romans 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.11). Ecclesiastes 9," this, this should be a prelude to our exertions in behalf of others: we should "first pluck the beam out of our own eye, before we attempt to pull out the mote that is in our brother's eye."

I do not mean that we are to forbear doing anything for God until we ourselves are perfect (for then we shall never exert ourselves for him at all,) but we should make our first and main efforts on our own corruptions, that we may teach others by our example, as well as by our precepts.

***~~2. Let your zeal be extended to all around you—~~***

Every man may find abundant scope for his labors in his own immediate neighborhood: in visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, relieving the sick, and comforting the afflicted.

But some are called to more extensive spheres of usefulness: magistrates and ministers have a greater scope afforded them for benefitting the world. And O, how loudly do the heathen nations call upon us for the exercise of zeal! How many in every country under Heaven are saying to us, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!"

*The office of zeal is to overlook our own ease and interests, and to find our happiness in serving God*: but, alas! how little of this zeal is to be found among us! How few, when God is wanting ambassadors to distant climates, are ready to say, "Here am I; send me." This is much to the shame of the Christian world. Our Lord tells us of ungodly men that would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" to false human opinions, and we are backward to use such exertions for the conversion of multitudes to the faith of Christ. Ah! let us wipe off this reproach; and labor, all of us in our respective spheres, and according to our abilities, to promote the salvation of our fellow-men, and to advance the kingdom of Christ to the utmost ends of the earth!

***~~#1797~~***

***~~PAUL'S SERMON AT TROAS~~***

***~~[Acts 20:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.7).~~***

"On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight."

IF we look at Christianity as it exists at this day, it appears little else than a *name*and a *form*: but if we contemplate it as it existed in the apostolic age, it will be found an active and invigorating principle in the minds of men, engaging all their affections, and stimulating them to the greatest exertions.

As for Paul's labors for the propagation of the Gospel in the world, we forbear to speak of them at present, any farther than they are connected with the passage which is immediately before us: but his preaching from evening to midnight, and then continuing his discourse afterwards until break of day, will give us some idea of the exertions he made in the cause of Christ, and of the interest which his hearers also felt in all that related to their Christian course.

The account given of his discourse, will lead us to notice,

***~~I. The proper employment of the Sabbath—~~***

The Jewish Sabbath was appointed by God himself to be spent in holy exercises. On it the sacrifices were twice as numerous as on other days; and the law of Moses was read for the instruction of the people. But under the Christian dispensation, the time of its observance was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first; in commemoration of the resurrection of our blessed Lord, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is probable that, for a considerable time, the seventh day still continued to be observed by those who were proselyted from the Jewish religion, lest their neglect of that day would put a stumbling-block in the way of their brethren: but the first day was that which from the beginning was held sacred by the early Christians; and it was dignified with the peculiar title of the "Lord's-day, compare [1 Corinthians 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.2) with [Revelation 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.10)."

On this day the Church at Troas was assembled, to offer unto God their accustomed sacrifices of prayer and praise, and particularly "to break bread," that is, to commemorate the death of Christ agreeably to the directions given by our Lord himself on the night previous to his crucifixion. This ordinance constituted an essential part of the service on every Lord's-day: it called the attention of the Church to that great mystery which was the foundation of all their hopes, even to the body of Christ as broken for them, and the blood of Christ as shed for them. Moreover, it led them to apply to Christ by faith for a continued interest in his death, and a more abundant communication of his blessing to their souls.

Among us, the Lord's Supper is not administered so often; but our employment on the Sabbath ought to be, in fact, the same: it should consist in these two things:

***~~1. A personal fellowship with Christ as dying for us—~~***

In entering into the house of prayer, we come, it is true, to worship the Father; but we must never forget that it is only in and through Christ that we can have access to him; and that every prayer must be offered to the Father in the name of Christ.

We assemble, too, to hear the word of God; but it is the Gospel, the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, that we must desire to hear: and the faithful minister will "determine to know nothing among his people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If he preaches the *law*, it will be as "a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ." Or if he insist upon any particular *duty*, it will be, not to lead his hearers to establish a righteousness of their own by their obedience to it, but to show them how they are to manifest the sincerity of their faith, and how they are to glorify their God and Savior.

Both minister and people must remember that they meet as Christians, who have their hopes fixed entirely on Christ, and expect everything as the purchase of his blood. Whether the Lord's Supper is administered or not, "Christ is to be evidently set forth crucified before us;" and "to know him," "to win him," "to be found in him;" and "to receive out of his fullness," must be the great object of our assembling together.

***~~2. A personal surrender of ourselves to him, as his redeemed people—~~***

When the first Christians met thus constantly "to break bread," they confessed openly, that they were disciples of that crucified Savior; and they engaged themselves, as it were by a solemn oath, to live and die in his service.

Thus do we profess, in all our solemn acts of worship, that we have been "bought with a price," even with the inestimable price of the Redeemer's blood; and that we are bound by every possible tie, "to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." We do not in general associate this idea with anything but the Lord's supper; but we ought to associate it with all the services of the Sabbath; and to consider ourselves as living thus upon Christ by the renewed exercises of faith, in order that we may live to Christ in the more enlarged exercise of holy obedience.

Let us now proceed to notice,

***~~II. The particular circumstances of that meeting—~~***

The place where they were assembled was an upper chamber—

It was a room three stories high, and so small and crowded, that the windows, even at night, were forced to be open for the admission of air, while some were constrained to sit in them for lack of more convenient accommodation. Little do we think what a blessing it is to us that we have houses built on purpose for the service of our God. True it is that even in them we do not always find such commodious seats as one could wish: but, if there were no other places for our reception than such as they possessed at Troas, we fear that multitudes who now receive instruction from Sabbath to Sabbath, would never trouble themselves to seek it, where they must submit to so much inconvenience for the attainment of it.

***~~In that room, there were "many lights"—~~***

The enemies of the Church were ready to raise all manner of evil reports against the disciples; and they would gladly have represented these nocturnal meetings as scenes of much iniquity. To cut off all occasion for such calumnies, the disciples took care to have the place of their assemblies well lighted in every part; and it is probable that it was for the express purpose of obviating all such remarks, that the historian recorded this otherwise unimportant fact. It teaches us, however, that we should be always on our "guard against even the appearance of evil," and "cut off occasion from them that seek occasion" against us, and "not let our good be evil spoken of."

***~~There Paul preached his farewell discourse—~~***

At what precise hour he began, we know not; but "he continued his discourse until midnight;" and after a short interruption, resumed it "until break of day." Do we wonder that he would so long detain his audience? No! the occasion was very peculiar; "he was about to depart on the morrow," never probably to see their face again. His heart was full; the subject was inexhaustible: the hearts of his audience were deeply impressed, and they drank in the word with insatiable eagerness. What a glorious meeting must that have been; the preacher so animated with his subject, and the people so penetrated with the truths they heard!

Doubtless, it would not be expedient, under common circumstances, so to lengthen out the service of our God; but, if we could always meet under similar impressions, and have our hearts so engaged, how glorious would be the ordinances, and how exalted the benefit arising from them!

***~~A distressing occurrence, which for a time interrupted his discourse, tended ultimately to impress it more deeply on their minds—~~***

A youth, named Eutychus, being overcome with sleep, "fell down out of the window from the third loft, and was taken up dead." O, what grief must have seized the whole assembly! But the Apostle went down to him, and fell upon him, as Elijah and Elisha had done upon the persons they had raised to life, and by prayer to God prevailed for the restoration of his life. At the sight of this "they were much comforted." As it respected the youth, it would have been most distressing to think that he would be taken into the eternal world in such a state; as though he had been made, like Lot's wife, a warning to all future generations.

But more especially were they concerned for the honor of God and his Gospel. What a stumbling-block would it have been to the ungodly, that such an accident would have been occasioned by the unreasonable length of the Apostle's discourse! How bitterly would they have inveighed against him, and against these meetings that were encouraged by him! Truly it was no little joy to have such great occasions of offense removed.

But further, the miracle thus wrought before their eyes, was a striking confirmation of what they had heard: it was, as it were, a seal put by God himself to attest the truth of all that had been delivered to them, and an emblem, yes, a pledge also, of the blessings which all who received his Gospel might expect at his hands. Thus was this occurrence, so afflictive in itself, overruled for the furtherance of their joy, and for the more abundant display of God's grace and mercy.

***~~As an improvement of this subject, let us see,~~***

***~~1. How deep an interest we should take in the Gospel of Christ!~~***

It is much to be regretted that we see but little of this fervor in our religious assemblies: neither we who minister, nor you who hear, are affected with the Gospel in any measure as we ought to be. In many congregations there may be found persons sleeping, like Eutychus, though the sermon be not an hour long. And where they are not actually asleep, how many hear in such a drowsy, listless, inattentive manner, that they evidently take no interest in the subject, nor could give any good account of what has been spoken to them.

O brethren, let it not be so with us. Let us rather come together as that assembly did; I to preach, and you to hear, as though we were never to meet again in this world. The subjects of the Apostle's discourse are as important to us, as they were to the primitive Christians: let us beg of God to impress them more deeply on our minds, that they may be to us "a savor of life unto life," and not, as they are to too many, "a savor of death unto death."

***~~2. How earnestly we should improve our present fellowship with each other!~~***

It is but a little while, at all events, that our present connection can be continued. I must soon go to give an account of my ministry, as you also must to answer for the way in which you have improved it: and even from Sabbath to Sabbath we know not whether the present opportunity shall not be our last. Surely this thought would make us exceeding anxious to obtain increasing edification in faith and love, so that "I may be your rejoicing, and you be mine, in the great day of the Lord Jesus!"

***~~#1798~~***

***~~PAUL'S APPEAL TO THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS~~***

***~~[Acts 20:17-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.17-21).~~***

"From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

IT is, if we may so speak, to accidental circumstances, that we are indebted for that full development of Paul's character which we have in the Holy Scriptures. He never willingly set about to commend himself; but he was sometimes compelled to vindicate himself against the accusations of his enemies, and *to make known his own principles and conduct, in order to prevail on others to tread in his steps*. It was with this latter view that he made his appeal to the elders of Ephesus, when he was about to take a last farewell of them at Miletus.

Let us consider,

***~~I. The appeal he made to them—~~***

His stay among them had been of three years continuance; so that during that time they had had abundant opportunities of knowing everything respecting him. To them therefore he appealed respecting,

***~~1. The exercises of his mind—~~***

He had "served the Lord with all humility of mind" conscious of his own utter insufficiency for so great a work as had been committed to him, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16), and willing to make himself the servant of all, if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare, 2 Corinthians 4:5 and [1 Corinthians 9:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19).

With this humility of mind he had blended compassion for their souls; so that whether he thought of those who rejected the Gospel, or those who walked unworthy of it, he had wept much on their account, both in his addresses to them, and in his supplications in their behalf, [Romans 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.2). [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18). [2 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.4).

Moreover, he had persevered in his efforts for their good, notwithstanding such difficulties, as had often proved a severe trial to his faith and patience, [Acts 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.3) and [Acts 13:50-51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50-51); [Acts 14:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.5-6); [Acts 14:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.19-20); [Acts 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.5).

***~~2. The labors of his life—~~***

He had exerted himself for them with fidelity and diligence: in all his communications, consulting, not what might *please*, but what would "*profit*them," and delivering to them his sentiments, not merely in public addresses, but privately and personally in their own houses, whenever an occasion offered.

***~~3. The subject of his ministrations—~~***

He had never entertained them with unprofitable speculations, but had uniformly endeavored to instruct them in the two great fundamental doctrines of Christianity, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These he inculcated on all, whether they were self-righteous Jews, or philosophizing and contemptuous Gentiles: he inculcated these things, I say, on all, as being equally necessary, and equally sufficient, for all the human race.

As the making of such an appeal to them may, to a superficial observer, appear to savor of pride, let us consider,

***~~II. The end for which he made it—~~***

We may be well assured that he sought not to advance his own glory: no; he had higher ends in view—he endeavored to show them,

***~~1. How much they were indebted to God for the privileges they had enjoyed—~~***

To have such a ministry of the word so long continued to them, was a greater blessing than to be loaded with all the temporal benefits that could have been bestowed upon them. By means of his ministry, vast multitudes had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Now therefore that they were about to be deprived of those blessings, it became them, not so much to grieve at the loss they were to sustain, as to adore God for the benefits they had enjoyed. In reviewing his labors among them for the space of three years, they would see how greatly they were indebted to God above other cities, which had enjoyed only a transient visit of a few days or weeks; and would feel themselves bound to render to the Lord, according to the benefits he had conferred upon them.

***~~2. How carefully they should guard against departing from the faith—~~***

Notwithstanding all the instructions they had received, they might, and would, if left to themselves, depart from God. Paul knew, that, "after his departure, grievous wolves would enter in among them;" and that "even from among themselves men would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." This, alas! is what frequently takes place at the removal of a faithful minister, unless there be substituted in his place an *Elisha*, on whom the mantle of Elijah has fallen. When Moses was on the mount only forty days, the people, even with Aaron at their head, departed from the Lord, and made a golden calf idol. What then must not be expected, where the bereavement is of long continuance, and the people are left without any such distinguished saint to superintend and control them? O let all of you take care, "lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled!"

***~~3. How earnestly they should strive to promote the interests of the Church—~~***

These elders were the same as in a subsequent verse are called "overseers," or bishops; and, as their peculiar duty called them "to feed the Church of God," he charged them to "take heed both to themselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit had placed them," even that Church, which our incarnate "God had purchased with his own blood." What weighty considerations does he here urge, to stimulate them to a diligent discharge of their high office! O that every minister felt their full influence, and were actuated by them in the whole of his conduct!

But we must not suppose that ministers alone are interested in this charge: for every member of a Church may do much towards the establishment of his brethren in faith, and love, and holiness. All should watch over one another for good; and this duty is still more imperative, when a faithful pastor is removed, and scope is thereby afforded for the entrance of contentious persons to distract and divide the Church.

***~~#1799~~***

***~~DUTY OF MINISTERS~~***

***~~[Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24).~~***

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

OF all the employments under Heaven, there is not one so honorable or so useful as that in which the ministers of the Gospel have the happiness to be engaged. The government of kingdoms has respect only to the things of time; whereas the ministry of the Gospel, both in its ordination by God, and its exercise by men, refers altogether to the concerns of eternity. We mean not to depreciate other offices; or to place the common office of a pastor on a footing with that of a Prophet or an Apostle: but still we must be permitted to "magnify our office" beyond that of any earthly magistrate, as far as *things visible and temporal are excelled by things invisible and eternal*.

But the trials with which a faithful discharge of our duty is attended are proportionably great. Fallen man does not like to be under God's inspection and authority: he wishes to banish God from his thoughts. If warned of his guilt and danger, he is indignant; and says to us, "Prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits; and make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us!" From the days of Cain, even to the present hour, has the exercise of vital godliness been an occasion of offense: and *the more the Divine authority has been asserted, the more offense has been given to an ungodly world*.

Hence Prophets and Apostles have all, in their respective ages, fallen a sacrifice to their fidelity. Paul, at his first appointment to the apostolic office, was told what great things he would suffer for the Lord's sake; and his trials far exceeded those of any other Apostle: but, in a review of all that he had endured, and in the prospect of all that he was yet taught to expect, he could say, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God!"

From these words I shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What is the office of a minister—~~***

The office of every minister is, "to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

***~~This was the one employment of the Apostle—~~***

He proclaimed, with all fidelity, "the Gospel" of Christ, or, in other words, the salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out for us by his own obedience unto death. This he proclaimed to be altogether "of grace," in the first appointment of the Lord Jesus to be a Mediator between God and man; in the acceptance of his sacrifice as an expiation for sin; in the bestowment of faith on the individuals of mankind; and in the completion of the work in the souls of all that shall be saved. From the beginning to the end, in all its parts, this salvation was traced by him to the free and sovereign grace of God!

Of these things, also, he "testified with much contention." He was constantly opposed by Judaizing teachers on the one hand, and by conceited Gentile philosophers on the other; and he was constrained to exert himself with all earnestness, in order that the truth of the Gospel might be fully known, and be established on the firmest basis. The Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians are the best commentary on these words; and must fully evince the energy with which the Apostle maintained his testimony, whether against dissembling friends or violent opponents.

***~~This, also, is the employment of every Christian minister—~~***

To make known the way of salvation is the very end for which ministers are ordained. They come as heralds of the Most High God, to proclaim mercy to a ruined world, through the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God. But against the testimony of a faithful Christian minister all the prejudices and passions of mankind will rise; and he will be constrained to maintain his ground by a *constant appeal to Holy Writ, as the only standard of truth, and the only arbiter that is competent to decide the controversy*. In his disputations he must be firm, in order to support the honor of his God, whose grace alone must be exalted from first to last. If an angel from Heaven were to broach a doctrine which derogated from this, he must withstand him to the face, and pronounce him accursed! [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9). Whatever truths he may have occasion to bring forward, he must always mark their bearing upon the *doctrines of grace*; showing how they lead to those doctrines, or arise out of them; so that the truth of the Gospel may be kept inviolate, and "Christ may be exalted as all in all! [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11)." In a word, he must determine, throughout the whole of his testimony, to "know nothing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified! [1 Corinthians 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.1-2)."

While in this passage we see *what*the ministerial office is, we behold also,

***~~II. How the minister's office is to be discharged—~~***

We have reason to he thankful for the trials he sustained; since they drew forth from him a full statement of his feelings in relation to them. From his example we learn, that this testimony must be borne,

***~~1. With undaunted firmness—~~***

*Never was there a faithful servant of God who was not persecuted for righteousness' sake*. If bonds and imprisonments do not await the pious minister at this day, it is not because he is less an object of hatred now than formerly, but because he is better protected by the laws of the land. The men who build the sepulchers of departed saints are as ready as ever to persecute the living ones, if only the civil restraints imposed upon them were withdrawn. The continuance of *the inquisition*among Catholics sufficiently shows what ungodly hypocrites would yet do, if they had it in their power.

But the servant of God must be ready to encounter every danger: he must die daily, in the habit of his mind; and be ready to lay down his life, at any time, and in any manner, for his Master's sake. "He must make no account" either of labors or of sufferings, if only he may approve himself to God, and be serviceable to the souls of his fellow-creatures.

***~~2. With inflexible perseverance—~~***

Never must he cease from his labors, as long as he has strength to follow them. He has begun a course which must never end but with life itself. He has received a commission from his Lord; and to the Lord he must give account of the manner in which it has been executed. Never must he be "weary in well-doing." Paul, when stoned and left for dead, was no sooner, as by miracle, restored to life, than he resumed his work, and prosecuted his labors with all his former intrepidity. He had respect to the account which he must speedily give at the judgment-seat of Christ; and he determined, through grace, that he would give it with joy, and not with grief. So must every minister have the blood of his people required at his hands: and he must so acquit himself in his labors for them, that, if he saves not them, he may at least deliver his own soul.

***~~For an improvement of this subject, let us follow it up,~~***

***~~1. In a way of inquiry—~~***

If we are to bear our testimony with fidelity, you are to receive it with the simplicity of little children. But have we not reason to complain with the prophet, "Lord, who has believed our report?" I know, indeed, that many receive it with outward approbation: but who among you accounts it more precious than life itself? If received aright, all things will be counted but as dung and dross in comparison with it. If received aright, it will be obeyed: your course of life will be directed by it: and you will be standing ready to give up your account to him, whose word it is, and whose salvation is proclaimed unto you. O! *Do not deceive yourselves with a mere profession of faith in Christ; but give yourselves up altogether to him*: and make him "all your salvation, and all your desire."

***~~2. In a way of encouragement—~~***

Once more we bear our testimony before you, and declare that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior, the only Savior, of the world. Once more we declare that his salvation is free for all; as free as the light we see, or the air we breathe. The grace of God, as revealed in it is exceeding abundant; insomuch that, "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound," if only you are willing to accept it as the gift of sovereign love and mercy.

Do not, I beg you, place the smallest reliance on anything of your own: for I testify to every one among you, that if you attempt to blend anything of your own with the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will make void the grace of God, and render Christ himself of no effect. "This is the record of God which we are commissioned to proclaim, 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." Receive this record sincerely, and all will be well: reject it, and you must inevitably perish: for "there is no other name given under Heaven whereby we must be saved, but the adorable name of Jesus Christ." If an adherence to Christ exposes you to difficulties, be it so: and be content to bear the cross for his sake. But if, through the fear of man, you deny Christ, know that he will deny you before the whole universe at his tribunal. "If, on the contrary, you suffer with him, fear not but that you shall be also glorified together."

***~~#1800~~***

***~~MINISTERIAL FIDELITY~~***

***~~[Acts 20:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.26-27).~~***

"I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

NO one can be conceived more averse to egotism than was the Apostle Paul. Yet, on some occasions, he felt it necessary for the vindication of his own character, to assert what was true, even though the assertion did tend to place his actions in a more favorable point of view than he would have wished to place them, if such a necessity had not existed. Nor was it only when impelled by necessity that he so acted. There were occasions whereon a regard for the souls of men induced him to refer to his own feelings and proceedings towards them, so that he might the more deeply interest them in that line of conduct which he prescribed; and which would issue in their own eternal welfare.

Such were the circumstances under which he made the appeal before us. He was addressing the elders of the Ephesian Church, whom he had sent for to Miletus, and whom he knew that he would never behold again in this world. He therefore reminded them how he had conducted himself among them; so that he might engage them, after his departure, to tread in his steps.

The words which I have just read refer to the *Ministerial fidelity*which he had exercised towards them, and to the satisfaction with which, in the prospect of the future judgment, he looked back upon it; since he had a testimony in his own conscience, and in their consciences also, that, whatever might eventually be the effect of it with respect to them, "he was pure from their blood."

