***~~Charles Simeon's Devotional Commentaries on Ephesians-Philemon~~***

***~~EPHESIANS~~***

***~~#2092~~***

***~~THANKS TO GOD FOR HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE AND MERCY~~***

***~~[Ephesians 1:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.3-12)~~***

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in Heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

In our progress through the Holy Scriptures, we are necessitated to investigate, in its turn, every doctrine of our holy religion. There are indeed some doctrines which appear to be almost wholly improper: but we do not conceive ourselves at liberty to pass over any part of the sacred records as improper for discussion, provided we enter into it with the humility and modesty that befit us. It is undeniable that the Apostles mention occasionally, and without the smallest appearance of hesitation, the doctrines of predestination and election: and therefore we are bound to explore the meaning of the inspired writers in reference to these passages, as well as to any others. We are aware that great difficulties attend the explanation of these doctrines; (though certainly not greater than attend the denial of them:) and we are aware also, that they are open to abuse: but *there is no doctrine which has not its difficulties*; nor any which has not been abused: and, that we may not be supposed to entertain an undue partiality for these obnoxious doctrines, as some call them, or to wish to establish them on inadequate grounds, we have selected a large portion of Scripture which cannot easily be perverted; and which is indeed so plain, that it speaks for itself. We shall be careful also to bring them forward precisely in the way in which they are declared by the Apostles themselves, that is, not in a speculative and controversial way, but in a practical manner, as incentives to holy gratitude and obedience.

Paul, under a deep sense of the mercies given to himself and to the whole Church at Ephesus, breaks forth into the devoutest acknowledgments to that God from whom they had flowed, and to whom all possible thanks and praise were due.

In considering his words, we shall show,

***~~I. What are those blessings which we have received from our God—~~***

***~~"He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings"—~~***

The Ephesian Church, though chiefly composed of Gentiles, consisted in part of Jews also, [Acts 18:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.19-20); [Acts 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.24); [Acts 18:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.28) with, verse 11, 12, 13 of our text, where the distinction is made between "we" Jews "who first trusted in Christ," and "you" Gentiles who believed afterwards. See also [Galatians 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.16-18). And, though it is possible there might be some hypocrites there, as well as in other Churches, Paul does not stop to make distinctions of that kind, but speaks of them all in the judgment of charity, as real Christians, and partakers of all the blessings which by their profession they were supposed to possess.

As believers, they had been blessed with "spiritual blessings in heavenly things, widely different from those which were possessed by any "natural man," and from those which the earthly and carnal Jews expected their Messiah to bestow. Of these blessings, some of the principal ones are here enumerated.

*God has adopted us into his family!* He has dealt with us as his children, and given to us the inheritance of children.

Once the believer was "afar off" from God, being an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:" but by an act of rich mercy and grace he has been adopted by God, and made to stand in the relation to him of a child to a father. Though he neither has anything, nor ever can have anything, that can recommend him to God—yet "is he accepted" to the Divine favor, having all his past iniquities "forgiven," and his soul washed from all its stains, in "the Redeemer's blood." Being thus brought into the nearest relation to God, he is treated, "not as a servant, who knows not what his lord does; but as a son," who may fitly be made acquainted with all his Father's will.

To him is that stupendous mystery made known, that, in the time appointed of the Father, the whole intelligent creation of men and angels, who were once of one family, but were separated by the fall of man, shall be brought once more under the same Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who at first created them, and to whom originally they paid all due allegiance.

As to men, there would be no difference between them in this respect: the common Father of all would equally receive all, whether Jews or Gentiles, and incorporate them all into one body, who would equally and without any distinction be partakers of his grace, and heirs of his glory. For all of them without exception, provided only they *believe*in him, he has provided an inheritance, to which, on the instant that they believe in him, they become entitled, and which, after the period fixed for their abode on earth, they shall possess to all eternity.

***~~These spiritual blessings are given to us "in Christ"—~~***

All of them without exception are:  
the purchase of his blood,  
the fruit of his intercession,  
and the gifts of his grace.

They are all treasured up in him; and when He is given to us, they are made over to us, as the gold ore in the mine. They were all given to Him, in the first instance, as our head and representative, and can be possessed by us only as we are found in him.

Are we chosen? It is "in him."

Are we predestined to the adoption of children? It is "in him."

Are we accepted? It is "in him."

Are we forgiven? It is "in him."

Are we brought into one body? It is "in him."

Have we obtained an inheritance? It is "in him."

Are we "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the pledge of that inheritance?" It is "in him."

Are we blessed with all spiritual blessings? It is "in him," and in him alone.

O that we were more sensible of our obligations to Christ in reference to these things! Is it not surprising, that anyone can read the passage before us, and overlook Christ, who throughout the whole of it is represented as the "All in all?" Let this be borne in mind: that, while all is traced to the Father as the original source, all must be referred to Christ as the procuring cause, and be received from Christ as the fountain-head. It is only by receiving Christ himself that we can ever partake of any one of his benefits.

Having noticed the benefits given to us *in Christ*, we proceed to show,

***~~II. In what way he has communicated them to us—~~***

On this depends, in a great measure, the debt of gratitude we owe him. If in the bestowment of them he has been forestalled by earnest solicitations on our part, and been prevailed upon only by the great and meritorious services which *we*have rendered to him—then, though we have reason to praise him, we have also reason to praise ourselves, and may justly claim for ourselves some part of the honor of our own salvation.

***~~1. He has communicated all these blessings to us, in a way of sovereignty—~~***

He is a Sovereign; and it is only of his own will and pleasure that he has formed any creature whatever. We feel his sovereignty in this respect. Let any man ask himself,

"Why was I created at all?

Why was I formed a man, and not a beast?

Why was I born of Christian, and not of heathen, parents?

Why was I born under the meridian splendor of Gospel light, and not in the darker ages of the Church?

Why was I preserved in life, while millions have closed their eyes upon this world as soon as they were brought into it?

Why was I endued with intelligence, while so many are devoid of reason?"

To all such questions there is but one answer,*"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight!"*This is the true answer that must be given to all inquiries respecting the spiritual blessings which he has bestowed upon us—they are all the fruit of his free and sovereign grace! "He has chosen us from before the foundation of the world," and "predestined us to the enjoyment of them." He has done this purely "of his own will and pleasure:" and in doing it, he has consulted nothing but his own glory. It has been "according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, verse 5, 6."

Yet, while his predestination of us is the result of "his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself," and can be referred to nothing but "his own purpose and grace," we are not to imagine that he is actuated by a mere arbitrary volition; for it is a volition founded in "*his plan*, verse 9, 11 with 2 Timothy 1:9," though the reasons by which he is actuated are unknown to us.

Were this doctrine dependent only on a single expression, we would speak of it with the more uncertainty: but, in the passage before us, it is as the warp, which pervades the whole piece: it cannot, like the woof, be separated, and made to give way to some more palatable sentiment. It is impossible for any man to read the passage with an unprejudiced mind, and not to acknowledge, that this is its obvious import; and that nothing but the most determined efforts of ingenious and labored criticism can extract from it any other meaning.

***~~2. He has communicated all these blessings to us, in a way of holiness—~~***

One ground on which many object to the doctrines of election and predestination is, that these doctrines are hostile to the interests of morality. But for such an objection there is no real foundation. On the contrary, they are the greatest security of a life of holiness, seeing that they have insured to us the attainment of holiness as a preparation for the ultimate possession of glory. God, we are told, has "chosen us:" but to *what*has he chosen us? To salvation independent of holiness? No, but to salvation in the way of holiness. He has chosen us, "that we would be holy, and without blame before him in love."

Here it deserves particular attention, that God has not chosen us because we *were*holy, or because he foresaw we would become holy, but in order that we might be holy. He has chosen us to holiness as the means, as well as to glory as the end. He has ordained both the means and the end; and the end solely by the means.

Hence, wherever election and predestination are spoken of, they are spoken of in this view, as having respect to holiness, and as assuring to us the attainment of holiness. God has chosen us "through sanctification of the Spirit, as well as through the belief of the truth, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)," and has "predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)."

Let this be duly considered, and it will remove the greatest obstruction in our minds to the reception of these deep mysterious truths. When once we see that they secure infallibly the attainment of holiness in the way to glory, and that*no man is entitled to think himself one of God's elect, any farther than the holiness of his life bears testimony to him*—we shall soon renounce our prejudices, and willingly concede to God's sovereign grace, the whole glory of our salvation!

***~~3. In a way of wisdom and prudence—~~***

Truly this great salvation is the most stupendous effort both of wisdom and prudence: of wisdom, in its contrivance, and of prudence, in its administration.

How wonderfully does it mark God's indignation against sin, even at the moment that it extends mercy to the sinner; since it shows the sinner, and constrains him to acknowledge, that, if the wrath due to him had not been borne by his Surety, he never could have been saved at all. It shows him further, that in this way of salvation through the sacrifice of the Son of God, all the Divine perfections are glorified; insomuch that, while the claims of justice and mercy appear to oppose each other, they so harmonize together, that *justice is exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy is exercised in a way of justice*.

Further, in this way of salvation the soul of the believer is so penetrated with wonder and with love, that he cannot but yield himself up unreservedly to God, and count a thousand lives too little to consecrate to his service, or to sacrifice for his glory.

Nor is there less of prudence in the *administration*of it, than there is of wisdom in its contrivance. For, notwithstanding it is dispensed in a sovereign way altogether according to God's good pleasure, he never interferes with the liberty of the human will, nor ever draws any one but by "the cords of love." It is by presenting truth to the mind, and motives to the heart, that he overcomes men, and "makes them willing in the day of his power."

Infinitely various are the ways in which he dispenses his blessings: and even at this time his people are able to see most unsearchable wisdom in the way in which he has dealt with them, so as to make them see in the clearest light the extent of their obligations to him, and to furnish them with songs of praise, which each is ready to think he shall sing the loudest of any in the kingdom of Heaven.

Moreover, so infallible are the means he uses, that he never failed in any one instance to accomplish in any soul the purposes of his grace, or to carry on and perfect the work he had begun. Well then may it be said, in reference to "the riches of his grace" which he has dispensed to us, that "he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are not able to receive these precious truths—~~***

We are far from thinking that the doctrines of election and predestination are of primary and fundamental importance. We well know that many eminently pious persons have not been able to receive them: and we have no doubt but that a person may serve God most acceptably, though he would not have an insight into these mysterious truths. We only ask that you will be content to wave your objections for the present, and not set yourselves against these precious doctrines, as too many are apt to do. If you have not a preparation of mind for the reception of them, you will only perplex yourselves by dwelling upon them, and give advantage to Satan to distress your minds.

Be content to receive for the present the fundamental doctrines of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and seek to experience them in their full extent. Contemplate the blessings with which God the Father has blessed you through the mediation of his Son; and ever bear in mind, that you are indebted for them all:  
to the Father, as the original *source*of all;  
to the Son, as *procuring*them for you by the virtue of his death;  
and to the Holy Spirit, as the great agent by whom they are *communicated*to your souls.

Enjoy them in this view, and bless God for them in this view, and "what else you know not now, you shall know hereafter."

***~~2. Those who have embraced these precious truths, and found delight in them—~~***

Enjoy them for yourselves; but do not unnecessarily obtrude them upon others. Give milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who are of age to digest it. Be careful too that you do not in any respect abuse them, as the habit of too many is. The decrees of God do not supersede the necessity of fear and watchfulness on your part. The hour that you begin to relax your diligence, from an idea that God will carry on his work in you at all events, you provoke God to abandon you to yourselves, and to give you up to the delusions of your own hearts. It is by a holy life only that you can know your election by God, 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4; and if you are not making advancement in holiness, you have no reason whatever to hope that you shall ever attain to glory; seeing it is by the means only that you can ever attain the end.

If you would make a legitimate improvement of these doctrines, use them as means of exciting the deeper gratitude to God. Trace up to God's electing love and predestinating grace every blessing you either enjoy or hope for: and get your hearts more in unison with that of the Apostle, when he burst forth into that song of praise, "Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ!" Then shall you find that these truths, which are a stumbling-block to many, shall be to you as marrow and fatness to your souls!

***~~#2093~~***

***~~THE WISDOM OF GOD IN REDEMPTION~~***

***~~[Ephesians 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7-8)~~***

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."

IN no part of the inspired volume are the wonders of redemption more fully opened, than in the passage before us. The pardon of sin, adoption into God's family, and a participation of eternal glory—are all distinctly specified as blessings which under the Gospel we enjoy. All are traced to Christ as the *procuring cause*, and to the Father as the *prime source*, from the riches of whose grace they flow, and to the praise of whose glory they are all ordained. But as the subject would be endless if we entered into it in this general view, we shall limit our observations to the words which we have just read, and notice from them,

***~~I. The substance of the Gospel—~~***

"In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Here notice,

***~~1. What is implied in this declaration—~~***

It is here supposed that *we are all in a state of bondage to sin and Satan, and under guilt and condemnation on account of sin*. And this but too justly describes the condition of every child of man.

We cannot more truly mark the state of man, than by comparing it with that of the *fallen angels*. They fell into sin, and for their sins were cast out of Heaven, and consigned over to merited punishment in Hell, where they are "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

The difference between the fallen angels and us is this:

They are actually suffering the punishment of their sins; we are respited for a season.

They are irremediably doomed to eternal perdition; for us a remedy is provided, so that we may yet have redemption and forgiveness, if we seek it in God's appointed way.

Labor, I beg you, to realize this idea in your minds: for it is only by justly apprehending your condition without the Gospel, that you can be prepared for a participation of its blessings.

***~~2. What is expressed—~~***

"Redemption" and "forgiveness" are provided for us, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and "through the blood" of his cross. The Lord Jesus Christ has, by his own obedience unto death, "obtained eternal redemption for us," having suffered in his own person all that was due to our sins, and having so fulfilled the law in our stead, as to bring in an everlasting righteousness, whereby we may be justified. In Him are these blessings treasured up for us, and "out of his fullness may be received by us." By believing in him, we become savingly interested in all that he has done and suffered for us, and attain the actual possession of the blessings he has purchased for us.

This is, in few words, the sum and substance of the Gospel; as John has plainly told us, "This is the record, (the Gospel record,) that God has given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life, [1 John 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.11-12)."

The point to which we would more particularly turn your attention, is,

***~~II. The character of the Gospel—~~***

It is a dispensation,

***~~1. "Rich in grace"—~~***

All "the glorious riches of God's grace" are here displayed. Consider the *means*by which this redemption is procured—even by the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son!

Consider the *persons*for whom it is provided—not for angels, (they are left to reap for ever the bitter consequences of their sin,) but for men, who were an order of beings far inferior to them!

Consider *how*it is that any become savingly interested in this redemption: it is in consequence of their having been from all eternity elected and predestined to it by the sovereign and unmerited grace of God. From first to last it is all of grace; and designed of God to exhibit to the whole universe, through all ages, "the exceeding riches of his grace [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7)."

Let any one compare the state of the *fallen angels*in the lake of fire, and of the *redeemed saints*that are around the throne of God, and view the wonders of grace which have been wrought in favor of the redeemed; and then he will be able in some measure to comprehend the character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of grace.

***~~2. "Abundant in wisdom and understanding"—~~***

In order to render the salvation of man consistent with the perfections of the Deity, divine justice must be satisfied, and truth be kept inviolate, by the punishment of sin. But if sin must be punished, then how could the sinner be saved? *This was a problem which not all the angels in Heaven could solve!* But God, by sending his own Son to be our substitute and surety, has removed the difficulty. Sin has been punished to the full in Christ. The law, both in its penalties and requirements, has been fulfilled in Christ—so that mercy may flow down to us in perfect consistency both with law and justice; and "God may be just, and yet the justifier" of sinful man!

Indeed *the law*is the more magnified, in having executed its sentence against a person of such infinite dignity! *Mercy*is the more exalted, in being exercised at such a cost as the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son! Here is indeed "the wisdom of God in a mystery!" and well may Christ be called in this view, "The wisdom of God, and the power of God."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Seek to appreciate this blessed Gospel—~~***

We are grievously negligent in relation to this matter. Men will labor with indefatigable industry to comprehend the laws of nature; but are shamefully remiss in exploring the mysteries of grace, which are revealed to us in the Gospel. Let your minds be intent on this subject, which can never be adequately comprehended, either by men or angels.

***~~2. Labor to adorn it in your life—~~***

Let the character of the Gospel be exemplified in you.

Is the gospel full of *grace?* Then be full of praise and thanksgiving; ever cleaving to him by whom your redemption has been wrought, and adoring him by whom the Savior himself was sent into the world!

Is the gospel full of *wisdom?* Do you show how harmoniously every grace may be exercised by you; and how perfectly all the attributes of the Deity, as far as they can be communicated to so frail a creature, may be transferred to, and illustrated by, his redeemed people.

***~~#2094~~***

***~~THE SEALING OF THE SPIRIT~~***

***~~[Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14)~~***

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

THE blessings which we receive through Christ are innumerable. Many are mentioned in the preceding part of this chapter. One of the last and greatest blessings which we receive in this life, is the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

We shall show,

***~~I. What the sealing of the Spirit is—~~***

***~~The metaphor of sealing conveys an adequate idea of the Spirit's operations—~~***

A seal stamps its own image on the wax that is impressed by it; and marks the thing sealed to be the property of him who sealed it. Just so, the Holy Spirit forms all the lineaments of the Divine image on the soul that is sealed by him; and shows that it belongs to God.

***~~But the text itself affords us the best explanation of this term—~~***

*The future inheritance of the saints consists in a perfect conformity to God's image, and a perfect enjoyment of his love*. The sealing of the Spirit is a "pledge of that inheritance," or, in other words, a part of that inheritance already given to the soul, and a pledge that the remainder shall in due time be given to it. This gift of the Spirit is to be continued to the church until the final consummation of all things The Church is Christ's "purchased possession," [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28), and its complete "redemption" from all the penal effects of sin will be at the day of judgment, [Romans 8:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.23). The experience of individuals may vary with respect to it; but there shall always be some in the Church who possess and enjoy it.

We are also informed respecting,

***~~II. The manner in which it is effected—~~***

***~~The agent is none other than the Holy Spirit—~~***

It is not in man's power to sanctify his own soul: nor can any one assure himself that he is the Lord's. To impart these blessings is the prerogative of God alone, [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21-22).

***~~The subjects of this work are true believers—~~***

An unbeliever cannot possibly be sealed; because the Holy Spirit would never mark those as God's property, who do not really belong to him.

***~~The means by which it is effected, are the promises—~~***

We do not presume to limit the Spirit's operations; but his usual method of sealing is by applying the "promises" to the soul, [1 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4), 1 Thessalonians 1:5. *Of themselves, the promises can accomplish nothing; but, through his divine power, they have a comforting and transforming efficacy*,[2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4).

The Apostle further specifies,

***~~III. Its proper tendency and operation—~~***

***~~The sealing of the Spirit will never elate a man with pride—~~***

It may seem indeed that such distinguishing mercies would puff us up; but their invariable effect is to humble those who receive them. All the saints of old abased themselves in proportion as they were favored of God, [Job 42:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5-6) and [Isaiah 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.5). Nor can there be any stronger evidence that a work is not of God, than its producing a contrary effect upon us.

***~~The sealing of the Spirit is intended solely to honor and glorify God—~~***

Every work of grace should lead the mind to God as the author of it; and the more exalted the mercy, the more powerful should this effect be. Now this, above all, administers to us the greatest cause of thankfulness, and will certainly incline us to love and serve him from whom it has been derived.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who are ignorant of this sublime subject—~~***

To many, alas! the sealing of the Spirit is mere foolishness; but those who account it so, "speak evil of things that they understand not." Let us seek to experience it ourselves, instead of censuring those who do.

***~~2. To those who desire to be sealed—~~***

God is willing to bestow this blessing on all who seek it. If we possess it not, we would inquire what there is in us which has occasioned God to withhold it from us. We would beg of God to take away from us that hardness of heart which incapacitates us for it, and would live more on the promises, that by them it may be imparted to our souls.

***~~3. To those who are sealed—~~***

What a mercy is it, that you, who might long since have been sealed for condemnation, have, according to the good pleasure of God, been sealed for Heaven! Be thankful to God for this unspeakable gift: be careful too that you grieve not him by whom you have been sealed, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30); but improve the promises yet further for your progressive advancement in true holiness, 2 Corinthians 7:1.

***~~#2095~~***

***~~THE SPIRIT'S INFLUENCES AS A SPIRIT OF WISDOM~~***

***~~[Ephesians 1:15-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.15-19)~~***

"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

WE are told by our blessed Lord, that however great the pains of giving birth may be, a woman remembers no more her anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. Yet if the mother, watching the child from month to month, would see no growth in his bodily stature, nor any improvement in his intellectual Faculties, her joy would soon be turned into grief, and she would account the death of the child a greater blessing than its birth.

Somewhat similar to these are the feelings of a minister towards those who have been born to God through his ministrations. Like "the angels in Heaven, he rejoices over every sinner that is brought to repentance:" but if his subsequent care and labor be attended with no benefit to his converts, he will feel much pain and sorrow on their account. He will "travail, as it were, in birth a second time, until he sees Christ completely formed in them."*To see them walking in the truth, is the one object of his desire, and the summit of his joy* 3 John, verse 4. It is only when they stand fast in the faith, that he has a real enjoyment of his life, [1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.8).

How sorrowful was the Apostle Paul, when the people to whom he had ministered did not make their profiting to appear, [1 Corinthians 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-3). [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.1); [Galatians 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.11); [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20). [Hebrews 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12). On the contrary, he quite exulted when he heard of their growth in faith and love, [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4). But in nothing did he show his concern for their welfare, more than in his unwearied intercessions in their behalf.

The prayer which he offered for the Church at Ephesus, evinces clearly,

***~~I. That the Spirit, as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation, may be obtained by all—~~***

What was sought on behalf of all the Christians at Ephesus, may certainly be expected by Christians in every age and place—

***~~1. We need the Spirit as much as they did in the Apostles' days—~~***

If we are unconverted, then our *eyes*are blind, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4), our *souls*are dead [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1), yes we are incapable of receiving or knowing the things of the Spirit, because we have not that spiritual discernment, whereby alone they can be discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14).

If we are converted, still we are in need of fresh supplies of the Spirit, as much as the Ephesian converts were. It is "by the Spirit only that we can know the things which have been freely given to us by God, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12)." The Apostles not only had been converted, but had enjoyed the public and private instructions of their Divine Master for nearly four years: yet after his resurrection he "opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)," and on the day of Pentecost gave them his Spirit in a more abundant measure, "to guide them into all truth, [1 Corinthians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.11) with [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); 1 [John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.27)." It is by repeated communications of the same Spirit that we also are to obtain a deeper insight into the things of God. We find oftentimes, even after we have been saved, that *the written word is only to us as "a dead letter;" and that unless the Spirit shines upon it, we learn no more from it than from a dial when the sun is hidden behind a cloud.*

If then we need the Spirit as much as they did of old, we may expect him as well as they.

***~~2. The promises relating to the communications of the Spirit are made to us, as much as to any persons whatever—~~***

Those promises of the Old Testament extend to the Church in every age. Shall we confine to the apostolic age such declarations as those, "Turn at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you, [Proverbs 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.23);" "All your children shall be taught of the Lord, [Isaiah 54:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.13) with [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45);" "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, [Jeremiah 31:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.33-34);" "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, [Ezekiel 36:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.27)." To deny our interest in such passages as these, were to rob us of half the Scriptures.

And what shall we say to the promises of the New Testament? Shall we limit those also to the Apostles' days? Hear what our Lord says, "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, then how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him, [Luke 11:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.13)." "If any man thirsts, 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 on him would receive, [John 7:37-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-39)." "I will send you another Comforter, who shall abide with you for ever, [John 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16)." Hear what his Apostles also say: "Believe on Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39)." "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)."

Language has neither force nor certainty, if such declarations as these are not to be applied to us.

But, to prevent misapprehension, we shall proceed to state distinctly,

***~~II. What discoveries the Spirit will make to our souls—~~***

This is certain, that no new revelation is to be expected by us. The canon of Scripture is closed, and if any man pretends to new revelations, let him con-firm his pretensions, by clear and undoubted miracles; or else let him be rejected as an enthusiast and deceiver. *The Spirit now enlightens men only by shining upon the written word, and opening their understandings to understand it.*But in this way he will make wonderful discoveries to the soul. He will give us just views,

***~~1. Of God himself—~~***

Somewhat of God may be known from books, without any supernatural aid: but the knowledge gained in that way will be merely *theoretical*—it will have no suitable influence upon the heart and life.

But the very same truths, when applied by the Spirit to the soul, make a deep impression on the mind; they fill it with wonder and with love; and constrain the enraptured soul to exclaim, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you! [Job 42:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 42.5)." How precious does Christ appear at such seasons! How "unsearchable the length and breadth and depth and height of his incomprehensible love! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)." These are the manifestations of himself which our blessed Lord promised to his Church, [John 14:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-23); [John 16:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14-15); and without which we cannot know aright, either him or his Father, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27).

Let us pray then for "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in, and for, the knowledge of him."

***~~2. Of the hope to which he has called us—~~***

How low are our apprehensions of the Christian's portion, when no particular revelation of it is made to the soul! We can speak of pardon and acceptance, of grace and glory; but we speak of them with no more feeling than if they were mere fictions. But O what a "gloriously rich inheritance" does ours appear, when our eyes are opened by the Spirit to behold it!

One *Pisgah-view*of the promised land—how does it transport the soul to Heaven, and make us long to die, that we may be with Christ! *As for the inheritances of princes, they then appear as worthless as the toys that amuse a child. The realities of the eternal world surpass all sublunary things, as the splendor of the sun exceeds the glimmering of a candle*. "These things, which no carnal eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, these things, I say, God now reveals to us by his Spirit, [1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10);" yes, he gives us a pledge of them in our hearts, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14).

***~~3. Of the work he has wrought in us—~~***

We are apt to undervalue the work that is already wrought in us, because so much remains to be done. But when God shines upon his own work, we entertain very different thoughts respecting it. It is no light matter then in our eyes to have been quickened from the dead, and "created anew in Christ Jesus." It seems no less a work than that which was "wrought for Christ, when God raised him from the dead," and "set him at his own right hand, above all the principalities and powers," whether of Heaven or Hell. We were dead and buried; and Satan set, as it were, the stone, the seal, the watch, to keep us securely under the power of the grave. But our God came "by the mighty working of his power." and made us triumphant over all the powers of darkness, and still "always causes us to triumph in Christ." Truly the believer, when he views these things, is a wonder to himself: he is a burning bush which is unconsumed, [Exodus 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 3.2), a captive ruling over his oppressors [Isaiah 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.2), a worm threshing the mountains, [Isaiah 41:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.15).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Let us seek to attain the Christian's character—~~***

The Ephesians were already Christians: they possessed the two distinctive marks of the Christian character, "*faith*in the Lord Jesus Christ, and *love*unto all the saints." These marks we must possess. It is in vain to hope for the higher manifestations of the Spirit, until we have received those communications which are of prime and indispensable necessity. Until these evidences of true religion appear, neither can ministers have any joy over you, nor can you any scriptural hope for yourselves. Come then to Christ as perishing sinners, and cast in your lot with his people, that you may have your portion with them in the eternal world.

***~~2. Let us seek to enjoy the Christian's privileges—~~***

We would not have any of you live below your high spiritual privileges. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," is willing to bestow on you the richest gifts, and to exalt you to the sublimest happiness. He is ready to make all his glory pass before your eyes, and to proclaim in your hearing all his goodness, [Exodus 33:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 33.18-19). Though he will not catch you up to Paradise, as he did the Apostle Paul, or make the heavens open to you, as he did to the dying Stephen—yet will he shine into your hearts, to give you light and knowledge, of which you have at present scarcely any conception, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6). Seek then these sublime attainments, which will at once enhance your present happiness, and increase your fitness for your heavenly inheritance!

***~~#2096~~***

***~~CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH~~***

**[Ephesians 1:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18-23)**

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

LITTLE do men imagine what power is necessary to effect the salvation of their souls. They are ready to suppose that they can repent, and turn to God, of themselves, by the force of their own resolutions. But the creation itself was not more the product of a Divine power, than the new creation is in the souls of men. Yes, if we can conceive that any one thing needs a greater exertion of omnipotence than another, it is this.

The Apostle strongly expresses this idea in the passage before us. He is praying for the Ephesian converts, that they may have just and adequate notions of the power that has been exercised towards them, in bringing them to their present state. Overwhelmed, as it were, with the thought, he accumulates all the most forcible terms that language could afford him, in order to convey some faint idea of the subject: and then he illustrates the point by the most stupendous effort of omnipotence that ever was exhibited since the foundation of the world; namely, by the raising of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the investing of him with all power, both in Heaven and earth.

In contemplating this work of omnipotence, the exaltation of Christ upon his Father's throne, we shall fix our attention upon two things:

***~~I. His supremacy above all creatures—~~***

The death, the resurrection, and the ascension of our Lord Jesus, we pass over in silence. It is not the act of our Savior's elevation, but the state to which he is elevated, which we propose for your present consideration. This includes,

***~~1. A state of dignity—~~***

"The right hand of God" is a metaphorical expression for the place of the highest dignity and glory in the heavenly world. There Jesus sits, exalted "far above all" creatures in earth, in Hell, or in Heaven. The phrase, "principalities and powers," is applied in Scripture to men, [Titus 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.1); to devils, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12); and to the holy angels, [Ephesians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10). And the Apostle evidently intended to comprehend them all, because he specified yet further "every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Now it would seem, that as, on earth, there are different ranks and orders of magistrates, from the king, who is supreme, to those who exercise the most limited jurisdiction, so there is a gradation of beings both in Heaven and Hell. We read of Michael, the archangel; and of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; and to them we ascribe a pre-eminence among their fellows.

But however exalted any creature may be, Jesus Christ is raised "far above" him. The luster of the whole universe, in comparison with his, would be only like that of the twinkling stars before the meridian sun; they may have a splendor in his absence; but before him they are constrained to hide their inglorious heads: they are eclipsed, they vanish at his presence. If he but allows one ray of his majesty to appear, men fall, as dead, at his feet; devils tremble; and "angels worship him" with profoundest adoration.

***~~2. A state of power—~~***

While Jesus yet hung upon the cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it." From that time "all things were put under his feet;" and more especially from the moment that he was seated on his mediatorial throne. It is true that "we see not yet (as the Apostle says) all things put under him." But though they are not visibly seen, they are in fact. All his enemies are like the live kings of Canaan, when Joshua and all the elders of Israel put their feet upon their necks. They are living indeed; but their power is broken: and they are doomed to a speedy and ignominious death. Devils are more aware of this than men: when they saw Jesus in the days of his flesh, they asked, "Have you come to torment us before our time?" Still however they combine with men, and stimulate them to oppose his will. But when they are consulting together, saying, "Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us," he "laughs them to scorn, and has them in derision." He allows them to accomplish their own will, as far as it may subserve his purposes; and "the remainder of their wrath he restrains." Full of pride and blasphemy, they boast what great things they will do: but "he puts his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their jaws," and in a moment brings all their boasted projects to an end! [Isaiah 37:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.29). [Job 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 5.12-13). Whatever they may effect, they are his instruments, to "do what his hand, and his counsel, had determined before to be done." In all things "his counsel stands, and he does all his pleasure."

By means of this supremacy, he is enabled to carry on,

***~~II. His government of his Church—~~***

In investing his Son with "all power in Heaven and in earth," God had especial respect to the welfare of his Church. He constituted his Son,

***~~1. The Head of the Church—~~***

The Church is called "his body," and "his fullness." The body, we know, consists of many members: and it is the whole aggregate of members that constitutes the body: and the body, joined to the head, forms the complete man. This is the precise idea in the text. Every believer is a member of Christ: the whole collective number of believers form his entire body: and, by their union with him, Christ himself is represented as complete. The body would not be complete, if any member were lacking; nor is the Head complete without the body: but the body united to the Head is "the fullness," the completion of Christ himself.

The head however exercises a control over the whole body. As being the residence of the soul, it may be said to actuate all the members: it moves in the limbs, sees in the eyes, hears in the ears, speaks in the tongue, and imparts a vital energy to the whole. Thus does Christ "fill all in all." There is not a member of his mystical body which does not derive all his strength from him. From him the understanding receives its comprehension; the will, its activity; the affections, their power. It is by him that we live; or rather, as the Apostle speaks, "he is our life." In all persons, there is the same absolute dependence on him: "in all" circumstances, his agency is needed. It is as much needed to produce a good thought, as to carry it into execution.

"In all" ages, he is equally the true and only source of good to man. None in any place or period of the world have anything which they did not first "receive out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16);" so true is it, in the strongest sense of the words, that "he fills all in all." Thus is Christ, in his present exalted state, the living, and life-giving Head of all his Church, his Church militant, and his Church triumphant.

***~~2. The Head over all things for his Church's good—~~***

In the management of the universe, Jesus consults the best interests of his Church. If he permits evil to befall his people, it is with a view to their deeper humiliation. It, on the contrary, he fills them with peace and joy, it is for the purpose of quickening them to more Holy ardor in his ways. Nothing is further from the intention of their enemies than to do them good: but they are all under his control; and when they desire nothing so much as to frustrate his purposes, they ignorantly and unwittingly fulfill them, [Genesis 50:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 50.20).

As, in his own case, the envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of Pilate, and the blind fury of the populace, conspired to bring him to that death, which was to fulfill the Scriptures and to redeem the world, and which was of necessity to precede his exaltation to glory; so every creature, whatever is its aim, is executing his gracious purposes with respect to his Church, and is doing that very thing, which every member of the Church, if he could foresee the final outcome of events, would actually wish to be done.

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. Our duty towards him—~~***

Is he the supreme Governor of the universe? Then we should obey his voice—and submit to his will—and seek in all things his glory.

Is he in a more especial manner our Head? Then we should look to him for direction, and depend on him for everything we may stand in need of.

***~~2. Our security in him—~~***

Who shall overcome him, when "all things are under his feet?" or, "Who shall pluck us out of his hands," provided we belong to him? We may, with Paul, defy all the principalities and powers both of earth and Hell, [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39). Neither the Church at large, [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18), nor the smallest member of it, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9). [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14), has anything to fear. "If he is for us, none can be successfully against us! [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

***~~3. Our happiness through him—~~***

The principal subject of the Apostle's prayer is, that we may know what mighty power God exercises towards his believing people. The exaltation of Christ is introduced by him quite incidentally, and merely for the purpose of illustrating his main point. But, having introduced the subject, he draws a parallel between the believer's exaltation, and that of Christ.

Behold then the Lord Jesus raised from the dead, and seated at his Father's right hand, far above all principalities and powers: such is the honor, and such the happiness, that is imparted to the believing soul, compare, verse 19-22 with 2:5-7; and even that which he now enjoys, is but a shadow of what he will enjoy to all eternity. Believer, let your expectations be enlarged: the felicity of the Head is the felicity prepared for the members: "Such honor have all his saints!"

***~~#2097~~***

***~~ORIGINAL SIN STATED, AND IMPROVED~~***

**[Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3)**

"We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

AMONG the many beautiful traits which mark the character of Paul, we cannot but notice particularly his readiness to place himself on a level with the least and lowest of mankind, and to *confess his obligations to the sovereign grace of God for all the difference that had been made between him and others*. In his Epistle to Titus he gives such a representation of himself and his fellow-Apostles in their unconverted state, as was most humiliating to them, while it afforded rich encouragement to all who felt the plague of their own hearts.

In like manner, in the epistle before us, after showing that the Gentile world had been altogether in a state of bondage to sin and Satan, he declares, that he himself, and all others without exception, had in fact been in a condition no less deplorable, both by nature and practice; by practice having habitually fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and being "by nature children of wrath, even as others."

That we may fully enter into the confession which he here makes, we shall,

***~~I. Explain the terms here used—~~***

We may notice them,

***~~1. Separately—~~***

As in the preceding, verse the words "children of disobedience" mean "disobedient children," so, in our text, "children of wrath" must be understood as importing "children doomed to wrath:" just as a similar expression of Peter is actually translated: what in the Greek is "sons of a curse," is in our translation "cursed children, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)." It is a Hebraism, common throughout all the inspired writings.

Such, we are told, is the state of all "by nature." Those who are adverse to the doctrine of original sin, would interpret these words as importing, that men were in this state "by habit or custom:" but the words cannot with any propriety be so construed: the only true and proper sense of them is that which our translators have here assigned to them.

The Apostle further says, that he and his fellow-Apostles were in this state, "even as others." The Jews were ready enough to account the Gentiles accursed; but they thought that no curse could attach to them, because they were children of Abraham. This mistake Paul rectifies in our text, declaring, that whatever privileges the Jews might enjoy above the Gentiles, there was in this respect no difference between them; the Jews, yes the Apostles themselves, being, by nature, children of wrath, even as others.

***~~2. Taken in their collective sense—~~***

According to their plain and obvious and undeniable import, they declare, that every child of man, whatever be his privileges, or whatever his attainments, is by nature under the wrath of God.

All, as fallen in Adam, deserve God's wrath. Adam was the covenant-head and representative of all his descendants. Had he stood, they would have stood in him: and as he fell, they fell in him. If it is thought strange, that his posterity would be responsible for his act, let it suffice to say, that, if he fell, there can be no doubt but that we, if subjected to the same trial, would have fallen also. Yes, considering all the circumstances in which he was placed, (created in the fullest possession of all his faculties, having a perfect nature, and subjected only to one single trial, and having dependent on him the welfare, not of himself alone, but of all his posterity,) it was infinitely more probable that he would stand, than that we should, who come into the world in a state of infantile weakness.

But, whether we approve of it or not, so the matter is; and so it was ordained of God: and, exactly as Levi is said to have paid tithes in Abraham, (though he was not born until one hundred and fifty years after the circumstance of paying tithes occurred,) merely because he was in the loins of Abraham at the time that he paid tithes to Melchizedek; so may we be justly said to have sinned in Adam, because we were in the loins of Adam when he sinned. Hence it is declared by God himself, that, "in Adam all have sinned, [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12)," and "in Adam all have died, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22)."

Moreover, all, as partakers of Adam's fallen nature, are fit for the wrath of God. Adam begat children in his own fallen likeness. Indeed, being corrupt himself, he could transmit nothing but corruption to his descendants, "for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Now in whoever iniquity be found, God cannot look upon it without abhorrence: and hence it is said, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," "neither can corruption inherit incorruption."

Further, all, both as fallen in Adam, and corrupt in themselves are actually under a sentence of wrath, and actually doomed to it. This is indeed a solemn truth; but it is explicitly declared by an inspired Apostle, that, "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners," yes, that "by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, [Romans 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18-19)."

Having endeavored to ascertain the precise import of the words, we proceed to,

***~~II. Establish the truth contained in them—~~***

In proof of what our text asserts, we appeal,

***~~1. To Scripture—~~***

Consult the declarations of Almighty God. In the Old Testament he has testified, that every human being, without exception, is corrupt, not in act only, but "in every imagination and thought of his heart! [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)." And this testimony which the heart-searching God himself bore before the flood, as a reason for destroying the earth, he renewed after the flood, as a reason why he would deluge the earth no more; seeing that, if he would proceed to destroy it as soon as it would become universally corrupt, he would have to repeat his judgments continually, there being nothing but iniquity in every child of man, [Genesis 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.21).

In the New Testament we have a similar declaration from our blessed Lord. He, assigning a reason why no unregenerate man can possibly behold the kingdom of God, says, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, [John 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.6)," and therefore incapable of enjoying a spiritual kingdom.

With these declarations of God agree the confessions of his most eminent saints. To his original corruption David traced the sin which he had committed in the matter of Uriah; not intending thereby to extenuate, but rather to aggravate, its guilt: "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin has my mother conceived me! [Psalm 51:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.5)." Paul also, speaking of the conflicts which he yet had to maintain against the corruption that remained within him, says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing, [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18)." "I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members, [Romans 7:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.23)." Thus we see both these eminent saints confessing that their nature, as derived from their first parents, was altogether corrupt.

To these we may add the promises which God has made to his fallen creatures: "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh! [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26)." What can be the meaning of this? What need have they a new heart, if the old heart is not corrupt? Or why would he promise to take away the stony heart, if the heart is not by nature hard and obdurate?

Not to multiply passages, which yet might be multiplied to a great extent, we will further appeal,

***~~2. To experience—~~***

Let anyone make his observations on what passes all around him, or trace the records of his own heart, and say, whether *children, as born into the world, are not partakers both of Adam's corruption, and Adam's punishment*.

Is not *every child*full of evil tempers and dispositions? There is, it is true, more evil in some than in others: but who ever saw "a child in whose heart folly and iniquity were not bound up?" If a child be even tolerably free from fretfulness, and impatience, and selfishness, and falsehood, is it not admired as a prodigy? And when children grow up to the exercise of reason, do they improve that reason in seeking after God? Do they not invariably show that their dispositions are altogether earthly, and that by nature they desire only the things of time and sense? Nor is this the case with children of one age or one nation only, but of every age, and every nation; yes, of the most godly parents too, as well as of the ungodly.

And, as they inherit the *corruption*of Adam, so do they also his *guilt*and *punishment*. Death, we know, was the penalty of Adam's transgression, "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." But children who have never sinned in their own persons, are subjected to death. We see little new-born infants oppressed with sickness, and racked with pain, and cut off by an untimely stroke of death. For whose sin are they thus punished? Their own? They are not capable of *actual*sin. It is for Adam's sin therefore that they are punished [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12); [Romans 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.14); and that indisputably proves that they are, as they are represented in our text, "children of wrath."

We do not say that children, dying before they have committed actual sin, are consigned over to everlasting death: we hope, and believe, that God does, for Christ's sake, extend his mercy to them. But this alters not the case at all: we consider only what they are in themselves, and what they deserve at God's hands, and to what, as fallen creatures, they are doomed by God's righteous law: the relief which may be afforded them by the Gospel is not the present subject of our consideration.

Our present position which we are to establish, and which we think we have fully established, is, that all, as born into the world, are "children of wrath."

We will now endeavor to,

***~~III. Suggest a suitable improvement of the subject—~~***

Surely we may see from hence—

***~~1. In what a deplorable condition are all those who are yet in a state of nature—~~***

Children of wrath were they born, and children of wrath have they continued to the present hour. We know indeed how strenuously it is asserted by many, that baptism and regeneration are the same thing, and that to look for a new nature in conversion is unnecessary. But we would ask every parent here present, have you invariably found that your children, from the moment that they were baptized, put away their evil dispositions, and instantly became new creatures? Is it even generally found, that this change takes place at baptism? I might almost proceed to ask, did you ever see this change so wrought by baptism, that you could not do otherwise than refer it to baptism as the means which God made use of for that end?

We do not presume to say, that God never does confer a new heart in baptism; but we say, that if that be the usual, and still more the constant, means of regeneration to the children of men, it is very extraordinary that the change wrought is so rarely visible, that, if it were undeniably to appear, it would be universally esteemed a miracle.

The truth is, that those who are so strenuous for this opinion, have invariably but very low notions of original sin. It is their low sense of their disease that leads them to rest in such a remedy. But, as "the fault and corruption of their nature is such as deserves God's wrath and damnation, they must have a new nature given to them by the operation of the Holy Spirit: they must be renewed, not externally, or partially, but inwardly, and in all the powers of their souls: they must "be renewed in the spirit of their minds, [Ephesians 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23)," their whole dispositions being changed from earthly and carnal to spiritual and heavenly: in a word, they must be created anew in Christ Jesus, verse 10, and become altogether "new creatures, old things passing away, and all things becoming new, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)."

The change may be fitly be compared with a river where the tide comes: one while it flows with great rapidity from the fountain-head to the ocean: a few hours afterwards it flows with equal rapidity back again towards the fountain-head: and this change is wrought by the invisible, yet undisputed, influence of the moon.

In like manner does the soul of every truly regenerate man flow back towards God, from whom but lately, with all its faculties and powers, it receded: and this change is effected by the invisible, but real and undoubted, operation of the Spirit of God: and until this change is effected, we remain under the wrath of Almighty God.

O consider the wrath of God: how terrible the thought! To all eternity it will be "the wrath*to come*." May God stir us all up to flee from it, and, in newness of heart and life, to "lay hold on eternal life!"

***~~2. In what a happy condition are those who have been brought from a state of nature to a state of grace—~~***

Such, while they humbly acknowledge that they "were children of wrath," may with adoring gratitude assure themselves, that they are so no longer. But let them never forget what they were, or what obligations they owe to that grace of God which has delivered them. Hear how strongly Paul inculcates this on those to whom our text was addressed: "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ".…"Why remember," (O beloved brethren, remember,) "that at that time you were without Christ, (O, think of that!) being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were afar off are made near by the blood of Christ, verse 4, 5, 11-13." Dear brethren, remember this transition; and let every syllable that records it fill your souls with gratitude to your almighty Savior and Deliverer.

***~~3. What attention would be shown to the welfare of the rising generation—~~***

They are "all by nature children of wrath." And would they be left in that awful state? Would no means be used to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?

O parents, look at your dear offspring; and while fondling them in your arms, or delighting in their progress, remember what they are, and cry mightily to God for them night and day. Be not contented with their advancement in bodily strength, or intellectual power, or temporal condition; but seek above all things to behold them turning to God, and growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let all your plans for them have respect to this one point, the changing of them from children of wrath to children of the living God.

Let those also who have the care of children endeavor to get their own minds impressed with the thought, that their office is not so much to convey instruction in worldly knowledge, as to lead the souls of the children to Christ, that they may be partakers of his salvation: and let them engage in their work with hearts full of tender compassion to their scholars, and of zeal for God.

And, my dear children, let me address also a few words to you. Think me not unkind if I remind you of what you are by nature. If I speak to you as children of wrath, it is not to wound your feelings, but to stir you up to improve the opportunities that are afforded you for attaining a better and a happier state.

What would you do, my dear children, if you were shut up in a house that was on fire, and a number of benevolent persons were exerting themselves to rescue you from the devouring element? Would you not strive which would first be partakers of the benefit?

Know then, that this is a just representation of your state—you are children of wrath, and are in danger of dwelling with everlasting burnings: and the object of your instructors is, to show you how you may flee from the wrath to come. O listen to their instructions with all possible care; treasure up in your minds all their exhortations and advice; and beg of God, that through those Scriptures which they explain to you, you may be made wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus.