In opening the subject of *Ministerial fidelity*, I will show,

***~~I. Wherein it consists—~~***

The Apostle sums it up in this one expression: "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

***~~"The counsel of God" is that which he has revealed in the Gospel of his Son—~~***

It is elsewhere called "the word of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, [2 Corinthians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19)." This, of course, comprehends all that relates to our *fall in Adam*, and our *recovery in Christ*.

The whole of our *guilt*, both original and actual, must be stated; and so stated, as that every one may be made sensible of his lost condition, and of the utter impossibility of ever restoring himself to the Divine favor.

The *law*must be set forth in its spirituality, and with its penal sanctions, that is, as requiring perfect and perpetual obedience, and as denouncing its irrevocable sentence of condemnation for one single transgression, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10).

The *saving plan*which God, of his infinite mercy has devised for the satisfying of his justice and the honoring of his law, must then be opened. His gift of his only dear Son, to take our nature upon him, and in that nature to fulfill the law for us; enduring in his own person all its righteous penalties, and obeying to the uttermost all its holy demands. His gift of his Son, I say, thus to work out a righteousness for us, a righteousness fully commensurate with all the demands, whether of law or justice, and, by imputation made available for our restoration to his favor.

This, I say, must be declared as the only method devised by God for the salvation of the world.

But it is not for our restoration to his *favor*merely, that he has devised this plan; but for our restoration to his *image* as well. And here must be opened the indispensable necessity of *mortifying all sin through the influences of the Holy Spirit, and of devoting ourselves wholly and entirely to God*.

***~~"The whole" of this counsel must be set forth regularly—~~***

It must be declared: *plainly*, without disguise; *fully*, without concealment; *firmly*, without doubt; *authoritatively*, without fear.

It is not to be enrapt up in polished language, for the sake of pleasing a fastidious ear; but to be opened in the simplest terms, or, as the Apostle says, "Not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, 1 Corinthians 1:17; [1 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4); [1 Corinthians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.13)."

Nor must there be any personal bias in our minds towards any one part of the system above another; to doctrines above duties, or to duties above doctrines: every truth that is revealed in the Scripture must be brought forth in its place, and have that measure of prominence in our statements which it bears in the sacred volume. On points of dubious aspect we may express ourselves with doubt; but on all the great leading features of redemption we would express no more doubt than on the most self-evident truth that can be subjected to our view. In delivering these truths, also, we would "speak as the oracles of God, [1 Peter 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.11)," even as "Ambassadors from God, in whose place we stand," and whose word we deliver, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20). [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13); [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

When the Apostle says that he "had not shunned" to exercise this fidelity, he strongly intimates,

***~~II. The difficulty of maintaining it—~~***

***~~Such statements as these are very offensive to the pride of man—~~***

*Man naturally conceive of himself as not very sinful, and not deserving of any great measure of punishment.* He hopes, too, that he has within himself a sufficiency of wisdom to discern his duty, and of resolution and strength to perform it. He trusts also, that, by executing his own purposes at the time that he shall find convenient to do so, he shall reconcile himself to God, and obtain favor in his sight. But the Gospel brings down at once all these towering imaginations, and reduces every child of man to a level with tax collectors and harlots; so far, at least, as to make them "renounce all confidence in the flesh, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3)," and seek for mercy simply through faith in Christ. It pronounces every man "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! [Revelation 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18-19);" and counsels him to seek in "Christ alone, his wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

Nor is the *holiness*which the Gospel requires a whit less offensive to the worldly man, than its humiliating doctrines are to the self-righteous. When we say to him, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, 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);" and when we require him to "be crucified to the world by the cross of Christ, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14);" we seem to him as exacting far too much, and as shutting Heaven against all but a few gloomy enthusiasts.

***~~Nor does anyone ever make this stand for God with impunity—~~***

Look back to the days of old, and see which of the prophets was not persecuted by the people to whom he ministered, [Acts 7:52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.52). And who among the Apostles escaped the rage of their indignant enemies? Even our blessed Lord, who "spoke as never any man spoke," and wrought such numberless miracles in confirmation of his word, was hated and persecuted even unto death! He tells us, "The world hates me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil, [John 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.7)."

See in the present day, whether there be not the same enmity evinced against his faithful servants as in the days of old? See whether ministerial fidelity does not uniformly subject a man to hatred, and reproach, and persecution, in every place, and every age. It matters not how blameless a man is in the whole of his conduct, or how benevolent in the whole of his conduct; hated he will be, yes, and despised and persecuted too, if he is faithful to his God, and to the souls of men. Men will account him "their enemy, if he tells them the truth! [Galatians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.16);" and so universal is this effect, that "if a minister pleases men, he cannot be the servant of Jesus Christ, [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)."

If we would "speak unto them smooth things, and prophesy deceits," and in our life and conduct countenance their worldly habits, we might easily conciliate their regards. "If we were of the world, the world would love its own:" but when we bear our testimony against the ways of men, we must expect them to say of us, "I hate Micaiah, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil! [1 Kings 22:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.8)."

Now it must be supposed that we have our feelings as well as other men; and that it can be no pleasing thing for us to render ourselves objects of contempt and hatred to all around us: but we know what we have to expect: we know that "the servant cannot be above his lord; and that it is sufficient for him if he is treated as his lord, [Matthew 10:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.24-25)." But this plainly shows, that to maintain this fidelity is no easy matter; and that, if we consulted with flesh and blood, we would "shun" the office which is sure to entail upon us such painful consequences.

The solemn appeal which the Apostle makes respecting his fidelity, leads us to notice,

***~~III. The importance of it to the souls of men—~~***

It is indeed of the utmost importance,

***~~1. To those who are ministered unto—~~***

There is but one way by which any man can be saved; and that is the way which God has revealed to us in the Gospel. God, in his eternal counsels, "has laid a foundation for us in Zion, [Isaiah 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 28.16);" and "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:11." Whatever men may imagine, "there is salvation for us in no other: for 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)."

Now, if we conceal this way of salvation, or pervert it in any respect, either by adding to it or taking from it, we must of necessity mislead the people, and, as far as they depend on us, eternally ruin their souls! To have such a pastor, is their misfortune: but it will pot be considered as any excuse for them. They have the sacred records in their hands; and if they studied them with diligence, and earnestly sought instruction from God, they would "be guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto salvation." If, being themselves blind, they commit themselves to the guidance of the blind, they must participate in their leaders' fate, and with them "fall into the ditch! [Matthew 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.14)."

***~~2. To those who minister—~~***

"God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation;" and he has said, "He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully! [Jeremiah 23:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.28)." To us, also, he has committed the souls to whom we minister; and he will require an account of them from us, at the day of judgment. He has placed us as watchmen, who are to care for their souls, and to give them warning from him. "O Son of man," says he, "I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself! [Ezekiel 33:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.7-9)."

On his own fidelity his everlasting salvation depends. It is with him as with a *sentinel*at the extremity of a camp. If the enemy comes, and he gives the alarm, whether the enemy prevails or not, he is blameless. But if he sleeps upon his post, or neglects to give the alarm, then he is amenable to his commander for every life that has been sacrificed, and his life must go as an atonement for his fault. If this is the case where a man is in the service of an earthly monarch, and where the bodily life only is concerned, then how much more must it be so in the service of the Most High God, and where *the eternal welfare of souls is committed to us!*It is just; it is right that it would be so: and it is in vain to hope that we shall ever "save ourselves," if we are not faithful in our endeavors to "save them that hear us! [1 Timothy 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.16)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have disregarded all the counsel that has been given them—~~***

To many our word has appeared only as "a cunningly devised fable," and "an idle tale." But we call you to witness, yes, and can make our appeal to God also, that we have, according to our ability, "declared unto you the whole counsel of God." And, though we have met with our measure of discouragement, like others, we have never shrunk from our duty, or shunned to execute it to the very utmost of our power. On your own souls, therefore, must lie the guilt of neglecting God; or, as the Apostle expresses it, " But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility! [Acts 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.6)."

Yet God forbid that I would rest without further efforts for your salvation. God is not weary in waiting for you; neither would I be weary in laying before you his whole counsel. It is probable, indeed, that this may be the last time in which I shall ever behold the face of some among you: for though I would not be removed from you before another Sabbath, the probability is that someone at least may be here present this day, with whom my next meeting will be at the bar of judgment! I beseech you, then, to think what an awful thing it will be to go to the judgment-seat of Christ with all your guilt upon you! Yet, if you remain impenitent and unbelieving, this must be your unhappy condition: you will "die in your sins," and endure the punishment of them to all eternity!

Think me not harsh for asserting this: for, as Paul says, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?" Peter also appeals in like manner, "If judgment begins at the house of God, what shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of God? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? [1 Peter 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17-18).

These appeals are very forcible, because they make you judges in your own cause. I ask, then, "What must your end be? and where will you appear at the last day?" If you will say, 'In Heaven,' be it so: I would to God you might! But conscience is not so blind, but that it will remonstrate against such a confidence as that. Conscience will tell you, that, if you will not obey the Gospel, but will continue to "reject the counsel of God against yourselves," you will do it at your peril; you will do it to your ruin!

***~~2. Those who are disposed to follow the counsel of their God—~~***

Remember to follow "the whole of it," "without partiality and without hypocrisy, [1 Timothy 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.21). [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17)." The religious world are extremely apt to forget their duty in this respect. Some place all their piety in *contending for doctrines*, in opposition to morals. Others place all their piety in *exalting morals*, to the disparagement of doctrines. Some will take one set of doctrines; and others, a set which appear opposed to them: and both will think that they are doing God service, while they anathematize each other;*as if religion consisted in the adoption of human creeds, rather than in the conversion of the soul to God*.

But let it not be thus with you. Let the word of God, and not the word of man, be your guide. Let everything be received from him with the simplicity of little children. And if there are in his word things which you cannot understand, sit not in judgment upon them with unhallowed confidence; but spread them before the Lord, saying, "What I know not, teach me!" You will bear me witness, that "the whole counsel of God has been declared to you;" nor has anything ever been kept back from you, because it did not square with this or that system of man's device.

Let every part of the inspired volume be treated in the same way by you. Never be afraid to trace everything to the sovereign counsels of your God: and, on the other hand, never forget that your condemnation is, and will be, the work of your own hands, even as your salvation is of God alone. By yourselves, indeed, must salvation be wrought instrumentally: but, if you ever attain to it, you must say, "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose;" for it is altogether the fruit of his counsel, and the operation of his grace!

***~~#1801~~***

***~~WATCHFULNESS RECOMMENDED~~***

**[Acts 20:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.31).**

"Therefore watch, and remember, that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears!"

IT is, for the most part, *a blessing to mankind that they cannot look into futurity: for, on the one hand, they would have their present enjoyments almost entirely destroyed by the prospect of future ills; while, on the other hand, a prospect of remote good would prove but a small alleviation of their present troubles.*Nevertheless, from a wise foresight of probable and contingent events, the most incalculable benefits arise.

Paul knew, by immediate revelation from God, that, after his departure, some would be found among the leading members of the Ephesian Church, who would labor to introduce divisions and dissensions among them: and the probability was, that, unless extraordinary watchfulness were maintained by the elders of that Church, the restless sectaries would succeed in their efforts: he therefore, in the farewell discourse which he delivered to the elders at Miletus, put them on their guard; and thus, by forewarning them of their danger, contributed in a very high degree to the preservation of that Church in peace and purity.

From the caution contained in the words before us, we observe,

***~~I. That to warn men of their danger is the kindest office of love—~~***

Will anyone doubt whether it was an act of love in Paul to warn the Ephesians: to warn them individually as well as collectively; to warn them "by night and by day," as often as he could gain access to them; to warn them with such earnestness as scarcely ever to address them without floods of "tears;" to do this incessantly, for three years together, when there was perhaps no other Church with whom he made so long an abode? However his fidelity might have been represented there, we have no doubt of the source from whence it sprang.

Shall it be thought harsh then and unkind in us to warn our hearers? Who would impute it to harshness, if a parent warned his child, when walking on the brink of an unseen precipice, or playing on the hole of an asp, or cockatrice den? "We know the terrors of the Lord; and therefore we persuade men." We know, that the soul that dies in an unregenerate state can never be admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); we know, that no person can be saved, who does not truly believe in Christ, and rely upon him alone for salvation, [John 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.18); [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36). [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9); we know, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

On these accounts we warn the unholy, the unbelieving, the unregenerate; and entreat them to flee from the wrath to come! If we appear earnest at any time, ought we to be blamed as too zealous, or needlessly severe? No! you have infinitely more reason to complain on account of our coldness and treachery, than on account of any excess in our fidelity and earnestness. What little zeal we do show, should be esteemed the fruit of love.

If we could follow you from the public ordinances to your respective houses, and there renew to you separately, and with tears, the warnings we have given you in public, we would perform to you the kindest office; and most approve ourselves the servants of Him who wept over the murderous Jerusalem, and died for the salvation of a ruined world.

To evince that such fidelity cannot under any circumstances be dispensed with, we observe,

***~~II. That there are none so established, but they need to be put upon their guard—~~***

The persons warned by Paul, were not the low, the ignorant, the obscure, but the most distinguished persons in the Ephesian Church: they were the elders, who superintended and governed the Church, and had doubtless been appointed to their high office because of their superior attainments in piety and virtue.

Who then are they that can claim an exemption from pastoral admonitions? Shall the rich? They perhaps, of all people in the world, most need to be put upon their guard, because their dangers are increased far beyond those of any other class! [Mark 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.25). Are those whose proficiency in knowledge or grace has raised them to eminence in the Church, exempt from danger? Look on David, or Solomon, or Peter, or Hymeneus and Philetus, or Demas—and then say whether any qualifications or attainments can place us beyond the reach of temptation; or whether there be a man in the universe to whom the exhortation in the text may not with great propriety be addressed? Be it known to you, that even Paul himself found it necessary to "keep his body under control, and bring it into subjection, lest he would at last become a cast-away:" and therefore "what I say unto one I say unto all, *Watch!*"

It is of importance too to remember,

***~~III. That the oftener we are warned, the more our responsibility is increased—~~***

The guilt contracted by the inhabitants of Bethsaida and Chorazin, far exceeded that of the idolatrous Tyrians or Sidonians, because they had disregarded the warnings given them by our blessed Lord: and the people of Capernaum, who had been exalted to Heaven in their privileges, were cast down to Hell for their abuse of them, and were doomed to a more awful condemnation than even Sodom or Gomorrah! [Matthew 11:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.21-24).

Our Lord told the Jews, that "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin (comparatively): but that, after the warnings he had given them, they had no cloak for their sin." Precisely to the same effect is Paul's admonition in the text: he reminds the Ephesians how long and earnestly he had warned them; and from thence insinuates that, if they are unwatchful, their guilt will be proportionably increased.

Is not this rule of judging universally admitted and approved? Is it not in this way that we estimate the criminality of our fellow-creatures? Do we not always consider, that, the more earnestly the necessity of obedience has been pressed upon them, the more aggravated is their disobedience or neglect? Surely then we should "remember how many years we have been warned;" and expect, that "to whom much has been committed, of them will God require the more."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

Let believers watch, "lest being led astray by the error of the wicked, or by their own deceitful lusts, they fall from their own steadfastness, [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)." Let backsliders also watch "lest being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," they abandon themselves to wickedness or despair. Let all watch, lest being blinded by the god of this world, they become slaves to his dominion, and partakers of his eternal misery!

***~~#1802~~***

***~~A FAREWELL DISCOURSE~~***

**[Acts 20:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.32).**

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

THIS is one of the most affecting portions of Scripture that can be found in all the Book of God. In it, the Apostle is taking leave of the Ephesian elders, over whom he had watched for the space of three years, and whose face he knew that he would behold no more. He was able to appeal to them, that, during that whole period, he had ministered unto them with the utmost fidelity, and watched over them with all the tenderness of a loving parent. And now that he was parting from them, he warned them of the evils which he foresaw, not only as probable, but certain: for that, from among themselves, some would arise, to introduce dissensions and divisions among them, and to fill with *tares*the field which he had so carefully cultivated with the purest *wheat*. He could not continue always with them—he therefore now commended them to God, who alone was able to complete the work which had been begun in their souls.

In these words we see,

***~~I. The desire of a minister for his people, when present with them—~~***

A faithful minister not only carries his people in his arms like a father, but "travails in birth with them," as a mother, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19). He pants for,

***~~1. Their present edification—~~***

It is here taken for granted that they are standing on the only true foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. In truth, if any person has not come to the Lord Jesus Christ as the one foundation of a sinner's hope, *he may be called a professing Christian, but he is no other than a baptized heathen!*But, supposing that the work of conversion has really been wrought in the souls of his people, the faithful minister desires to see them built up, and edified in faith and love. He would not have that any of his spiritual children would continue in a state of infantile weakness: he wishes to see them grow, and "increase with the increase of God." From children he would have them advance to young men and fathers, until they have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ." If they were as eminent as Paul himself, he would "not consider them as having already attained, or as being already perfect;" but he would exhort them to "forget what was behind, and to press forward to that which is before; and never to relax their ardor, until they have finished their course, and attained the prize of their high calling."

***~~2. Their everlasting salvation—~~***

They are "begotten to a glorious inheritance!" As God's children, "they are heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ:" and never does he consider his care for them as terminated, until he sees them translated from earth to Heaven. As long as they are in the body, they are exposed to the assaults of Satan: and "he is jealous over them with a godly jealousy, lest that serpent who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, would by any means prevail over them."

They are here intermixed with the ungodly, by whom they may be deceived and defiled. It is in Heaven alone that they are beyond the reach of temptation: there are none but *saints*thither—all who bear that sacred character are going. When the pastor beholds them safely landed on that happy shore, his soul is completely at rest respecting them; and he looks forward to the happy day when he shall be united to them there, as "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore.

But, as occasional separations from them in this world are unavoidable, we may contemplate,

***~~II. His consolation when absent from them—~~***

Though useful to his people as an instrument, he knows that he is not necessary to them; and that God carries on his work within them without his puny efforts. He therefore, when absent from them, commends them,

***~~1. To God, as the source of all good—~~***

From God they have received all the good that is in them; and from the same divine source alone can any blessing flow down unto them. To him, therefore, the minister commits his people. And it is a source of joy to him that they have in God an all-sufficient Friend, who is ever present with them, and tenderly affected towards them, and conversant with all their necessities, and able to supply all their needs. What can they lack, if only they live near to him? He can "make all grace abound towards them, that they may have always all-sufficiency in all things." To his care, therefore, he commits them with confidence, assured that "He is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

***~~2. To the Word, as the means of all good—~~***

The Holy Scriptures are justly called "the word of God's grace," because they contain a wonderful revelation of grace, suited to, and sufficient for, our every need. *In that is contained everything that we can desire, for our instruction, our consolation, and support. By that the whole work of grace may be carried on and perfected within us. It is by that that we are at first begotten to God: and by that shall we be nourished unto life eternal.*"The word is able for all this, even to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." "By that we are made pure" and "sanctified;" and through its effectual operation on the soul will Christ perfect his whole work within us: as it is said; "He loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it may be holy and without blemish! [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27)." Now, to this fountain may every saint have access at all times; and out of it, as "from a well of salvation, may he draw water with unutterable joy." To the inspired Scriptures therefore, the pious minister commends his people; knowing, that, if they will but make a just use of it, it will, as God's instrument, accomplish every end for which it has been sent, and perfect the whole of God's work within them.

***~~What, then, shall now be my parting advice to you?~~***

***~~1. Live near to God—~~***

On this your whole stability will depend. "If you be with him, he will be with you: but, if you forsake him, he will forsake you." The direction which God gave to Abraham, he gives alike to all his people: "Walk before me, and be blameness." We must set God ever before us, and walk as in his immediate presence; (yet not so much impressed with fear, as with love: for Enoch walked with God; he walked not only before him as a Master, but with him as a Friend,) going with holy boldness into his presence, spreading before him our every need, and desiring his aid in every difficulty. "Acquaint yourselves with God" in this way, and your souls shall "be kept in perfect peace."

***~~2. Make good use of his word—~~***

It is by his word, chiefly, that God will direct and comfort your souls. I will not say that the Holy Spirit never operates in a way of direct and immediate agency upon the soul—but we are not to look for that, or expect it, in common cases. *It is by shining upon the word, and applying it with power to our souls, that the Spirit usually works*: and that we may expect; yes, and we shall experience it too, *if we meditate upon the word, and pray over it, and implore the Spirit's influence to seal it on our hearts.*Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere, the unadulterated milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."

You all know how a little child lives upon its mother's bosom—just so, let it be your care to live thus upon the blessed word of God; "esteeming it more than your necessary food," and looking for a constant communication of all needful strength through that appointed medium. *Only live upon that word, and it shall surely nourish you unto life eternal!*

***~~3. Keep your eyes steadily fixed on your eternal inheritance—~~***

The man who is in a race keeps his mind fixed, as it were, upon the prize; which he is determined, if possible, to obtain. In like manner you must keep in view the prize of your high calling; and "have respect, even as Moses had, to the recompense of the reward."*In the prospect of Heaven, every trial will appear light, every Christian duty will be accounted easy*. What we may meet with in life, or whether we shall ever behold each other's face again in this world, God alone knows. But let us live for God, and for eternity: *let us live, as we shall wish we had lived, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to receive our eternal doom!*Let us go forward in the path of duty, assured, that the rest which awaits us will richly repay our labors, and the crown of righteousness our conflicts.

***~~#1803~~***

***~~THE BLESSEDNESS OF LIBERALITY~~***

***~~[Acts 20:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.35).~~***

"Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said: It is more blessed to give than to receive."

SCARCELY anything can be conceived more calculated to improve our minds, than the committing to memory such portions of Scripture as are peculiarly important. The Jews were accustomed to have select passages of their law fastened upon their garments, in order that they might be continually reminded of their duty. David, with less ostentation, and more piety, "hid God's word within his heart," as the means of preserving him from sin, [Psalm 119:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.11); and he has recommended a similar practice to all young people, in order that their corrupt inclinations may be checked by the recollection of God's commands, [Psalm 119:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.8).