***~~#2098~~***

***~~THE RICHES OF DIVINE GRACE DISPLAYED~~***

***~~[Ephesians 2:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4-7)~~***

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

WHAT an accumulation of sublime ideas is here presented to our view! Well might the Psalmist say that the meditation of God was sweet to him. We scarcely know whether to admire more the grace of the Benefactor, or the felicity of those who participate in his blessings. But the text requires us to fix our attention on that most delightful of all subjects, *the riches of divine grace*. The Apostle has in the preceding verses described the state of the unregenerate world. He now displays the grace of God towards the regenerate,

***~~I. In its source—~~***

***~~God is "rich in mercy," and "abundant in love"—~~***

Mercy and love are, as it were, the favorite attributes of the Deity, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7); and the exercise of these perfections is peculiarly grateful to him, [Micah 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.18). There is an inexhaustible fountain of them in the heart of God, [Romans 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12); they have flowed down upon the most unworthy of the human race; and will flow undiminished to all eternity. While he retains his nature, he cannot but exercise these perfections, [1 John 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.8).

***~~These are the true sources of all the grace displayed towards fallen man—~~***

Man had nothing in him whereby he could merit the attention of his Maker. He was fallen into the lowest state of guilt and misery: but the affections of his Creator yearned over him. In this view, God's solicitude to find Adam, and his affectionate (perhaps plaintive) inquiry after him, [Genesis 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.9), are very striking. God felt (if we may so speak) an irresistible impulse of compassion towards him.

We may conceive of God as expressing himself in the language of the prophet, [Hosea 11:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.8-9). Hence was it that the Son of God was sent into the world, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16); hence also were so many offers of mercy made to man; and to this alone is it owing that so much as one has ever found acceptance with God.

But, to judge how great the love was with which he loved us, we must trace it,

***~~II. In its operations—~~***

The grace of God has been displayed towards us in ten thousand ways; but we must confine our attention to its operations, as they are set forth in the text.

***~~God has "quickened us even when we were dead in sins"—~~***

What is meant by "dead in sins," appears from the preceding verses. We were walking according to the course of this world; we were the willing servants of Satan; we were indulging all kinds of "filthiness, both of flesh and spirit;" we were demonstrating ourselves to be "by nature" as well as practice, "children of wrath;" and we were utterly destitute of all power to help and save ourselves, [Romans 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.6). Yet even then did God look upon us in tender compassion. This may be illustrated by [Ezekiel 16:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.4-6); he quickened us by the same Spirit whereby he raised Christ from the dead. Compare [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18) with [Romans 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.11). In so doing, he united us "together with Christ," and rendered us conformable to him as our Head. What an astonishing instance of divine grace was this!

He has also "raised us up, and enthroned us together with Christ in Heaven"—

The Apostle had before expatiated on what God had wrought for Christ, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20), "quickened, raised, enthroned." He now draws a parallel between believers and Christ. What was done for Christ our head and representative, may be considered as done for all the members of his mystical body. In this view Christians may be considered figuratively as risen with Christ, and as already seated on his throne: their hearts, their conduct, their rest, is in Heaven, [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2). [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20). How has he thus verified the declaration of Hannah, [1 Samuel 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.8). How has he thus revealed "the exceeding riches of his grace!"

How worthy of God such a stupendous display of grace is, we shall see if we consider it,

***~~III. In its end—~~***

God is not only the author, but also the end of all things, [Romans 11:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.36); nor would it become him to do anything but with a view to his own glory. The manifestation of his own glory was the express end for which he revealed his grace, [Ephesians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.6), and this end is already in some measure attained.

All ages, to the end of time, must admire the grace of God towards both the Jewish and the Gentile world. Everyone who partakes of that grace, must of necessity admire it: the "exceeding riches of it" are unsearchable. God's "kindness" too, is infinitely enhanced by flowing to us "through Christ Jesus." The price paid by Christ will to eternity endear to us the blessings purchased: at present, however, the design of God in revealing his grace is not fully answered.

***~~But it will be completely answered in the day of judgment—~~***

Then, how exceeding rich and glorious will this grace appear! Then the depth of misery, into which we were fallen, will be more fully known; the spring and source of that grace will be more clearly discovered; and all the divine operations will be seen in one view. Then Christ, the one channel in which it flows, will be more intimately revealed to us. How will every eye then admire, and every tongue then adore! Surely nothing but such an end could account for such operations of the Divine grace; let every one therefore seek to experience these operations in his own soul. Let those who have been favored with them glorify God with their whole hearts.

***~~#2099~~***

***~~SALVATION BY GRACE NOT HOSTILE TO GOOD WORKS~~***

**[Ephesians 2:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-10)**

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

ALL of God's works, of whatever kind they be, are designed to praise him.

His works of *creation*proclaim his wisdom and his power.

His works of *providence*display his goodness.

His works of *redemption*magnify his grace.

It is of these last that the Apostle is speaking in the preceding context, even of all that God has done for us in the Son of his love; and he declares that it was all done, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." The Gospel is too rarely viewed in this light: it is by many scarcely distinguished from the law; being considered rather as a code of laws enforced with penalties, than as *an exhibition of mercies confirmed with promises*. But it is as an exhibition of mercy only that we ought to view it; precisely as it is set forth in the words before us: from which we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. That salvation is altogether of grace—~~***

By "salvation" I understand the whole work of grace, whether as revealed in the word, or as experienced in the soul: and it is altogether of grace:

***~~1. It is so—~~***

Trace it to its first origin, when the plan of it was fixed in the council of peace between the Father and the Son, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13). Who devised it? who merited it? who desired it? It was the fruit of God's sovereign grace, and of grace alone. Trace it in all its parts; the gift of God's only-begotten Son to be our surety and our substitute; the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf; and the revelation of that mystery in the written word. Who will arrogate to himself the honor of haying acquired these, or of having contributed to the acquisition of them in the smallest degree?

It may be thought perhaps, that, because a saving interest in these things is obtained by faith, we may claim some honor on account of the faith which apprehends them; which, being exercised by us, may be considered in some respects as giving us a ground of glorying before God. But this also is the gift of God, no less than the plan of salvation itself: it is not in any man by nature; nor is it to be wrought in man by any human power: it is not the effect of reasoning: for then the acutest reasoners would be the strongest believers; which is frequently far from being the case. It is solely the gift of God: and hence those who have believed, are said to "have *believed through grace*,[Acts 18:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.27)." It is expressly said to be given to us, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29); and when Peter declared his faith in Jesus as the true Messiah, Jesus said to him, "Flesh and blood had not revealed this truth unto you, but my Father who is in Heaven."

This is the true reason why many believed the testimony of Christ and his Apostles, while others were hardened in unbelief: those "whose hearts God opened," as he did Lydia's, received the truth; while all others treated the word, either with open scorn, or secret indifference.

***~~2. It must be so—~~***

Salvation must either be of grace or of works: the two cannot be mixed together, or reconciled with each other. If it is of works in any degree, it is no more of grace, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6); and in whatever degree it is of works, it so far affords us an occasion of boasting; seeing that it is then a debt paid, and not a gift bestowed, [Romans 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.4).

To avoid this conclusion, some will say that salvation may be of works, and still be also of grace; because the works being wrought in us by God, he is entitled to all the glory of them. But, granting that they are wrought in us by God, yet, inasmuch as they are *our*works, they afford us a ground of glorying: and, to say that they do not afford us a ground of glorying, is directly to contradict the Apostle in our text, where he says, "It is not of works, lest any man would boast." The same Apostle elsewhere says, "It is of faith, that it may be by grace [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16);" from both which passages it is evident, that, if it is of works, from whatever source those works proceed, it can no longer be by grace.

But here it may be asked, 'If works, notwithstanding they are wrought in us by God, afford us a ground of glorying in ourselves, does not faith afford us the same ground of glorying?' I answer, No! for *it is of the very nature of faith to renounce all hope in ourselves, and to found our hopes solely on the merits of another. It disclaims all glorying in self, and gives all the glory to Him from whom it derives its blessings.*In this it differs essentially from every other work: other works, though wrought in us by God, bring a glory to ourselves; but this, of necessity, transfers to God all the glory resulting from its exercise; and, consequently, neither does, nor can, nor desires to, arrogate anything to itself.

Thus we hope that the point is clear: salvation is altogether of grace from first to last. The plan of salvation as originally devised, the Savior who wrought it out for us, the acceptance of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf, and the faith whereby we are made partakers of his sacrifice—are all the gifts of free and sovereign grace. The foundation and the superstructure are wholly of grace: and, "when the headstone shall be brought forth, it must be with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it! [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7)."

If to this it be objected, that by such doctrines we subvert the very foundations of morality, we answer,

***~~II. That, though good works are wholly excluded from all share in the office of justifying the soul—yet is the performance of them effectually secured—~~***

Believers are "the workmanship of God" altogether, as much as the world itself is: and as the world was created by Christ Jesus, so are they "created anew in Christ Jesus." But we are "created unto good works, which God has before ordained that we would walk in them."

The concluding words of our text show us:

***~~1. That God has ordained good works as the path wherein we are to walk—~~***

This is an unquestionable truth: the whole of the moral law demonstrates it: every promise, every threatening in the whole Bible attests it. Not a word can be found in the whole sacred volume, that dispenses with the performance of good works: on the contrary, it is expressly said, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The least idea of reaching Heaven in any other path, is invariably reprobated as a most fatal delusion. The means and the end are indissolubly connected in the councils of Heaven, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13); and to hope that they shall ever be separated, is to deceive and ruin our own souls. *If we are not careful to maintain good works, we entirely counteract all the purposes of God in his Gospel, and cut ourselves off from all hope of salvation*, [Titus 2:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.4-8). Mark the eighth verse especially.

***~~2. That God has prepared and fitted his people to walk in them. This perhaps is, of the two, the more exact sense of the original—~~***

He has given to his people a new nature, and infused into their souls a new and heavenly principle, by which they "have passed from death unto life." They have received from Christ "that living water, which is in them as a well of water springing up unto everlasting life [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14)." They can no more sin in the way they did before, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9). Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they move in a new direction, desiring the things of the Spirit, as formerly they desired the things of the flesh, [Romans 8:1-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1-5) and [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17). They are created in Christ Jesus unto good works; and the impulse given them in this new creation they obey.

The metaphor here used, may, if not pressed too far, illustrate the matter, and set it in a clear point of view. God, when he created the heavenly bodies, appointed them their respective paths in the regions of space. To each he gave its proper impulse, having previously fitted it for the performance of the revolutions assigned to it: and in their respective orbits he has ever since upheld them, so that they all without exception fulfill the ends for which they were created.

Just so, in the new creation, God has appointed to all their destined course through the vast expanse of moral and religious duty. He has also, at the time of its new creation, given to each soul the impulse necessary for it, together with all the qualities and dispositions proper for the regulation of its motions according to his will: and he yet further, by his continual, though invisible, agency, preserves them in their appointed way. *Men fit themselves for perdition: but it is God alone who fits any for glory.*See [Romans 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.23), where the same word is used as in the text. See also [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12).

But further than this the metaphor must not be pressed: for the heavenly bodies have neither consciousness nor volition; but we have both: they too carry with them nothing that can cause an aberration from their destined course; whereas we have innumerable impediments, both within and without: hence they fulfill their destinies without the smallest intermission; while we, alas! deviate from the path assigned to us in instances without number.

Still however, in the event, the purposes of God are at last accomplished, as with them, so with us also: and, notwithstanding, in the estimation of a self-righteous Pharisee, the chief reason for performing good works is taken away—yet are they performed, and shall be performed by every one that has "received the grace of God in truth."

***~~Observe then from hence,~~***

***~~1. What need we have of humility—~~***

The pride of the human heart can never endure the doctrines of grace. So tenacious are men of everything that may give them a ground of glorying in themselves, that they will rather perish in their own righteousness, than submit to be saved by the righteousness of another, [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33); [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3). But, brethren, you must submit. God will not condescend to your terms. It is in vain to contest the matter with him—it is folly, it is madness, so to do. You know full well, that the fallen angels have no claim on God for mercy: and what have you more than they? But God, who has passed by the angels, has given a Savior to you, yes, and salvation too, if you will receive it as a gift of grace.

Let it not be a hard matter with you to accept the offered benefit. Would the fallen angels, do you think, refuse it, if a tender of it were made to them? O then, prostrate yourselves before your God, as deserving nothing but wrath; and let him glorify in you the unsearchable riches of his grace!

***~~2. The vast importance of faith—~~***

It is by faith alone that you can apprehend the Savior, or be made partakers of his benefits. You must "be saved by grace, through faith." Your whole life must be a life of faith, according to what Paul has said, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." But this faith you must receive from above. You can neither come to Christ, nor know Christ, except as you are taught and drawn by the Father, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27). [John 6:65](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.65). Pray to him, saying, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Pray also to him to "increase your faith" yet more and more: for it is only by being strong in faith that you will approve yourselves to God, or abound, as you ought, in all the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.

***~~3. What obligations lie upon you to serve and glorify your God—~~***

Be it so; you are not to be saved by good works: but is there no other motive that you can find for the performance of them? Do you feel no *obligation*to Him who sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that you might live through him? When you know that God has "ordained that you should walk in the daily exercise of good works," have you no desire to please him? And when you know that this is the only path in which it is possible for you ever to arrive at your Father's house, will you willfully turn aside from it? If gratitude will not constrain you, will you be insensible to fear?

But further, it is by your works that men will judge of your principles: and, though they represent the doctrines of grace as leading to licentiousness, they will expect to see you more holy than others; and if they are disappointed in this, they will cast the blame upon your principles, and upon the Gospel itself.

Will you then put a stumbling-block in the way of others, and cause "the name of your God and Savior to be blasphemed?" No, "you have not so learned Christ, if so be you have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus." See then that you abound in every good word and work; and "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing!"

***~~#2100~~***

***~~THE STATES OF THE REGENERATE AND THE UNREGENERATE CONTRASTED~~***

***~~[Ephesians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12-13)~~***

"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."

*THERE is scarcely anything which has a greater tendency to impress our minds with exalted views of the grace of God, than to compare the guilt and misery of an unconverted state, with the purity and happiness into which we are brought by the Gospel of Christ.*As a shipwrecked person, viewing the tempest from a rock on which he has been cast, feels a solemn and grateful sense of the mercy given unto him; so surely must everyone who "looks unto the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been dug," stand amazed at the Divine goodness, and be quickened to pour out his soul in grateful adorations.

To produce this frame, is the scope of the whole preceding part of this epistle, wherein the Apostle extols and magnifies the grace of God, as manifested to his redeemed people. Having shown what their state had been previous to conversion, and contrasted it with that to which they are introduced by the Gospel, he exhorts them to bear it in remembrance: "Why remember;" remember what you were, that you may be thankful for what you are, verse 11 with the text.

We propose to show,

***~~I. The state of unregenerate men—~~***

The state of the Jews and Gentiles represented in a very lively manner, the conditions of persons under the Gospel: the external privileges of the Jews, typifying the internal and spiritual privileges of the regenerate; and the abhorred state of the Gentiles marking with equal clearness the ignorance and misery of the unregenerate. In this view, *what the Apostle says of the Ephesians, previous to their conversion to Christianity, may be considered as applicable to all at this day, who are not truly and savingly converted:*

***~~1. They are "without Christ"—~~***

The Gentiles, of course, had no knowledge of, nor any saving interest in, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is with the unregenerate among ourselves: they are without Christ. Compare [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); they are separated from him as branches cut off from the vine: they do not depend upon him, or receive sap and nutriment from him. They indeed *call*themselves Christians; but they have no union with Christ, nor any communications from him.

***~~2. They are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel"—~~***

Israel is called a commonwealth, because they were governed by laws different from all other people, and possessed privileges unknown to the rest of the world. Thus the *true*Israel at this day may be considered in the same light; because they, and they only, acknowledge Christ as their governor: they alone yield obedience to his laws, and they alone enjoy the privileges of his people.

Now as the Gentiles were "aliens" from the commonwealth of the Jews, so are all unconverted men "aliens" from the commonwealth of the converted. They are governed by different laws; following the customs, fashions, and erroneous maxims of the world—they are separated from them in heart and affection; and though, from necessity, they must sometimes have fellowship with the godly, they never unite with them as one people, or desire to have one lot together with them.

***~~3. They are "strangers from the covenants of promise"—~~***

There is, strictly speaking, but one covenant of grace: but the Apostle speaks of it in the plural number; because it was given at different times, and always with increasing fullness and perspicuity. Whether given to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, or to Moses, it was always the same: only the promises annexed to it were more copious and explicit. It is called "the covenant of promise," to distinguish it from the covenant of works, which consisted only in requirements; whereas this consists chiefly in promises: under the covenant of works, men were to do all; under the covenant of grace, they were to receive all.

It is obvious that the Gentiles were "strangers" to this covenant: and though it is not alike obvious, it is equally true, that the unconverted are strangers to it also. We confess they are admitted into the external bond of it in their infant baptism: but they do not become partakers of the promised blessings until they sue for them in the exercise of faith and prayer. And we will venture to appeal to the generality of baptized persons, Whether they are not as much strangers to the covenant of promise, as if no such covenant existed?

Do they rest upon the promises?

Do they treasure them up in their minds?

Do they plead them in prayer before God?

Do they found all their hopes of happiness upon them?

Alas! they have little acquaintance with the nature of the covenant, and no submission to its terms: and consequently they are utter strangers to the covenant, and to the promises contained in it.

***~~4. They are without hope—~~***

The Gentile world is always represented as in a hopeless state; and though we presume not to say, that God will not extend uncovenanted mercy to any—yet we have no warrant to affirm that he will. If indeed they perfectly fulfilled the law-written in their hearts, there is reason to think that God would have mercy on them, [Romans 2:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.26-27); but who among them does perfectly fulfill that law? But, waving this, there is an absolute certainty that the state of unconverted men under the Gospel is hopeless: no mercy can possibly be extended to them, if they continue unconverted they must inevitably and eternally perish. For how would they have any hope, when they are "without Christ" (who is the Head of all vital influence), and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (to which alone any saving blessings are communicated), and "strangers from the covenant of promise" (which is the only channel by which those blessings are conveyed to us)? From whence then can they derive any hope? or what foundation can they have for it?

***~~5. They are "without God in the world"—~~***

The gods of the heathen were no gods: therefore those to whom the God of Israel was unknown, were "without God in the world." And thus it is with the unconverted among ourselves: for though they acknowledge the being of a God, they know not what a just and holy God he is; nor do they glorify him as God, by a conformity to his revealed will. They desire not to hear of him: they endeavor to blot out the remembrance of him from their minds; their whole conduct accords with that of Pharaoh, when he said, "Who is the Lord, that I would obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go, [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2)." In a word, the language of their hearts is like that of the fool whom David speaks of, "No God!" there is no God to control or punish me; or, if there is, I wish there were none, [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1).

But that all do not continue in that deplorable condition, will appear by considering,

***~~II. The state to which they are introduced by the Gospel—~~***

Every living man once was in the state above described; but in conversion, men "who were once afar off, are made near to God."

In what the nearness of converted men to God consists, will appear by the very same considerations as have already been used to illustrate their distance from him in their unconverted state. The Gentiles had no liberty of access to God among the Jews: they had an outer court assigned them; and it would have been at the peril of their lives, if they had presumed to enter the place appropriated to the Jews. But on conversion to Judaism, they were admitted to a participation of all the rights and privileges of the Jews themselves.

Thus persons truly converted to God have liberty to approach the Majesty of Heaven; yes, since the veil of the temple was rent in twain, a new and living way is opened for them into the holiest of all: they may go even to the throne of God, and draw near to him as their reconciled God and Father. As soon as ever they are "in Christ Jesus," united to him by faith, and savingly interested in his merits, they have every privilege which the most eminent saints enjoy: their sins are pardoned; they have peace with God; and, though they may not be so full of joy as others—yet they have the same grounds of joy, inasmuch as "their Beloved is theirs, and they are his!"

***~~To this happy state they are brought "by the blood of Christ"—~~***

It was the blood of the sacrifice that availed for the restoration of sinners to the Divine favor under the law: and in the same manner it is the blood of Christ, and that only, that can avail for us. But as in the former case, so also in this, two things are necessary: the blood must be *shed*as an atonement for sin; and it must be *sprinkled*on the offender himself, to intimate his entire affiance in it.

Now the shedding of Christ's blood was effected on Calvary, many hundred years ago: and that one offering is sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. Nothing more therefore is lacking to reconcile us to the Deity. But the *sprinkling*of his blood upon our hearts and consciences must be done by every one for himself: we must, as it were, dip the hyssop in the blood, and apply it to our own souls. Or, in other words, we must exercise faith in the atonement of Christ as the only ground of our acceptance before God. In this way, and in this only, are we ever brought to a state of favor with God, and of fellowship with his people.

***~~This subject being mentioned as that which was deserving of continual remembrance, we would call upon you to "remember" it—~~***

***~~1. As a criterion whereby to judge of your state—~~***

It is evident, that, if once we were afar off from God, and now we are near to him, there must have been a transition from the one state to the other, or, as the Scripture expresses it, a "passing from death unto life." Has this transition then ever taken place in your souls? It is not necessary that you should be able to trace the precise time when it began, and the various steps by which it was accomplished: but there is an impossibility for it to have taken place, without your having sought it humbly, and labored for it diligently. Have you then this evidence at least that it has been accomplished? If not, you can have no reason to think that you have ever yet experienced the change which characterizes all who are made heirs of salvation.

***~~2. As a ground of humiliation—~~***

If you were the most eminent saint that ever lived, it would be well to *bear in mind what you once were, and what you would still have been, if Divine grace had not wrought a change within you.*Look then at those who "are afar off;" and, when you see their alienation from God, their enmity against his people, their distance from even a hope of salvation, behold your own image, and be humbled on account of your past abominations: yes, "walk softly also before God all the days of your life," in the recollection, that, *as that once was your state, so it would be again, if the grace that originally interposed to change you, does not continually maintain that change in your souls*.

***~~3. As a source of gratitude and joy—~~***

It is scarcely needful to say, that those who have experienced a restoration to God's favor, should bless and magnify their Benefactor and Redeemer. But have not those also, who are at the greatest distance from God, reason to rejoice and sing? Yes surely; for they may look at those who are now in Heaven, and say, "The blood which availed to bring them near to God may also avail for me." O joyful thought! Ponder it in your hearts, you careless sinners: consider what the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to do for you. Every saint, whether on earth or in Heaven, was once in your state; and if you will seek remission through the blood of Christ, you shall be partakers of their privileges, both in this world and in the world to come.

***~~#2101~~***

***~~ACCESS TO GOD BY THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18)~~***

"Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

AS there is no question more important, so there is none more beyond the reach of unassisted reason, than that which Balak put to Balaam, "With what shall I come before the Most High God?" Many are the expedients which have been devised for obtaining acceptance with God: but there has been only one true way from the beginning, namely, through the sin-atoning sacrifice of Christ. This has been gradually revealed to man with increasing clearness; but was never fully manifested until the days of the Apostles. The sacrifices of the Mosaic law threw considerable light upon this interesting subject: yet, while they revealed, they tended also to obscure, it: for the Gentiles were forbidden to enter into the sanctuary; and had a court assigned them, called the court of the Gentiles, [Ezekiel 42:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 42.20). If they became proselytes to the Jewish religion, they were, together with the Jews, received into the sanctuary, or outer court of the temple. The priests and Levites were admitted into the inner court; and the high-priest into the holy of holies; but that only on one day in the year.

Now the Apostle tells us, that by these distinctions "the Holy Spirit signified, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." But in due time Christ himself appeared; and *by his death, he both fulfilled and abrogated the ceremonial law*. Since that period the difference between Jew and Gentile has no longer subsisted; the partition wall was thrown down; and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, in token that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, were henceforth to have an equal access to God through Christ.

It is our present intention to show,

***~~I. The way of access to the Father—~~***

The text contains a brief summary of all that God has revealed upon this subject: it informs us that the way to the Father is,

***~~1. Through the Son—~~***

The high-priest under the law was the mediator through whom the people drew near to God: and by his typical mediation we see how we are to approach our God. He entered into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifices, and afterwards burnt incense before the mercy-seat; representing, by the former, the *sin-atoning sacrifice*of Christ; and, by the latter, his *prevailing intercession*. Without the blood of Christ offered in sacrifice for us, no man could ever have found acceptance with God. Nor would that have availed, if he had not also gone within the veil to be "our advocate with the Father, as well as the sin-atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Even if we had been pardoned in consideration of his death, our reconciliation with God would not have continued long; we would soon have renewed our transgressions, and have provoked God utterly to destroy us. But, by this twofold mediation of Christ, Divine justice is satisfied for the offenses we have already committed, and the peace that has been effected is maintained inviolate. Now our Lord himself declares that there is no other way to the Father but this, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6); and Paul assures us, that, in this way, we may all draw near to God with boldness and confidence, [Hebrews 10:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.19-22).

***~~2. By the Spirit—~~***

We know not how to pray to God aright, unless the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities and teaches us, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26). We have no will to approach him, unless the Holy Spirit incline our hearts, [Song of Solomon 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 1.4). *Even in the regenerate there still remains so strong a disinclination to prayer*, that unless God draws them by the influences of his Spirit, they find an almost insuperable reluctance to that duty. Moreover, we have no power to exercise spiritual affections at the throne of grace, unless the Spirit, as "a Spirit of grace and of supplication," gives us a broken and a contrite heart, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10). Without his aid, we are only like a ship, whose sails are spread in vain, unless there is a wind to fill them. Even Paul, it would seem, had never prayed aright until his conversion; and then it was said, "Behold he prays."

Lastly, without the Spirit, we have no confidence to address the Majesty of Heaven. We are deterred by a sense of guilt; and are ready to think that it would be presumption in us to ask anything at his hands. The Holy Spirit must be in us as "a Spirit of adoption, before we can cry, Abba, Father! [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)." Yes, to such a degree are the mouths of God's dearest children sometimes shut by a sense of guilt, that the Holy Spirit himself makes intercession in them no other way than by sighs and groans, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), latter part.

Thus, as there is a necessity for the mediation of Christ to remove our guilt, so is there also of the Spirit's influence on account of our weakness; since, without his assistance, we have no knowledge of our needs, no will to seek a supply of them, no power to spread them before God, nor any confidence to plead with importunity and faith.

The path being thus clearly marked, let us consider,

***~~II. The excellency of this way—~~***

Waving many things whereby this topic might be illustrated, we shall content ourselves with observing, that this way of access to God,

***~~1. Gives us a wonderful discovery of God himself—~~***

What an astonishing view does this give us of the Divine nature! Here we see manifestly the existence of the three persons in the Godhead. Here we see the *Father*, to whom we are to draw near, together with the *Son*, through whom, and the *Spirit*, by whom, we are to approach him. These are evidently distinct, though subsisting in one undivided essence. Moreover, the offices of the Three Persons in the Trinity are so appropriate, that we cannot speak of them otherwise than they are here declared: we cannot say, that through the Spirit, and by the Father, we have access to Christ; or that through the Father, and by Christ, we have access to the Spirit: this would be to confound what the Scripture keeps perfectly distinct.

The *Father*is the Original Fountain of the Deity.

Christ is the *Mediator* through whom we approach him.

The Spirit is the *Agent* by whom we are enabled to approach him.

That each of these divine Persons is God, is as plainly revealed, as that there is a God: and yet we are sure that there is but one God. *It is not for us to unravel this mystery; but with humility and gratitude to adore that God, who has so mysteriously revealed his nature to us.*

While we are led thus to view God as he exists in himself, we cannot but contemplate also his *goodness*to us. What greater mark of it can he conceived, than that *the sacred Three*would so interest themselves in our salvation?

That the *Father*would devise such a way for our acceptance with him.

That the *Son*would open the way by his meritorious death and his prevailing intercession.

And that the *Holy Spirit*would condescend to guide us into it, and to keep us in it, even to the end!

That these offices would be sustained and executed for the salvation of such insignificant and worthless, yes, such guilty and rebellious creatures, may well excite our wonder, and furnish us with matter of endless praise and thanksgiving!

***~~2. Is calculated to produce the most beneficial effects on the minds of men—~~***

What consideration can be more awakening than that which necessarily arises from the subject before us? Was such a dispensation necessary in order to our restoration to the Divine favor?

Must the Father send his only Son to die for us?

Must the Son atone and intercede for us?

Must the Holy Spirit descend and dwell in our hearts?

Can none of us be saved in any other way than this?

How deep then must have been our fall; and how desperate our condition! And how inconceivably dreadful must our state be, if we neglect so great a salvation!

On the other hand, what can be more encouraging than to see that such abundant provision has been made for us? What can a sinner desire more?

What clearer evidence can he have of the *Father's*willingness to receive him?

What firmer ground of confidence can he desire, than the sacrifice and intercession of the *Lord Jesus*?

What further aid can he need, who has the *Holy Spirit*to instruct, assist, and sanctify him?

Surely none can despond, however great their guilt may be, or however inveterate their corruptions.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who never seek access to God in prayer—~~***

Our Lord told the Jews that "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but that now they had no cloak for their sin." How truly may this be said to those who refuse to come to God in the way appointed for them! Surely they must be without excuse, and, if they continue in their sin, without hope also: for in no other way than this can we draw near to God; nor will God in any other way draw near to us.

***~~2. Those who fear that they shall not find acceptance with God—~~***

There can be no ground for such fears, provided we really desire to go to God in his appointed way. The more we consider the condescension and grace of God in providing such means for our recovery, the more must we be persuaded that God will cast out none who come unto him. Only let us "open our mouths wide, and he will fill them." We may "ask what we will in the name of Jesus, and it shall be done unto us."

***~~3. Those who enjoy sweet communion with God—~~***

This is the highest of all privileges, and the richest of all enjoyments. To have access to the Father with boldness and confidence, is a foretaste even of Heaven itself. Let us then abound more and more in the duty of prayer; for when we can say with the Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ," we may also add with a full assurance, "And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin!"

***~~#2102~~***

***~~THE EXALTED PRIVILEGES OF TRUE CHRISTIANS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 2:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19-22)~~***

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

IT is well for Christians to contemplate their high privileges. But, in order to estimate them aright, it is necessary that they should bear in mind the state in which they were, previous to their embracing the Gospel. The difference between the Jews and Gentiles was great; yet scarcely greater than that between the nominal and the real Christian. *The merely nominal Christian, though possessed of many external advantages, is, with respect to the spiritual enjoyment of them, on a level with the heathen*; or rather, I would say, below the heathen, inasmuch as his abuse of those advantages has entailed upon him the deeper guilt. We may therefore apply to the unconverted Christians what Paul speaks of the Ephesians in their unconverted state, "They are without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, verse 12."

From this state however they are delivered, as soon as they truly believe in Christ. They are then, as my text expresses it, "no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." The exalted state to which they are brought is represented by the Apostle under two distinct metaphors; they are made:

***~~I. The people of God, among whom he dwells—~~***

***~~They are "fellow-citizens with the saints"—~~***

Bodies that are incorporated, whether in cities, boroughs, or societies of any kind, have their peculiar privileges, to which others who belong not to them are not entitled. Thus it is with the saints, who are formed into one body in Christ, and have the most distinguished privileges confirmed to them by a charter from the court of Heaven. That charter is the Gospel, in which all their immunities and all their claims are fully described. What *externally*belonged to the Jewish nation at large, is *internally*and *spiritually*made over to them: "to them belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God and the promises, [Romans 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.4);" yes, all that God has revealed in his Gospel, all that he has promised to his believing people, all that he has engaged to them in his everlasting covenant, all that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoyed on earth, and all that they now possess in Heaven—all without exception is theirs, "All things are theirs when they are Christ's." They are "citizens of that heavenly city," seeing that "they are come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, [Hebrews 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22);" and whatever pertains to that is the lot of their inheritance.

***~~They are also "of the household of God"—~~***

As in the days of old there was an outer court for the Gentiles, and an inner court into which the native servants and children of Jehovah were privileged to enter—just so, now believers have access to God as his more immediate children and servants. They go in and out before him with a liberty unknown to the natural man; they hear his voice; they enjoy his protection; they exist from day to day by the provision which he assigns them: the family to which they belong comprehends "an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in Heaven," together with myriads who are yet on their way to Zion. All regard him as their common Head, their Lord, their Master, their Father and their Friend.

Exalted as this privilege is, it is far surpassed by that which is contained under that other metaphor,

***~~II. The temple wherein he dwells—~~***

***~~The whole body of true believers is the temple of the living God—~~***

Their foundation properly is Christ. But, in the text, the Church is said to be "built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets," because they with one voice testified of Christ; and on their testimony the Church is built. This is the import of what our Savior said to Peter, "You are Peter, and on this rock will I build my Church." He did not mean, that he would build it on the person of Peter, but on the testimony of Peter just before delivered, namely, that "Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God! [Matthew 16:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16-18)." Of the Church Christ is also "the chief corner-stone," which, while it supports the building, connects the parts of it together, and gives it stability through the whole remaining superstructure.

The building raised on this foundation consists of "living stones, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5)," all selected by sovereign grace, and with unerring wisdom "fitly framed together," so as mutually to confirm and strengthen one another, and collectively to constitute an edifice for the Lord. Various degrees of labor are bestowed on these, according to the situation they are to occupy. Some, which are designed for a more conspicuous place in that building, have many strokes: others, which have a less honorable place assigned them, are sooner and more easily brought to the measure of perfection which is necessary for them.

All of this work is carried on silently, and in a way unnoticed by the world around them. As in the temple of Solomon, "every stone was made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building, [1 Kings 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 6.7)." So it is in this spiritual building: every stone is fitted in secret: the work is carried on in each, without attracting the notice and observation of men: but *all will at last be found so precisely fitted for their respective stations, as to demonstrate the infinite skill and unerring wisdom of the Divine Architect*.

***~~The end for which this structure is raised, is the inhabitation of the Deity—~~***

For this end fresh converts are "added to the Church daily, even such as shall be saved." For this end the work is carried on and perfected in the heart of every individual believer. For this end all the means of grace, like the scaffolding, are continued, until the whole shall have received its final completion. For this end the Holy Spirit is imparted to all, so that all are compacted together, standing firm on the one foundation, and united to each other by indissoluble bonds. And at last God shall take possession of it, as he did in the days of Solomon, when by the bright cloud he filled the house, so that the priest could no longer stand to minister before him, [1 Kings 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.10-11).

In all this honor every saint partakes. Every one, even in his individual capacity, is a temple of the Lord, [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19), and has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, [John 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.17); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23). "In his heart Christ dwells by faith, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17);" and, through the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit, "he grows continually, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Yes, this honor has the Church at large; and this honor have all the saints of every successive age.

***~~Reflections—~~***

***~~1. How thankful should we be for such inestimable privileges!~~***

Believers, whoever you are, you were once lying in the quarry, as insensible as any who are still there. It was not by any agency of yours, no; nor for any superior goodness in you, that you were taken thence; but purely by God's power, for the praise of the glory of his own grace. He it is that has made the difference between you and others, between you also and your former selves. O! look unto the rock whence you have been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you have been dug! *Never forget what you once were, or what you would still have continued to be—if God, of his own good pleasure, had not brought you thence, and made you what you now are.*

Be thankful also for the means which God, in his own infinite mercy, is yet using with you, to carry on and perfect his work in your souls. If you have many strokes of the hammer, complain not of it—you have not one too many, not one that could be spared, if you are to occupy aright the place ordained for you. Lie meekly and submissively before your God; and let him perfect his work in his own way.

And contemplate the end for which you are destined, even "to be a habitation of God, through the Spirit," to all eternity! Shall not this prospect make you "joyful in all your tribulation?" Shall so much as an hour pass, and you not give praise and thanksgiving to your God? Look forward to the end, even to "this grace that shall be given you at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" and beg of your God and Savior not to intermit his work one single moment, until you are rendered completely fit for the station you are to hold, and the honor you are to enjoy in the eternal world.

**2. How studious should we be to walk worthy of** **our privileges!**

This improvement of our privileges we would never overlook: it is the use which the inspired writers continually teach us to make of them. Are we the temples of the Holy Spirit? Then we must be far removed from all connection with ungodly men, [2 Corinthians 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16-17); and from all hateful and polluting passions, [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17). And in us must be offered up continually the sacrifices of prayer and praise, [1 Peter 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.4-5); from which "God will smell a sweet fragrance," and by which he will eternally be glorified. Surely "holiness befits God's house for ever;" and "this is the law of the house," that every part of it, and its very precincts, even to "its utmost limits, would be holy, [Ezekiel 43:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 43.12)." Labor then for this.

Consider "what manner of persons you ought to be in all holy conduct and godliness:" and, as every vessel of the sanctuary was holy, so let your every action, your every word, your every thought, be such as befits your high calling and your heavenly destination!

[[Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8). See Sermons on [1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11) where it forms the second Sermon of a series.]

***~~#2103~~***

***~~ANGELS MADE WISER BY THE GOSPEL~~***

**[Ephesians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.10-11)**

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

CHRISTIANITY is altogether a deep stupendous mystery; such as could never have entered into the mind of man; such as never could have been devised by the highest archangel in Heaven. Even subordinate parts of it, such as the calling of the Gentiles, and the uniting of them in one Church with the Jewish people, are spoken of under this character, even as a "mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit; even that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel."

Indeed, so mysterious was this particular appointment in the eyes of the Apostle Paul, that, in the contemplation of it, he exclaimed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

It is upon that subject primarily that the Apostle is speaking in the whole preceding context. He declares himself to have been expressly ordained by God as "a preacher to the Gentiles," that, through him "all men," not Jews only, but Gentiles also, might "see what was the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, to the intent that now unto the angels also might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." Here the mystery which he refers to is the Gospel, in which are contained "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and in which also is pre-eminently displayed "the manifold wisdom of God."

In unfolding this great subject, I shall endeavor, as God may help me, to set forth:

***~~I. The manifold wisdom of God, as exhibited in the Gospel—~~***

Truly, it is wonderfully displayed,

***~~1. In making salvation possible—~~***

As far as any finite intelligence could see, it was impossible for man to be saved, when once he had transgressed the law of God: for the honor of God's law demanded the execution of its sanctions on those who had violated its commands. Divine justice must be satisfied; nor could it in any way relax its claims of vengeance. The truth of God, also, was pledged to inflict on man the penalty of death; nor could the decree, once passed, be in any wise rescinded.

What then could be done? Shall mercy triumph at the expense of all the other perfections of God? Shall it be said, that God has no regard for the honor of his law, for the rights of justice, for the sacredness of truth? Shall the holy God be thus divested of the attribute of holiness, in order that unholy beings may escape the sentence which, by their iniquities, they have incurred? It cannot be! Yet how shall man be saved without it?

Here the wisdom of Almighty God found out an expedient, which would at once solve every difficulty, and open a way for the exercise of mercy, in perfect consistency with every other perfection of the Deity. A surety shall be found; a substitute for sinful man; one, by whose obedience the law would be honored; by whose sufferings, also, justice shall have its claims fully satisfied; by executing the penalty of transgression upon whom, as the representative of our fallen race, shall truth be kept inviolate; and the holiness of God shall not be tarnished, even though the sinner be re-admitted to the bosom of his God. This one point of substitution clears the whole.

But how can this be? To stand in man's place, he must be a man; and, to render his substitution available for the whole race of mankind, he must be possessed of infinite dignity and worth. Both these things combined in the substitute that Divine wisdom provided. *God's co-equal, co-eternal Son was sent to take our nature upon him; and, in that nature, to obey the law which we had broken, and to endure the penalty which we had incurred.* Thus was salvation brought within the reach of fallen man.

***~~2. In devising a salvation suitable to man—~~***

Desperate, beyond measure, was the state of man. Not the fallen angels themselves were more incapable of restoring themselves to the favor of their God, than man. But in the provision which Divine wisdom made for man was every need supplied.

Was man laden with *guilt?* It shall be removed by a sacrifice.

Was man under a *curse?* He shall be delivered from the curse, by one "becoming a curse for him."

Did man need a *righteousness*wherein to stand before God? A righteousness shall be wrought out for him, and imputed to him.

Is he, by reason of his natural *depravity*, incapable of enjoying God's presence, or of doing God's will? A new nature shall be given him, and, "through the strength of Christ, he shall be enabled to do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

Is man *unable*to do anything whereby he shall merit any of these things? They shall all be given to him freely, "without money and without price [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)."

Is he, even when restored, unable to *keep*himself? The Lord Jesus Christ shall "carry on and perfect in him the work he has begun, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

May that enemy, who assaulted and ruined him in Paradise—yet prevail over him again? "His life shall be hidden with Christ in God," beyond the reach of harm; so that when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, he "shall be secured to appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)."

Nor is this salvation suited to man's necessities in its provisions only, or in the freeness with which it is bestowed. The means by which it shall be communicated are also precisely such as his necessities require: he has nothing to do, but simply to look to Christ by faith; and all these blessings shall flow down into his soul precisely as health did into the bodies of the dying Israelites, the very instant they looked to the brazen serpent. The only difference between them shall be, that, whereas the Israelites looked but once, and had their health completely restored, the sinner must look to Jesus continually, and derive from him such gradual and progressive communications as his necessities require. All "this, I say, is by faith, that it may be by grace, and that the promise may be sure to all the seed, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16)."

***~~3. In appointing a salvation so conducive to His own glory—~~***

By this wonderful device, the substitution of God's only dear Son in the place of sinners, God not only prevented any dishonor accruing to himself by the exercise of mercy, but actually secured more glory to himself than he ever could have derived from any other source.

Justice would doubtless have been honored, if the whole human race had been consigned over to the curse which they had merited. But how much more was justice honored, when God's co-equal, co-eternal Son was subjected to its stroke; not because he had committed sin himself, but because he had taken upon him the sins of others! How highly was it honored, when not the smallest measure of its claims could be set aside; but Jesus, as our representative, was constrained to pay the utmost farthing of our debt, before one single soul could be liberated from its obligations to punishment!

And how was the law honored! It would have been honored, indeed, by the perfect obedience of man: but now was it honored by having God himself, in an incarnate state, subjected to its dominion; and by the determination, that not any child of man would ever be saved, except by pleading Christ's obedience to the law, as his only ground of hope! Well does the prophet say, "He has magnified the law, and made it honorable! [Isaiah 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.21)."

As for holiness, O how bright it shines, in this mysterious dispensation. Not a sinner shall be saved, who does not acknowledge his desert of everlasting perdition; and who has not a perfect righteousness wherein to appear before God; or who does not plead for mercy at the Savior's hands as much for the smallest defect in his best deeds, as for the most flagrant transgression that he ever committed!

I may add, too, that truth is no less honored, seeing that, rather than there would be the smallest departure from it, God's only dear Son would have its utmost denunciations fulfilled in him, and not a sinner be saved, who did not plead this very execution of God's judgments as the reason for their being averted from himself.

May we not, in the review of these things, adopt the language of the Apostle, and say, "O the depths!" Truly this "wisdom is manifold;" and in this salvation are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3)."

But my text, while it speaks of the wisdom contained in the Gospel, leads me particularly to declare,

***~~II. The instruction which the angels themselves derive from the revelation of it to the Church—~~***

The angels, from the first moment of their creation, saw much of God: but of him, as exhibited in the Gospel, they could have no conception, until that fuller revelation of him was given to the Church.

Then the angels began to see:

***~~1. The extent of God's perfections—~~***

They had seen his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the works of creation. They themselves, indeed, were bright monuments of these perfections.

The justice of God, too, they had beheld in very solemn colors, in the judgments inflicted on myriads of their fellows, who were once as holy and as happy as themselves.

They had seen in what profusion love had poured its blessings on the *innocent*. But could it extend to the *guilty*? Could it extend so far as to send his only-begotten Son to stand in the place of the guilty, and to bear their punishment? Impossible!*Show love to the guilty, and wrath to the innocent!* Yes, and show wrath to the innocent, as the only way of showing love to the guilty? It could not be! It must be abhorrent from the very soul of a holy God so to act. Yet, behold, Divine Wisdom did so ordain to act.

But how could *Justice*concur in this? Can Justice be brought to execute vengeance on one that is innocent, for the sake of sparing others that were guilty? Methinks that the sword, if seized for such an end, would fall from the very hands of Justice, and refuse to do its office! Yet Justice did proceed thus far, and not suffer. Mercy to prevail in behalf of any child of man, until its claims were thus satisfied by the sinner's Surety. We may conceive, that from what they had seen of the goodness of God, they would believe him ready to exercise mercy, on the supposition it were compatible with his honor in all other respects: but that he would devise such means for the exercise of mercy, and be capable of carrying those means into effect, they could never have imagined.

Yet, in the provisions of the Gospel they beheld all this, not only contemplated, but carried into effect. We wonder not, that, on attaining such views of the Deity, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" for, truly, "great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh! [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)."

***~~2. The harmony of his perfections—~~***

Of this there was not a trace in all the universe besides. But here "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)." Here that was visible, which the prism of the philosopher discovers in the rays of light. There are, in light, rays of a more somber hue, as well as others that are more brilliant; and it is the perfect union and simultaneous motion of them all that constitutes perfect light.

Such light is God himself. His perfections are various, and of a diversified, though not of an opposite, aspect. But they all combine in Christ, "in whose face is seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6)." Yes, he is "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)." In this mysterious dispensation, they saw not only every perfection of the Deity exercised so as not to interfere with each other, but every perfection of the Deity, that was most adverse to the sinner's welfare, made his most strenuous friend and advocate. Justice, which had demanded the execution of the penalty upon him, now demands his liberation from it; because everything that justice could require has been done by the sinner's Substitute and Surety.

If, in human judicatures, justice require a debtor to be sent to prison, it pleads no less powerfully for his liberation from prison, the very instant that his debt is paid. And exactly thus, is divine Justice itself now become the sinner's friend. In like manner, truth and holiness are also friendly to the happiness of man; because they demand for him the execution of every engagement that has been made in their behalf by God, with their great Head and Representative, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How infinitely was this beyond the conception of the angelic powers, before it was revealed to the Church! But by the Gospel, into which they are continually searching, they have obtained the knowledge of it.

Peter, speaking of this very salvation, says, "Which things the angels desire to look into, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12)." In the most holy place of the temple there were the ark, which contained the law; and the mercy-seat upon the ark; and two cherubim upon the mercy-seat, bending down, in order to search into the mysteries contained in it. The great mystery there shadowed forth was, the Lord Jesus Christ (the true Ark), containing in himself, and having fulfilled for us, the law: and God the Father, extending mercy to all (for the mercy-seat was of exactly the same dimensions as the ark) who would come to him by Christ. This mystery they saw unraveled when Christ came into the world, and executed his high office for the salvation of man. But in it there are yet depths utterly unexplored, even by the highest archangel; and the wonders of wisdom and love contained in it will be more and more unfolded, as long as there shall continue any portion of that mystery unfulfilled.