Among the various passages which claim peculiar attention, this which is before us has a very distinguished place. It would seem that our gracious Lord was in the habit of frequently inculcating the divine lesson in the text. And so generally was this saying known among his disciples, that the Evangelists did not judge it necessary to record it in any of their Gospels. Almost thirty years after his death, it was commonly mentioned in the Church and was enforced by his Apostles as a principle of action, which was to be adopted by all his followers.

Paul, having summoned the elders of the Ephesian Church to meet him at Miletus, took his final leave of them, and gave them all the cautions and directions which he judged necessary. He entreated them more particularly to cultivate to the uttermost a spirit of benevolence; remembering the example which he himself had set for them, and bearing in mind that saying of our Lord, of which he had so often reminded them, namely, that "it was more blessed to give than to receive."

Happily for us, Luke was inspired to record in the history of Paul, what he, and all the other Evangelists had omitted in their histories of Christ. And the very circumstance of its being so providentially preserved, may well render it an object of our most attentive regard.

Let us consider then,

***~~I. The grounds of this declaration—~~***

That *the man who lessens his property by giving, would, by that very act, become more truly blessed than the most destitute person can be made by receiving, appears a paradox that cannot be explained*. But to evince the truth of it, we shall point out some particulars, wherein the act of giving is manifestly more blessed than that of receiving—

***~~1. It calls forth more noble feelings—~~***

The feelings of him who receives in a befitting manner, are by no means despicable. *Gratitude*is a very refined and dignified sensation; and, when ennobled by a view of God's hand, and an acknowledgment of his overruling providence in raising up to us a benefactor, it becomes one of the noblest exercises of the human mind. Yet we must confess that the donor has the advantage of the receiver in these respects: for *generosity and compassion are more elevated sentiments than gratitude*, inasmuch as they have in them less of what is selfish, and originate, not in any personal gratification, but solely in the wants and miseries of a fellow-creature. Moreover, if the donor is in a right spirit, *he will act altogether with a view to God's glory: he will consider himself simply as God's agent or steward*; and, instead of admiring himself on account of what he does for God, he will bless and magnify his God for employing him in so honorable a service.

Would we form a just idea of the feelings of a good man discharging the duties of benevolence; let us paint to ourselves the sensations of the angel who was sent to strengthen our Savior after his conflicts with all the powers of darkness, [Luke 23:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.43). Did he receive with joy the Father's mandate? Did he fly on the wings of love to execute his divine commission? Did he administer consolation to Jesus with unutterable tenderness; and return with ardent gratitude to express his sense of the high honor conferred upon him? In him then we behold the true image of a saint, performing towards the afflicted the kind offices of love.

***~~2. It more assimilates us to the Deity—~~***

We do not at first sight behold any likeness to the Deity in him who receives an alms: yet, methinks, we may, without dishonoring our God, trace some resemblance: for Jehovah himself is receiving daily from his creatures a tribute of prayer and praise, which comes up before him as incense, and is the offering by which he considers himself as glorified.

Moreover, our blessed Lord identifies himself with his distressed followers, and acknowledges himself as fed and clothed, when food and clothing are administered to his people, [Matthew 25:35-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-36); yes, in the days of his flesh, he condescended to exist through the benevolence of others [Luke 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.3).

But in the donor there is a very striking likeness to the Deity, who is daily "opening his hand, and filling all things living with plenteousness." More particularly, if the donor is overlooking the trifling distinctions of neighborhood or of party, and be extending his alms to all, whether friends or enemies, he approves himself in the highest degree conformable to the image of his God, who is "the comforter of all those who are cast down, [2 Corinthians 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.6)," and who makes "his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sends his rain upon the just, and upon the unjust, [Matthew 5:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44-45); [Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.48)."

***~~3. It is a source of more extensive benefits—~~***

He who receives an alms, benefits himself and those who depend upon him. The world around him too derive some good from his example, in that he teaches them a quiet submission to the will of God in circumstances of affliction and necessity. The good which is done by the donor is almost incalculable. In the first place, he relieves the wants of others, who but for his timely aid, perhaps, must have languished, or even perished, for want. But the joys of poverty relieved, form but a small portion of the benefits which a benevolent Christian imparts. He exceedingly improves his awn soul, confirming in himself the most benevolent affections, and establishing habits which greatly conduce to his own happiness. Nor are the advantages which accrue to himself confined to this world: for even in Heaven will he have a recompense, [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14); [Luke 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.9), and that too proportioned to the zeal with which he had cultivated the principle of love, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6).

Moreover, the benefits extend to all around him. Who can estimate the good which he does to the souls of others, while he adorns and recommends the Gospel of Christ? For he not only makes himself an example to other professors of religion, and provokes them to emulation, but he removes the prejudices of the ungodly, and constrains them to confess the excellence of those principles which in their hearts they abhor, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16). With humble reverence we may say, that the benefit reaches even to Christ himself: for, as "in all the afflictions of his people he is afflicted, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9)," so in all their consolations also he is comforted, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40).

Further, if further we can go, even God the Father also is made a partaker of the benefit. For that which above all things he regards his own glory: and our alms-deeds are often the occasion of most heartfelt praises and thanksgivings to him. This Paul specifies as one of the most blessed effects of liberality; an effect, in comparison with which, the relief of a fellow-creature is almost unworthy of notice, [2 Corinthians 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.12).

Having pointed out the grounds of this extraordinary declaration, we proceed to show,

***~~II. The improvement that would he made of it—~~***

Paul, in exhorting the Ephesian Elders to "remember this saying of the Lord Jesus," designed to stimulate them to a suitable improvement of it. Now it will be found of use to us,

***~~1. To form our principles—~~***

There is a benevolence which is extremely profitable to the world in a *temporal*view, while it is altogether unprofitable, and even ruinous, to their spiritual interests. When this principle is considered as the whole of religion, when it is made the *foundation of a sinner's hope for salvation*, and substituted in the place of Christ, it is then worthless, and odious, in the sight of God.

But when benevolence is cultivated from a regard to Christ, and exercised with a view to his glory, it is "a fragrance of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God, [Philippians 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.18)." When viewed with all its attendant exercises of mind, it is the sum and substance of all practical religion, [Galatians 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.2). Without this, all pretenses to religion are vain: for if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, it is impossible that we would love God whom we have not seen, [1 John 4:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.20).

As for wealth, we would consider it as of no value, any further than it enables us to exercise ourselves in offices of love. To amass wealth, or to spend it on ourselves, would afford us no pleasure, in comparison with devoting it to pious purposes: for, if it is more blessed to give it away, than to receive the most needful supplies, then much more must the giving it away render us more blessed than either the spending or the saving of it can do. This is manifestly the scope of the divine aphorism in the text; and on this estimate of wealth our principles should be formed. It would be an established maxim with us, that to do good is to receive good, and to exercise love is to be truly blessed.

***~~2. To regulate our practice—~~***

Let the fore-mentioned principle be duly considered: and, when we are fully persuaded that*to do good is the surest way to receive good*, we shall gladly embrace every opportunity of benefitting others, and of getting good to ourselves.

Behold then, an opportunity now offers itself to every one of you, and, in the name of our adorable Lord, we entreat you both to confer, and to receive, blessedness.

**First, *confer*blessedness.** Think that perhaps your present generosity may be overruled, not merely for the temporal relief of a distressed brother, but for the everlasting salvation of some immortal soul! O let this thought stimulate you to the most cheerful and beneficent exertions.

If any say, "I have nothing but what I earn by manual labor; and even that is little more than suffices for my own necessities." I answer, This is the very case stated by Paul, who determines that such persons ought to give according to their ability, [Ephesians 4:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.28); and, in the very verse before the text, he tells us how he himself acted under those circumstances; and then he adds, "I have showed you, that, so laboring, you ought to support the weak, verse 34, 35."

**Next, *receive*blessedness.** We have hitherto spoken on behalf of our indigent and afflicted brethren. But we must change our voice: it is not for them, so much as for you, that we preach. Yes, you who are opulent, you who have the means of doing good, you are the persons to whom we preach, and for whom we preach. Receive blessedness, I say; far greater blessedness than it is in your power to confer on others. Strengthen in yourselves the habits of benevolence.

Imitate Him "who went about doing good;" "who, though he was rich—yet for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich, [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)."

Imitate the God and Father of the universe, whose tender mercy is over all his works. Go, and put your money into his hands. "He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done. [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17)" It is "fruit that will abound to your own account, [Philippians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.14)."

If you trust in your wealth, it will be a foundation of sand, a broken reed: but do good with it, and you will "lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, [1 Timothy 6:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.18-19)." Whether then you covet present or future happiness, "remember the words of the Lord Jesus," and show the love to others which he has shown to you! [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.34).

***~~#1804~~***

***~~PAUL'S READINESS TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE~~***

**[Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13).**

"Then Paul answered: Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

INNUMERABLE are the devices of our great adversary, to blind our eyes, and to keep us in a course of sin; and, when we have been enabled to burst the chains in which he once led us captive, he labors still to tempt and beguile us in every possible way, if he may prevail at last to turn us aside from God. *None, while they continue in the flesh, are out of the reach of his assaults*. Even our blessed Lord, when he condescended to assume our nature, "was in all things tempted as we are, though without sin."

Such is the subtlety of Satan, that he will instigate even the best of men to become tempters to their brethren. He stirred up Peter to dissuade his Lord from submitting to those sufferings which he had covenanted to endure: and in like manner he moved the saints at Caesarea to dissuade Paul from going up to Jerusalem, where he was proceeding for the furtherance of his Master's cause.

There was at Caesarea a prophet named Agabus, who took Paul's belt, and bound with it his own hands and feet, and then declared that the owner of that belt would so be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem, and be delivered into the hands of the Romans. Immediately all the saints at that place besought Paul with tears to desist from his purpose, that by staying away from Jerusalem he might avoid the predicted evils. This advice, though well meant on their parts, proceeded in reality from Satan himself; who knew, that if he could intimidate the Apostle Paul, he would gain a material advantage over the whole Church of God. But Paul was aware of Satan's device, and saw his agency, though under the semblance of an angel of light: and his answer to his weeping friends shows how every Christian should act, when tempted to turn from the path of duty; "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

From these words we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. That the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all that we can do or suffer for him—~~***

Were Christians as well acquainted with their Lord as they ought to be, there would be no occasion to insist upon so obvious a truth. But that none may continue ignorant of it, we entreat you to consider,

***~~1. Who Jesus is—~~***

He is no other than God's co-equal, co-eternal Son; "God of God, Light of light, very God of very God;" even "God over all, blessed for evermore." Every perfection of the Deity is his: He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

Now we are told, that "for a good man some would even dare to die:" shall less regard then be shown for him who is God, as well as man? If our admiration of a creature's excellence is such as to make us voluntarily surrender up our life for him, shall anything be deemed too much to do or suffer for the Creator, in whom all excellence is combined, and from whom all excellence proceeds? Shall a star be so admired, and the sun itself not be glorious in our eyes?

***~~2. What Jesus has done and suffered for us—~~***

From all eternity, before we or even the worlds were made, did he set his love upon us, and enter into a covenant with the Father to redeem us from the miseries which he foresaw we would bring upon ourselves. In the fullness of time he took upon him our nature for this very end: yes "though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant." During his whole stay upon earth he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and, when the appointed hour was come, he surrendered himself into the hands of his enemies, and "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

What shall we say to these things? Did he act thus towards us when enemies; and shall we account anything too much to do or suffer for Him, who has shown himself so great a friend?

***~~3. What Jesus is yet doing for us—~~***

Day and night is he interceding for us, that the wrath of God, which we have merited, may be averted from us. Whence is it that such barren fig-trees as we are, are yet permitted to cumber the ground? If he had not so often pleaded, "Spare them, O my Father—yet another year!" would we not have long since been cut down, and cast into the fire?

Behold how, notwithstanding all our obstinacy in sin, he is yet sending his word to instruct us, his ministers to invite us, yes more, his Spirit also to strive with us, if by any means he may save our souls alive. Know that every good purpose or desire that has ever existed in your bosoms, has been inspired by him, with a view to bring you home to the fold of God.

Above all, see what he is doing for his believing people; how he watches over them for good, supplies their every need, carries on his good work in their souls, and makes them more than conquerors over all their enemies!

Think of these things; and then say: Whether such love would not constrain you to live to him, and, if need be, to surrender up your life for him?

Truly, if we feel no weight in such considerations as these, we can have no interest in Christ; for it is certain,

***~~II. That the true Christian has learned duly to appreciate his worth—~~***

We do not say that every Christian has the attainments of the Apostle Paul: but every one resembles him in this, that he entertains worthy thoughts of Christ,

***~~1. In the convictions of his mind—~~***

Merely nominal Christians are content to compliment Christ with the name of Savior: but the true believer has a practical sense of his excellency: he views Christ as the one foundation of all his hopes: he sees that nothing but his sin-atoning blood could ever have obtained reconciliation for him with his offended God: Except as redeemed by the blood of Christ, the believer has no more hope than the fallen angels: he is convinced that with them he must take his portion to all eternity, if he is not savingly interested in that great Sacrifice which was made for the sins of the world.

*As bought with the precious blood of Christ, the believer sees that he is the Lord's property, and that to devote himself wholly to him is not only an acceptable, but a highly "reasonable, service."* In the deliberate conviction of his mind "he thus judges, that if one died for all, then should all live, not unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again." And this we say is the universal sentiment of all true Christians: for the Apostle says, "None of us (of us Christians) lives to himself, and no man dies unto himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; so that, whether living or dying, we are the Lord's!"

***~~2. In the purposes of his heart—~~***

This is not a speculative sentiment in the believer's mind, but a rooted principle, that operates in the whole of his behavior. In his eyes, Christ "is exalted, and extolled, and is very high." No words can express how "precious He is to him." Hence he gladly gives himself up to Christ; and seeks to have, not his actions only, but his very "thoughts also, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

As for the opposition of an ungodly world, he cares nothing about it: whatever crosses lie in his way, he takes them up; and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear them" for his Redeemer's sake. It he is called to sacrifice friends, or interests, or liberty, or even life itself, he draws not back: he has counted the cost, and is ready to pay it; desirous only that "Christ may be magnified in his body, whether by life or death." Like Moses, he "esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt;" and, like Paul, "counts all things but rubbish, that he may win Christ." In a word, he is "ready, not to he bound only, but also to die, at any time and in any manner, for his name's sake!"

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those whose views of Christ are imperfect—~~***

Doubtless there is no man that knows him fully, or can "search him out unto perfection." The Apostles themselves "knew him but in part," and "saw him only as through a glass, darkly:" but the generality of professors behold "no form or loveliness in him" at all, or at least not such as to stir up in their hearts any ardent "desire after him."

Now in our text we have a criterion whereby to judge of our views of Christ: do we find our hearts so knit to him with love and gratitude, as to render his "yoke easy to us, and his burden light?" Is liberty or life itself of no account with us, if by the sacrifice of it we may glorify his name? Then indeed we may be said to truly know him; then have we that "knowledge of him which is life eternal." But, O, how rare is this! Beloved brethren, search and try your own hearts in relation to it; and if, as is to be feared of too many among us, you have never yet been transported with love to his name, beg of God to "reveal him in your hearts" by his Holy Spirit, and to "shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

***~~2. Those whose attachment to him is wavering—~~***

Many desire to follow Christ, but are afraid to bear his cross. But, brethren, you must have a cross to bear. Though I am no prophet like Agabus—yet I can tell you, by the Spirit of God, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." You may not be called to suffer imprisonment and death; but you must be prepared to welcome them, if they would be allotted to you for the sake of Christ. You must expect that your friends will dissuade you from exposing yourselves to the contempt of some, and the hostility of others: and, if your dangers would be great and imminent, they will even try to prevail upon you by their entreaties and tears.

But beware how you listen to any advice which may divert you from the path of duty. Even good people will sometimes be crying, "Spare yourself!" when they see you "abounding" with more than ordinary zeal "in the work of the Lord." But, while you tenderly reprove their weakness (as Paul did,) be firm and steadfast to your purpose: for "if once you put your hand to the plough, and then look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God." "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."

***~~3. Those who are practically manifesting their zeal for his glory—~~***

Blessed be God, there are some who have already begun the employment of Heaven, and are singing, "Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever!" And, as in Heaven there are multitudes who "loved not their lives unto the death," so among us, I trust, there are some who would willingly die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Happy, happy those who feel this readiness of mind to do and suffer whatever they may be called to; for great is their reward in Heaven.

Go on, beloved, steadfast in the faith, and never giving way to terror on account of any adversaries. Are you advised to shrink from trials? Reply with Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" But remember, that your sufficiency for this proceeds from God alone: if not upheld by him, you will, "as soon as tribulation and persecution arise because of the word," be turned aside, and make shipwreck of your faith. Live near to the Savior then, and maintain sweet fellowship with him: then you will find his service a delight; and whatever sufferings you are called to endure for him, you will easily sustain. But, if once you decline from loving Christ in your heart, his commandments will become grievous to you, and every cross a burden. The true way to meet even the most formidable death with joy, is to "die daily," and to be continually "looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of Christ!"

***~~#1805~~***

***~~PAUL BECOMING A NAZARITE~~***

**[Acts 21:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.20-23).**

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come."

FEW subjects require so much caution in the preacher, or candor in the hearers, as that which we are now called to contemplate. *To lay down general rules is easy: but to apply them to all states and circumstances is a matter of extreme difficulty*: just as the drawing a rough outline of the human body may be done by a novice in the art of painting; but to fill up all the parts in the perfect order of nature, requires the hand of a master. Yet it is not uncommon for persons to sit in judgment on their fellow-creatures with as much confidence as if it was impossible for them to err.

The conduct of the Apostle Paul in the passage before us has been much condemned; and a minister almost endangers his own character by undertaking to defend it. But I am persuaded that it is defensible, and that he acted as became him in existing circumstances: and I cannot but think, that when the whole Church at Jerusalem united in recommending that conduct, and Paul adopted it on their recommendation, it is somewhat presumptuous in us, who are so incompetent to form a judgment in comparison with them, to stigmatize what by them was universally approved.

Indeed, to suppose that he who but a few days before had withstood so manfully the solicitations of his friends to keep away from Jerusalem, and had declared himself ready to be bound or to die there, for the Lord's sake, would be left of God to betray the cause which he had undertaken to support, is to dishonor, not the Apostle only, but that God whom he served.

That we may communicate our sentiments clearly, we shall endeavor,

***~~I. To explain the Apostle's conduct—~~***

***~~There was a violent prejudice at Jerusalem against the Apostle Paul—~~***

Paul, having been sent chiefly to the Gentiles, had neglected the Jewish rituals; while the Church at Jerusalem, consisting entirely of Jews, had still been observant of its forms. Nor is this difference to be wondered at; for even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, knew not that the Gentiles were to be incorporated with the Jews, and that the partition-wall between them was to be broken down. Hence they, and all their converts, adhered to the ceremonial law, and to many of "the customs," which they had "received by tradition from their fathers:" nor do they appear to have wholly laid them aside, until the destruction of Jerusalem and of the whole Jewish polity rendered the continuance of them impracticable. Considering therefore the veneration in which the Mosaic institutions were held, it is not to be wondered at that the Jewish Christians would regard Paul as an apostate from Moses.

It was to counteract this idea, that an expedient was devised by James and the Jewish elders. They knew that while this prejudice remained, the Christians at Jerusalem were not likely to reap any benefit from the ministry of Paul; or rather, that great dissensions and divisions were likely to be occasioned by him: and therefore they wished to reconcile the minds of the people by some public act on the part of Paul. It happened that at that time there were four Jewish Christians who were performing vows of Nazariteship in the temple; and it was proposed to Paul to join with them, and to submit to all the rites prescribed to Nazarites by the law: and thus to show publicly, that, though he had neglected all Jewish ceremonies among the Gentiles, and had maintained that they were no longer binding on the Jews themselves, he did not think that the observance of them was criminal.

James was particular in making known to Paul the precise ground on which he wished him to accede to the proposal. He reminded Paul, that he did not mean to interfere with the decree which had been made in reference to the Gentiles many years before, when Paul himself had come up to Jerusalem to inquire respecting the continuance of circumcision; but that he only wished to convince the Christians at Jerusalem that Paul was no enemy to Moses.

On these grounds Paul, who not very long before had himself made a vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea, [Acts 18:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.18), adopted the plan proposed, and immediately proceeded to carry it into execution.

The particular duties of Nazarites, and the sacrifices they offered at the time of their purification, are stated in the 6th chapter of the book of Numbers. The person who took upon him those vows, was only bound so far as he had voluntarily bound himself: and hence Paul was at liberty to join the other Nazarites, and to complete with them what they alone had begun.

Such was the precise state of the case, and such the conduct of the Apostle Paul, which now we proceed,

***~~II. To vindicate—~~***

Various are the charges which have been inconsiderately brought against Paul for his conduct on this occasion; but if we view it candidly, we shall find that he was not really obnoxious to any one of them. He has been accused of,

***~~1. Insincerity—~~***

Great stress is laid on those words of James, "Do this," "that all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning you, are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly, and keep the law, verse 24." But can we suppose that James exhorted him to declare a downright falsehood, which thousands of Jews there present were able to contradict? Would not such a proposal have excited in Paul the greatest abhorrence? We must understand the proposal as it was understood at the time. The Jewish Christians had been informed, that Paul set himself against Moses, and would in no case submit, or allow any other Jew to submit, to any of his appointments.

Now, says James, show them that this is not true, by submitting to this particular appointment proposed to you. To this proposal Paul acceded. Was there any insincerity in that? No! it precisely accorded with his own views, and was the deliberate expression of his own mind.