***~~3. The felicity arising from this exercise of his perfections—~~***

When man fell, the angels could expect no other than that the fate of the fallen angels would be his. But, when a salvation was revealed, whereby millions, as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, shall be restored to God—with what surprise and joy must those benevolent beings be penetrated! We are told, that even "one sinner turning" with penitential sorrow to his God causes joy throughout all the angelic hosts. What then must they have felt, when this mystery, whereby millions of millions shall be saved, was revealed! How must they be transported with joy at the continual increase of the Lord's people on earth, and the constant influx of perfected saints to the regions of bliss, and the consequent augmentation of the choir, by whom praise is continually ascribed to God and to the Lamb!

Their surprise is greatly heightened by this: that whereas, if men had continued upright, they would have possessed a glory commensurate only with a *creature's*righteousness, they are now clothed with the righteousness of their *Creator*himself, and put into possession of a glory and felicity proportioned to it. With what amazement must the whole of this dispensation fill them!

Besides, their own happiness is also greatly augmented by this: for though they have never sinned, and therefore derive not salvation from Christ, as we do—their views of the Deity are marvelously enlarged: and, as their happiness, from necessity, arises from beholding the glory of God, it must have been increased in proportion as their knowledge of this mystery has been enlarged.

All this they had yet to learn, before that salvation was proclaimed to man: but, by the revelation of it to the Church, they have been instructed in it; and their views of it, and blessedness arising from it, will yet be more and more enlarged, until the "mystery itself is finished," and every redeemed soul be perfected in bliss.

***~~From this wonderful subject we may see,~~***

***~~1. What guilt they contract, who pervert the Gospel of Christ—~~***

A blending of anything with the merits of Christ is, as Paul informs us, a substitution of "another Gospel" in the place of that which is revealed. Or rather, it is "a perversion of the Gospel of Christ, [Galatians 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.6-7)." And how many are there who are guilty of this? In fact, it is with the utmost difficulty that anyone is kept from this sin. All are ready to lean to their own righteousness, and, in one way or other, to look to themselves for something to recommend them to God, and to entitle them to his favor. But, whoever does this, makes the cross of Christ of no effect, [Romans 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.14). [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4).

Shall this declaration be thought harsh? Look then, and see what this conduct does. *See what contempt it pours on the wisdom of God, and on all that he has done for the salvation of man*. See how it dishonors and denies every perfection of the Deity. In blending anything of our own with the work of Christ, we deny:  
that justice was so inexorable,  
or holiness so immaculate,  
or truth so inviolate,  
or mercy itself so great  
—as the Gospel represents.

We also assert, in opposition to it all, that man, with all his infirmities, can by his own good works lay a foundation for boasting before God.

Brethren, this is, of all sins, most trivial in the sight of man, but most hateful in the sight of God. Nor is this without reason: for other sins withstand only the authority of God; whereas *this sin makes void all the counsels of his love, and all the purposes of his grace*. I say then to you, as the Apostle does, that whoever he is who entertains in himself, or encourages in others, such a conceit as this, must be accursed; yes, "though he were an angel from Heaven, I repeat it, he must, and shall be, accursed! [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9)."

***~~2. What folly they commit who neglect this great salvation—~~***

The angels are not savingly interested in this mystery as we are: yet, behold, how earnest they are in searching into it! Yet, to the generality of those who *call*themselves Christians, it is little better than "a cunningly-devised fable." Methinks, if men were fond of science of any kind, they might be expected to find pleasure in this: for there is no mystery so deep, there is none so certain, there is none which will so richly repay the labor of investigation, as this.

This observation I would make, if this mystery were merely a matter for speculation and research. But it is not to be regarded by anyone in that light: it is not a subject to occupy the meditations of a theorist, but to engage the devoutest affections of the soul. It is our very life! It is that in which the eternal welfare of our souls is bound up! [Deuteronomy 32:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.47). It prescribes the only possible way of acceptance with God: and he who will not walk in that way, not only renounces all hope of Heaven, but plunges himself infallibly into all the miseries of Hell!

Dear brethren, awake to your duty: awake to your most urgent and important interests: and let the salvation of Christ become the one object of your pursuit. You perceive that Paul was sent to preach, that "all men" might know the fellowship of this mystery. Seek, then, to answer the ends for which it is transmitted to you in the written word, and the ends for which it is preached to you by every minister of Christ.

***~~3. What happiness is reserved for the saints in Heaven—~~***

The happiness of the holy angels consists mainly in this, in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing! [Revelation 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-12)." And how much more must this be the case, with those who can say, "He has loved *us*, and washed *us*from our sins in his own blood! [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5)." There can be no doubt but that our happiness will consist in contemplating all the wonders of Christ's love, and in beholding the glory of God's perfections as displayed in the great mystery of redemption.

And if here, in this world, a little glimpse of Christ is sufficient to fill us "with joy unspeakable and full of glory," then what must a full discovery of his glory effect upon our souls? Here even Paul himself saw Christ only "as in a looking-glass darkly," but in Heaven, the least and basest of the saints shall behold him "face to face." Shall we not, then, long for the time when we shall be translated to that blissful place, where we shall have the full vision of his glory, and see him as we are seen, and "know him as we are known! [1 Corinthians 13:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.12)."

Let us, then, contemplate this blissful scene, until we have already obtained *Pisgah views*of its excellency, and foretastes of its blessedness. And, whatever hastens us to that land, or prepares us for it, let us welcome it from our inmost souls, "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ;" that "when his glory shall be revealed, we may rejoice before him with exceeding joy! [1 Peter 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13)."

***~~#2104~~***

***~~PRAYER THE MEANS OF THE RICHEST BLESSINGS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 3:14-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.14-19)~~***

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

*MANY who espouse the cause of religion when it is in flourishing circumstances, are apt to decline from it when their profession exposes them to any great trouble.*The Ephesians had heard of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and were in danger of turning from the faith through the fear of persecution. Paul cautions them against being intimidated by the tribulations which he endured for their sakes; and assures them, that they ought rather to consider it as an honor, that their cause had been so vigorously maintained by him; and that he was suffering persecution for asserting their rights in opposition to the bigoted and blood-thirsty Jews.

Precluded as he was from prosecuting his ministerial labors for their good, he spent the more time in prayer for them. This was a liberty of which none could deprive him: yes, rather, the more his body was confined, the more his spirit was enlarged on their behalf. He considered them as members of the same family with all the Church militant and Church triumphant, of which Christ is the Head; and, with the profoundest reverence and humility, he implored for them all those blessings which he desired for himself, and which were suited to their state:

***~~I. The strengthening communications of the Spirit—~~***

The first blessing which a child of God would desire, is strength; because he longs as much to execute his Father's will, as he does to enjoy his favor. The occasions on which he needs an increase of strength, are many and urgent. He has:  
many *trials*to endure;  
many *temptations*to withstand;  
many *duties*to perform;

and in himself he is insufficient for any one of these things. But "God will give his Holy Spirit unto those who ask him." He will "strengthen us in our inner man," so that:  
our *wills*shall be active,  
our *affections*shall be lively,  
our *resolutions*shall be firm,  
our *exertions*shall be effectual.

It is no small measure of "might with which he will strengthen us." The greater our necessities, the more abundant will be his liberality towards us. He will bestow "according to the riches of his own glory," so that, if the utmost efforts of Omnipotence were necessary for us, they would be put forth in our behalf; and God's own ability would be the measure of his communications to us.

***~~II. An abiding sense of Christ's presence—~~***

The believer longs to enjoy the presence of God in his soul, because he finds by experience that the "joy of the Lord is his strength." Nor shall he be disappointed of his hope, if he only spreads his desires in prayer before God. There is no habitation, not even Heaven itself, in which Christ more delights to dwell, than in the heart of a believer. He has promised to "come and make his abode with his people," as he did of old in the tabernacle and temple, or as he did in the flesh that he assumed. *In*them he will exert his power; and *to*them he will reveal his glory: he will "manifest himself to them, as he does not unto the world."

But in order to bring Jesus into the soul, we must exercise faith.

It is faith that apprehends, and pleads his promise.

It is faith that brings him down from Heaven.

It is faith which opens the door of the heart for his admission into it.

It is faith which detains him there; and which gives us a realizing sense of his presence.

It is by *prayer*that we must obtain this blessing, and by *faith*that we must enjoy it.

***~~III. An enlarged discovery of his love—~~***

The presence of Christ in the soul is desired, in order to a more lively sense of his love. Now "the love of Christ has a breadth and length, a depth and height," which are utterly unsearchable! Properly speaking, nothing has more than three dimensions; length, breadth, and thickness. The Apostle divides the last into two, in order the more strongly to express his idea:

the love of Christ extends to the remotest corners of the earth,

the love of Christ reaches "from everlasting to everlasting,"

the love of Christ descends to the very confines of wickedness itself, and exalts to thrones of glory, those who are its favored objects.

In its full extent, it "surpasses the knowledge" of men or angels; but in a measure it is "comprehended by all the saints." Men's capacity to comprehend it, is proportioned to their growth and stature in grace; those who are but infants, have only narrow and contracted views of it; while those who are advanced to manhood, stand amazed at its immeasurable dimensions!

But in order that we "may be able to comprehend it," we ourselves would be "rooted and grounded in love" to him. As a sense of his love is necessary to beget a holy affection in us towards him, so a love to him disposes our mind to contemplate, and enlarges our capacity to comprehend, his love to us. Each in its turn is subservient to the promotion of the other: but under circumstances of trial, which endanger the steadfastness of our profession, we are more especially called to have our love to him "rooted and grounded," so as to be immoveable amidst all the storms with which it may be assailed: and then, from every exercise of our own love, we shall acquire a greater enlargement of heart to admire and adore his love to us.

***~~IV. A repletion with all the fullness of God—~~***

The Apostle's prayer rises at every successive step, until he arrives at a height of expression, which, if it had not been dictated by inspiration, one would have been ready to condemn as blasphemy. Amazing thought! May we offer such a petition as this? Yes, there is indeed in the Deity an essential fullness, which is incommunicable to his creatures: but there is also a fullness which he does and will communicate to his redeemed people, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). In him are all the perfections:  
of wisdom and goodness,  
of justice and mercy,  
of patience and love,  
of truth and faithfulness.

And with these he will "fill" his people, according to the measure of their capacity; so that they shall be as "holy as he is holy, and as perfect as their Father who is in Heaven is perfect." If any possess but a small portion of his perfections, it is owing to their being "straitened in themselves; for none are straitened in him."

But how is this to be attained? Will *repentance*effect it? No. Will *mortification*procure it? No! That which alone will avail for this end, is *an enlarged discovery of the love of Christ*; and therefore the Apostle prays for the one in order to the other. Indeed, high thoughts of a creature's kindness to us have a natural tendency to produce in us a resemblance to him; but a sense of Christ's love has an irresistible influence, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14), to transform us into his image, and to "fill us with all his fullness."

***~~Reflections—~~***

***~~1. How much do the saints in general live below their privileges!~~***

Who that is conversant with the religious world, would imagine that such things as are mentioned in the text were ever to be attained? One is complaining of his weakness and insufficiency; another is complaining of his darkness and distance from Christ. One is harassed with doubts and fears; another bewails his emptiness and the prevalence of sin.

Alas! alas! How different would be their experience, if they were more constant and importunate in prayer! What strength and comfort, what light and holiness, might they not enjoy! Beloved brethren, do but contemplate the state to which the Ephesians were taught to aspire, and you will blush at your low attainments, and be confounded before God for your partial acquaintance with his mercies.

***~~2. How rich is the benefit of prayer!~~***

There is nothing for which "effectual and fervent prayer will not avail, [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16)." However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." We may search out all the promises in the Bible, and take them, like notes of hand, for payment. Our God will never refuse what is good for us:  
his *generosity*is unwearied,  
his *faithfulness*is inviolate,  
his *treasury*is inexhaustible!

O that there were in us such a heart, that we could go to him at all times, renewing our petitions, and taking occasion from every fresh grant, to enlarge our desires, and be more importunate in our entreaties!

Beyond the Apostle's request we cannot perhaps extend our conceptions: but short of them we would not stop. Ambition here is virtue.

Let no strength but omnipotence, content us.

Let no presence but the actual dwelling of Christ in our hearts, satisfy us.

Let no view of his love but a comprehension of it in all its dimensions, limit our researches.

Let no communication short of all the fullness of God, allay our appetite for his blessings.

[Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18), [19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ephesians 3.19). See sermons on [1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11), where it forms the fourth sermon of a series.

***~~#2105~~***

***~~GOD'S POWER TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE~~***

**[Ephesians 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20-21)**

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

MAN is a dependent creature, and therefore should be instant in prayer: but he is also a creature infinitely indebted to his God, and therefore he should abound also in thanksgiving. The Apostle's direction to us is, that "in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we should make our requests known unto God, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6)." This rule he himself observed, as well in relation to those for whom he interceded, as for himself. He has been pouring out his heart before God on behalf of the Church at Ephesus; and he concludes the prayer with that animated doxology which we have just read.

It is our intention to consider,

***~~I. His representation of the Deity—~~***

God has given a wonderful display of his omnipotence in the visible creation: and he is ever ready to exert it in the behalf of those who call upon him.

***~~There is no limit to his power to bless his people—~~***

We may ask what we will, and he will do it for us, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7). We may "ask" for the pardon of all our sins, the supply of all our wants, and for support in all our conflicts—and he will grant our requests. We may then bring forth all the *promises*in the Bible, and "ask" for the fulfillment of them all to our souls—and they also shall be granted. We may then collect all the most comprehensive expressions that language can afford us, and offer them in prayer before him; and still *his liberality will keep pace with our petitions*.

After having exhausted all the powers of language, we may proceed to stretch our imaginations beyond the limits of distinct and accurate conception: and, provided the things be proper for him to give, and for us to receive, he can, and will, bestow them. He will do for us not only what we ask, but what we "think." He will do it "all" and "above" all, and "abundantly" above all, yes, "exceeding" abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

What a glorious view does this give us of the power and goodness of our God!

***~~The works which he has already wrought in us, are a specimen and pledge of what he will yet do for us—~~***

Let us survey what he has done, and is doing, in every one of his saints. He has quickened a dead soul. This is as great a work as that which he performed in raising Christ from the dead, and setting him above all the principalities and powers of earth, of Hell, of Heaven; and, in that view, it displays the exceeding greatness of his power, [Ephesians 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18-19).

He has turned the tide of our *affections*back again to the fountain head. They were flowing with an irresistible current towards the creature; and God has arrested them in their course, and caused them to flow with rapidity and strength towards himself. We admire this phenomenon in rivers near the sea: but the spiritual change is an incomparably greater display of omnipotence than that; it is nothing less than a new creation! [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17).

He preserves a spark alive in the midst of the ocean. What is the *principle of grace*within us, but a spark of heavenly fire kindled in us by the Spirit of God? But, instead of finding anything in the heart to keep it alive, it meets with everything calculated to repress its ardor. Yet *though immersed, as it were, in an ocean of corruption, it maintains its vigor, and burns brighter in proportion to the efforts made for its extinction*.

He has taken "a brand out of the burning" and is fitting it for a conspicuous ornament in his temple. We are in ourselves only like branches of a vine, of which "no use can be made, not even a pin to hang any vessel thereon, [Ezekiel 15:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 15.3-4);" moreover, we still bear the marks of the fire upon us: yet is God forming and polishing us that we may be an ornament to Heaven itself: so that, when we appear there, the workman shall be both "admired in us, and glorified in us, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10)."

These things show "the power which now works in us, according to which" God will exert himself in the future. What he has done, and is yet doing, is a pledge of what he will do: it is the commencement of that work which will be perfected in glory.

On this delightful view of the Deity the Apostle grounds,

***~~II. His doxology—~~***

That we may have a just and comprehensive view of this, let us consider,

***~~1. What is that "glory" which is due to God—~~***

We certainly must not limit the word "glory" to the mere idea of praise. We must understand it as corresponding with the fore-mentioned character of God; and as importing admiration, entreaty, confidence, and thanksgiving.

We cannot contemplate the power and goodness of God, without being filled with admiration and love. Instead of giving him glory, we would dishonor him in the highest degree, if we did not adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Who in the heavens can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? O Lord God Almighty, who is a strong Lord like unto you, [Psalm 89:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.6); [Psalm 89:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.8)."

And to what purpose do we admire God's power to bless his people, if we do not present before him our entreaties? It is in vain that we confess him able to answer and exceed our petitions, if we do not carry to him our sins to be forgiven, and our needs to be supplied. If we believe that he will fill our mouths, we cannot but open them wide, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10).

We must also, under the most trying circumstances, maintain an unshaken confidence in him, as able and willing to save. It was by this that Abraham "gave glory to God." "He staggered not at the promises through unbelief, but was strong in faith, [Romans 4:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.19-21)," believing, that if he would reduce his beloved Isaac to ashes, "God was able to raise him up again, [Hebrews 11:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.17-19)," and to accomplish all that he had spoken respecting him.

As for the offering of *thanksgiving*, that is the first and most obvious meaning of the Apostle in the text. We must not think of God merely as "able" to do such great things, but as *willing*also: and for the encouragement which this representation of the Deity affords us, we must bless, and praise, and magnify his name. The words of the Psalmist are exactly suited to the occasion, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things: and blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen! [Psalm 72:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.18-19).

***~~2. How, and by whom, it would be offered—~~***

It is "by Jesus Christ" alone that any blessings descend from God to us: and it is by him that all our services must ascend to him. However devout and excellent the offering is, it cannot come to God but by Jesus Christ. It neither has, nor can have, any merit in itself: it must derive all its value from the merit of his death, and the virtue of his intercession. This is the uniform testimony of the inspired writers, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15). [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5); and it is of infinite importance that we would be grounded in the knowledge of it.

But who are they that are to give him glory? The Apostle says, "To him be glory in the Church." He does not exclude the world, as though they had no reason to bless their God; but because he knew that they had no disposition to bless him. They do not pray to him: how then would they receive answers to prayer? and how would they discover his ability to exceed our highest thoughts?

But the Church are "a people near unto God, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14);" they are in the habit of praying to him, and of receiving answers to their prayers: and they know, by sweet experience, his power and willingness to save! [Psalm 126:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 126.3). They therefore are disposed to give him glory: and they would gladly spend eternity itself in advancing his honor, and singing his praise.

And is there one among you who does not add, "Amen!" If there be one such ungrateful wretch, let him know, that God is as "able to destroy as he is to save, [James 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.12)." But let us hope rather that all of you are now like-minded with the Apostle, and that you will go from this place to "praise the Lord, who has dealt wondrously with you, [Joel 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.26)." Take then with you those delightful strains of David: "Among the gods there is none like unto you, O Lord; neither are any works like unto your works: for you are great, and do wondrous things—you are God alone! [Psalm 86:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 86.8-10)."

***~~#2106~~***

***~~A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED~~***

**[Ephesians 4:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1-3)**

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

*THE end of all true religion is practice*: and the perfection of practice is a habit of mind suited to the relations which we bear to God and man, and to the circumstances in which from time to time we are placed. It is not by external acts only that we are to serve God: the passive virtues of meekness, and patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance, are quite as pleasing in his sight, as the most active virtues in which we can be engaged. Hence Paul, in entering on the practical part of this epistle, entreats the Ephesian converts to pay particular attention to these graces, and to consider them as *the clearest evidences of their sincerity, and the brightest ornaments of their profession*.

He was at this time a prisoner at Rome: but no personal considerations occupied his mind. He had no request to make for himself; no wish for any exertions on their part to liberate him from his confinement: he was willing to suffer for his Lord's sake; and sought only to make his sufferings a plea whereby to enforce the more powerfully on their minds the great subject which he had at heart, their progressive advancement in genuine piety.

With a similar view we would now draw your attention to,

***~~I. His general exhortation—~~***

**First, let us get a distinct idea of what the Christian's "calling" is—**It is a calling:  
from death to life,  
from sin to holiness,  
from Hell to Heaven.

Every Christian was once dead in trespasses and sins, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1). [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3); But he has heard the voice of the Son of God speaking to him in the Gospel, [John 5:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.24-25). [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5); and, through the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, he "has passed from death unto life, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14);" so that, though once he was dead, he is now alive again; and though once lost, he is found, [Luke 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 15.24).

From the time-that he is so *quickened*, he rises to newness of life, [Romans 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.4-5). Just as his Lord and Savior "died unto sin once, but, in that he lives, lives unto God," so the Christian is conformed to Christ in this respect, "reckoning himself dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, [Romans 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.9-11)." By his very calling he is "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18);" and engages to be "holy, even as God himself is holy, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16)."

Once the believer was a "child of wrath, even as others, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2);" and, had he died in his unconverted state, must have perished forever. But through the blood of Jesus he is delivered from the guilt of all his sins, and obtains a title to the heavenly inheritance. Hence he is said to be "called to the kingdom and glory of his God," and "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.12) and [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14)."

Thus is the Christian's "a high calling," "a holy calling," and "a heavenly calling."

***~~Such, believer, being your calling, you may easily see what kind of a walk that is which is suited to it—~~***

Do you profess to have experienced such a call? Walk worthy of:  
the *profession*which you make,  
the *expectations*you have formed, and  
the *obligations*which are laid upon you.

It is not any common measure of holiness that befits a person professing such things as these. How unsuitable would it be for one who pretends to have been "born from above," to be setting his affections on anything here below; or for one who is "a partaker of the Divine nature," to "walk in any other way than as Christ himself walked!"

And, seeing that you "look for a better country, that is, a heavenly one," would you not aspire after it, and "press forward towards it, forgetting all the ground you have passed over, and mindful only of the way that lies before you? Should not "your conduct be in Heaven," where your *treasure*now is, and where you hope in a little time to be, in the immediate presence of your God?

If you have indeed been so highly distinguished, would you not "live no longer to yourselves, but altogether unto Him who died for you and rose again?" Would anything short of absolute perfection satisfy you? Would you not labor to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

This then is what I would earnestly entreat you all to seek after, even to walk worthy of your high calling, or rather, "worthy of the Lord himself," who has "called you out of darkness into his marvelous light!"

But that we may come more closely to the point, we will call your attention to,

***~~II. The particular duties he inculcates—~~***

In order to adorn our Christian profession, we must especially keep in view,

***~~1. The cultivation of holy virtues in ourselves—~~***

Without this, nothing can ever prosper in our souls. "Lowliness and meekness" are unostentatious virtues; but they are of pre-eminent value in the sight of God, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4). They constitute the brightest ornament of "the hidden man of the heart," which alone engages the regards of the heart-searching God.

In the very first place, therefore, get your souls deeply impressed with a sense of your own unworthiness, and of your total destitution of wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, or anything that is good. No man is so truly rich as he who is "poor in spirit." No man is so estimable in God's eyes, as he who is most abased in his own. With humility must be associated meekness.

These two qualities particularly characterized our blessed Lord, 2 Corinthians 10:1; of whom we are on that account encouraged to learn, [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29); and whom in these respects we are bound to imitate, "having the same mind as was in him, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)." Let these dispositions then be cultivated with peculiar care, according as James has exhorted us, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conduct his works with meekness of wisdom, [James 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.13)."

And while we maintain in exercise these graces, let us also be long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. However meek and lowly we are in ourselves, it cannot fail but that we must occasionally meet with things painful from others. The very graces which we manifest will often call forth the enmity of others, and cause them to act an injurious part towards us. But, if this would be the case, we must be long-suffering towards them, not retaliating the injury, nor harboring resentment in our hearts, but patiently submitting to it, as to a dispensation ordered by Infinite Wisdom for our good.

But where this is not the case, there will still be occasions of vexation, arising from the conduct of those around us: the ignorance of some, the misapprehensions and mistakes of others, the perverseness of others, the lack of judgment in others, sometimes also pure accident—will place us in circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment. But from whatever cause these trials arise, we should show forbearance towards the offender, from a principle of love; not being offended with him, not imputing evil intention to him, not allowing our regards towards him to be diminished; but *bearing with his infirmities, as we desire that God would bear with ours*.