***~~2. Inconsistency—~~***

When Peter had, through fear of some Jewish Christians, been guilty of dissimulation, and had made such a compliance as that recorded in our text, Paul had publicly reproved him before the whole Church, [Galatians 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.11-14); and now that Paul himself was brought into similar circumstances, (it may be said) he acted in the very way that he had before condemned. But this is not a just statement of the case.

Peter had acted in a very different manner, and from very different principles. He had not only gone back to Jewish ceremonies himself, but had compelled the Gentiles also to conform to them: and this be had done solely through the fear of man. But Paul compelled no one to follow his example: he abridged no man's liberty: *he merely conformed to a rite himself, from love to his fellow-creatures, and from a hope of furthering their eternal welfare*.

The two cases were as different as can well be conceived. Paul did nothing but what he had frequently done on other occasions. He had himself circumcised Timothy, that Timothy might find the readier acceptance among the Jews: and Paul tells us, that he had always acted on the same Principle, whenever a just occasion had arisen; "To the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law, [1 Corinthians 9:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.20)." Thus, instead of being guilty of any inconsistency, he acted on the very principles which he had invariably pursued.

***~~3. Unfaithfulness both to God and man—~~***

Paul had received a commission to go to the Gentiles; and to show both to them, and to the Jews, that the law was abolished, and that both Jews and Gentiles were henceforth to form "one body in Christ:" and, it may be said, that in this act of his, he was "building again the things he had destroyed."

But again, I say, we must distinguish between*an occasional conformity to a rite for the sake of removing prejudices—and an insisting on that rite as necessary*. If he had told the Jews that the ceremonial law was necessary to be observed in order to their salvation, he would indeed have betrayed the cause of Christ. If he had even inculcated the observance of it as having an efficacy towards their acceptance with God, he would then also have betrayed the cause of Christ: because it is certain, that such an idea would have put the ceremonial law in the place of Christ, and would have made the cross of Christ of no effect, [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-4).

But he merely showed, that if, on the one hand, men were not to be saved by their observance of the law, they would not be condemned for it, provided they did not rely upon it for their justification before God.

The time for the total abolition of the ceremonial law was not yet fully come—it was gradually passing away; and, when Jerusalem would be destroyed, as it would soon be by the Romans, the whole Jewish law and polity would be swept away together. Until that period would arrive, the observance of the law was purely optional; and whether men observed it or not, they would equally be accepted by God, provided they acted really with a view to please and honor God, [Romans 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.2-3); [Romans 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.6). This was the whole that Paul's conduct was intended to prove; and his proving it in the way he did, was highly acceptable to God, and profitable to the Church.

Having shown the propriety of his conduct, we now proceed,

***~~III. To improve it—~~***

Many valuable *lessons*we may learn from it; a few of which we will now suggest to you:

***~~1. Endeavor truly and simply to approve yourselves to God—~~***

God forbid that anything which has been spoken would be considered as justifying dissimulation, or as countenancing a worldly temporizing spirit: no, we must act uprightly, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. We must so act, as to have "the testimony of our conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have our conduct in the world."

The Christian should, so to speak, be a transparent character; and should prevent, as far as possible, "his good from being evil spoken of." In acting according to circumstances, we must take care not to be influenced by unhallowed principles, or to carry our concessions to too great an extent. It will sometimes happen, that the path of duty is extremely difficult to find, and that even good men may differ in their judgment respecting it: but in such cases it will be well, after consulting the most aged and experienced of the Lord's people, to commit the matter to the Lord, and to do that which we judge will be most acceptable in his sight: and, if we have the testimony of our consciences, that we are willing to be bound or die for him, we need not fear but that God will guide us aright, or, at least, so guide us, that we shall not greatly err.

***~~2. As far as you can consistently with a good conscience, consult in your conduct the welfare of those around you—~~***

That inconsiderate conduct which has no regard to the feelings of others, is common indeed, but highly culpable. We may by imprudence, cast a stumbling-block before others, when, by a more wise and temperate conduct, we might remove it out of their way. In all such cases, however we may think to please God by our zeal, we grievously offend him by our lack of love. Happy would it be if this matter were better understood by young people of every description.

Many persons might be won by a conciliatory conduct, who are repelled and disgusted by the injudicious sallies of intemperate zeal. Children, servants, yes, all of you who are under authority, remember, that if you have souls, so have your parents, and masters, and governors, souls also: and though you are not to concede one Christian principle for any man, or to act in anything contrary to a known duty—yet you ought, to a certain degree, to "become all things to all men," and to "seek, not your own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

***~~3. Guard against rash and uncharitable judging—~~***

If the conduct of Paul, when acting by the advice of James and of all the elders at Jerusalem, has been misunderstood, the conduct of holy men at this time may be misunderstood also; and*we may be condemning them for things which God most highly approves*. It is impossible for us to judge aright, unless we put ourselves into the precise situation of those whose conduct we are contemplating: nay, more, we would also know the exact motives by which they were actuated.

These things are known perfectly to God alone; to whom alone the office of judging belongs. "Who are you that judge another? To his own Master he stands or falls." If you do not see the exact propriety of a brother's conduct, apply to him for an explanation of it, if you will; but judge him not. Are you weak? Judge not the strong. Are you strong? Despise not the weak. But all of you determine this rather, to "take up every stumbling-block out of your brother's way," and "seek those things whereby one may edify another, [Romans 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.13); [Romans 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.19)."

***~~#1806~~***

***~~CONVERSION OF PAUL~~***

***~~[Acts 22:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.16).~~***

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."

THE conversion of Paul, taken in connection with all the circumstances attending it, is one of the most remarkable events recorded in the New Testament. Among the numberless observations to which it might give rise, there is one only which I would notice: and that is, that it displays, in a preeminent degree, *the sovereignty of God in the dispensation of his mercies*. Considering how he was engaged at the moment when God was pleased to arrest him in his career of sin; and what condescension was manifested to him, in the personal appearance of the Lord Jesus himself to him, and in the oral communications made to him by the Savior; it must be acknowledged that *he was one of the most signal monuments of divine grace that ever existed from the foundation of the world*,verse 15 with [1 Timothy 1:12-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.12-16).

But it is with the direction that was given him by Ananias that I propose at this time to occupy your minds: for, though it was addressed to him alone in the first instance, it is precisely what would be delivered to everyone who is convinced of sin, and that is inquiring with sincerity, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

I propose, then, to consider this direction,

***~~I. As given to the Apostle on this occasion—~~***

Being a Jew, he had been circumcised in his infancy, according to the Divine appointment. But now, being converted to the faith of Christ, he must be baptized also, in order to participate in all the blessings of the Christian covenant. Mark,

***~~1. The particular things enjoined—~~***

He must be baptized. Baptism was the appointed rite of admission into the Christian Church. It was enjoined by the Lord Jesus Christ himself to all his followers without exception; nor could anyone be acknowledged as a disciple of his, until he had submitted to this ordinance.

Baptism however, of itself, could avail nothing to the salvation of his soul. It was the blood of Jesus Christ alone that would cleanse him from his sins—in that fountain, therefore, he must "wash," in order to be purged from his guilt: and this process was the work of faith alone.

And hence was that further direction given him to "call upon the name of the Lord." The Lord Jesus Christ it was who had appeared to him, and had sent him to Ananias for instruction: and it was that same Lord on whom he must henceforth call, as the one only source of all good, "the Author of eternal salvation to those who seek and obey him, [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.9)." It was the Lord Jesus Christ who had shed his blood for him: and to him must he apply, to sprinkle him with that blood, and thereby to cleanse him from his sin. Accordingly, we find that he did, in the time of his deepest extremity, direct his prayers unto that Savior, and obtain from him that "grace which proved sufficient for him, [2 Corinthians 12:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-10)."

In the discharge of this duty he must make no delay. He might think, perhaps, that he was too vile to be admitted thus at once into covenant with God; or that the Church itself would not receive him; or that, at all events, it would be better for him to wait for a season, in order to evince the sincerity of his faith. But to no such objections must he listen: the path of duty was plain before him; and he must follow it without delay, "not tarrying" a single day under the idea of finding a more convenient season.

***~~2. The connection existing between them—~~***

The direction given him appeared to consist of different parts: but it was, in fact, one single act whereby he was to accomplish all. Baptism, though not necessarily accompanied with "the washing away of sin," (for Simon Magus was as much "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" after his baptism as before, [Acts 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.16); [Acts 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.23),) was ordinarily, and intimately, connected with it. Of itself, indeed, baptism could do nothing; but, as used in faith, it did much. As appointed by God, it was a sign of the person's believing in Christ, and a seal of the righteousness which he had received through faith, [Romans 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.11). It was also an acknowledgment on the sinner's part that he was bound to serve the Lord in the way of holiness; and a pledge on God's part that he would have grace and strength to do so, if only he would seek it in the exercise of faith and prayer, [Romans 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.3-4). Thus it was intimately connected both with the justification of the soul, and with its sanctification after the Divine image; and consequently, in the judgment of charity, it might be spoken of as "washing away both the guilt and the pollution of sin."

In both these senses it is said to "save" men, [1 Peter 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.21); but then we must ever remember, that in the act of baptism there was "a calling upon the name of the Lord" for these blessings, and an exercise of faith in him for the communication of them. In itself, it was only a *figurative representation*of the blessings sought for and imparted: the communication of the blessings themselves depended on the sincerity of him who sought them: if he sought them with real humility and faith, they were imparted to his soul; and if not, they were withheld from him: but, as in that day it could not be expected that persons would apply for baptism unless they were sincere, it might well be hoped that, in the ordinance, they really obtained the blessings which they professed to seek, and that "as many as were baptized into Christ did really put on Christ, [Galatians 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.27)."

To this we may add, that God did, on many occasions, accompany that ordinance with a more than ordinary effusion of his Holy Spirit, both in his gifts and graces; according to what is intimated by the Apostle: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy God has saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior, [Titus 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5-6)."

On the day of Pentecost, a hope was held forth to the awakened penitents, that God would so bless this ordinance to them, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39); and many years afterwards was this very connection spoken of, as realized in the experience of the Corinthian converts. They had been among the most abandoned of mankind: yet says the Apostle to them, "But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, [1 Corinthians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.11)." As enjoined of God, the rite is necessary for all; but, as performed by man, it is effectual to those only who receive it aright, and who possess the dispositions which the ordinance itself supposes and implies.

But to all to whom it proves effectual, we may safely say, "Being buried with Christ in baptism, you are also therein risen with him, and stand complete through him" in the presence of your God, [Colossians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10-12).

But this direction may be considered,

***~~II. As addressed to all who are convinced of their sinful and undone state—~~***

To all such persons it says,

***~~1. Seek the remission of your sins simply through Christ—~~***

For you he shed his blood upon the cross, even to effect thereby your reconciliation with your offended God and Father, [Colossians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20-22); and it was in reference to that event that the prophet spoke, when he said, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity, [Zechariah 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.1)." In that fountain, therefore, you must wash: there is nothing else that can ever cleanse you from even the smallest sin. As for rivers of tears, they can be of no avail: they may prepare you for the reception of mercy, but can never purchase the pardon of one sin: the rivers of Abana and Pharpar would in vain have been applied to by Naaman the Syrian, when the office of healing his leprosy was assigned to Jordan only. In like manner, however excellent any substitute for the blood of Christ may appear, it will effect nothing.

On the other hand, "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin! [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" and therefore I say to everyone who feels his need of mercy, "Go to Christ, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks to you better things than ever the blood of Abel's sacrifice did to him, [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24);" yes, and better things than the most enlarged heart can conceive! [1 Corinthians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9). If you have been as moral as Paul in his unconverted state, you must seek remission in this way: and if you have been as bloody a persecutor as he, you must seek remission in this way. "Not one who comes to Him shall ever be cast you."

***~~2. Look to Him alone for all the blessings that you stand in need of—~~***

It is characteristic of the Christian in every age and place, that "he calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.2) with [Romans 10:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.11-14)." Now this does not merely imply an acknowledgment of him as God, but also a dependence on him for all spiritual and eternal blessings. He is appointed by God the Father to be "Head over all thing's to the Church [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22);" and "in him is treasured up a fullness of all spiritual blessings, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," that "out of his fullness we may all receive, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." According to our faith, and according to our necessities. Comply, then, with this appointment, and go to him on every occasion; and "let the life which you now live in the flesh be wholly and exclusively by faith in him, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has loved you, and given himself for you! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~3. Confess Him openly before men—~~***

This is one of the great ends of baptism; which implies an open acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and a determined surrender of ourselves to his service, [Hebrews 10:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.22-23). We must devote ourselves unreservedly to our God and Savior; and must confess him openly before an ungodly world. Nor can this by any means be dispensed with: for if "with the heart man believes unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10);" and our blessed Lord has warned us, that "if we are ashamed of him, and deny him before men, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us before his Father which is in Heaven."

Perhaps you may imagine that circumstances are now so different, that there will be no difficulty in confessing Christ. But you will find it still no easy matter to approve yourselves faithful to him in this respect: for, though we are not now in fear of being dragged to prison and to death for our adherence to him, we are certain of exciting much contempt and hatred among our friends and relatives, as soon as ever we devote ourselves unreservedly to Christ.

It is still as true as ever, in fact, though not in the same degree, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" and we need at this day, as they also did in the apostolic age, to be strengthened from above for this warfare which every faithful soldier of Christ will have to maintain. For it, therefore, you must prepare; and in it you must engage with all boldness: and you must "be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain a crown of life."

***~~4. Let there be no delay in this necessary work—~~***

You may be ready to think that there is some reason for delay: you have some important engagements at this time, and you wish to wait until they are completed: or you apprehend that a future period will be more favorable than the present. But I must say, that no reason under Heaven can justify a neglect or postponement of this duty. Tell me, convinced soul, "Why do you tarry?" Give me a reason: give me a reason that shall satisfy even your own mind. But I defy you: I defy the whole world to assign so much as one reason that shall bear even a moment's investigation. But I could, if needful, assign a thousand reasons why it is madness to delay.

Arise, then; "arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." What! shall it be needful to urge you in such a cause as this? Is there a fountain opened for sin, and will you need to be importuned and urged to wash in it? *If one sin lying upon the soul is sufficient to plunge you into everlasting perdition, need you be exhorted to wash away, in one single moment, all the sins you have ever committed, so that you shall be before God as spotless as if you had never sinned?* Is the Lord Jesus Christ ready to answer every petition that your soul can offer, and will you need to be urged to spread before him your requests?

Is your honoring of him before men the recompense which he especially requires at your hands for all that he has done and suffered for you—and do you need to be urged to render him this reasonable service? I do hope that some of you, at least, will feel ashamed at your past delay; and that you will now, even before you depart from this place, seek grace from him, that you may be enabled to comply with the directions in my text, and to show that you have not received such transcendent blessings in vain.

Let me also entreat that you will go home in silent meditation, every one of you to his secret chamber, and there prostrate yourselves before him, imploring mercy at his hands, and consecrating to him your every faculty, both of body and soul. May every one of you 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)."

***~~#1807~~***

***~~PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF BEFORE FELIX~~***

***~~[Acts 24:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.14-15).~~***

"However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

IN the chapter before us we have a striking instance of the confidence inspired by the consciousness of truth. Paul had been seized under the mistaken idea that he had introduced a heathen into the temple, and profaned the temple. Had there been no other ground of animosity against him, it is probable that he would soon have convinced his adversaries of their mistake; but he was the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore very obnoxious to the whole Jewish nation. Hence a prejudice existed against him, as hostile to the temple and the law: and the moment a cry was raised against him, though on quite a mistaken ground, it excited a universal tumult.

From the enraged populace he was rescued by the Roman soldiers: and an opportunity was thus afforded him of vindicating himself before the Roman Governor at Caesarea. Ananias, the high-priest, with the elders of the Jewish people, went down, with a famous orator named Tertullus, to accuse him. Tertullus, anxious only to obtain judgment against him, omitted nothing whereby he might gain his cause—he complimented Felix on the equity and acceptableness of his government; when it was universally complained of as most iniquitous: and he charged Paul with the profanation of the temple, of which he had not been in the least guilty; and with exciting the tumult, which the Jews themselves had raised.

But in the midst of all, Paul stood like a rock, unmoved by the waves that dash upon it. When permitted to speak, he followed his accuser through the various articles of the charge. In his introduction, he showed the difference between the artful compliments of a courtier, and the respectful address of a Christian: and, in the remainder of his short apology, he refuted every accusation that was brought against him. There was one part indeed of the charge, which, in a less obnoxious form, he acknowledged. He was accused of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." "This," says he, "I confess unto you, that after the way which they call heresy, I worship the God of my fathers."

Now from this acknowledgment of his we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. In what way the Christian serves his God—~~***

***~~We have not here to consider the Christian's experience at large; but simply to advert to his faith and hope—~~***

The Christian "believes all things that are written in the law and the prophets." Whatever God has told him, whether it accords with his pre-conceived notions or not; yes, whether he can comprehend it or not; he does not presume to gainsay it, but receives it upon the authority of God. But the things to which the Apostle more especially alluded in the text, were those which relate to Christ and his Gospel, [Acts 26:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.22-23); such as the prophecies which predicted his advent, the representations which shadowed forth his work and offices; and the promises made to his obedient followers—all of which are embraced by the Christian with sincere faith.

This is the foundation on which the Christian builds his hope. He expects assuredly, that "there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust," when "every one shall receive according to what he has done, whether it be good or evil." To the ungodly this period is an object of fear and terror; but to the Christian, of joyful hope. He "knows in whom he has believed; and is persuaded, that what He has promised, he is able also to perform:" to that day therefore he looks forward, as the completion of all his wishes, and the consummation of all his joys.

In all this there appears to be nothing very remarkable. But before we affirm that, let us consider,

***~~II. In what light this service of his is often viewed—~~***

*Where these sentiments are held in a merely speculative manner, they give no offense*: they are even approved as orthodox: but where they are *practically*maintained and enforced, they are vilified as "heresy," and loaded with every opprobrious name. It is in vain that we appeal "to the law and the prophets;" it is in vain that we show to men that these are the things "which they themselves believe;" in vain we refer them to the articles and homilies, which contain the acknowledged sentiments of our Church; or to the prayers which every member of our Church offers up to God: nothing can convince men that we are not heretics or fanatics. *Practical*Christians are still "a sect everywhere spoken against, [Acts 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.22)."

Now what is the reason of this?*Whence is it that the same truths which are approved in theory, would be disapproved when reduced to practice?*The reason is, that *while held in theory only, they leave us in full possession of all our evil habits and propensities; but when applied to practice, they produce a course of life directly opposite to the desires of the flesh, and the customs of the world*.

Suppose, for instance, a man's faith be such as enables him to realize all that the Scriptures have spoken; to tremble at every threatening, and to expect the accomplishment of every promise; suppose it leads him to "live entirely by faith in the Son of God," as "all his salvation and all his desire"—what a difference will this of necessity put between him and others!

Suppose his hope also is such as disposes him to live in daily preparation for his last account, and in a blessed anticipation of the glory that awaits him—will not this make him appear strange and singular? And will not those who feel condemned by his heavenly life, reflect on him, rather than on themselves?

Doubtless they will: they did so in the days of Christ and his Apostles; who neither said, nor did, more than the Scriptures required: but *the people hated the light, and would not come to the light, lest their deeds would be exposed*; and agreed to brand that as heresy, which they could not prevail upon themselves to embrace and practice.

And thus it will be to the end of time: men will let you think as you please, if only you will conform to their habits: but *if you will take the Scriptures as the only rule of your faith and practice, you shall be hated and reviled for it as long as there is an ungodly man upon earth!* "He who is born after the flesh, will, and cannot but, hate and persecute him that is born after the Spirit." "The servant cannot be above his Lord."

What then is to be done? Are we to lay aside this service? if not, let us inquire,

***~~III. In what manner it is to be maintained—~~***

This whole apology affords us a very bright example. We are not to sacrifice truth and virtue to a senseless or malignant clamor; but to maintain our principles,

***~~1. With firmness of mind—~~***

We are to "prove all things; and then to hold fast that which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)." We cannot be too careful in examining every principle which is inculcated as of Divine authority. We would never give our assent to any doctrine whatever upon the testimony of man; but would search the Scriptures for ourselves, to see whether the things we hear are agreeable to them or not. But, when once we are satisfied that anything is really from God, then we must "hold it fast." We must "not be tossed to and fro, like children, with every wind of doctrine;" nor, on the other hand, must we be deterred from confessing Christ through the fear of man: but we must "hold fast that which we have received, that no man may take our crown, [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11);" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23)."

Paul had enough to intimidate him, if there were any legitimate reason for yielding to the impressions of fear on such occasions: but "nothing could move him: not even life itself was of any value in his sight," when standing in competition with fidelity to his Lord. It was his attachment to Christ that was the real ground of the persecution he now met with; yet he would not deny his Lord; but confessed himself "a heretic," according to their acceptance of the term. Thus should we be steadfast in the faith; and be willing even to lay down our lives in its defense.

***~~2. With tenderness of spirit—~~***

There is a contemptuous way of speaking of the world, in which some professors of religion indulge themselves, which is extremely reprehensible. It is true indeed that the world is both blind and carnal; but we ought to look well to our own spirit when we take upon ourselves to call them so: for, "who is it that has made us to differ? Or what do we have, that we have not first received?" When we think of their blindness and carnality, it should not be in the proud spirit of a Pharisee, "Stand aside, I am holier than you," but with tears, even with floods of tears, on account of their unhappy condition [Luke 19:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41). [Psalm 119:136](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.136). [Jeremiah 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.17).

We should call to mind our own former blindness, (as Paul does [Acts 26:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9-11),) for the humiliation of our own souls, and as an encouragement to seek their welfare. And "we should be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear [1 Peter 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.15);" "in meekness instructing them, if God perhaps may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, [2 Timothy 2:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.22-24)."

***~~3. With purity of heart—~~***

This the Apostle particularly specified as the associate of his faith and hope, verse 16. *To profess a regard for Christian principles while we are regardless of Christian practice, is only to deceive our own souls.*Faith and a good conscience are the two pillars on which the fabric of our religion stands: and if either of them give way, the other falls of course! [1 Timothy 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.9); [1 Timothy 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.19). The world will try our principles by this touchstone: they will say, "What do you do more than others?" And truly, *when we profess so much higher principles than they, they have a right to expect in us a purer life*. Not that they would be justified in rejecting the Gospel, even if every professor of it were to become a Judas: but such is their perverseness, that they will harden themselves more against religion on account of one Judas, than they will esteem it for the piety of a dozen other Apostles. This however is only an additional reason for watchfulness on our part.

Whatever may be the conduct of the world, "our duty is to show them our faith by our works." In this way we may hope at least to do some good: we shall "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and "make them ashamed who falsely accuse our good conduct in Christ." We may hope too that in some instances we may accomplish more; and "win by our good conduct those who never would listen to the written word." At all events, it is in this way that we must approve ourselves to God, and stand with confidence before him in the day that he shall judge the world.

***~~#1808~~***

***~~A CONSCIENCE VOID OF Offense~~***

***~~[Acts 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.16).~~***

"So I strive always to keep my conscience void of offense before God and man."

THE Gospel of Christ has in all ages been stigmatized as having an unfriendly aspect on morality; and its professors have been accused as maintaining the position "that we may continue in sin that grace may abound." But, however the disgraceful conduct of hypocrites may have appeared to countenance such a charge, it is certain that every true Christian is a living witness for God, and a public monument of the sanctifying influence of the Gospel. Paul was not inferior in holiness to any human being, our blessed Lord alone excepted; yet was he inveighed against as a man that was not fit to live upon the earth.

In the passage before us we have an account of the accusations brought against him by a certain orator, named Tertullus. He was represented as "a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and, to complete the whole, an impious profaner of the temple, verse 5, 6." In other words, *he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness*.

In answer to these allegations he shows that, as to sedition, the reason of his coming to Jerusalem was to bring alms to his nation, and to present his offerings to God; and that his demeanor there had been peaceable and quiet, for they had not found him in the temple disputing with any man, nor raising up the people either in the synagogue, or in the city.

As to the charge of heresy, he acknowledges, that after the way that they called heresy, he did worship the God of his fathers, believing those very Scriptures, and hoping for the accomplishment of that very resurrection, which his accusers themselves professed to believe and hope for.

And lastly, as to the profaneness and impiety with which they charged him, he declares that his principles led him to a far different conduct: that that faith and hope, which he professed, stimulated him to the most scrupulous performance of every duty both to God and man: "herein," says he, (or it might be translated, on this account, that is, on account of this faith and hope,) "I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men." We propose to show:

***~~I. What is the attainment which every true Christian labors for?~~***

Without entering into any metaphysical inquiries concerning the nature of the *conscience*, we may observe that its office is to testify to every man the quality of his past actions, and to regulate his conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong. It does not so properly judge respecting the truth or falsehood of any position: (that is rather the office of the understanding) it regards rather actions than sentiments; and the good or evil that is in them, rather than any prudential considerations respecting them. The conscience is a monitor in every man's own bosom that may be called, in a qualified sense, the voice of God within him. The conscience is not wholly subject to his own control: for though much may be done to bribe, or silence it—yet sometimes it will speak out, and force the most obdurate sinner to listen to its voice.

The *rules*whereby it judges are various: where the light of revelation does not shine, the conscience has no better rule than the law of nature, or the law of a man's own mind. It is then regulated by every man's own apprehensions of good or evil; and therefore must of necessity give a verdict more or less erroneous, as the person's mind is more or less instructed in moral truth. On this account, it would not be easy with respect to heathens to determine precisely what a conscience void of offense is; for certainly, allowances must be made for the different degrees of light which men enjoy. But with respect to us, who live under the clear dispensation of the Gospel, these difficulties in a great measure vanish. The following considerations may help to throw some light upon the subject.

**The conscience is not to be judged void of offense merely because it does not accuse us.**There are many so thoughtless and dissipated that they give themselves no time to reflect. They are engaged in a continual round of business or amusement; they shun all those scenes which would be likely to bring their sins to remembrance; they avoid all serious conversation; and thus they pass months and years without feeling any remonstrances of conscience: that faculty is lulled asleep; and, if by any means it is in the least degree awakened, every method is adopted to check its clamors, and restore its usual tranquility. Of such persons God speaks by the Prophet Hosea, when he says, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness."

**There are others who imbibe principles which are well calculated to weaken the influence of conscience.** They take it for granted that there is no great evil in sin; that God will never execute his threatenings against it; that they cannot be obnoxious to his wrath, because they have not committed any heinous sins, or, if they have, they were only such as the fashions of the world, and the frailties of their nature might well excuse. By such principles as these, they persuade themselves that they have no ground for fear: like some of the Jews of old, they "heal their wounds slightly, saying,*Peace, peace*, when there is no peace," or, like others of them, they affirm boldly, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the vain imaginations of my heart."

***~~There is yet another description of persons who have at times been harassed with remorse of conscience; but they have so often resisted their convictions, sinned against the light, and done violence to all their own feelings, that they have, as the Apostle says, "seared their consciences as with a hot iron," and rendered themselves "past feeling."~~***

Now it will be needless to prove that such persons have not a conscience void of offense; they may be rather said to have no conscience at all; or, if they have, it must be called what the Apostle calls it, an evil conscience.

***~~As a conscience is not void of offense merely because it does not accuse, so neither is it necessarily so, even if it would approve.~~***

Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong. Even among those who bear the Christian name, how many are there who think that religion consists in penances and pilgrimages, and in the observance of superstitious rites and ceremonies; yes, who would think, that the extirpation of heretics was the most meritorious work they could effect! Yet, if they were to abound in such works as these, and thereby gain the approbation of their own consciences, must we therefore say that their consciences were void of offense? Surely not!

Paul has told us with respect to himself, that he truly "thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus:" but does he assert his innocence upon that ground? No! he calls himself "a blasphemer and injurious, and a persecutor, yes, the very chief of sinners."

Our Lord tells his disciples that many would think, "whoever killed them would do God service:" but could this conceit excuse their murderous acts? No. If we act upon wrong principles, our actions must be bad: nor can our error change the quality of our actions: it may indeed extenuate our guilt; but it can never render that good, which is in its own nature evil.

To speak then immediately to the point: There are two things necessary to constitute a conscience void of offense; it must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty; and it must testify upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between that rule and our actions.

**It must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty.** The rule of duty is concise and plain: we are to "love God with all our heart and soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves: on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Now this rule, in theory, is universally acknowledged; but, through the influence of our carnal interests and passions, we lose sight of it entirely, and imagine ourselves conforming to it, when we are violating it in every point of view. *We suppose that the love of this present world will consist with a good conscience*, though God himself has told us, that "if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We think we may indulge pride, envy, selfishness, and a thousand other malignant passions, and yet conform to the law of love.

*While the eyes of our understanding are thus blinded, we cannot be said to have a conscience void of offense*; because the conscience being unenlightened with respect to the rule of judging, it cannot possibly give a just verdict on our case. It must be acquainted with the several relations in which we stand to God and man: it must see what is required of us as *creatures*, as *sinners*, as *redeemed*. It must know that *God claims our entire dependence, supreme regard, unreserved obedience*. It must feel the necessity of abasing ourselves before God in dust and ashes, and of "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us." In short, it must *be convinced, that "a life of faith in the Son of God," and "a cleaving to him with full purpose of heart," are the distinguishing features of the true Christian*. But besides this, it must be acquainted also with the several duties which we owe to our fellow-creatures, as superiors, equals, and inferiors; and that too not only in their civil capacity, but in their relation to us as members of Christ's mystical body. When it is thus enlightened, then, and then only, is it capable of being void of offense toward God and man.

***~~But it is yet further necessary that conscience would be able to testify, upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between this rule of duty and our actions.~~***

Its testimony must proceed from a watchful observation of all our motives and principles of action. It must be in the habit of bringing our conduct to the touchstone, and of discerning between the pure metal and the most specious counterfeits. It must be on its guard against the bias it receives from prejudice and passion; and must be able to appeal to the heart-searching God for the truth of its testimony. Not that it need testify that there is no sin in us; for then who could ever receive a favorable verdict, seeing "that in many things we all offend?" But its testimony must be to this effect; that, after searching the sacred records, after praying for the teachings of God's Spirit, after carefully investigating not only our actions, but our motives and principles, and after comparing these with the rule of duty, it cannot discern *that there is any one sin habitually indulged, or any one duty allowedly neglected*.

This is the true import of what is called in our text, "a conscience void of offense:" and this every true Christian labors to maintain.

We now come to show,

***~~II. The vast importance of a conscience void of offense to every man—~~***

Men in general are well pleased if they can secure the approbation of their fellow-creatures, and maintain a character for morality in the world. *They are therefore chiefly attentive to their external conduct*, and not very solicitous about the thoughts or desires of their hearts. But this will not satisfy the true Christian. He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart, and that the most secret thought is "naked and open before him." Like the Apostle, he accounts it "a small matter to be judged by man's judgment;" he says, 'What good can the applause of men do me, if I am condemned of my Judge? Or, why need I regard the opinion of the world, if I am accepted and applauded by my God?' Seeing how contemptible every testimony is in comparison with that of his Maker, he "studies to approve himself to God, a servant that needs not to be ashamed."

In whatever relation of life he stands, he endeavors to fulfill the duties of it.

Is he in authority? He conscientiously improves his influence for the good of men and for the glory of God. More especially, if he sustains that weighty office of a minister of Christ, he will not be a faithless steward, or a slothful servant, but will "be instant in season and out of season," and will "watch for souls as one that must give account."

On the other hand, is he in an inferior station? he will perform his duties, "not with eye-service, as a man-pleaser, but as unto God." He will not esteem himself at liberty to yield a partial obedience: he will not think that his observance of relative duties supersedes the necessity of delight in God. Nor, on the other hand, will he imagine, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligation to equity and mercy. Every duty both to God and man occupies his attention, and is performed in its season, "without partiality and without hypocrisy."

Nor is this strictness merely occasional—it does not exist only in a time of sickness, or during a season of preparation for the Lord's supper. No, he is "always" engaged in the same "exercise:" the law of God is written in his heart; obedience to it is his delight; nor can any consideration whatever divert him from his purpose. He is not insensible how hard it is to flesh and blood to "cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye:" but *no regard to carnal ease will induce him to spare his idol*. He expects not that the world would love or honor him, when he recollects how it treated his divine Master. He is well assured that, "if he will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution."

But *so far from being terrified at the cross, he takes it up and glories in it.*He reverences his conscience more than he does the whole world. He studies by meditation and prayer to get his conscience well informed; and then he confers not with flesh and blood: he asks only, "What is my duty? How shall I maintain a good conscience? How shall I please my God?" These questions satisfactorily determined, he can say with the Apostle, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in the path of duty, for the name of the Lord Jesus."

That this is no exaggerated statement, but really the character of every true Christian, will appear from the clearest declarations of Holy Writ.

Paul repeatedly speaks of Christians in this light: he represents them as being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world." He prays for them that they may be "sincere and without offense until the day of Christ;" yes, "that their whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And David, giving the character of those who are accepted of God, expressly declares that they are "without deceit." "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

If it would afford us any additional satisfaction to find men of like passions with ourselves who have attained to this character, the Scriptures afford us many striking instances. Paul himself could testify before the Jewish Sanhedrin, that he had "lived in all good conscience before God until that day." And in another place he speaks of the testimony which his own conscience bore to his character in these respects, as a source of most exalted pleasure to his soul: "our rejoicing," says he, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conduct in the world." A similar testimony was given by our Lord himself to a man of far Jess attainments than Paul: of Nathanael he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit."

But it may be said, 'We acknowledge that Christians are so described, and that some eminent persons have attained to that character:' but still the question recurs: Cannot a man be a true Christian, without having such a conscience as has been described? Before we give a precise answer to this, we would observe, that it is possible a man may be a Christian, and yet not enjoy the comfort of such a conscience; the corruptions of his heart, the temptations of Satan, an occasional commission of sin, and even certain disorders of the body—may prevent his conscience from yielding such a testimony; yes, may cause it to accuse and condemn him, notwithstanding he is a real Christian. But if any asks whether any one can be a true Christian without having a just ground for such a testimony, or in other words, whether he can be in a state of salvation without possessing real integrity of heart? We answer, that, if there be any truth in the word of God, he cannot.

What says *David*with respect to this? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." This cannot mean that if he has iniquity in his heart, God will not hear him: but that if he *harbors*it, or allow it in any instance, it will be in vain for him to hope for any mercy from God.

*John*speaks yet more strongly to the same effect: "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. [1 John 3:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.7-10)."

Now what can be the import of this passage? To interpret it rigorously according to the strict letter of the words, would certainly render it inconsistent with other passages of Scripture, which declare that "there is no man who lives and sins not:" but to reconcile it with any *allowed*sin, is absolutely impossible.

Here then we trust we may satisfactorily close the discussion of our text. Seeing that *the conscience has been shown to be without offense only when it can testify of our unreserved conformity to God's law; and that no one can be a true Christian, unless it is his chief labor to maintain such a conscience*.

***~~It only remains that we improve the subject.~~***

And now may God in infinite mercy send down upon us his Holy Spirit, to impress our minds with conviction, if we have not yet attained the Christian character, and to fill us with consolation if we have!

We all profess to be Christians in reality, as well as in name. We all feel averse to acknowledge that we have no part or lot in the Gospel salvation: and surely it is a painful task to rob anyone of a hope so comfortable, so delightful. It will be far more congenial with our feelings, if we take for granted, that, in this Christian assembly, we all deserve the Christian name. Let us then indulge the pleasing thought; let us now consider ourselves as genuine disciples of Christ; let us give him the glory of what he has wrought in us; and let us, for the confusion of all the adversaries of the Gospel, and for the confirmation of our own souls, unite in making our acknowledgments to God.

'O Searcher of all hearts, who at this instant observe the state of every soul here before you, we would not approach you with any pharisaical boasting, pretending to give the glory to you, while we are indeed taking it to ourselves. No, Lord, let that be far from us: we know, that, if we had done all that had been commanded us, we would only have been unprofitable servants: but instead of being merely unprofitable, we feel that we are vile and miserable sinners. Nevertheless, we trust that we are monuments of your grace; and we desire now to join in humble adorations and thanksgivings for what you have done for our souls. Through your grace and mercy we enjoy a conscience void of offense toward you and toward man. We feel at this time, that, notwithstanding all our short-comings and defects, we have a sincere and uniform desire to please you. Our consciences testify that there is no one instance wherein we knowingly do to others, what we would not think it right for them, in a change of circumstances, to do to us. Nor are we contented with doing to men as we would be done unto: no, Lord, You, who see in secret, know what longing desires we have after you. You behold us daily approaching your footstool with deepest humiliation and contrition; and hourly, as it were, washing in the fountain of Christ's blood, which alone can "purge our consciences from dead works." Nor does our hope of forgiveness embolden us to sin; but rather, you know that it animates us to obedience. As for sin, we can appeal to you, we hate and abhor it. If at any time we commit it, even in thought, you know how much our souls are pained, and how we renew our applications to you for pardon and strength. We say the truth in Christ, and lie not, our consciences also bearing us witness in the Holy Spirit, that we have great heaviness and continual sorrow in our hearts for the corruptions that yet remain within us; and that, *if we could have the desire of our hearts, we would bid an eternal farewell to sin, and be "holy as you are holy, and perfect as you are perfect*."

Dear brethren, have you such an evidence of your sincerity before God? Do you not now feel any misgivings in your consciences respecting these things? If you can thus appeal to the heart-searching God, then earnestly pray that he would perfect his good work in your hearts; and be "utterly purposed" that from this moment you will no more offend.

Glad would we be if all were acting thus agreeably to their profession, and walking thus in the paths of peace. But have the consciences of all approved these acknowledgments? Have none felt any misgivings? Has not conscience whispered to anyone: 'This is not your state?' If this be the case with any one, let him hearken to the friendly intimation, the faithful remonstrance: for "if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things: but if our heart condemns us not, then, and then only, have we confidence towards God."

***~~#1809~~***

***~~A CONSCIENCE VOID OF Offense~~***

***~~[Acts 24:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.16).~~***

"So I strive always to keep my conscience void of offense before God and man."

THE Gospel is often represented as unfavorable to morality, but true believers are living monuments of its sanctifying influence. Paul was deemed a "fellow not worthy to live upon the earth;" he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness, verse 5, 6, but he distinctly and satisfactorily disproved the allegations.

Respecting Sedition, verse 12.

Heresy, verse 14, 15.

Profaneness, in general, verse 16;  
in the particular that had been specified, verse 17, 18,  
and boldly affirmed that his principles had quite an opposite effect.

We shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is that attainment which every true Christian labors for?~~***

A metaphysical inquiry into the nature of conscience would be to little profit. *Its office is to testify the quality of our actions, and to regulate our conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong.*It regards actions rather than sentiments, and the good or evil that is in them rather than any prudential considerations respecting them. The *rule*whereby it would judge, is, the word of God, and it is considered as good or evil, according to the verdict it gives.

***~~Not that the conscience is void of offense merely because it does not accuse—~~***

There are many so immersed in cares or pleasures that they never reflect on the state of their souls, [Hosea 7:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 7.2); and, if at any time their conscience is alarmed, they instantly endeavor to check its clamors, and restore its tranquility.

Others persuade themselves that they have no cause for fear, and that they shall have peace notwithstanding all their sins, [Jeremiah 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.11). [Deuteronomy 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19).

Others have, by resisting, quenched the light within them, and thus have reduced themselves to a state of awful obduracy, 1 Timothy 4:2. Such persons have no other than "an evil conscience."

***~~Nor is a conscience necessarily void of offense, even though it would approve—~~***

Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong. By conforming to their own principles they may gain the approbation of their own minds: but it does not therefore follow that they are innocent. Their mistakes cannot change the quality of their actions: error may extenuate, but cannot remove their guilt. Would those who think it meritorious to extirpate heretics, or those, of whom our Lord speaks, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2) be justified in following the dictates of their deluded consciences? Paul determines this in his own case, compare [Acts 26:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9-11) with 1 Corinthians 15:9 and [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13); [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15).

***~~To be truly void of offense, conscience must have a clear discovery of the Scriptural rule of duty—~~***

The rule of duty is concise and plain, [Matthew 22:37-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.37-40); this however, though allowed in theory, is practically denied. *Most all men persuade themselves that their love of the world will consist with their duty to God*,[1 John 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15); *and that pride, envy, selfishness, etc. may accord with love to man*, [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-7). How would conscience, thus blinded, give a just verdict? Or how would its blindness cause that to be good, which is in itself evil?

***~~Conscience should be able also to testify upon good grounds that there is a correspondence between that rule and our actions—~~***

Conscience should be in the habit of examining our principles and motives, and be on its guard against any bias from prejudice or passion: it should be able to appeal to God for the truth of its testimony; not that it need to testify of sinless perfection—that is not possessed by any, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2). But it must testify, that, after the strictest search,*it can find no sin habitually indulged, or duty allowedly neglected.*

"A conscience void of offense" being that which every true Christian labors to maintain, I proceed to mark,

***~~II. The vast importance of a conscience void of offense to every man—~~***

***~~To labor for a conscience void of offense is certainly the character of all who fear God—~~***

The world is satisfied with gaining the applause of men; but the Christian makes but little account of *man's*judgment, 1 Corinthians 4:3. *He knows that the eye of God is upon his heart*,[Hebrews 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.13); he therefore "studies to approve himself to God:" he has respect to every part of his duty "toward God and man." He does not think that his observance of relative duties supersedes the necessity of delight in God; nor, on the other hand, that the devoutest exercise of prayer and praise can absolve him from his obligations to equity and mercy towards man, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17);" and this, not at certain seasons only, but always: nor will he be deterred by any regard to ease, or interest, or fear. Inquiring only, "What is my Scriptural duty?" [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13).

***~~Nor can anyone be a true Christian who has not attained a conscience void of offense—~~***

Every pardoned sinner is supposed to be without deceit [Psalm 32:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.2). All in the primitive Church are spoken of in this light [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10); [Philippians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15). See also [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23). Paul did not hesitate to affirm that such was his character, [Acts 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.1). [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). And the same is ascribed to one who, in point of experience, was far inferior to him, [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47); nor is anyone in a state of salvation who has not attained it.

Many things may conspire to rob a Christian of the comfort of such a conscience, (the corruptions of his heart, the temptations of Satan, and even bodily disorders, may cause him to despond for a season) but a just ground for such a conscience he cannot but possess. This is expressly asserted by David [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18), and John, [1 John 3:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.8-10). (If this were rigorously interpreted, it would contradict other passages of scripture, [1 Kings 8:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.46). But to reconcile it with *allowed sin*is impossible.)

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

We all are willing to believe ourselves real Christians, and it is painful to rob anyone of so comfortable a hope. Let us then, as Christians, unite our acknowledgments to God, [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-2). Let us adore him for that grace, whereby he enables us to maintain, always, and in all things, a clear conscience. But if, in this appeal to him, we feel misgivings, or conscience suggest an opposite testimony, let us remember that admonition, "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God," 1 [John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19-21)

***~~#1810~~***

***~~PAUL BEFORE FELIX~~***

**[Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25).**

"As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said: That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25)

*MEN usually persist in sin without duly reflecting on its consequences. Hence the peace which they enjoy, notwithstanding they are exposed to the displeasure of the Almighty*; yet the voice of warning and reproof will sometimes alarm them. Too often, however, the alarm is only of short duration. This was the case of Felix, when awakened by the preaching of Paul—

***~~I. The subjects of the Apostle's discourse—~~***

He was sent for to explain the principles he professed, but he was not satisfied with gratifying the curiosity of his hearers; he endeavored to reach their consciences, and convince them of their sins. On this occasion he spoke of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."