Now it is in preserving such a state of mind in ourselves, and manifesting it towards others, that we shall particularly adorn the Gospel of Christ: and therefore, in our endeavors to walk worthy of our high calling, we must particularly be on our guard, that no temper contrary to these breaks forth into acts, or be harbored in the mind.

***~~2. The promotion of peace and unity in all around us—~~***

As belonging to the Church of Christ, we have duties towards all the members of his mystical body. There ought to be perfect union among them all: they should, if possible, be "all joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, [1 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.10)." But, constituted as men are, it is scarcely to be expected that all who believe in Christ would have precisely the same views of every doctrine, or even of every duty. But whatever points of difference there may be between them, there should be a perfect unity of spirit: and to preserve this should be the constant endeavor of them all. All would consider themselves as members of one family, living under the same roof: if the house be on fire, they all exert themselves in concert with each other, to extinguish the flames. They feel one common interest in the welfare of the whole, and gladly unite for the promotion of it.

Thus it should be in the Church of Christ. Everything tending to disunion should be avoided by all; or if the bonds of peace be in any degree loosened, every possible effort would be made to counteract the evil, and re-establish the harmony that has been interrupted. A constant readiness to this good office is a great attainment; and, when joined with the graces before spoken of, it constitutes a most useful and ornamental part of the Christian character.

Attend then to this with great care. Show that you "do not mind your own things only, but also, if not chiefly, the things of others." Show, that the welfare of the Church, and the honor of your Lord, lie near your heart: and let no effort be lacking on your part to promote so glorious an object. Be willing to sacrifice any interest or wish of your own for the attainment of it; even as Paul "became all things to all men," and "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved."

***~~And now, let me, like the Apostle, make this the subject of my most earnest and affectionate entreaty.~~***

Consider, "I beseech you,"

***~~1. Its aspect on your own happiness—~~***

It is the consistent Christian alone that can be happy. If there be pride, anger, or any hateful passion indulged, "it will eat as does a canker," and destroy all the comfort of the soul; it will cause God to hide his face from us, and weaken the evidences of our acceptance with him. If then you consult nothing but your own happiness, I would say to you, "Walk worthy the calling with which you are called; and especially in the constant exercise of humility and love."

***~~2. Its aspect on the Church of which you are members—~~***

It is impossible to benefit the Church, if these graces be not cultivated with the greatest care. In every Church there will be some, who, by unsubdued tempers, or erroneous notions, or a party-spirit, will be introducing divisions, and disturbing the harmony which ought to prevail. Against all such persons the humble Christian would be on his guard, and oppose a barrier. *It is hard to conceive how much good one person of a humble and loving spirit may do.*If "one sinner destroys much good," so truly one active and pious Christian effects much. Let each of you then consider the good of the whole: consider yourselves as soldiers fighting under one Head. Your regimental dress may differ from that of others; but the end, and aim, and labor of all, must be the same; and all must have but one object—the glory of their common Lord.

***~~3. Its aspect on the world around you—~~***

What will the world say, if they see Christians dishonoring their profession by unholy tempers and mutual animosities? What opinion will they have of principles which produce in their votaries no better effects? Will they not harden themselves and one another in their sins, and justify themselves in their rejection of the Gospel, which your inconsistencies have taught them to blaspheme?

But if your deportment is such that they can find no evil thing to say of you, they will be constrained to acknowledge that God is with you of a truth, and to glorify him in your behalf. Especially, if they see you to be one with each other, as God and Christ are one, they will know that your principles are just, and will wish to have their portion with you in the eternal world, [John 17:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21-23).

***~~4. Its aspect on your eternal welfare—~~***

In all the most essential things, all the members of Christ's mystical body are of necessity united. There is:

"one body," of which you are members;  
"one Spirit," by which you are animated;  
"one hope of your calling," which is heavenly glory;  
"one Lord," Jesus Christ, who died for you;  
"one faith," which you have all received;  
"one baptism," in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, of which you have all partaken;  
one God and Father of all, who is:  
"above all," by his essential majesty;  
"through all," by his universal providence;  
"and in you all" by his indwelling Spirit, verse 4-6.

And shall you, who are one in so many things, be separated from each other so as not to be one in Christian love? It cannot be!

Your love to each other is the most indispensable evidence of your union with him: and, if you are not united together in the bonds of love in the Church below, you never can be united in glory in the Church above. If ever then you would join with that choir of saints and angels which are around the throne of God, be consistent, be uniform, be humble; and let love have a complete and undisputed sway over your hearts and lives!

***~~#2107~~***

***~~CHRISTIAN UNITY~~***

**[Ephesians 4:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.4-6)**

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

IT is often urged, as an objection against Christianity, that those who profess it are not agreed respecting the doctrines which it inculcates: and we are mockingly urged to come to an agreement among ourselves, before we attempt to proselyte others to our religion.

That persons calling themselves Christians differ widely from each other, is readily acknowledged. But it must be remembered, that Christianity is not a mere theory, which leaves men at liberty in relation to their practice. It is a religion which requires its votaries to have their whole souls brought into subjection to it, and cast, as it were, into its very mold: and those who desire not a conformity to its doctrines, will deny the doctrines themselves; having no alternative, but to set aside the requirements, or to condemn themselves for their disobedience to them.

But between genuine Christians there is, on all the fundamental points of religion, a surprising agreement, even such a unity as does not exist on any other subject under Heaven.

Every true believer, whether learned or unlearned, feels himself to be a sinner before God; dependent altogether on the blood of Christ to purge him from his guilt, and on the Spirit of Christ to renew and sanctify his soul.

The necessity of universal holiness, too, is equally acknowledged by all; so that, whatever difference there may appear to be between the different members of Christ's mystical body, it is only such as exists in the countenances of different men; the main features being the same in all; and the diversity being discoverable only on a closer inspection.

That this truth may the more fully appear, I will take occasion, from the words before us, to show,

***~~I. The foundation which the Gospel lays for unity—~~***

***~~The unity of the Gospel is carried to a great extent—~~***

The whole Christian Church is brought by the Gospel into "one body," of which Christ is the head, and all true believers are the members, [1 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.12).

This body is inhabited by "one Spirit," even the Holy Spirit, who pervades the whole, and animates it in every part. It is his presence alone that gives life; and were he withdrawn for a moment, the soul would be as incapable of all spiritual motion, as a dead corpse is of all the functions of the animal life.

To "one hope are we all called, even to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for us."

The "one Lord" of all is the Lord Jesus Christ, who "purchased the Church with his own blood," and presides over it as "Lord of all," and will judge every member of it in the last day.

To all of them there is but "one faith;" to which all, without exception, must adhere, and by which alone they can be saved.

Into this new-covenant state they are all admitted by "one baptism," "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

And of all there is "one God and Father,"  
"who is above all," by his almighty power,  
"and through all," by his superintending providence,  
"and in all," by the constant operation of his Spirit and grace.

***~~All this may well serve as a foundation for unity, among those who profess the Gospel—~~***

The force of this observation is universally acknowledged, in reference to the physical frame. The whole human frame proceeds from one source, is subject to the same wants, nourished by the same supplies, and affected with the same lot. In reference to that, it is judged reasonable that every part would have the same care one for the other; and that every member would sympathize with the rest, whether in a way of joy or sorrow, according as circumstances may require, [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25-26). All idea of a separate interest is quite excluded; and the happiness of every individual part is bound up in the welfare of the whole.

Much more, therefore, may all disunion be proscribed in so sacred a body as the Church, where not merely the prosperity of the different members is at stake, but the honor of Almighty God also, and the interests of the whole world.

Accordingly, we find universal harmony provided for, in,

***~~II. The unity it enjoins—~~***

It requires a unity:

***~~1. Of sentiment—~~***

This is not to be expected in everything: for, where the mind is so constituted as ours is, and possesses such different measures of information, and beholds subjects from such different points of view, it is not possible that there would be a perfect agreement of sentiment upon everything. But it may well be expected to prevail, so far at least as to prevent dissension and division in the Church of God. This the Apostle inculcated with all possible earnestness: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment, 1 Corinthians 1:10." A departure from this rule is declared to be a proof of grievous carnality, [1 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3); and, if fostered in the soul, and promoted in the Church, it is judged a sufficient ground for the most marked disapprobation from every child of God: "Mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them: for those who are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" and corrupt appetites, [Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.17-18).

***~~2. Of affection—~~***

Love is the grace which most adorns the true Christian: it is properly his distinctive mark, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10). It is not to be interrupted by party distinctions; which, instead of justifying an alienation from each other, would themselves, as far as possible, be buried in oblivion. In the body, no one member can say to another, "I have no need of you." The least and lowest has its appropriate office, as well as those whose powers are of a superior order: nor does its difference of form or office cause it to be overlooked, or its welfare to be despised.

But herein the Christian world is doubtless very defective. Minor differences and distinctions are magnified among them into occasions of mutual aversion; insomuch, that a circumstantial difference, in relation to the mere externals of religion, often sets persons as far asunder as they are even from professed heathen.

*Let not Christianity be blamed for this. The evil arises solely from that corruption of the human heart which Christianity is intended to subdue and mortify.* And I cannot but regard the change which has taken place in this respect, through the influence of the Bible Society, as a blessing of peculiar magnitude to the whole Church of God. The duty of all, to whatever denomination of Christians they may happen to belong, is, to "love as brethren;" yes, to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one to another." The true pattern is that which was set on the day of Pentecost, [Acts 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.32). To all, therefore, I would say, with the Apostle, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." [Philippians 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1-4)

***~~3. Of conduct—~~***

As immortal beings, we all have one great pursuit, which we ought to follow with our whole hearts, and in comparison with which all other things would be as dung and dross. We would all resemble the twelve tribes of Israel, in their journey through the wilderness. All kept their appointed places; those who led, not despising those who followed; nor those who moved in the rear envying those who led the van. All surrounded the tabernacle, as the first object of their unvaried solicitude; and all looked forward to Canaan, as the crown and recompense of all their labors.

So should it be with us. To advance the cause of God in this world, and to reach the promised land, should be the objects nearest to all our hearts. In this, then, let us all unite: "forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Let us, I say, as many as are mature, "be thus minded, [Philippians 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.14-15)."

***~~#2108~~***

***~~THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Ephesians 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7-8)~~***

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

FROM the divisions which exist in the Christian Church, it has been said by the enemies of Christianity, "First agree among yourselves, before you attempt to proselyte others to your religion." That divisions do exist, is undeniable: and that they are a disgrace to our holy religion, must be confessed. But still, while we mourn over these differences, we believe that there is no society under Heaven that is more agreed in all essential points than the Church of Christ. In the great essential points of *repentance*towards God and *faith*in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the necessity of *obedience*to all the commands of God, there is no difference among any true Christians, whether they be found among the most enlightened philosophers or the most uncivilized barbarians.

In our bodily frame there are many members, which, though widely different from each other in their use and structure, are in perfect harmony with each other, as being all actuated by the same spirit, harmoniously employed for the good of the whole.

And this is precisely what exists in the Church of Christ: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines, [1 Corinthians 12:4-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.4-11)."

This is exactly what the Apostle affirms in the passage before us: whatever differences there be among us, we would "forbear one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:" for, amidst all those differences, "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all, verse 2-6."

Whatever differences are made, either in respect of gifts or graces, they are all made by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, agreeably to what had been foretold concerning him; as the Apostle says in our text: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be led to consider,

***~~I. The obligations we owe to Christ—~~***

On the primitive Church there were many special and miraculous gifts bestowed, in reference to which, the Apostle says of Christ, "He gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, verse 11." But, while a distinction was made among the members of the Church in reference to gifts, there were graces bestowed indiscriminately on all, though in different degrees, according to the will and pleasure of the Giver of them all, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is at this time:

***~~There is among men a great diversity both of gifts and graces—~~***

Some are endowed with richer talents than others originally, at their first coming into the world. In early infancy, a distinction is visible, both in respect to corporeal and mental endowments; weakness and imbecility being the lot of some, while strength and energy are the happy portion of others. Wealth and poverty also place men far asunder, in reference to their station in society; insomuch that, to one who considers only the outward appearance, the most elevated and the most depressed of men seem almost to belong to different orders of creation, rather than to different ranks of the same order.

Something of the same may be noticed in reference to the *graces*of Christian men. I say, something of the same: for, where any portion of real grace is, there is such an elevation of character, that there is a far less distance between the extremes of those who are born of God, than there is of those who are yet in their natural and unregenerate state. But John speaks of "little children, young men, and fathers," in the Church; and consequently there must of necessity be so much of disparity in real saints as will justify the use of these appropriate and characteristic terms.

***~~But, whatever be the measure of any man's gifts, he is altogether indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the true source and giver of them—~~***

We see the truth of this observation in reference to intellectual powers; which, even before any means have been used for the improvement of them, are found much stronger in some than in others. And, though I readily acknowledge that talent depends, in some measure, on the cultivation of the human mind—yet I must say, it is God alone who inclines or enables us to cultivate it with effect.

In like manner it must be confessed, that much also may depend on our use of the means of grace; but still I must say that it is "God alone who gives us either to will or to do;" and, consequently, whatever flows from our willing and doing must be his gift also.

*Remember then, I beg you, to whom you are indebted for every grace you possess*.

Have you any measure of repentance? It is conferred on you by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you any measure of faith? "It has been given you by him to believe."

Have you any measure of holiness? This also has come from Him, "who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

Yet we must not suppose that no guilt attaches to us for the lack of these graces: we are bound to repent, and believe the Gospel, and to obey the commands of God; and shall be justly doomed to punishment, if we abide in impenitence or unbelief.

Yet, for all these graces, so far as we possess them, we must confess our obligation to the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in the distribution of them, acts according to his own sovereign will. So that *we have no ground for glorying, if we possess a larger measure. Nor have we any ground for repining, if we possess a less measure*. We may "covet earnestly, indeed, the best gifts;" but, whatever be the measure of them which has been conferred upon us, we must be thankful for them, and improve them diligently, for the benefit of man, and the honor of our God.

While we acknowledge our obligations to Christ, it will be proper to inquire,

***~~II. Whence it is that he is empowered to confer them—~~***

Respecting this we are informed by David, who prophesied concerning our blessed Lord, and foretold that he would be invested with the power which is here ascribed to him.

***~~Let us first understand the prophecy itself—~~***

The psalm from whence it is taken, was written by David, on occasion of his carrying up the ark to Mount Zion. David, having subdued all his enemies, desired to honor God by bringing up the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion, and placing it in the tabernacle there, as its permanent abode. In celebrating this event, he goes back to the days of Moses, when all the hosts of Egypt were destroyed in the Red Sea; and the Hebrews, enriched with the spoils of Egypt, formed with them a tabernacle for the service of their God. In both events, the triumphs of Israel's God were seen, and the work of their Messiah was prefigured: "You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive—you have received gifts for men; yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18)."

***~~Now let us see the application of it to the Lord Jesus—~~***

Our blessed Savior had now vanquished all his enemies upon the cross: "by death he had overcome death, and him who had the power of it, that is, the devil;" and "having spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly upon the cross, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." In his ascension, like a mighty conqueror, he "led them captive," as it were, at his chariot-wheels. And as conquerors, in their triumphs, were accustomed to scatter gifts and largesses among the people, so he received from his heavenly Father the Holy Spirit, and poured him forth upon the Church, in all his gifts and graces, in order that "the most rebellious" of men might be converted to the Lord, and "the Lord God might dwell among them."

The right to confer these gifts was founded on his previous conflicts and victories: and, when they were completed, the right was exercised, to the unspeakable benefit of the Church at that day; and not at that day only, but in all subsequent ages, even to the present hour.

***~~Now, then, see,~~***

***~~1. What reason we have to bless God for Christ's ascension—~~***

The Apostle tells us, in the words following my text, that "Jesus ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." This was the very end of his ascension. He had come down from Heaven, that he might procure for us these blessings: and now *he ascended up to Heaven, that he might confer on us the fruits of his victories*. The sun arises on the earth, that he may diffuse his benefits through the whole material creation: and in like manner the Sun of Righteousness is risen, to scatter forth his blessings upon fallen man.

Does any one feel his need of grace, or mercy, or peace? Let him remember, that the Lord Jesus Christ is ascended to Heaven on purpose to bestow them. Had he not ascended, the Holy Spirit would never have been sent down to us: but now that Jesus "has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit," no one needs to remain destitute of any spiritual blessing whatever.

If it is said, we have been rebellious; I answer, our past rebellions will be no bar to the communication of his blessings to us, if only we be willing to lay down the weapons of our warfare, and to implore mercy at his hands. It is "for the rebellious" that he himself has received the gift; and on the rebellious he is willing to confer it. Let all then, without exception, rejoice in the evidence they have, that Christ has vanquished all their enemies; and in the certainty, that all who look to him shall be enriched "out of his fullness, receiving grace" upon grace, and grace corresponding with the grace which there was in him.

***~~2. What rich measures of grace we are authorized to aspire after—~~***

Though we all ought to be thankful for the smallest measure of grace, we should never be satisfied until we have attained the largest. We are told by the Apostle, that we would "grow up into Christ as our living Head," even "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ himself, verse 13, 15." What a glorious object for our ambition is here!

O brethren, be not straitened in your own affections; for you are not straitened in your God! The lord Jesus, who first descended from Heaven, and became incarnate for you, is now ascended to Heaven in the very nature that he assumed for you: and well does he know all your wants and necessities, which he is as ready, as he is able, to supply. Open wide, therefore, your mouth, in supplication to him; and be assured, that he will give you a more abundant supply of his grace; nor will ever withhold his hand, until you are filled with all the fullness of God.

***~~#2109~~***

***~~THE USE OF A STATED MINISTRY~~***

***~~[Ephesians 4:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-16)~~***

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

IT is a truth never to be forgotten, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fountain of life, and that "all our fresh springs are in him." Unless this is borne in mind, we shall never be able to do the will of God aright; nor will Christ ever be glorified by us as he ought to be. Hence the Apostle, after exhorting the Ephesian converts to walk worthy of the calling with which they had been called, reminds them, that, so far as they had been enabled to do this, they had done it through grace received from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the predictions concerning him, had ascended up to Heaven, and bestowed it upon them.

One particular prediction to this effect he specifies; and then, commenting upon it, declares, that Jesus, having triumphed over all his enemies, had, after the manner of conquerors, who scattered gifts and largesses among their followers, conferred these and other blessings upon them. Of the other blessings he had bestowed upon his Church, the Apostle mentions some which were *extraordinary*and *temporary*—as apostles, prophets, and evangelists; and some which were *ordinary*and *permanent*—as pastors and teachers, whose office was to be continued for the benefit of the Church in all succeeding generations.

What the particular benefits were which the Church was to derive from these pastors and teachers, he then proceeds to notice, and sets them forth under a variety of most beautiful and instructive images. That we may enter more fully into the subject, we shall endeavor to show,

***~~I. The ends for which the pastoral ministry was ordained—~~***

These were,

***~~1. The giving of duly qualified instructors in the Church—~~***

This seems to be the import of those words which first occur in our text, and which might perhaps have been more properly translated, "For the fitting of holy men for the work of the ministry for the edification of the body of Christ." Among the Jews, especial care was taken that the knowledge of the true God would be transmitted to the last generations: as David says, "God decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children, [Psalm 78:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.5-6)."

Just so under the Christian dispensation, care is taken, that there never shall be lacking a succession of persons duly qualified and authorized to transmit to every succeeding generation the knowledge of Christ, and of his Gospel. Paul says to Timothy, "The things which you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also, [2 Timothy 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.2)." Were the ministerial office to cease, the Church itself would soon fall into decay: for though it is certain that *the Scriptures are of themselves, when applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, able to make men wise unto salvation*, it is also certain, that the ministry of the word is, and ever has been, the chief instrument which God makes use of for the conversion of the world. A vision was given to *Cornelius*, and an angel sent to inform him where he might find an instructor; and repeated visions were given to Peter, and not only given, but explained to him by the Holy Spirit, in order to remove his scruples, and prevail upon him to go to Cornelius, for the express purpose of honoring God's instituted means of communicating the knowledge of his Gospel.

For the very same end was *Philip*directed, by the Holy Spirit, to go to the Ethiopian eunuch, and to open to him the portion of Scripture which he was reading. The Spirit might as easily have opened the eyes of the eunuch, without the intervention of Philip: but he chose to put the honor on the means which he had instituted; and to effect that by his minister, which he would not effect by the word alone.

In all ages shall such ministers be raised up, through the operation of the preached word; nor shall the Church cease to be supplied with them, until there shall remain no more members to be added to her, nor any further work to be wrought in those of which she is composed.

***~~2. The edification of the Church itself—~~***

The Church of Christ is his body: those who believe in him are his members: and every member has a measure of growth which it is destined to attain: and it is the completeness of the members in number and proficiency, that constitutes the perfection of the whole body. Towards this perfection the Church is gradually advancing. To help forward this good work is the office of God's servants, who are continually laboring for the good of the Church, and striving to edify her in faith and love. The *ignorant*they are to instruct.

The *weak*they are to strengthen and establish.

The *wandering*they are to bring back.

And over *every member*are they so to watch, that all may be progressively fitted for the discharge of their respective offices, and that God may be glorified in all.

But as the ministry can be effectual only through the medium of our own exertions, it will be proper to show,

***~~II. The use we should make of the pastoral ministry—~~***

It finds us sinners: it brings us to the state of saints: and when formed by it into one great community, it leads us to a performance of the duties we owe to all the members of that body. In each of these states we have duties to perform:

***~~1. As sinners, we should seek that faith which alone will save us—~~***

There is but "one faith;" and one "knowledge of the Son of God," in which we must be all agreed. In matters of minor importance we may differ from each other: but "the Head we must all hold:" we must simply look to the Lord Jesus Christ, as dying for us, and as making reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross. Our hope must be in him, and in him alone: and, if we place the smallest dependence on anything of our own, we can have no part in his salvation.

In relation to this matter, there must be no diversity: perfect "unity" is required: and to bring you to this unity, is the great scope of our labors. Brethren, consider this; and inquire whether our ministry has had a proper influence upon you in this respect? Have you been made to feel yourselves guilty and undone; and have you fled to Christ for refuge, as to the one hope that is set before you? Have you renounced all dependence whatever on yourselves; and are you daily looking to him as "made of God unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?"

We say again, that if our ministry is not effectual to bring you to this, it is not a savor of life unto you, but a savor of death to your more aggravated condemnation!

***~~2. As believers, we should seek to "grow up into Christ in all things"—~~***

While we are yet weak in the faith, we are in constant danger of being turned aside from the truth of God. Both men and devils will labor incessantly to draw us from the one foundation of a sinner's hope. But we are to be "growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." We are not to continue "as children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." We are to be aware of the devices of our enemies. We are to get a deeper insight into the great mystery of godliness. We are to become daily more and more established in the truth as it is in Jesus, so as to be proof against all "the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

On whatever side we are assaulted, our enemies should find us armed. Are we attacked by the specious reasonings of false philosophy, or the proud conceits of self-righteous moralists, we would reject the dogmas both of the one and the other, and "determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." "To him we should cleave with full purpose of heart," making daily more and more use of him in all his offices.

As our Priest, we should confide more simply in the atonement he has offered for us, and in his continual intercession for us at the right hand of God.