Hence we observe that,

***~~1. The subjects are essential parts of the Gospel—~~***

Many confine their ideas of the Gospel to the one subject of justification by "the faith of Christ." But the Apostle when dilating on "the faith of Christ," introduced the subjects mentioned in my text. The knowledge of these is in fact necessary to a just comprehension of that. We must see our desert and danger as transgressors of the law, before we can ever duly appreciate the Gospel.

***~~2. They are of deep and vital interest to every man—~~***

Doubtless they were of peculiar importance to such abandoned characters as Felix and Drusilla. Felix had induced Drusilla to forsake her own husband, and to marry him: he was moreover remarkably avaricious and oppressive; but they are necessary to be impressed on us also.

Under the term "righteousness" we must comprehend all the duties which we owe to our neighbor.

Under the term of "temperance," all that relates to the government of our own appetites and passions.

Though we are not guilty of adultery, and avarice, and oppression in their grosser forms, we may find much under these heads for humiliation before God.*At the day of judgment we must answer for every secret violation of God's holy law*. The prospect of that solemn account may well endear to us the Gospel of Christ.

***~~3. They commend themselves to our reason no less than to our faith—~~***

Paul "reasoned" with his Royal auditors on these subjects. To bring home to the heart of a heathen the salvation of Christ, much previous knowledge was requisite; but*to bring him to a sense of his guilt and danger, nothing was necessary but an immediate appeal to his reason and conscience*; and, when addressing persons who are ignorant of revelation, we shall do well to adopt the Apostle's plan.

What degree of success attended his efforts will appear from,

***~~II. The effects it produced—~~***

***~~On Drusilla's mind it seems to have produced no effect—~~***

She, as a Jewess, must have often heard these subjects treated; but, having sinned against light and knowledge, she was unaffected by all she heard. Just so, many are hardened even by the Gospel itself.

***~~But Felix "trembled"—~~***

A curious and uncommon sight! *The judge "trembling" at the reasonings of his prisoner!*But well might he tremble at the review of his past life and at the prospect of a future retribution. And who has not reason to tremble, if he has not fled to Christ for refuge and found acceptance with God through him? Take the holy law of God, my brethren, and try yourselves by it. Surely there will not be one who will not cry out, as Felix should have done, "What shall I do to be saved?"

***~~He forbore however to improve the occasion as he ought—~~***

He promised himself a more convenient season for attending to the concerns of his soul. But what season could be more suitable, than when the Spirit of God was striving with him, and his conscience was awake, and an inspired instructor was at hand to lead him to a Savior? Could he have better hopes of success, when he had seared his conscience, quenched the Spirit, confirmed his evil habits, and delivered himself up to the chains of Satan? The hoped-for day, alas! never arrived! He still for two years longer continued his avaricious and oppressive habits, verse 26, 27. O that he had known the day of his visitation, and improved his day of grace!

***~~Let his example serve as a caution to us—~~***

All of us have known, in some measure, the motions of God's Spirit. All of us have felt, at times, some general apprehensions respecting the account which we must give at the day of judgment. But how many have silenced their convictions, in hopes of finding some more convenient season for attending to them! And how many have died before the hoped-for opportunity arrived! Let us beware of this device of Satan, whereby he upholds his kingdom in the world. He does not tempt any to resolve that they will never repent: but takes the more plausible method of insinuating that they will have a more convenient season for repenting.

Let us remember, that the same temptations will recur, and the same motives influence us at future periods. Let us attend to that beneficial advice of the Apostle, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13); [Hebrews 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.15). And let us seek, without delay, that godly sorrow which works repentance unto salvation, [2 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10).

***~~#1811~~***

***~~PAUL'S COMMISSION~~***

**[Acts 26:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.17-18).**"I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

NEVER was there a more glorious triumph of Divine grace than in the conversion of Paul. How active and inveterate an enemy he was to Christ, previous to his conversion, is well known. Had he only been arrested in his career, and humbled, it would have been a signal victory: but to change the whole current of his affections, and to turn against Satan those weapons which through the instrumentality of this fiery bigot, he had been using to destroy the Church—this was indeed to "beat the sword into a plough-share, and the spear into a pruning-hook," and to display, in the brightest colors, the power and grace of Christ.

We do not wonder, that when the Christians, whom he had so cruelly persecuted, heard of "his preaching the faith which he had just before labored to destroy," "they glorified God for him."

The call of this man to the apostleship, and the particular commission given him, are the points contained in our text. But as Paul's ministry differs from ours only in the extent of his commission, and not in the subject of his ministrations, we shall wave any particular notice of him, and state to you the immediate and ultimate, objects of our labors—

***~~I. The immediate objects of our labors—~~***

That there is some considerable difference between the Gentiles and ourselves, we willingly concede. The *darkness*among them was more entire, their *superstitions*more absurd, their *impieties*more gross. But when we have made all due allowance on these heads, we must still say, that the points of resemblance between us are general, while the points of difference are only few and particular.

***~~What, we would ask, is our state with respect to knowledge and practice?~~***

From education we have obtained some general notions of Christianity. But what views have we of the extreme depravity of our nature, and the total alienation of our hearts from God? What insight have we into the way of salvation, as honoring all the perfections of the Deity, and as rendering Christ the hope, the joy, the glory of the universe? Is the beauty of holiness, or the nature and excellence of the spiritual life clearly discerned among us? Are the devices of Satan known? Are we so exercised in the use of the Christian armor, as to be able to "fight a good fight," and "war a good warfare?"

Is not our *practice*too, as defective as our *knowledge*? Satan is "the God of this world," "the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." And by what do we discover his agency? Is it not by the wickedness to which he instigates the world? See then, whether he does not exercise his power over us. *Do not envy, wrath, malice, revenge—too often dwell in our hearts? Are not pride, ambition, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness, the principles which actuate us in almost all our pursuits? Do we not harbor in our bosom sensuality, impurity, lasciviousness, and a whole host of evil passions!*What greater proof can we have, that we are yet "in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will?"

***~~To rectify the state of our hearers with respect to these things, is the immediate object of our labors—~~***

We wish "to open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness unto light." It is with this view that we set forth the "unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of the heart:" it is with this view that we exhibit Christ in all his fullness, suitableness, and sufficiency. In short, it is with this view that we study, and labor, and pray. It is the hope of being useful in enlightening your minds, that makes our crosses easy, and our burdens light.

We know, that if light once comes into your minds, we may hope to see you cast off the yoke of Satan, and become "the freemen of the Lord." While you continue in darkness, we are aware that you must of necessity remain under the power of the evil one: but when you have learned what provision is made for you in the Gospel, and how effectual the operations of the Holy Spirit shall be for your restoration to God, we anticipate the result, and rejoice in the prospect of your perfect emancipation. This is the end we desire to accomplish; even that you may be brought to *surrender up yourselves unreservedly to God, and live as entirely under his influence*, as you have hitherto lived under the influence of Satan.

But these objects, important as they are, are only means to a further end, which we call,

***~~II. The ultimate object of our labors—~~***

It would be a small matter to rectify your sentiments, or to change your conduct, if we did not succeed also in our ulterior objects; namely,

***~~1. The bringing you into a state of acceptance with God—~~***

What would any change avail you, if you were under the guilt of unpardoned sin? That you all need forgiveness, you yourselves will not deny. And that the attainment of it is the most desirable of all objects, is a truth, which, in seasons of reflection, you cannot but feel. In a dying hour especially, if your minds are at all suitably impressed, you would account it of more value than the whole world.

This then, beloved brethren, is what we desire to bring you to. It is painful, inexpressibly painful to us, to see you perishing in the midst of mercy! We long for your salvation: we would account the salvation of a soul as the richest recompense we can possibly receive: and on this account we endeavor to take you by the hand, and to lead you to Christ. We assure you in God's name, that "the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin;" and that "all who believe shall be justified from all things." And then do we feel most truly happy, when we see you enjoying peace with God, and walking with him as your reconciled God and Father.

***~~2. The bringing you to the final and everlasting possession of his glory—~~***

Our object is not fully attained, until you are placed beyond the reach of harm, in the complete possession of happiness and glory. Could we but prevail with you, we would leave not so much as one of you in a perishing or doubtful state: we would "take all of you from the dunghill, and set you among the princes," "the saints in light." Those who have been set apart in the Divine counsels, and renewed after the Divine image, are already "begotten to an incorruptible inheritance:" even now are they "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." But at present they are only minors, who have the title indeed, but not the full possession of their estates. We long to help you forward to the last hour of your lives, and, if you die before us, to see you, like a ship sailing into its destined port, enjoying "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Then Christ himself "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied;" and then we also bless our God, that "we have not labored in vain, or run in vain."

***~~In improving this subject, we would commend to your attention the following reflections:~~***

***~~1. How injurious to the world is prejudice!~~***

There is a sad prejudice prevailing in the world against the truth itself, and against all who faithfully dispense it. The Gospel is often represented as calculated only to make persons melancholy, if not to drive them mad: and the worst motives that may be conceived, are imputed to us for preaching it. The consequence of this is, that many are kept away from attending the ministration of the word; and many, when they do hear it, shut their ears, and fortify their hearts, against the admission of it.

But look into the text, and see what our objects are: is there anything so formidable in these, that the succeeding in them would be called "a turning of the world upside down?" See the effects of the Gospel elsewhere described: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;" "Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorn shall grow up the myrtle-tree." "Then shall the lame man leap as an deer, and the tongue of the mute sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

Are these such changes as are to be deprecated, or that those who are instrumental to them would be regarded as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things?" Search the Scriptures, brethren, and judge for yourselves: or, if you will form your judgment from the calumnies of a blind ungodly world, then know that these very calumnies are so many testimonies to the truth of what we preach; and that in proportion as our ministry is reviled after the manner of Christ's and his Apostles, the presumption is in our favor, that it does indeed resemble theirs.

***~~2. How highly should the ordinances be prized—~~***

Conversion, from the first motions of good desire, to the entire formation of the Divine image on the soul—is of the Spirit of God. But the Holy Spirit works by means, and principally by the ministry of his servants in the public ordinances. When therefore we go up to the house of God, we should go thither with a full expectation of meeting our God there, and with an ardent desire to experience his powerful operations on our souls. There, if we really desire it, our eyes shall be opened, our clouds of darkness dispelled, our chains of sin broken, our iniquities pardoned, and the whole work of salvation perfected within us!

Would we then grudge the time that will be occupied in waiting upon God? Would we prefer business, or pleasure, or any worthless indulgences, on the Sabbath, to a devout attendance on the house of prayer? Or would we fear a little banter and ridicule, or the loss of any temporal interest, which may be incurred by showing an attachment to the Gospel of Christ?

If we could have access to any that are now before the throne of God, and could ask them, what they thought of the ordinances? Would they show towards them the indifference that we do? Would the three thousand who were converted on the day of Pentecost, express regret, that ever they heard that sermon of Peter's, and "continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers?" Learn then now to think of the ordinances as you will think of them hereafter; improve them, whether on the Sabbath-day, or week-day, as you will hereafter wish that you had improved them; and beg of God in private, before ever you go up to his public ordinances, that you may draw water with joy out of those wells of salvation."

***~~3. How efficacious a principle is faith!~~***

The concluding words of our text are generally considered as connected only with the word that immediately precedes them: and certainly, in this sense, they declare a most important truth, namely, that we are "sanctified by faith in Christ." But we apprehend, that a comma would follow the word "sanctified;" and that the last words of the text would be connected with both the clauses that precede it. Thus, "That you, by the faith that is in Christ, may receive, etc."

Faith is in reality that principle, by which, and by which alone, we obtain all spiritual blessings. Certainly it is that by which we receive the "forgiveness of our sins, [Romans 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1);" for nothing but faith will unite us to Christ, or interest us in his meritorious death and passion. It is by faith also that we must be "sanctified [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9);" for we cannot be renewed but by the Holy Spirit; nor can we receive the Spirit but from, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the exercise of faith.

Finally, it is by faith that we must obtain "that inheritance, which God has prepared for those who love him." We must "*live*by faith," and "*stand*by faith," and "*walk*by faith," and be "*saved*by faith," from first to last. The very text informs us, that by faith we are *justified*, and *sanctified*, and *glorified*. Let us then beg of God to infuse this divine principle into our hearts. Let us study the character of Christ more and more; in order that we may know his excellency, and "receive continually out of his fullness;" and that "God may make him unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."

***~~#1812~~***

***~~PAUL'S TESTIMONY~~***

***~~[Acts 26:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.22-23).~~***

"But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

EVEN to this moment, the Gospel, when faithfully preached, is called "A new doctrine, [Acts 17:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.19)." But it is the very same that it was from the beginning. We know no other "Gospel" than that which "was preached to Abraham," or than that which was delivered to man in Paradise. *The only difference between the Apostles and the Prophets was, that the one foretold the Savior who would come, and the other proclaimed the Savior who had come*. As for us, we have only to follow the steps of the Apostles, and to bear the same testimony as was uniformly borne by them.

In the words before us, we have the entire substance of the Apostle's ministrations. Let us notice,

***~~I. The testimony which Paul bore—~~***

***~~This related both to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and to the manifestation of him to the world—~~***

He was not ashamed to declare, that the Lord Jesus Christ had suffered on the accursed tree, and been put to death as a malefactor. But he bore witness, that God had raised him from the dead, and that in and by his resurrection his claims to the Messiahship were established beyond all reasonable doubt, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4). Others, indeed, had been raised by the prophets, and by the Lord Jesus Christ himself: but, though raised, they had died at last, like all others of the children of men: but "Christ was risen to die no more, [Romans 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.9);" so that "in that, as in all other things, he had the pre-eminence," and was indeed "the first-born from the dead, [Colossians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.18)."

Being now ascended into the highest heavens, he had sent the Holy Spirit to testify of him, and to make known that salvation which was henceforth to be proclaimed in his name; and to be proclaimed, not to the Jews only, but unto Gentiles also, even to the ends of the earth.

With these general statements he entered, of course, into all the ends and purposes of this great mystery; and showed, that by it the salvation of man was affected, since it was for our sins that Christ died, and for our justification that he rose again, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)."

***~~In the whole of it he insisted on nothing but what Moses and the prophets had declared before him, [1 Corinthians 15:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.3-4).~~***

Exceeding full is the testimony which they have borne to the work and offices of the Lord Jesus. Of his *death*, Moses in fact spoke, in all the sacrifices which were offered; as did the prophets also, in the most express terms, [Isaiah 53:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.5). [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26). [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10).

The *resurrection*of our Lord, too, was plainly shadowed forth by Moses in the ordinance of the scape-goat, and in the entrance of the high-priest within the veil with the blood of the sacrifices: and with equal plainness was it foretold by David, [Psalm 16:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.10), and exemplified in Jonah, [Jonah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.17).

The manifestation of him, also, both to Jews and Gentiles, alike occupied their attention; the one exhibiting him as the "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people would be, [Genesis 49:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.10);" and the other, as given for "a light to enlighten the whole world, [Isaiah 42:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.6); [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6)."

But in our text we are particularly called to notice,

***~~II. The circumstances under which Paul bore it—~~***

***~~Truly his labors and his sufferings had been such as no human being could have sustained, if he had not been aided and upheld by Almighty power—~~***

His "labors were more abundant than those of any other Apostle;" and his trials, beyond measure, were great. Compare [Romans 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.19) and [Acts 20:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.34) with [2 Corinthians 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.4-5); [2 Corinthians 11:23-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-29). But "he obtained help from God," and therefore was enabled to proceed without weariness or dismay: God had promised to support him, verse 17; and this promise was fulfilled in a variety of ways. Sometimes God averted trials from him, [Acts 9:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.24-25); [Acts 18:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.9-10); [Acts 18:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.12); [Acts 18:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.17); [Acts 23:12-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.12-31); sometimes upheld him under them, [2 Corinthians 4:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.8-10). [2 Timothy 4:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.16-18); and sometimes delivered him out of them, when it seemed as if his career had already been brought to a close, [Acts 14:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.19-20); [Acts 21:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.31-32); [Acts 23:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.27). Hence the Apostle thankfully acknowledged his obligations both to the providence and grace of God; to the one, as fortifying his mind; and to the other, as strengthening his body, for all that he was called to endure.

***~~To the same Almighty power must every faithful minister ascribe his continuance in the free discharge of his duty—~~***

The labors or sufferings of ministers, at this, day, are as nothing, in comparison with those which were sustained by the Apostle. But the continuance of life, and health, and liberty, should be regarded as the special gift of God: and more particularly should we acknowledge *our preservation from sin and from apostasy, as the very work of God*; without whose gracious aid we would never be able to withstand the assaults of our great adversary one single hour. Even the being kept steadfast in the faith is no small mercy: and if we are enabled simply to adhere to the doctrines of the Apostles and prophets without being led aside into any pernicious error or vain conceit, we may well acknowledge, with devoutest gratitude, our obligations to Almighty God.

***~~We may see, in this passage,~~***

***~~1. What is the real ground of that hatred which faithful ministers have to encounter—~~***

Many reasons were assigned by Paul's enemies for their inveteracy against him: but the true reason was, that he bore a faithful testimony to those very truths which they themselves professed to believe. They could not endure the fidelity with which he called them to receive the testimony of Moses and the prophets. And is not similar fidelity a ground of offense at this day? Yes! *there is no man who boldly maintains the authority of Christ, and demands unlimited subjection to him, but the men of this world will cry out against him, as fanatical!*But, if only we can say that we speak nothing but what the prophets and Apostles have declared before us, we need not regard either the calumnies or opposition of the whole world. The same God that helped Paul will help us also, and will richly recompense into our bosoms whatever we may suffer for his sake.

***~~2. What reason we have for thankfulness, if a faithful ministry is continued to us!~~***

Satan is ever on the watch, to rob us of it. Innumerable are the efforts which he makes to intimidate or ensnare the servants of the Lord Jesus. There are no persons in the world against whom he directs his efforts with more subtlety or venom. Surely they greatly need the prayers of their people in their behalf. If Paul said so frequently, "Brethren, pray for us!" much more may they, whose attainments are so inferior to his. Let us, then, be thankful to God for the ministry we still enjoy; and while it is continued to us, let us improve it with all our might.

***~~#1813~~***

***~~PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS OWN MINISTRY~~***

***~~[Acts 26:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.24-25).~~***

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable."

AMONG the duties of a Judge, there is not any one of greater importance than that of giving a patient and candid attention to a prisoner's vindication of himself. But this is not always to be found, when religion forms the ground of accusation against a man. Prejudice and passion are too easily called into action on those occasions, and too often usurp the place of reason and reflection. Paul had very abundant cause to complain of this. He made many arguments before judges and governors, but could scarcely ever obtain a patient hearing. In the passage before us, he was standing before Festus and Agrippa; but long before he had completed his statement, he was interrupted by Festus, who cried with a loud voice, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane."

It will be profitable to notice,

***~~I. What was the subject of Paul's ministry—~~***

***~~This he himself had briefly, but comprehensively stated, verse 22, 23.—~~***

He preached Christ as a dying and risen Savior: and declared to all, "Jews and Gentiles," "small and great," that if they would believe on Jesus, he would bring them into the full knowledge of the truth, and fill their souls with unutterable peace and joy. Nor did he introduce these doctrines as new; for they were none other than "Moses and the Prophets" had declared before; *Moses*, in the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, [Leviticus 14:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 14.4-7); [Leviticus 16:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.8-10); and the *prophets*, in plain and express predictions Isaiah 53.

***~~And this is the one subject of our ministry also—~~***

We set before you, from time to time, the great work of redemption, through the sacrifice of the Son of God: and declare to you, that there is no other atonement, no other means of reconciliation, with an offended God. We direct your eyes to Christ also as risen from the dead to a new and endless life; and as not only making intercession for you, but possessing in himself all fullness of spiritual blessings, that you may receive from him whatever you stand in need of. We declare also, that no tongue can express, no imagination conceive, what "light," and peace, and joy, shall flow into your souls, if only you will believe on him, and give yourselves up unreservedly to him.

In these things we are sometimes supposed to bring new things to your ears; but we speak "nothing but what Moses and the prophets most explicitly foretold."

Unexceptionable as this was, we shall be grieved to see,

***~~II. In what light Paul's testimony was viewed by his enemies—~~***

***~~Festus considered Paul's testimony as an indication of mental derangement—~~***

Festus, seeing that Paul was a man of erudition, concluded, that he had lost his senses by an over attention to study; and that, consequently, all further attention to him would only be an unprofitable waste of time. Hence he said aloud, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane."

***~~And it is scarcely a more favorable judgment that is sometimes formed of us—~~***

Persons are very ready to pronounce, that those who preach and profess the Gospel, are mad. But whence arises such a judgment as this? Is there anything in the Gospel itself that affords ground for it? Or do the foregoing sentiments deserve so severe a censure? True it is, that the prophets were uniformly reviled for the declarations they made: but one would have hoped, that the accomplishment of their prophecies would have secured for us a more equitable judgment: this however is not to be expected: as long as there remains a carnal mind in existence, so long must it be "enmity against God [Romans 8:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.7);" and while there is a natural man unconverted to God, so long will there be one to whom the things of the Spirit are foolishness! [1 Corinthians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.18); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). We have only the fate of the prophets of old, who in their day were accounted mad also, 2 Kings 9:11. [Jeremiah 29:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 29.26); and, if judged as they were, we must say with Paul, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God! [2 Corinthians 5:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.13)."