As our Prophet, we should rely on him more entirely to instruct us in the knowledge of God's will, and to guide us into all truth.

As our King, we should look to him to put down all our enemies, and to bring every thought of our hearts into captivity to his holy will.

In a word, we should live more simply and entirely by faith in him, receiving daily out of his fullness all that we stand in need of, and improving it all for the glory of his name.

Thus to establish you in Christ, is a further intent of our ministry; even to bring you to live in the same communion with him, as the members have with the head. You must feel that you have nothing in yourselves, but all in him. Whatever communications you receive from him, must be employed in executing his will, and in promoting his glory.

***~~3. As members of Christ's mystical body, we should seek to promote the welfare of the whole—~~***

In the natural body, all the members consult and act for the good of the whole: no one possesses anything for itself only; but all being compacted together by joints and ligaments, and every joint, from the largest to the smallest, supplying a measure of unctuous and nutritious matter, each according to its ability, for the benefit of the member that is in contact with it, and for the good of the whole body, all grow together; and that from infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, until the whole has attained that measure of perfection which God has designed for it.

Thus it must be in the mystical body of Christ's Church. Believers are no more independent of each other, than they are of Christ: as they are united unto him by faith, so are they to be united to each other by love. None are to consider anything which they possess as private property, but as a trust to be improved for the good of the whole. Nor are they to consider only that part of the body with which they are in more immediate contact, but the whole without exception; assured, that the happiness of the whole is bound up in the welfare of every part; and that all being connected by one common interest, all must labor together for one common end.

When this is attained, the intent of our ministry is fully answered. A life of faith, and a life of love, is that for which God has begotten us by his Gospel. But let me ask, Is this end answered upon us? Do we regard the whole Church of God, as well that part which is more remote, as that which is nearer to us, as members of our own body, entitled to all possible care and love? O that it were thus in every place under Heaven!

O that there were no schisms in this sacred body! But let there be no lack of effort, on our part, to advance the temporal and spiritual welfare of all around us: let there be "an effectual working in the measure of every part, so that the body may be increased, and the whole be edified in love!"

***~~#2110~~***

***~~EDUCATION AND WALK OF CHRISTIANS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.20-21)~~***

"But you have not so learned Christ; if so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

WE shall do well ever to remember, that *Christianity is not a mere speculative theory that is to inform the mind; but a great practical lesson, to renew the heart, and to bring us back to the state from whence we are fallen*. The means which it prescribes for the attainment of its end, are doubtless most mysterious: but still the end is that for which the means are ordained; and *the restoration of our souls to the Divine image must be our one constant and uniform pursuit*.

Paul ever bears this in mind. He sets forth, in the clearest view, and the most glowing colors, the wonders of redeeming love: but he ever comes to this at last, that we are to "be sanctified by the truth," and that "the truth must set us free" from all our spiritual enemies.

He was, at the time he wrote this epistle, imprisoned at Rome: yet what did he desire of the Ephesian Church? Did he request them to interest themselves in his behalf, that he might be restored to liberty? No; the thought did not so much as enter into his mind: the welfare of their souls was all his concern: "I, therefore," says he, "the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that you walk worthy the calling with which you are called, verse 1;" and again, "This I say and testify in the Lord, that you walk not as the Gentiles walk, verse 17;" you are instructed better—you can never conform to their practices: no, "you have not so learned Christ, if so be you have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

In these remarkable words, we see,

***~~I. The Christian's education—~~***

"He has been instructed by our Lord Jesus Christ himself."

***~~There is a teaching which proceeds from Christ himself—~~***

I readily grant, that, in learning from the inspired writings, we may properly be said to learn of Christ: for he himself said to his Apostles, "He who hears you, hears me; and he who despises you, despises me; and he who despises me, despises him who sent me, [Luke 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.16)." But it is evident that much more than this is contained in the words before us: in fact, here is a contrast drawn between those who learn by the word, or human teaching only—and those who learn of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The former may find their instruction insufficient to regulate their life: the latter never can, because Christ instructs the heart, to which nothing but Omnipotence can gain access.

This teaching is sometimes ascribed, in Scripture, to the Father: "Every man that has heard and learned of the Father, comes unto me, [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45)."

Sometimes it is ascribed to the Son: "No man knows the Father, but the Son, and he to whoever the Son will reveal him, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27)."

Sometimes it is ascribed to the Holy Spirit: "The Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, [John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.26)."

But the truth which is taught is the same; since, whether it be the Father or the Son who instructs us, it is always by the agency of the Holy Spirit. To say exactly how Christ instructs us, is beyond our power: it is not by visions, or by voices, or by dreams, as in the days of old; but *by opening to us the Scriptures, and giving us a spiritual perception of the truths contained in them*. We know not how our own spirit operates on our body: yet we have no doubt but that it does; because the body obeys in all things the motions of the mind. Just so, though we cannot define the precise mode in which the Spirit of God operates on our spirit, we know, by the effects, that an influence is exerted by Him upon our minds, and that by that influence we are enabled to see and comprehend many things which to the natural man are utter foolishness, [1 Corinthians 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-12); 1 Corinthians 2:14.

***~~This teaching every true Christian receives—~~***

In matters of science, the Christian has no advantage above others: his progress will be regulated by laws that are common to every student. But in the concerns of the soul he has a decided superiority, above all his equals in age and learning. He has the Lord Jesus Christ for his instructor: his "heart has been opened by the Lord, as Lydia's was, to attend to the things of God, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14);" and his understanding has been opened to understand them [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45)." It was by this teaching that Peter, a poor fisherman, was enabled to declare the true character of Christ, which the Scribes and Pharisees, with all their advantages, were not able to discern: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah; for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in Heaven, [Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17)."

If it is thought that this privilege was confined to the Apostles, or to the apostolic age, I answer, that it is the portion of all God's people to the end of time; according as it is written, "All your children shall be taught of God, and great shall the peace be of your children."

Suited to this education is,

***~~II. The Christian's walk—~~***

The Apostle tells us what this is; he tells us,

***~~1. Negatively, what it is not (verses 17-19)—~~***

The state of the Gentile world is awful in the extreme. Whatever may be the conduct of a few among them, the great mass are alienated from all good, and addicted to all evil. As for God, they know him not, nor have any desire to know him. Their minds are altogether alienated from everything which God would approve: they have no disposition but towards the vanities of this polluted world; nor, when they transgress what even their own consciences would dictate, do they feel that compunction of heart that would become them.

The mere professors among ourselves do not indeed resemble the Gentiles in some respects: they are free from open idolatry, and more limited perhaps in their sensual indulgences: but in an alienation from the life of God, and an addictedness to earthly vanities, they differ very little from the heathen world.

But true Christians are of a very different mind: as the Apostle says, "You have not so learned Christ." No, indeed! the true Christian has not so learned Christ: he cannot "run to the same excess of riot" that ungodly men do; nor will he be conformed, in any of these vanities, to the world around him. He "comes out from the world, and is separate; and would not willingly touch the unclean thing;" much less revel in all manner of impurity. This very separation from the world is that which chiefly incenses the world against him. He leaves from "the broad road which leads to destruction, and walks rather in that narrow path which leads unto life."

***~~2. Positively, what it is—~~***

The Christian, who has really heard Christ, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, will adhere to the truth as it is in Jesus: he will labor that the full end of Jesus' incarnation and life and death would be realized in him. He will see how the truth was exemplified in Jesus; and will endeavor "so to walk, even as he walked." Not that he will be satisfied with any change in his outward conduct: he will seek to become a new creature; to put off the whole body of sin with which he is encompassed; and to put on the whole body of righteousness whereby he may approve himself to God.

The life of God, from which the unenlightened is alienated, is that which he will cultivate to the utmost of his power; and in maintaining it, he will labor with all earnestness, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before, if by any means he may attain so rich a prize.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who desire to understand the Gospel—~~***

Remember what it is you have to learn: the Apostle calls it "learning Christ." This gives us the complete idea of all that a Christian needs to know. The Gospel is an exhibition and revelation of Jesus Christ:  
all that he is in himself, and all that he is to us;  
all the mysterious purposes of his grace;  
all the offices that he sustains in the work of redemption;  
all that he has done and suffered;  
all that he is now doing;  
all that he has engaged to do;  
all that can be known of him  
—is there set forth!  
There may we behold all the glory of the Godhead shining in his face. This, then, is what we have to learn: the knowledge of Christ is all and in all. Come, then, and sit at the feet of Jesus; come, and learn of him with all docility of mind, as little children; entreat him to take away the veil from your hearts, and to "manifest himself unto you as he does not unto the world." Then shall you "behold his glory, even the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father;" and know Him, whom to know is life eternal.

Let no one be discouraged because of his lack of intellectual powers: for "what he has hidden from the wise and prudent, he will reveal to babes and sucklings;" and "his strength shall be perfected in their weakness."

***~~2. Those who desire to adorn the Gospel—~~***

Take not the world's standard of duty as that which you would aim at, for that will not suffice. Nor can you ever please God by such a measure of sanctification as the best of unenlightened men desire. No, "you must not walk as the Gentiles walk;" nor as the merely nominal Christian walks. You must soar far above him—you must see how Christ himself walked, and follow him in all his ways; being "pure as he was pure," and "perfect as he was perfect."

Never imagine that you have yet attained. To your last hour there will be remnants of "the old man to be put off," and larger measures of "the new man to be put on." It is not in your life and conduct merely that you are to be "renewed," but in the entire "spirit of your mind:" from being earthly, sensual, and devilish—you must become heavenly, spiritual, and holy. You must never cease, until you have attained to the full measure of the stature of Christ himself.

This is to walk worthy of your calling; and in this shall your "learning of Christ" most surely result. If you truly hear him, and are taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, you cannot so walk as the world around you walk. You must only "walk, as Christ himself walked."

***~~#2111~~***

***~~THE OLD MAN, AND THE NEW~~***

***~~[Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22-24)~~***

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new man, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

CHRISTIANITY is universally professed among us: but many know little more of it than the name. Those who are in some measure acquainted with its principles, have, for the most part, learned it only from books and human instruction. But there are some who have learned it, as it were, from Christ himself. Their *understandings*have been opened, and their *hearts*instructed by his Spirit. These are said to "have heard Christ, and to have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, verse 21." These may be distinguished from the others by the effects of their knowledge. While the nominal Christian remains willingly ignorant of true holiness, the truly enlightened man labors to attain the highest measure of it that he can. This Paul represents as the infallible consequence of divine teaching: and his declarations respecting it set forth the sum and substance of a Christian's duty.

***~~I. Put off the old man—~~***

There are many terms peculiar to the Holy Scriptures which need to be explained. Those in the text are of the greatest importance.

***~~"The old man" is that principle of sin which actuates the unregenerate man—~~***

It is a natural principle. As a man consists of a soul with many faculties, and a body with many members, so does this principle, though but one, consist of many parts. Pride, unbelief, etc. etc. constitute that body of sin, which is here denominated "the old man;" and it is called "old," because it is coexistent with our existence, and is derived from our first parents, after whose fallen image we were made.

It is a corrupt principle. It is expressly called so in my text. All its inward "lustings" and desires are vitiated, and invariably reveal themselves by the external fruits of a vain life.

It is also a deceitful principle, continually representing good as evil, and evil as good: it constantly disappoints our expectations, making that to appear a source of happiness which never yet terminated in anything but misery.

***~~This it is our duty to be "putting off"—~~***

It is indeed no easy matter to effect this work; yet in dependence on God's aid we may, and must, accomplish it. We must suppress its actings. It will break forth, if not resisted, into all manner of evil; but we must fight against it, and "bring it into subjection, [1 Corinthians 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.27)." Our eternal life and salvation depend on our "mortifying the deeds of the body, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13)." Not contented with a partial victory, we must check its desires. A weight that may be easily stopped when beginning to roll, will prove irresistible when it is running down a steep declivity. We must check evil in its first rising, if we would not be overpowered by it: none can tell how far he shall go when once he begins to fall!

We must therefore "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)." To do this effectually, we must guard against its deceits. We should examine our motives and principles of action. Sin is deceitful; the heart also is deceitful; and Satan helps forward our deceptions. That which is very specious in its outward appearance is often most odious to the heart-searching God. We must therefore bring everything to the touchstone of God's word: we must "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, [1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)."

But we must not be satisfied with resisting sin. We must,

***~~II. Put on the new man—~~***

***~~"The new man" is that principle which actuates the godly—~~***

It consists of many parts, just as the evil principle does. Humility, faith, love, etc. are among its most characteristic features. It is divine in its origin. It belongs to no man naturally; but is "new." It is the gift of God, the work of his Spirit. It is "created" within us, and is as truly the workmanship of God, as the universe itself is. All who possess it are said to be "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10)."

It is moreover holy in its operations—all its motions and tendencies are holy. It works to transform us "after God's image." It leads to an unreserved obedience to both tables of the law. It directs to "righteousness" towards man, and "holiness" towards God. Nor will it be satisfied with any semblance of religion, however specious. It labors uniformly to bring us to the experience of "true" holiness both in heart and life.

***~~This it is our duty to be putting on—~~***

As the prodigal was not merely pardoned, but clothed in robes suitable to his new condition, so are the children of God to be adorned with virtues suited to the relation which they bear to their heavenly Father. We must be "renewed," not in our outward actions only, but, "in the spirit of our minds:" the great spring of action within us must be changed, and "the new man" must reign in us now, as "the old man" did in our unregenerate state.

Do we ask, How shall this great work be effected? We answer, Encourage its motions, and exert its powers. The new principle of life in us is as water, which seeks continually to extinguish the corrupt principle within us: and if, upon any temptation occurring, we watched carefully the motions of that principle, we would frequently, perhaps invariably, find it directing us to what is right.

But it is "a still small voice" that cannot be heard without much attention, and it may be very soon silenced by the clamors of passion or selfishness: it is the voice of God within us; and, if duly regarded, would never allow us to err in any great degree.

It has also powers, which, like the members of the body, may be strengthened by exertion. Put forth its powers in the exercise of faith and love, and it will be found to grow as well as any other habit.

Having indeed the tide of corrupt nature against it, its progress will not be so rapid, nor will it admit of any intermission of our labors: but the more we do for God, the more shall we be disposed, and enabled, to do for him. We must however remember not to address ourselves to this duty in our own strength: of ourselves we can do nothing; but if we rely on the promised grace of Christ, we shall be strengthened by his Spirit, and be "changed into his image from glory to glory."

***~~We may improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. For conviction—~~***

If this progressive change is the necessary evidence of our being true Christians, then alas! how few true Christians are there to be found! Yet nothing less than this will suffice. If we are really "in Christ, we are new creatures; old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new, 2 Corinthians 5:17." *It is not an external reformation merely that we must experience, but a new creation*. Let all reflect on this. Let all inquire what evidence they have of such a change having passed upon their souls. The voice of Christ to all of us is this, "You must be born again; unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3); [John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.7)."

***~~2. For consolation—~~***

Many are ready to despond because of the severe conflicts which they experience between the spiritual and the carnal principle in their souls. They say, if I were a child of God, how could it be thus? We answer, This is rather an evidence that such persons are partakers of a divine nature: if they were not, they would be strangers to these conflicts. Though they might feel some struggles between corruption and conscience, yes, and between reason and conscience, the one attempting to vindicate what the other condemns, they would know nothing of those deeper conflicts between the flesh and spirit, especially in reference to the secret exercises of the soul in its daily converse with God. These evince the existence of a new principle, though they show that the old man still lives within them, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17). Let not any then despond because they feel the remains of indwelling corruption, but rather be thankful if they hate it, and if they have grace in some good measure to subdue it. Let them trust in God to "perfect that which concerns them;" and look to him to "fulfill in them all the good pleasure of his goodness:" then shall they in due time "put off their filthy garments, [Zechariah 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.4)," altogether, and "stand before their God without spot or blemish" to all eternity!

***~~#2112~~***

***~~GRIEVING THE SPIRIT~~***

***~~[Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30)~~***

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you are sealed unto the day of redemption."

THE Holy Scriptures are not written after the manner of human systems, but often blend warnings with promises, and duties with privileges, in a way that by some would be thought to involve them in inconsistency. The Apostle, cautioning the Ephesians against various evils which he had observed among them, adds, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God;" in which expression he seems eventually to refer to those who had "grieved the Lord in the wilderness," and had therefore been excluded from the promised land, [Hebrews 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.10); [Hebrews 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.17), and to those who "by rebelling against God had provoked his Holy Spirit, so that he was turned to be their enemy, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10)."

Yet at the same time he informs them, that the Holy Spirit had sealed them, as the Lord's property, unto the day of redemption, when he would claim them as his own. The advocates of human *theological systems*do not like such apparent contrarieties: they would rather say, if they be sealed unto the day of redemption, how can they be in any danger of so grieving the Lord, as to be finally excluded from the heavenly Canaan? Or, if they be in danger of such a calamity, how can it be that they would ever have been sealed unto the day of redemption? But we may safely leave these matters to God, who will clear up all such difficulties in the last day.

That we may grieve the Holy Spirit, and that believers are sealed by him unto the day of redemption, are both equally certain: nor is there any great difficulty in reconciling the two, to a mind that is truly humble and contrite; because the liberty of man is not at all affected by the decrees of God. Man never loses his proneness to fall, notwithstanding God's counsel shall ultimately stand: and therefore he needs at all times the caution in our text, while the encouragement afforded in it is at all times proper to animate his exertions.

But—not to enter into intricate disquisitions about difficulties, which, after all that can be said upon them, can never be entirely removed—we shall proceed, with a view to practical improvement, to notice,

***~~I. The inestimable benefit conferred upon believers—~~***

Many are the offices which the Holy Spirit executes in the great work of redemption. He is the one Agent by whom redemption is applied in all its parts. By him is *life*imparted to those who were dead in trespasses and sins: "he convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" and "glorifies Christ" in the sight of all who are so instructed.

But there is one office in particular of which we are now called to speak, namely, his *sealing*of believers unto the day of redemption. This is more especially dwelt upon by the Apostle, in the first chapter of this epistle, where he says that the Ephesian converts, "after they had believed in Christ, had been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, as the pledge of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, [Ephesians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13-14)." This office he executes upon all true believers:

***~~1. By an eternal designation of them to God's service—~~***

Such a seal most assuredly exists, and was made use of by Almighty God from all eternity. It was made use of in the consecration of his only dear Son to his mediatorial office, "for him has God the Father sealed, [John 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.27)." It was made use of also in the setting apart his chosen people to be his own peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth, [Deuteronomy 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6)." "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are his, [2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)."

In the appointment of Abraham and his posterity to be a holy nation and a peculiar people, we all see and acknowledge the exercise of sovereign grace; though we find it difficult to acquiesce in this idea in reference to the eternal states of men. But where shall we draw the line? Or how shall we justify the dispensations of God towards the Jewish people, if we deny his right to exercise the same sovereignty towards all the sinners of mankind?

The truth is, that fallen man has no claim upon his God: in that respect he is exactly on a footing with the fallen angels: and, it God be pleased to show mercy to any, he may do so in any way, and to any extent that he shall see fit. And if he selects any as objects of his mercy in preference to others, he does no more injury to the rest, than he would to the great mass of the fallen angels, if he were at this moment, for the display of his own glorious perfections, to liberate any number of them from the chains of darkness in which they are bound. He "has a right to do what he will with his own: nor ought our eye to be evil because he is good, [Matthew 20:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.15)."

It is certain that the Lord has from eternity "set apart him who is godly for himself, [Psalm 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.3);" and not because he was godly, or would be so, but because God of his own sovereign will and pleasure ordained him unto life: as Paul expressly tells us, "Whom God did *predestine*, them he also *called*: and whom he called, them he also *justified*; and whom he justified, them he also *glorified*. Their call in this world, and their glorification in the next, originating altogether in the predestination of God from all eternity! [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30).

***~~2. By the sanctification of their hearts and lives—~~***

This, if I may so speak, is the broad seal of Heaven: "By their fruits you shall know them." "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me." By this seal the Thessalonian converts were so distinguished, that Paul did not hesitate to infer, from what he saw in them, that they were God's chosen people: when he called to mind "their works of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ—he knew from it their election of God, [1 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-4)." And on all true believers this seal is found: God's "peculiar people are invariably found to be holy and zealous for good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)."

Now this consideration may well reconcile us to the exercise of God's sovereign grace: for, if the idea of God's choice being altogether uninfluenced by holiness, either seen or foreseen in the objects of his choice, appears to militate against the interests of morality, the circumstance of God's having inseparably united this seal with the foregoing, sufficiently removes all fear on that head. In God's mind, our sanctification is as much ordained as our final salvation: "We are chosen, that we may be holy! [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." We are "elect unto obedience, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)." We are predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29); and in this way alone will anyone finally attain the salvation of his soul; since it is only in, and by, and through the means, that God has ordained the end: "He has from the beginning chosen us to salvation; but it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, 2 Thessalonians 2:13."

***~~3. By the manifestation of God's love to their souls—~~***

The Holy Spirit is a "Spirit of adoption" in the hearts of God's people, [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15); he is also a "Witness testifying of their adoption, [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16);" yes, he is to them, and within them, a pledge of their everlasting inheritance, [Ephesians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13). [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5), "shedding abroad in their hearts that love of God," which will constitute their happiness through eternal ages! [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5). In this also he operates as a seal, as Paul has said in reference to all true Christians: "Now he who established us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God; who has also *sealed*us, and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts, [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.21-22)."

By the first of these seals, we are known to God alone:  
by the second seal, we are discoverable to those around us:  
by the last seal, an assurance of our happiness is imparted to our own souls.

And though the impression of the last two is not at all times equally clear and strong—yet is it the privilege of all to possess them; and in proportion only as these last exist, will the first be ascertained.

In connection with the privileges of believers, we may well consider,

***~~II. Their duty towards their gracious Benefactor—~~***

The Holy Spirit is here represented as a parent, who, from his tender solicitude for the welfare of his children, is deeply "grieved" when they rebel in any respect, to the purposes of his love towards them. Now we may grieve the Holy Spirit,

***~~1. By departing from the truth in our principles—~~***

The particular office assigned to the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption, is to "glorify Christ," by receiving of the things that are his, and "showing them unto us, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)." Now in this office he delights: and when we duly appreciate the excellencies of Christ, and "behold his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father," then is the Holy Spirit delighted to dwell with us, and to carry on the whole work of grace in our souls.

But when we allow the wily "serpent to beguile us, and to turn us from the simplicity that is in Christ," then is the Spirit grieved: for he is a jealous God, and especially jealous for the honor of the Savior, whose cause he has espoused. Against two things then in particular we have to guard, namely, against *philosophical subtleties*on the one hand, and *Jewish superstitions*on the other. By both the one and the other of these was the Church of God rent, in the very first ages of Christianity; and thousands of souls were subverted by them. By the same are we also endangered. Our natural pride and self-conceit are ever at work, to add something to what God has revealed or to detract somewhat from it. Perhaps the simplicity of the Gospel is that which most offends the carnal mind. *A simple life of faith upon the Son of God, as having loved us and given himself for us, is most difficult to be maintained*. We want to *be*something; or to *do*something, so that we may share the glory of Christ, and ascribe some part of his honor to ourselves: but he is all, and must be all; and "all who glory, must glory in him alone!" Here reference may be made to any "questions and strifes of words" which may be agitated in the Church; for they all, when unduly insisted on, grieve the Holy Spirit." By retaining in constant exercise this humble and childlike spirit, we shall obtain frequent tokens of God's favorable acceptance: but by departing from it, we shall provoke him to hide his face from us.