But whence arises this harsh judgment?

***~~It arises, first, from their lack of honesty: they will not give us an attentive hearing; but will run away with any detached expressions, put on them a construction that they were never intended to bear, and draw conclusions from them that we would utterly disavow; and then impute to us all the folly which they themselves have invented.~~***

Another source of this harsh judgment is their ignorance of the Scriptures. They will not study the Scriptures for themselves, nor take the trouble to compare our sentiments with the sacred records. What wonder then if they conclude that we are mad, when they will not listen even to the voice of God himself?

The hope of vindicating themselves is a further source of the censures they cast on us: for, if they allow us to be right, they must of necessity condemn themselves; but, if they can persuade themselves that we are mad, then they may be considered as wise, and may rest satisfied with their own ungodly ways.

These, together with the rooted enmity of the carnal mind against God, are some of the chief sources of that uncharitable judgment which is passed at this day, no less than in the apostolic age, on the preachers and professors of the Gospel of Christ.

If the Gospel deserves not such unjust treatment, let us inquire,

***~~III. In what light Paul's testimony ought to be considered—~~***

We cannot but admire the calm and respectful—yet firm and manly, answer which Paul returns to the insulting language of his Judge.

***~~He maintained that he spoke only "the words of truth and soberness"—~~***

He was not afraid of his assertions being brought to any test: he knew that they were the very truth of God, and that unbiased reason must approve of all that he had taught.

***~~And, as far as our doctrine agrees with his, we also are ready to make our appeal both to reason and Scripture—~~***

Let our words be tried, and see whether they are not words of truth and soberness.

Refer to *Moses and the prophets*, and see whether they do not set forth Christ as the "All in all" in the salvation of man. See whether they do not characterize a life of faith in the Son of God, as the true, the sure, the only source of happiness, both in this world and the next. They uniformly declare, that, if we "awake from our sleep, and arise from the dead, Christ will give us light, [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14). These words, though quoted by Paul, are not contained in any particular passage of the Old Testament; but they are the substance of the whole."

*Reason*also is no less on our side than Revelation. If there is a God, should we not serve him? If he has provided a Savior for us, should we not seek a saving interest in him? If that Savior is empowered to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, should we not cleave to him with full purpose of heart? Men may call this madness, if they will; but they are the dictates of sound reason: and to contradict them is as irrational as it is impious and profane.

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. Be not alarmed at the aspersions cast upon true religion—~~***

Ungodly men will revile religion, and endeavor to deter others from embracing it, by calling it "madness." But the truth is, that they themselves are mad. Try them by the standard of *reason*and *revelation*, and see whether they can stand the test? No! they are beside themselves; "madness is in their hearts while they live!" "A deceitful heart has turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Have I not a lie in my right hand?"

If then they cry out against religion, know whence their clamor proceeds. The Jews said of Christ himself, "He has a devil, and is mad. Why listen to him?" Wonder not therefore if similar advice be given in reference to his faithful servants, and similar reasons be assigned for it: and if the service of God must be accounted madness, then take up your cross boldly, and say with David, "I will yet be more vile for the Lord!"

***~~2. Be careful to give no just occasion for them—~~***

There certainly is such a thing as foolish enthusiasm, and under the influence of it many are led to act so as to excite strong prejudices against religion. But these have much to answer for before God. Religion, in its most exalted state, is "a reasonable," and I may add also, a rational, "service." "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

Endeavor then to show, that "God has given you, not a spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind, [2 Timothy 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.7)." Endeavor to "walk in wisdom toward those who are without," yes, and to "walk wisely also before God in a perfect way." Ever remember, that "truth and soberness" must go together, and *the justness of your sentiments must always be marked in the blamelessness of your conduct*.

The first thing certainly is to embrace the truth with the simplicity of a little child, not exalting some favorite doctrines, and overlooking others, but giving to every doctrine precisely that degree of importance which it appears to bear in the Holy Scriptures. Some are always dwelling on predestination and election, others on faith, and others on good works; some on the sufferings of Christ, others on the light within. *To give every truth its due weight and proper place, would be the endeavor of a wise and sober-minded Christian*.

The next thing is, to carry your principles into effect, by regulating the whole of your conduct according to them, and fulfilling the duties of your own particular situation, whatever it may be, with care and diligence. This will "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you;" nor is there any better way of "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, than by well-doing."

***~~#1814~~***

**THE *ALMOST*****CHRISTIAN AND THE *REAL*CHRISTIAN COMPARED**

***~~[Acts 26:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.28-29).~~***

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

*IT is surprising to see what different effects the Gospel produces upon different minds; some view it as the very extreme of folly, while others regard it as the most glorious display of Divine wisdom.*Even when our blessed *Lord*himself spoke, some of his audience believed his words; while others said, "He has a devil and is mad." Thus differently were some of *Paul's*auditors affected also, when he vindicated himself before Festus and Agrippa; Festus exclaimed, "Paul, you are beside yourself;" while Agrippa, falling under the force of truth, said, "You almost you persuade me to be a Christian."

The effects however which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, is uniform: and Paul's answer to Agrippa affords us a fit occasion to set them before you in the clearest manner. It leads us to notice,

***~~I. In what state Agrippa was—~~***

***~~He was convinced in his judgment, but undecided in his will—~~***

He was conversant with all the Jewish laws and customs verse 3, and a firm believer in the prophetic writings verse 27; hence he expected assuredly that the promised Messiah would come. Respecting the advent of that Messiah, he had had no opportunity of hearing, except from the reports of persons who were adverse to the truth (and such is yet the unhappy lot of kings and princes, who are constrained for the most part to *form their judgment from very partial and erroneous statements*): but now, from the discourse of Paul, he was convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and that his religion was indeed from God.

Still however he knew not how to embrace this religion himself. He saw that an open profession of Christianity might possibly shake his authority among all his subjects; and that at all events *it must be attended with a life of mortification and self-denial*, since he must renounce "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and give himself up to God in a life of universal holiness. But this was too great a sacrifice for him to make. If he could be a Christian, and yet retain the pleasures of sense and the honor that comes from man, he would willingly embrace the Gospel; but if he must encounter so many difficulties, he will rather forego the pearl, than pay the price.

***~~This, alas! is the state of many among ourselves—~~***

Many are convinced that the Gospel is true, and that there is "no other name under Heaven but that of Christ, whereby we can be saved." They even envy the state of those who follow Christ; and wish, if it might be so, to share their lot in the eternal world. But to expose themselves to shame or loss for professing the Gospel, they dare not: their reputation, and their interests, are too valuable to risk in such a way: to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow Christ," is a requisition which they have no desire to comply with. If they might "serve God and mammon" too, and have "communion with Christ and Belial" at the same time, they would stand forth as open friends of the Gospel; but if they must "follow Christ outside the camp," and "forsake all for him," they cannot prevail upon themselves to encounter such difficulties.

This is particularly found among those who are held in much estimation in the world. The more eminent and distinguished any are, the more timidity they manifest. If Agrippa had been only a poor man, he perhaps would have followed up his convictions, and been altogether persuaded to become a Christian: but his high rank and conspicuous station operated as an insurmountable barrier in his way.

And so it is at this day: the poor embrace the Gospel freely; but the rich and the great and the learned scarcely dare be seen among the followers of the despised Nazarene: and hence it is, that so few of them are called, [1 Corinthians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26).

***~~But this state, though common, is indeed most dangerous—~~***

In one it may appear hopeful; because where the judgment is convinced, there is reason to hope that the heart will soon obey the dictates of the understanding: but when once men begin to "rebel against the light," they grieve in a most peculiar manner the Spirit of God, and provoke him to give them up to judicial blindness.

True it is, that the struggle between light and darkness is often of long continuance: but during all that time the person, is in a most pitiable state. He enjoys none of the benefits of true religion: he is a stranger to peace with God because he does not "cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart:" he has no peace in his own conscience, because he is sensible that he is not upright before God: he has no sense of God's love shed abroad in his heart, no delight in communion with him, no glorious prospects beyond the grave.

No! a consciousness that he is not wholly given up to God, eats out all comfort, and fills him rather with painful forebodings of the future judgment. His state is even worse than if he had been altogether destitute of light, [John 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.22). Every hour that he continues to fight against his convictions, greatly augments his guilt, [James 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.17), and insures a heavier condemnation, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19). The Judge of living and dead has told us, "that the man that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

If Agrippa's state then was so dangerous, let us inquire,

***~~II. What is that state in which we should all desire to be—~~***

We cannot but admire the address with which the Apostle answered this irresolute king. He had bonds and imprisonments; but of those he did not wish his bitterest enemies to partake: but of his hopes, his victories, his enjoyments, he wished all to have an equal fruition with himself; with the exception of his chains, he heartily prayed that they might be altogether in a state like his.

***~~Consider what was the state of the Apostle Paul—~~***

How clear, how full, how refreshing to his soul, were his views of Christ! Perhaps no human being was ever so highly favored in this respect as he. And what *effects*did these views produce? They filled his soul with a "peace that surpassed all understanding," and a "joy that was unspeakable and and full of glory:" they called forth all his powers, both of body and mind, into the service of his Lord. *He accounted all that he possessed, as bought with the precious blood of Christ, and therefore as to be used for him alone. To make him known to others was the one end for which he lived*: and whatever difficulties or dangers he had to encounter for the sake of Christ, none of them could move him; yes, rather he gloried in them, and rejoiced that he was counted worthy to contend with them. But who can adequately describe his state? Who can tell . . .  
the fervor of his desires after Christ,  
the zeal he had to promote his glory,  
the delight he felt in his service, and  
the assured prospects which he enjoyed of dwelling with Christ for ever?

***~~Such was the state which Paul desired for all his auditors; and such we should all desire for ourselves—~~***

We should not be content with anything short of the attainments that were made by Paul: nay, if we had attained the same as he, we would still "forget what was behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling."

We are far from saying, that none are Christians indeed until they have attained his stature: but we must caution all against thinking themselves Christians, while there remains any one lust which they will not sacrifice for Christ, or any one duty they will not perform. The man that will not lay down life itself for Christ, cannot be his disciple. Behold then the *pattern*which we must all resemble: the love, the zeal, the patience, the entire devotedness of heart and life to Christ which were in Paul, must be in us: we must, in *desire*and *endeavor*at least, if not in actual attainment, be almost and altogether such as he was.

This must be the pattern for all who are in the ministry, or are preparing for the ministry, to aim at. We would not be like the idle shepherds who neglected their flocks; but like the Great Shepherd himself, who "laid down his life for his sheep:" and though we may be called to a sphere of small and limited extent—yet would we be in that sphere, as Paul was in the vast circle which he was called to fill: we should be servants to all for Christ's sake, and labor in season and out of season for every individual committed to our care.

If any, on account of their more exalted station, suppose that these observations are not applicable to them, let them remember who Festus and Agrippa were, and that the prayer in our text was offered up in the first place more immediately for them. The higher any are, the more needful is it for them to imitate all the graces and excellencies of the Apostle Paul.

But without confining it to any rank or order of men, I beg to express the Apostle's wish for "all that hear me this day." This is the state proper for all of every degree; and necessary for them also, if ever they would approve themselves to God.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The wavering and undecided—~~***

Perhaps on account of your pious dispositions it may be said, you are "not far from the kingdom of Heaven:" but to what purpose will this be, if you do not advance? It will be no consolation to you that you were once not far from the kingdom, if at last you are not admitted into it. But consider what it is that prevents you from becoming Christians altogether? Be assured, that, whatever it is, it will ultimately ruin your souls.

The young man whom Jesus loved for the general amiableness of his character, was left to perish, when he refused to part with all for Christ. The Lord grant, that none of you may continue "almost persuaded," but that you may all with one heart and one mind devote yourselves to him instantly and without reserve.

***~~2. Those who think themselves altogether persuaded to embrace Christ—~~***

It is not uncommon to feel a very fervent desire to serve the Lord at one time, and afterwards to relapse into a state of coldness and indifference. *Our spiritual enemies often appear dead, when they are only lulled asleep for a season*. But O! brethren, beware how you leave your first love, or look back after having put your hand to the plough. See the bright example before you: see how, like the sun in its course, he shined brighter and brighter to the perfect day. So do you also proceed. Never think you have attained anything, while anything remains to be attained. Be never weary in well doing. Think what an ornament Paul was to his profession, and what a blessing to the world; and strive, that as God was glorified in him, so he may be more and more glorified in you also.

***~~#1815~~***

***~~PAUL'S DELIVERANCE FROM SHIPWRECK~~***

***~~[Acts 27:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.25).~~***

"So keep up your courage, men, for I have *faith*in God that it will happen just as he told me."

WHATEVER difference there may sometimes appear between the dispensations of God's *providence*and the declarations of his *word*, we may be well assured that there never was, nor ever shall be, the slightest opposition between them. The declarations of God indeed may be conditional, when the conditions are not actually expressed; and then the event predicted, will be conformed, not to the words, but to the spirit of the declaration. This was remarkably the case with respect to Nineveh, which was spared, apparently in opposition to the threatenings denounced against them, but really in conformity with the conditions contained in them: but no word that was unconditionally uttered, ever failed of its accomplishment.

In the history of Paul there were strong and positive assurances given him, that he would preach the Gospel at Rome, [Acts 19:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.21); [Acts 23:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.11). But various circumstances arose from time to time, which threatened to defeat this purpose of the Most High. When Paul was seized in the temple, the people dragged him out with extreme violence, and "went about to kill him, [Acts 21:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.31);" and when he made his defense before them, they were wrought up almost to madness, and cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live! [Acts 22:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.22)." The next day, when he was standing before the Jewish council, there arose so great a dissension between his auditors, that he was in danger of being "pulled in pieces by them, [Acts 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.10)." Then there was a conspiracy of more than forty persons formed to take away his life, [Acts 23:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.14-15); and, when this was, almost by miracle, defeated, another conspiracy was formed and defeated in like manner, notwithstanding the judge himself strove to favor it, [Acts 25:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 25.2-3); [Acts 25:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 25.9-11).

At last he was sent by sea to Rome: but behold, he was overtaken with a storm, which seemed to cut off all hope of his ever arriving at his final destination. Even Paul himself appears now to have given up all expectation that his life would be spared: but God sent an angel to dissipate his fears, and to assure him that what had been spoken to him respecting his standing before Caesar, would certainly be accomplished verse 24. This declaration the Apostle fully credited; and he took occasion from it to comfort and encourage all that were in the ship with him; "So keep up your courage, men, for I have *faith*in God that it will happen just as he told me."

From these words, as verified in the outcome, we shall take occasion to set before you,

***~~I. The office of faith—~~***

Faith is represented by Paul as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen:" and such it manifested itself to be in Paul at this time: he saw not how his deliverance was to be effected; but God had told him that the whole crew would be saved; and therefore he entertained no doubt whatever as to the outcome of their present dangers.

Now this is exactly the office of faith in relation to every word of God. Whether God threatens or promises, we must regard the outcome as certain. Much is told us in the inspired volume respecting the salvation of all who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. These promises we are to apprehend and rely upon, "not staggering at any of them," but having a confident assurance that they shall all be fulfilled to us in their season.

We must not however separate from this,

***~~II. The obligations of faith—~~***

When the peril of shipwreck became more imminent, the sailors, under pretense of casting anchors out of the fore-ship, would have endeavored to save themselves in the boat: but Paul, perceiving their intentions, told the centurion and the soldiers, that unless the seamen continued in the ship, none of the crew could be saved, verse 31. But had not God promised absolutely, that not one life among them would be lost? How then could the desertion of a part of the crew prove the destruction of the whole? The answer to this is plain: God had ordained the *means*as well as the *end*: and to seek the one without using the other, was to tempt God, rather than to trust him.

Now this observation is of great importance, as reflecting light on the manner in which God accomplishes all his promises to us. He "has given us exceeding great and precious promises;" and no one of them shall ever fail; but we are not therefore at liberty to sit down idly, and to expect salvation without any exertions on our part: *we must exert ourselves as much as if our success depended wholly on our own arm; and at the same time we are to trust in God completely, as if no effort whatever were used by us.*This is the mode prescribed by God himself. He tells us that "eternal life is the *gift*of God through Jesus Christ:" yet he says, "*Labor*for the food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27). Compare with this, other passages of like import: [Ezekiel 36:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.36-37). [Proverbs 2:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.2-6)."

The consideration of God's promised aid is so far from superseding our own personal exertions, that it is our great *encouragement*to put them forth, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13); and to look for salvation in any other way than that which God has marked out, is to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. The means and the end are equally ordained by God, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13); and what God has joined, it is in vain for man to put asunder.

In performing these duties, we may expect,

***~~III. The benefits of faith—~~***

Two benefits accrued to Paul and his associates, namely, *present peace,*and *final safety*. Notwithstanding the storm continued as violent as ever, and they had turned adrift the boat which they might have looked to as useful for their preservation, we behold the whole crew in a state of comparative peace and comfort, verse 36; and, in the outcome, every one of them obtained the desire of his soul; for though the ship grounded, and was broken in pieces, all were saved at last; some by swimming to shore, and others on boards and the broken pieces of the ship.

Here we behold an exact representation of the benefits which faith in Christ will always obtain. We shall be brought to a state of sweet composure, notwithstanding we are yet in the midst of a tumultuous world, and menaced with dangers on every side: we shall "be filled with joy and peace in believing, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13)," yes "with joy unspeakable and full of glory! [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)." Our anticipation of a successful outcome to our conflicts will be almost, as it were, a foretaste of Heaven, [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39). Nor shall we be disappointed of our hope at last, [Isaiah 45:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.17). Our way may be "through much tribulation:" yes, we may "be scarcely saved, [1 Peter 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.18)," that is, with vast difficulty; we may "be saved so as by fire, 1 Corinthians 3:15;" but we shall never perish: "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones would perish, [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14);" nor shall one grain, however sifted, or however small, be missing from his garner, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are proceeding on their voyage without any apprehension of danger—~~***

The mariners, though warned by Paul, thought little of danger until it was too late.

And have not *we*innumerable warnings from all the inspired writers? Yet we go forward thinking of little but temporal ease and prosperity. But how soon may the hour arrive, when, like the mariners, we shall be glad to part with all that we possess, for the preservation even of our bodily lives, and much more for the salvation of our souls! Let us in a time of ease and prosperity consider this, and stand prepared for troubles and for death itself. That servant alone is truly "blessed, whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find thus watching."

***~~2. Those who are harassed with storms and tempests—~~***

Many there are, who, in this ever-changing state of things, are "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted." But, blessed be God, they have "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." "The promises made to us in Christ, are sure to all the seed." However imminent our danger may appear, we should not despond: "there is help laid for us on One that is mighty," on One, who is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." Fear not then, but only believe; and whatever difficulties you may have to encounter, you have the promise of your Lord and Savior, that "none shall pluck you out of his hand;" and his Father's veracity and power, no less than his own, are pledged for your everlasting salvation, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29).

***~~#1816~~***

***~~PAUL BITTEN BY A VIPER, AND UNINJURED~~***

***~~[Acts 28:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.3-6).~~***

"Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god."

IT is curious to observe how, *in this chequered scene of life, judgments and mercies, trials and deliverances, crosses and comforts, are intermixed.*In the space of a few hours Paul was shipwrecked, and saved; destitute, and relieved; bitten by a viper, and preserved from injury; judged as a murderer, and honored as a God.

These events, though not of primary importance, are yet deserving of consideration.

The inhabitants of Malta, here called "Barbarians," as not being learned and polished like the Greeks and Romans, showed great kindness and hospitality to the shipwrecked crew: and in this they put to shame many who bear the Christian name, who would have plundered, rather than relieved, the unhappy sufferers. A fire being made to warm the people and to dry their clothes, Paul gladly exerted himself for the general good, and, gathering a bundle of sticks, put them on the fire. But a viper that had lain concealed in the fagot, no sooner felt the heat, than it seized the hand of Paul, and held it fast with it's teeth. Paul however, betraying no fear, held up his hand for a time with great composure, and then shook off the venomous creature into the fire. This event gave rise to various conjectures, which now we proceed to notice.

Let us see,

***~~I. In what light it was viewed by the people present—~~***

***~~At first they regarded it as a judgment on him for some heinous crime—~~***

There is even in the minds of heathens some idea of a superintending Providence, who, though in general inattentive to the concerns of men, interposes sometimes on great occasions, especially to detect and punish the crime of murder. The first thought therefore of the spectators was that Paul was thus singled out as a monument of Divine vengeance, which, though it had spared him in the shipwreck, would not suffer his iniquity to pass unpunished.

Now this sentiment is to a certain degree just: but it is erroneous when carried to too great an extent. Certain it is that God does on some occasions mark, as it were, in a visible manner his indignation against sin: but *in numberless instances even the most aggravated transgressions pass unpunished in this life, and are reserved for adequate retribution to the judgment of the great day*.

It is certain also that *temporal calamities are by no means to be regarded as certain marks of God's displeasure*: for they are often sent as fruits of his paternal love, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6). The great error of Job's friends was, that they judged him as a hypocrite, because of the heavy calamities that came upon him: and our blessed Lord has especially guarded us against forming such uncharitable conclusions, in relation to those whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices, or those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, [Luke 13:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.1-5).

The truth is, that in this world "all things come alike to all;" "nor can any man know either love or hatred by all that is before him, [Ecclesiastes 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 9.1-3)." Josiah, as well as Saul or Ahab, may be slain in battle; and Paul, as well as the rebellious Israelites, may be bitten by a serpent: and therefore to condemn any on account of the afflictions with which they are visited, is to act like those who accounted David, yes, and Christ himself, as judicially stricken and smitten by their God, [Psalm 41:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.8). [Isaiah 53:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4).

***~~Afterwards, they considered it as an evidence that he was a god—~~***

As the heathen imagined that there was a superior Being who punished sin, so they believed that their gods sometimes "came down to them in the likeness of men, [Acts 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.11)." Hence, when the people saw that Paul had sustained no injury, they concluded that he must be a god. But here they ran to an opposite extreme. Having no knowledge of the only true God, and of his power to protect his servants, they missed entirely the true construction, which they should have put upon the event before them. But indeed, *there is this propensity in every man to judge too favorably of those who prosper, as well as too unfavorably of those who suffer*. The just medium can be attained by those only, who investigate matters with a dispassionate mind, and take everything into consideration that would regulate and decide the judgment.

From showing in what light they viewed the event, we proceed to consider,

***~~II. In what light it should be viewed—~~***

God had doubtless some gracious design in this dispensation. We apprehend it was intended by him,

***~~1. As a means whereby to awaken their attention to his Gospel—~~***

Paul was sent to Rome that he might testify of Christ in Caesar's palace. And as he was now on his way thither, God ordained that he would have an opportunity of making known the Savior to the barbarians at Malta. But Paul was now a prisoner, and therefore not likely to gain much attention from the people: besides that, he was not at liberty to go among them as he would willingly have done. But, by this miracle, the attention of all was instantly fixed on him, and a way was opened for a free communication of the Gospel of Christ. That he availed himself of the opportunity, we cannot doubt: and that he had considerable success, there is reason to conclude, from the gratitude expressed by all ranks of people among them at his departure.

The same object, we apprehend, God has in view, by numberless dispensations which occur from time to time. Both mercies and judgments are continually represented as designed of God for this end: "And they shall know that I am the Lord." The miraculous powers with which the Apostles were invested were not credentials only, for the authenticating of their divine mission, but means also of recommending the Gospel to the attention and acceptance of men. And we shall do well to regard the various events that are now passing in the world, as calls from God to embrace and hold fast the Gospel of Christ.

***~~2. As a standing memorial of the care which God takes of all his faithful servants—~~***

Many and glorious are the promises which God gives us of security in his service. That we are not to expect visible and miraculous interpositions in our favor, is true: but we are not to suppose that he will leave us to the influence of blind chance, or give us up into the hand of our inveterate enemies. Were his gracious care withdrawn, "Satan would soon sift every one of us as wheat." But Jehovah keeps us in his everlasting arms, so that "no weapon that is formed against us can prosper." As our Lord could not be apprehended until his time was come, so neither can any of his faithful people be destroyed, until God himself has signed the warrant. See how amply this is set forth by David, [Psalm 91:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.9-13), and in the book of Job, [Job 5:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.19-23); and shall these promises fail of their accomplishment? "Has God said, and will he not do it; has he spoken, and will he not make it good?" The promises made directly to the Apostles, must, as to their literal sense, be limited to them, [Mark 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.17-18). [Luke 10:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.19); but, in the spirit of them, they must be applied to all, who put themselves under the shadow of Jehovah's wing, [Psalm 91:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 91.3-7). "The wrath of man shall praise him:" and every occurrence, however adverse to the eye of sense, shall work for the present and eternal good of all his faithful people, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28). [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17).

***~~Let us learn then from hence,~~***

***~~1. Justice to man—~~***

We all are prone to judge one another: but this is to usurp the prerogative of Jehovah. The command of Christ, and of his Apostles is, "Judge not!" "Judge nothing before the time, etc. [Matthew 7:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.1-2). 1 Corinthians 4:5."

***~~2. Confidence in God—~~***

It may be, that in the service of our God our trials may be great and numerous; yes, and we may be judged by our fellow-creatures with the severest judgment: but we may safely commit every event to him, 1 Corinthians 4:3, assured, that he will "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day," if not in this world—yet most certainly in the world to come.

***~~#1817~~***

***~~THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST EVIL SPOKEN OF~~***

***~~[Acts 28:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.22).~~***

"We desire to hear of you what you think: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

*AS prejudice is easily excited in the mind, so is its operation extremely powerful, wherever it is entertained.* An opprobrious term will often convey more in one moment, than could be conveyed otherwise in many sentences: and, as superseding the necessity of any specific accusations, it is generally resorted to as the means of bringing either persons or things into general contempt. The enemies of Christianity in every age have availed themselves of this advantage, to decry a religion which they did not choose to embrace. Thus, when Paul came to Rome, and had convened the principal Jews to his lodgings, he found that, though no accusations had been brought against him,*his religion, and all who professed it, were regarded in an odious light, through the malignant misrepresentations of their adversaries*. Let us then inquire,

***~~I. Whence it was that the Gospel was so universally evil spoken of in the apostolic age—~~***

That the Gospel was universally reviled, is obvious from the decided manner in which the notoriety of the fact is mentioned in the text; "We know it:" and it was so chiefly on two grounds:

***~~1. As being impious in itself—~~***

The *Jews*regarded it as subversive of the law of Moses. They could not see, that Jesus was the person to whom Moses and the prophets had borne witness: they could not see, that he had actually fulfilled the law, and was himself the substance, of which that was only the shadow: they therefore conceived his pretensions to be in direct opposition to God's revealed will; and his religion to be a system of impiety altogether.

The *Gentiles*also, finding that Christianity required an utter dereliction of all their false gods, and at the same time presented to them no visible object of worship, accounted all its professors atheists. They knew indeed that Christians worshiped Him who died for them on Mount Calvary: but that seemed only to add folly to impiety; since to regard him as a God and a Savior, who, to all appearance, was not even able to save himself, was an act of absurdity, in their eyes, bordering on madness.

***~~2. As injurious to mankind—~~***

To *individuals*it was supposed to be a source of distraction to the mind, and of immorality in the life. Even the Head of this religion, the despised Nazarene, was thought to be "beside himself;" nor were his followers in any better plight; since they professed to turn their backs upon all visible good, and to follow a good that was invisible. Moreover, in the midst of these high pretensions, they were supposed to be addicted to all manner of licentious habits, even such as the Gentiles themselves scarcely ventured to indulge, [1 Peter 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.12); [1 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.16).

To *families*, this religion was considered as a source of incalculable mischief; since, wherever it came, it set the nearest relatives against each other, as even the Founder of it himself had declared it would, [Matthew 10:34-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.34-36).

It was hostile also to the welfare of the *state*. It inculcated many things which the Roman laws forbad, and prohibited many things which they enjoined. It set up a king above Caesar himself, [Acts 16:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.20-21); [Acts 17:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.6-7); [Acts 24:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.5-6). Was such a religion as this to be tolerated? No! every sensible governor would give the same direction, respecting it, as Haman gave in relation to the Jews; that it ought to be banished from the face of the earth, [Esther 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 3.8-9).

But, now that Christianity is established, does the same prejudice against it remain? Let us inquire into this matter, and see,

***~~II. How far it meets with similar treatment at this day—~~***

The name of Christianity is still odious among millions of the human race; and, even among those who call themselves Christians, the true Gospel is disapproved and detested by multitudes, who are ready to number themselves among its warmest advocates. It is hated on many accounts:

***~~1. As too humiliating in its representations—~~***

It represents the whole human race as in a state of guilt and condemnation, and as utterly incapable of delivering themselves by anything that they can do. It presents to their view a Savior, in and through whom all their wants must be supplied, and to whom they must stand indebted for their whole salvation, from first to last, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30). But *men cannot endure to think themselves so guilty, so polluted, so enslaved, so utterly helpless and hopeless, as the Scripture represents them to be*; and this will be found to be at the root of all their objections against the Gospel: examine all the writings of those who oppose the truth, and this will appear to be the leading feature of them, that they suppose some degree of goodness and sufficiency to remain in fallen man; while the Gospel declares, that we are "altogether become abominable, [Romans 3:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.10-19)," and that even the will, as well as the power, to do good must be given us from the Lord, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13).

***~~2. As too easy in its proposals—~~***

It offers salvation freely to every human being, saying, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16). [Acts 16:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.30-31)." It requires nothing on our parts to earn salvation, nothing to merit it; but only to receive it thankfully as the free gift of God to us in Christ Jesus, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23). But the proud heart of man does not like to be so indebted to the free grace of God: that invitation, "Come, you that have no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price," is offensive to him: he would rather hear of some duties to perform that shall render him worthy of God's favor, and of some good works to be done, in order to form a ground of glorying before God: and, if works be declared to be utterly ineffectual to these ends, he immediately supposes them to be unnecessary altogether, and that we leave men at liberty to indulge in all manner of licentiousness.

***~~3. As too strict in its requirements—~~***

We stop not now to notice the inconsistency between the former objection and this: suffice it to say, that they are made by the same persons, and oftentimes almost in the same breath. *The Gospel requires that we mortify all sin whatever; that we "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and that we "live altogether not to ourselves, but unto Him that died for us, and rose again."*But this is supposed to be incompatible with all the common offices of life: and we are represented as making the way to Heaven so strait, that none but a few devotees can hope to enter into it.

Thus the truth of God is in reality traduced, as in the days of old, and, though the *name*of Christianity is honored,*the life and power of it are despised.*

Since then the Gospel is still evil spoken of to such a degree, permit me to state,

***~~III. What is our duty in relation to it—~~***

***~~We should endeavor to get all possible information respecting it.~~***

It would be strange indeed to form our judgment solely from the representations of its enemies: we ought assuredly to hear its friends also, and to learn what they have to say in its favor. If then we can have access to any who are qualified to instruct us, we would say to them, as the Jews did to Paul, "We desire to hear what you think." Were this step taken, and with any measure of candor, I have no doubt but that the prejudices against the Gospel would soon be done away. But there is one, to whom we may all have access, and whose judgment may be fully relied on; I mean, that very person to whom the Jews at Rome applied, even the Apostle Paul himself. No man had ever juster or deeper views of the Gospel than he; and no man has written so fully respecting it as he: consult him therefore: study those Epistles of his in which the subject is most fully stated, the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians. From those may be fully learned the *doctrines*which the Gospel maintains: and in his life may be seen the *practice*it requires. Go then, and sit at his feet, and ask of him in relation to everything we have spoken, "What do you think?"

***~~Our inquiries, however, should not be merely speculative, but practical—~~***

We should not, like Pilate, ask, "What is truth?" and then go away without any desire to be informed: but we should imitate rather the man whose blindness had been healed, "Who is the Son of God, that I may believe on him? [John 9:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 9.36)." All our inquiries should be with a view to practice, and with a determination of heart to follow the light wherever it may lead us. Did we, like the Bereans, search the Scriptures daily with this view, it would soon be said of us, as it was of them, "Therefore many of them believed, [Acts 17:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11-12)."

***~~We will now, by way of improvement,~~***

***~~1. Give a specific answer to the question ourselves—~~***

Is it asked by any, "What do you think" of the Gospel itself, and of the people who profess it? We reply, that, in our judgment, the plain simple doctrine of salvation by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God,' even "the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes;" and that its proper title is, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." As for those who profess it, we say, that, if they walk unworthy of it, they are hypocrites, and self-deceivers: but, if they adorn it by a suitable life and conduct, then are they "the excellent of the earth," "the Church of the living God," "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Of them will we say, with Moses, "Happy are you, O Israel: who is like unto you, O people saved of the Lord! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)." Whoever may speak against them, they may be of good courage; for God approves them, and will confess them as his before the assembled universe. They shall assuredly "be his, in the day that he shall make up his jewels! [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17)."

***~~2. I put the question to every one here present—~~***

What do you think? Do you think the doctrines of the Gospel so objectionable as the world represents them to be? Compare those doctrines with your own wants and necessities; and then say, whether they do not contain the very remedy which you stand in need of? Would Paul have represented them as containing "the unsearchable riches of Christ;" and would the angels be represented as ever "desiring to look into them," if they were unworthy of our regard?

Again, Do you think that those who embrace the Gospel deserve the ignominious appellation of "a sect?" By this name they were called in the first ages; and by this name they are yet too often called. But, because "they worship God in a way which the world calls heresy," are they therefore heretics? No! they are "the general assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in Heaven;" they are the living stones of which his temple is composed; and they are now, and shall to all eternity continue, the habitation of God through the Spirit, [Hebrews 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.23). [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5). [Ephesians 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19-22).

Once more, Do you think, that, because "they are everywhere evil spoken of," you would not join yourself to them? Sad indeed is your state, if you entertain such a thought as that: for, "if you are ashamed of Christ—of you will Christ be ashamed," when he shall come in his glory to judge the world. Remember the choice of Moses, and ask, Whether it be not that which you would make [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26). If the circumstance of the Lord's people being universally "evil spoken of" appears an argument against them, know, that it is greatly in their favor; and that, if you belong to a party that is not universally evil spoken of by the ungodly world, you are not of the party to which Paul belonged, nor shall have your portion with him in the eternal world.

What though they be "a little flock?" they are those to whom "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, [Luke 12:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.32)." What if they be walking in "a strait and narrow, unfrequented path?" it is "the path that leads unto life," while all other paths, however frequented, "lead only to destruction, [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14)." *The time is shortly coming, when those who now most loudly condemn them, will yet still more loudly condemn themselves*: "We fools counted their life madness, and their end to be without honor: but now they are numbered with the saints."

To all then I say, Beware what sentiments you imbibe respecting the Gospel of Christ; and beg of God that you may so think of it in this world, as you will assuredly think of it in the world to come.

***~~#1818~~***

***~~THE GOSPEL SENT TO THE GENTILES~~***

***~~[Acts 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 28.28).~~***

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will listen to it."

WHEN we consider how often we are called together to hear the word of God, we are surprised and humbled to find so little good done by it. But the Apostles themselves had the same cause for complaint as we. We can scarcely conceive a more solemn occasion than that on which the Jews at Rome were convened to hear the Gospel. Paul was brought thither as a prisoner, on account of his zeal and fidelity in the cause of Christ. The Jews were anxious to know from himself what were the peculiar doctrines which he maintained: and, having appointed a day for that purpose, they came to his lodging, and attended to his discourse from morning to evening.

But, alas! the greater part of them rejected his testimony, and drew from him that solemn admonition, which had, many hundred years before, been given to their fathers: he told them that *they were given up to judicial blindness*; and that the consolation which he in vain sought among them, he would find among the Gentiles; who were ordained by God to inherit those blessings which they despised.

There are two things which we propose to notice on the present occasion:

***~~I. The salvation here spoken of—~~***

It is of great importance to observe the terms by which the Gospel is here designated: it is called "the salvation of God."

***~~It is "salvation"—~~***

The true nature of the Gospel is by no means generally understood. *The generality conceive it to be nothing more than a new system of duties*. There are some, however, who appear to be acquainted with its nature to a certain extent, but materially fail when they come to explain themselves more fully. They will speak of our condemnation by the law, and our inability to save ourselves according to the terms of the first covenant: they will also represent Christ as introducing a new covenant, and as the Author of salvation to all who believe in him.

Thus far they are right: but when it is inquired what are the terms of the new covenant, and how it is that Christ saves his people, they show that "they have need to be taught afresh what are the first principles of the Oracles of God." They say that Christ has procured for us a milder law, which requires only sincere obedience: and that, if we endeavor to obey that law, his death shall atone for our imperfections, and his righteousness shall make up for our defects.

But this representation of Christ's work very ill accords with the terms by which the Gospel is characterized in the text. The Gospel in that view would be only a new law; and salvation by it would be, in fact, salvation by works, and not by grace. However the law itself is reduced, if our obedience to it, either in whole or in part, be the ground of our acceptance with God, it is salvation by works; and the performers of those works will have to glory before God. Let our justification depend ever so little on our works, the case will be precisely the same—we shall have some ground of boasting within ourselves: if not so much as we would have had by the first covenant, still we have some: which clearly proves, that this idea of the Gospel is erroneous: for the Gospel excludes boasting altogether! [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27).

The truth is, that the Gospel is a revelation of "salvation," of salvation wrought out for us by the Son of God; wrought out, I say, entirely by his obedience unto death. It views men as lost, entirely lost and undone in themselves. It represents Christ as assuming our nature to obey that law which we had broken, and endure those penalties which we had incurred: and it declares, that all who will come to Christ, relying wholly on his blood and righteousness, shall be accepted through him. It is true,*the gospel requires works as evidences of our faith; but the only ground which it proposes for our justification before God, is the all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ.*In a word, it reveals and offers to us a salvation purchased by the blood of Christ, and freely given to all who believe in him.

***~~It is emphatically called "the salvation of God"—~~***

This salvation was altogether planned by God. No created being could have devised such a scheme for saving man in perfect consistency with all the divine perfections. It was executed by God, who miraculously formed the human nature of Christ in the womb of a virgin, and upheld him in every part of his most arduous undertaking, and raised him from the dead, and constituted him Head over all things to the Church, that he might finish the work he had begun, and secure to himself the souls which he has purchased with his blood.

Finally, it was in every respect worthy of God; such a display of wisdom, of goodness, and of all his glorious perfections, as will be the one object of wonder, love, and praise, to all eternity.

As for the system which men have substituted in its place, it is indeed "another Gospel," which the Apostles never knew, and which God never revealed. It deserves not to be called "the salvation of God;" for it is no salvation at all: nor would any creature be ever saved by it. Who will undertake to tell us what that quantum of imperfection is which it allows of; or to define the exact limits of that sincerity which it requires?*It is the offspring of pride and ignorance; and will be the parent of everlasting misery, to all who embrace it!*That alone is the true Gospel, which leaves to man no ground of glorying in himself, but gives all the glory of his salvation to God alone.

Let us next turn our attention to,

***~~II. The things affirmed respecting it—~~***

We cannot but observe the solemnity with which the Apostle's affirmations are introduced. But there was occasion for it, because the things which he asserted appeared altogether incredible. He asserted,

***~~1. That the Gospel salvation was sent to the Gentiles—~~***

Of this the Jews had no conception. Being habituated to consider themselves as exclusively the Lord's people, and to regard the Gentiles as dogs—they could not even listen to the idea that the wall of partition would ever be broken down, and the Gentiles be incorporated with the Church of God, [Acts 22:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.21-22).

The Apostles themselves were exceedingly slow to admit the thought, notwithstanding they had been commanded to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature." Even six years after our Lord's ascension, Peter himself could not be prevailed upon to go and instruct a heathen family, without repeated visions to convince him that it was agreeable to the mind of God: and, when he had done it, he was called to an account for it by the whole college of Apostles, who were pacified only by the relation which he gave of the different visions, and the testimony which God himself bore to his conduct by pouring out upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit. When convinced by his arguments, they exclaimed with surprise, "Then has God unto the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life, [Acts 11:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 11.18)." But the Apostle here declares that God had sent salvation to the Gentiles, and that it would be sent to them throughout all the world. To this he adds,

***~~2. That they would listen to it—~~***

The Jews, notwithstanding they had enjoyed the ministry of Christ, and beheld his miracles, and had his resurrection so abundantly attested; notwithstanding an appeal also was constantly made to their own inspired writings, and the accomplishment of acknowledged prophecies was pointed out to them—notwithstanding every advantage, I say, they would not believe. The probability therefore was, that, if they, with all their means of information, rejected the Gospel, much more would the heathen reject it. But God fore-ordained that they would receive it. Accordingly, we find that millions in every quarter of the globe have been made obedient to the faith; and we are assured that all "the fullness of the Gentiles shall in due time come in. The prophet Ezekiel, in a vision of a river proceeding from the sanctuary, and becoming gradually so deep that it could not be forded, represents the progress of the Gospel. The river running into the Dead Sea, where, it is said, no fish can live, instantly healed the sea, so that living fish of every kind became innumerable. The Dead Sea fitly marked the state of the heathen world; and the effect produced upon it by the waters of the sanctuary, marked the change which the Gospel would infallibly produce, [Ezekiel 47:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 47.9)."

To God nothing is impossible; and he who has thus far accomplished his word, will certainly fulfill it to the end. The grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree, and all the birds of Heaven shall come and dwell under its shadow.

***~~In this subject will be found abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. For reproof—~~***

It is in this view principally that the words were uttered. And if Paul had so much reason to complain when he saw the Jews were not persuaded to embrace Christianity by one sermon, what reason have we to complain, when persons professing Christianity cannot be prevailed upon by hundreds of sermons to walk in any measure worthy of their profession! Surely thousands of the poor heathen—Indians, Hottentots, Hindus—who have received the word with gladness, and experienced the blessedness of this salvation, will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. Yes, among them there are many who value this salvation more than life itself. Ah! how will they reprove our supineness and indifference! Well; be it known unto you, that if you, who call yourselves Christians, will not value the Gospel as you ought, it shall be taken away from you, and be given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof with gladness.

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

When exertions are recommended for the conversion of the heathen, it is common to say, they will not renounce their superstitions; and we cannot attain their language so as to hope for any success in our endeavors. But if God has sent the Gospel to the heathen, and declared that they will hear it, we may well look to him to overcome all the difficulties that lie in our way.

But it may be said, the time is not come. What right have we to say this? or what reason to imagine it? If we consider the exertions that are making in the Christian world for the translating of the Scriptures into different languages, and for sending the Gospel to the remotest corners of the earth, we have reason rather to hope that the time has come. But the time as it respects us has always come; and there is no period when we ought not to exert ourselves in the cause of God, and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

The question then is, if God has sent salvation to the heathen, who is willing to carry it? for "they cannot believe, unless they hear: nor can they hear without a preacher." O that there were among us more, whose hearts the Lord had "touched with a live coal from his altar," that when he says, "Who will go for us?" would immediately reply, "Here am I, send me!" This was the prophet's frame of mind even when God told him that his ministrations would have no other effect than that of hardening the minds of men, [Isaiah 6:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.6-10). It was sufficient for him that he was doing the Lord's work. How much more then should we be ready to carry the Gospel to the heathen, when God pledges himself to us that they will hear it! Let us pray to God, that since the harvest is so great, he would send forth laborers; and, if we cannot do all we would, let us, each in his station, do all we can!