***~~2. By dishonoring the truth in our practice—~~***

To this more especially does the Apostle refer, both in the preceding and following context. Unhallowed tempers and dispositions are most offensive to the Spirit of God. O that all the professors of religion throughout the world were made duly sensible of this truth! But, whether they consider it or not, God will not dwell where there is bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamor, and evil-speaking and malice, or a habitual lack of a forbearing and forgiving spirit. Falsehood too in our words, and dishonesty in our dealings, and impurity in our hearts—will assuredly drive him from us, and bring down upon us the tokens of his displeasure: "If any man defiles the temple of God, him will God destroy, [1 Corinthians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.17)."

It a common thing to find those who profess religion low and miserable in their minds. But we would not wonder at it, if we knew what abominations are harbored in their hearts: we would rather wonder that God bears so long with them, and that his wrath does not break forth to consume them in an instant. Let us never forget this, that as well may light have fellowship with darkness, and Christ with Belial, as the Spirit of God can abide with those who yield not to his sanctifying operations. If, instead of conforming ourselves to the mind that was in Christ, we rebel against him, we shall "vex his Holy Spirit, and provoke him to become our enemy! [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who comply not with the written word—~~***

The word which is recorded in the Scriptures of truth is God's word: it is altogether given by inspiration from the Holy Spirit. If therefore we comply not with that, we resist the Holy Spirit, and "do despite to him." Consider this, you who receive not the word with all humility of mind, or labor not to conform to it in your life and conduct: think, whom it is that you resist and rebel against; even Him, who, if he departs from you, will leave you in a bondage from which you can never be delivered, and in misery from which you can never be redeemed, [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17); [Hosea 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 9.12). O learn to tremble at the Word of God, and beg that your whole souls may be so melted and poured into its mold, as to assume its every feature, and be formed into the perfect image of your God.

***~~2. Those who rest in a mere formal compliance with it—~~***

You cannot deceive that blessed Spirit whose province it is to search the heart and test the thoughts. He requires "truth in our inward parts:" he requires that your heart be right with him; that you "walk in the Spirit," and "pray in the Spirit," and "live in the Spirit," and give yourselves up altogether to his holy motions. Do not therefore dissemble with him, lest he give you up to your own delusions, and seal you up in utter impenitence to the day of final retribution. Of those who held the truth in unrighteousness, we are told that he gave them up to a reprobate mind.

I beg you, bring not upon yourselves this heaviest of all judgments: but today, while it is called today, surrender up yourselves entirely to his guidance, that he may "make you perfect in every good work, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus, [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)."

***~~3. Those who are endeavoring to please him in all things—~~***

The day of redemption is near at hand. O blessed day, when all the remains of sin and sorrow shall be for ever banished from the soul! Look forward to it; and order your every action, word, and thought, in reference to it. Pray to the Holy Spirit to work yet more and more powerfully upon you, in order to prepare you for your appearance before the judgment-seat of Christ. Guard against any sloth in the ways of God, lest, like the Church of old, you cause him to suspend the communications of his love, [Song of Solomon 5:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.2-6). Pray to him to give you that white stone, which none but he who has it can appreciate, and which has on it the name written, which none but he who possesses it can read, [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.17). Then shall you already even now enjoy a foretaste of your heavenly inheritance, and in due season "have an abundant entrance ministered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

***~~#2113~~***

***~~FORGIVENESS OF SINS~~***

**[Ephesians 4:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.32)**

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

IF a minister of Christ is bound to preach the Gospel with all plainness and fidelity, he is no less bound to guard it against abuse, and to inculcate on the professors of it the strictest conformity to the commands of God. Paul was careful to insist upon even the minutest parts of practical piety; and to show, that *the Gospel not only required, but had a direct tendency to produce, holiness, both in heart and life. In truth, if our religion does not prevail to regulate our tempers, and to correct every evil disposition of the soul, it is not sincere; nor will it ever be approved of God in the day of judgment.*

Yet, in enforcing practical duties, we would take care to urge them upon right principles; not as a forced obedience to the law, in order to obtain acceptance with God, but as a willing effort to adorn the Gospel, through which we have already been accepted of him. A sense of God's pardoning love would animate us, rather than a servile fear of his displeasure: and, while God's mercy to us would operate as a motive to obey him, it would also serve us as a pattern for our own conduct towards our offending brethren, whom we would "forgive, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us."

Now, it is a fact, that forgiveness is bestowed on men while they are yet in this world. And this truth I shall consider,

***~~I. As revealed in Scripture—~~***

***~~The truth itself is fully declared—~~***

God, in proclaiming his name to Moses, represented himself chiefly under the character of a sin-pardoning God: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, [Exodus 34:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.6-7)." And the whole of his dealings with his people, in every age, have borne testimony to him in this view, as "a God delighting in mercy," and as accounting "judgment a strange act," to which he was utterly averse.

The whole of the Scripture declarations may be comprised in that saying of the prophet, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7)." To cite the New Testament in confirmation of this truth is needless; seeing that, from one end of it to the other, it proclaims God as "rich in mercy unto all that call upon him."

***~~The ground of all his mercies is also declared—~~***

All the favor that God bears to man is "for Christ's sake." This was shown from the first moment that his designs of mercy were revealed to fallen man. There can be no doubt but that *sacrifices were ordained of God, for the purpose of shadowing forth that great sacrifice which would, in due time, be offered for the sins of the world*. For Abel offered his sacrifice in faith [Hebrews 11:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.4); but faith must have respect to the Word of God; and, consequently, God must have previously made known to man the way in which alone a sinner would find acceptance with him.

Indeed, though we are not expressly told that the animals, with the skins of which God clothed our first parents, were offered in sacrifice, I can scarcely doubt but that the whole mystery of the Gospel was revealed to them in that act; and they were taught, that through the sacrifice of Christ their iniquities would be forgiven, and that through the righteousness of Christ they would stand with acceptance before God.

The whole of the Mosaic economy exhibited this truth in the most striking colors, in that no person could come to God but by sacrifice; and "without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins, [Hebrews 9:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.22)." On this subject the New Testament expatiates in every part; referring our reconciliation with God to the atoning blood of Christ, [2 Corinthians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19), and declaring that "no man comes unto the Father but by Christ, [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)." The whole labor of the Apostles was to make this known: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that 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)."

In my text, the Apostle not only asserts this truth, but speaks of it,

***~~II. As experienced in the soul—~~***

Many will not admit that any one can know his sins forgiven. And I readily acknowledge, that it is a point on which a man may easily deceive his own soul, especially if he judges of it by any other criterion than that which God himself has proposed. If the life and conduct bear witness to us that we are the Lord's, then may we safely indulge the hope that we are accepted by him.

***~~God has, in former ages, given to men an assurance of his favor—~~***

To *Abel*this was given by some visible sign, which excited the envy and wrath of his brother, Cain [Genesis 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.4-5).

*David*, on the very first acknowledgment of his transgression, was informed by Nathan that his sin was pardoned, [2 Samuel 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 12.13); and he himself takes notice of it in a psalm of grateful acknowledgment: "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and you forgave the iniquity of my sin, [Psalm 32:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 32.5)."

To *Hezekiah*and *Isaiah*were similar assurances given, [Isaiah 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.7); [Isaiah 38:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 38.17).

And our blessed Lord not only repeatedly given this blessing to those who waited on him, but maintained his right to do so against those who questioned his power and authority to pardon sin, [Matthew 9:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.2-6). [Luke 7:48-50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.48-50).

***~~At present, also, the same blessing is still given to his faithful servants—~~***

What can be meant by the Spirit of adoption that is given to the believing soul? [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15)? "What can be meant by the witness of the Spirit? [Romans 8:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16), the sealing of the Spirit? [Ephesians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13), the pledge of the Spirit [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14). What can be meant by "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit? [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)," if God never imparts to his people a sense of his pardoning love?

I grant that if these divine sensations be not accompanied with a holy life, they are a mere illusion; but if the whole of our character and deportment be such as becomes the Gospel, then may we assure ourselves that these testimonies are from God, and that "our names are indeed written in the book of life, [Luke 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.20)." We may "know that we have passed from death unto life [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14)." Nor is this the privilege of the adult Christian only: for even the least in the family of Christ may possess it: as John says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ, [1 John 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12)." And to the whole Ephesian Church it was proclaimed, "God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you."

But it is not merely as *comforting the soul*that I insist on this, but chiefly and principally,

***~~III. As operating in the life—~~***

***~~A sense of God's pardoning love would operate on us generally—~~***

Nothing but this will ever call forth our energies fully in the service of our God. It is "the love of Christ that must constrain us:" and that, duly apprehended, will cause us to live altogether unto Him who died for us, and rose again! [2 Corinthians 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.15).

***~~More particularly, it would produce in us a forgiving temper against our offending brethren—~~***

*A spirit of forbearance and forgiveness is insisted on by the inspired writers, as indispensable to the Christian character; insomuch, that a person who is not under its influence has no hope of obtaining mercy at the hands of God.*The mercy which we ourselves have received for Christ's sake, is proposed in my text as a powerful motive for the exercise of a forgiving disposition on our part, and as a pattern which, in the exercise of it, we would resemble.

The same important truth is taught us in the parable of the unforgiving servant; who, when forgiven by his master ten thousand talents, seized a fellow-servant by the throat, and cast him into prison for the trifling debt of one hundred pence. For such merciless conduct his lord was justly incensed against him; as he will be against all who know not how to imitate the goodness of their God, [Matthew 18:23-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.23-35). There was no proportion between the debts, the one being about three pounds, and the other nearly seven million. It is on this principle that our Lord requires us to "forgive an offending brother, not seven times in a day, but seventy times seven, [Matthew 18:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.21-22)." For, if we call to remembrance our own offenses, and consider for a moment how great and multiplied they have been, we shall see, that *no injury which a fellow-creature can do to us can bear any proportion to the offenses which we have committed against God*: and, consequently, that *there should be no disposition in us but to render to our fellow-creatures according to what we ourselves have received at the hands of God.*

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. Be sensible of your obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

It is not for your own sake that God has forgiven you, but for his dear Son's sake. And if Christ had not interposed for you, to reconcile you unto God by his own death upon the cross, you would to all eternity have been in the condition of the fallen angels, who are receiving the due recompense for their sins in Hell.

Reflect, then, on your desert before God, and on the mercy you are receiving at his hands; and then direct your eyes to the Savior, and give him the glory due unto his name. Of course, it is here supposed that you have deeply repented of your sins, and "fled for refuge to Christ, as to the hope set before you:" for, if you have not thus come to Christ, you are yet "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and without any scriptural hope of salvation." But if, indeed, you have believed in Christ, then would every faculty of your soul be called forth in grateful and continual praises for all that you now enjoy, and all that you hope for in the eternal world.

***~~2. Endeavor to requite them in the way that he himself has enjoined—~~***

Look, not to your conduct merely, but to the inmost dispositions of your souls. *His love to you should be the model of your love to others.*Let his image, then, be seen upon you. And, as men are known by the very form of the characters they write, so "be epistles of Christ, known and read of all men, 2 Corinthians 3:2-3." "Let the same mind be in you as was in him, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5);" and, "as he has loved you, see that you also love one another, [John 13:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.34)."

***~~#2114~~***

***~~CHRIST'S LOVE A PATTERN FOR OURS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2)~~***

"Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor."

*TO restore us to the Divine image is one great end of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us.* There are indeed perfections in the Deity which are incommunicable to any creature; but his moral perfections admit of imitation and resemblance: and therefore we are exhorted to "be followers, or imitators, of God, as dear children, verse 1." But in the person of our blessed Lord and Savior, Jehovah is brought nearer to us, so that we may trace his very steps, and learn to follow him in every disposition of the mind, and every action of the life. Hence in the passage before us, while we are particularly informed of the manner in which he has displayed his love to man, we are exhorted to "walk in love, as he has loved us."

In our further elucidation of these words, we shall be led to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in a twofold view;

***~~I. As a sacrifice to God—~~***

It was not merely as a martyr that Jesus died, but as a sacrifice for sin. This appears,

***~~1. From all the sacrifices of the Mosaic law—~~***

For what end were these instituted, but to prefigure him? These beyond a doubt were offerings for sin, the victims dying in the place of the offerer, and making an atonement for him by their blood: and if the Lord Jesus Christ did not correspond with them in this particular, and actually fulfill what those prefigured, they were all instituted in vain, and were shadows without any substance at all.

***~~2. From the declarations of the prophets—~~***

The prophet thus plainly speaks of Christ as dying for the sins of men, "He made his soul an offering for sin." "He bore the sins of many." "On him were laid the iniquity of us all, [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6); [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10); [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12)." What is the import of these testimonies, if Christ did not offer himself as a sacrifice for sin?

***~~3. From the testimony of John the Baptist—~~***

It was in reference to the lambs that were offered every morning and evening for the sins of all Israel, that the Baptist spoke, when he pointed out the Lord Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." If Christ were not a sacrifice for sin, this testimony was not founded in truth.

***~~4. From the declarations of Christ himself—~~***

He constantly affirmed, that "he came to give his life a ransom for many:" that his blood would be shed for the remission of sins; and that by being "lifted up upon the cross, he would draw all men unto him."

***~~5. From the united testimony of all the Apostles—~~***

All with one voice represent him as redeeming us to God by his blood, and offering himself as "an atoning sacrifice, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world." In a word, the whole tenor of the sacred writings proves, that "he bore our sins in his own body on the tree," and "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

But in all this he was further designed,

***~~II. As an example to us—~~***

In the circumstance before noticed, we cannot resemble him; for "no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him." Nevertheless in the love which instigated him to this we may resemble him. Our love, like his, should be,

***~~1. Unselfish—~~***

It is not possible for us to add anything to him: we cannot make him more happy or more glorious by anything that we can do: "our goodness extends not to him;" "nor can we by any means profit him:" yet did he in this astonishing manner display his love to us. Thus in the exercise of our love we would not consider whether the objects of it will ever be able to make us any suitable return: we should show love in every possible way, without so much as desiring any return from man, or even desiring that our exercise of it would be known; yes, even though we knew that it would only be requited with evil. We would love our very enemies; and, "instead of being overcome by evil, should strive incessantly to overcome their evil with good."

***~~2. Generous—~~***

What unsearchable riches has he purchased even for his bitterest enemies? He would not that any one of them would fall short of the glory of Heaven. True it is, that we cannot thus enrich the objects of our love: yet we would do all we can towards it, by providing for them not only the things needful for the body, but, above all, the things that may promote the welfare of the soul. Here the poor may be on a par with those who are able to give out of their abundance: for if they are constrained to say, "Silver and gold have I none," they may add, "but such as I have, give I unto you;" and then may proceed to speak to them of the Savior, through whom they may obtain all the blessings of salvation. Thus, "though poor, we may make many rich."

***~~3. Self-denying—~~***

Our blessed Lord "emptied himself of all the glory of Heaven," and endured all the wrath of an offended God; and became a curse himself, in order to deliver us from the curse which our iniquities had deserved. And shall we decline exercising our love, because it may be attended with some pain or difficulty on our part? No! we should not hesitate even to lay down life itself, if by so doing we may promote the eternal welfare of our brethren [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16).

***~~4. Constant—~~***

"Whom our Lord loved, he loved to the end." There were many occasions whereon his immediate disciples displeased him: but he did not therefore "withdraw his mercy from them, or shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure." There are occasions also whereon we shall be called to exercise forbearance and forgiveness one towards another; and we ought to meet those occasions with love proportioned to them. We should strive with all our might to "follow peace with all men," and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Be thankful to Christ for all the wonders of his love—~~***

Think how unworthy you were of all his love: for, it was "when you were yet enemies, that he died for you," Think too what must have been your state to all eternity, if He had not so "undertaken for you." His sufferings under the hidings of his Father's face, and under the strokes of Divine justice, show what miseries awaited you in Hell forever, if He had not become your substitute and surety to discharge your debt. O! never for a moment lose sight of the obligations you owe to him for that "love of his, which surpasses knowledge."

***~~2. Present yourselves as living sacrifices to him—~~***

This may be done; and it is the very end for which such astonishing mercies have been given to you, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1). Consider all that you are, and all that you have, as his: and let it all be devoted henceforth to the glory of his name.

***~~3. Endeavor to resemble him more and more—~~***

Whatever attainments you may have made, you must still be aspiring after higher degrees of love, [1 Thessalonians 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.9-10). Look at him then, not only as the *ground of your hopes*, but as the *pattern for your imitation*. Trace him in all the labors of his love: trace him from Heaven to earth, and from earth to Heaven: trace him in all that he either did or suffered: and study to resemble him in the whole of his spirit and deportment. In all his labors "God smelled a sweet savor;" even as he had done in those offerings and sacrifices by which Christ had been shadowed forth, [Genesis 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 8.21). [Leviticus 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 1.9); and though your labors of love can never resemble his, as making an atonement for sin, they shall, like his, come up for a memorial before God, and be accepted as well-pleasing in his sight, [Hebrews 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10); [Hebrews 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.16).

***~~#2115~~***

***~~FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF INDULGED SIN~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.5-7)~~***

"For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them."

NEVER can we be wrong in bearing our testimony against sin. As for those who, from a zeal for the Gospel, pass over subjects of this kind as *legal*, we cannot but think them grievously mistaken: for Paul, whose love to the Gospel was so ardent, that "he counted all things but dung and dross for the knowledge of it," was inferior to no man in *inculcating the necessity of holiness, or in denouncing the judgments of God against indulged sin*. The words before us amply illustrate this: for, specifying particular sins, which would surely prove fatal to all who *lived*in them, he made them the subject of a faithful appeal, and of a most solemn warning to the Church of God in all ages.

Were we to speak of this subject under distinct heads, those which we have just mentioned would afford an easy arrangement: but on such a subject as this, I think that the mention of distinct heads would be an interruption to us, and weaken the impression which the text itself is calculated to convey.

***~~We declare then to you, brethren, that sin indulged will destroy your souls!—~~***

The Scriptures speak of sin under the twofold character, of the "filthiness of the *flesh*, and the filthiness of the *spirit*, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." Both these kinds of sin are mentioned in my text: "fornication and impurity" belonging to "the flesh;" and "covetousness" having its seat rather in "the spirit." Now these, whether more *open and flagrant*, or more *secret and refined*—are alike fatal to the soul, if they are harbored and indulged. They alike exclude us from Heaven: for it is impossible that a person who lives in the commission of them would "have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God".

***~~And "this," if you know anything of Christianity, "you know"—~~***

The whole voice of Scripture declares it. Even reason itself may be considered as bearing testimony to it: for *what delight can a holy God take in an unholy being?*Or how can the Lord Jesus Christ, "who died to destroy the works of the devil, exalt to a participation of his kingdom one who is fulfilling the works of the devil? We may as well conceive that "Christ and Belial would have communion with each other," as that a man who regards and retains iniquity in his heart would enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

***~~Let nothing, therefore, weaken the impression of this upon your minds—~~***

There are those who will dispute against this. They will speak of "impurity," especially if the marriage-bed be not invaded, as, at most, a trivial fault, necessarily arising from the ardor of youth, and undeserving of any serious regard.

And as to "covetousness," there is no such thing existing in the world, if every person's estimate of himself may be relied on. Men will, indeed, impute it to others; but no one acknowledges it in himself. Every one covers it with some specious name: 'It is prudence, economy, diligence, a proper regard for one's family; and surely there can be no blame attached to habits like these.' But let it be remembered what "covetousness" is: it is a desiring of anything for its own sake, that we may find our happiness in it, rather than in God; and place our dependence on it, rather than on God: and that whether it is in a man of opulence, or in a person of low degree, is equally "idolatry," and will infallibly exclude a man from the kingdom of God!

As for all the pretexts that may be urged either for this or for impurity, they are but "vain words," that will "deceive you," to your eternal ruin. Look and see what fornication brought upon the whole nation of Israel [Numbers 25:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 25.1) with [1 Corinthians 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.8); or what coveting did in the case of Achan; who, among two million people was singled out by lot [Joshua 7:10-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.10-26). *Be assured, that however secret your sin be, or however sanctioned by the habits of those around you, "the wrath of God will, sooner or later, come on all the children of disobedience!"*

Full well I know, how pleasing it is to be told that we have nothing to fear, and how ready we are to credit such unfounded assertions: but to what purpose will it be to "speak peace to ourselves, when God has said that there is no peace?" I warn you then, beloved, not to listen to any such delusive suggestions, by whoever they may be offered: but "let God be true, and every man a liar."

***~~And let nothing under Heaven induce you to comply with the solicitations of others, or to imitate their sins—~~***

Though you are united in a Christian society, and profess all the doctrines of Christianity, *you still are liable to be seduced by the arguments and examples of those around you. But remember, that, if you are partakers with others in their sins, you shall be "partakers also with them in their plagues!*[Revelation 18:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 18.4)." And it will be little consolation to you, in the eternal world, that you have partners in misery: nor will it be any excuse for you, that you have been deceived. God cautions you against deceit, whether it originates in yourselves or others. His word is plain: his warnings are solemn: and if you will not obey his voice, you must reap the fruits of your folly!

Unite not, then, with any in a course of sin. Partake not with any, either in following their evil ways, or in giving your sanction to them. Your duty is, to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them, verse 11." If you profess to be children of light, then you must walk worthy of your holy profession, "shining, before all, as lights in the world."

***~~If, however, you have been drawn aside to sin, then humble yourselves for it without delay, and turn unto your God in newness of life—~~***

Blessed be God! your state is not hopeless, though you may have fallen into sin. For at Corinth there were some who had been guilty of the very transgressions here referred to, and yet had obtained mercy through Christ: "Such were some of you," says Paul, "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 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11)."

So, then, may you be washed, and justified, and sanctified, if you turn unto God through Christ. The *blood*of Christ shall be sufficient for you, as it was for them; and the *Spirit*of Christ shall operate as effectually in you as in them. "Only acknowledge your transgressions," and "flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you;" so shall you find mercy from the Lord, and "your iniquity shall not be your ruin [Ezekiel 18:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.30)."

***~~#2116~~***

***~~A CONSISTENT WALK ENJOINED~~***

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

"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord: walk as children of light."

MANY imagine, that when they have believed in Christ, the work in them is complete: and, if they were then to die, it is true that they would be complete; because it is said of all believers, "You are complete in Christ." But no man in this world is so complete, but that he still needs to be urged forward, by warnings and exhortations, and promises and examples. This is clearly manifest from all the apostolic writings, in which the saints are cautioned against every species of sin, and stimulated to every species of duty.

The latter half of this epistle is altogether addressed to believers, in this precise point of view, exhorting them to "walk worthy of the calling with which they are called [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1)." The truth is, that saints are yet only as "brands plucked out of the burning:" they still bear the marks of the fire strong upon them, and are still in danger of being consumed by the influence of fiery temptations, if God in his mercy does not preserve them. *Their safety is in watchfulness and prayer*: in watchfulness, that they give not occasion to Satan to inflame their souls with evil: and in prayer, that, as soon as any spark shall light upon them, it may be extinguished. To all, without exception, of whom it may be said, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord," the exhortation that is added must be addressed, "Walk as children of light."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. The change which all true Christians have experienced—~~***

"**They were once darkness"—**

The term, "darkness," in Scripture language, imports ignorance, sin, and misery: and therefore most fitly expresses the state of unconverted men. The mind of the natural man is blind to the things of God: these things are spiritual, and he cannot comprehend them for lack of a spiritual discernment, 1 Corinthians 2:14. He knows not the spirituality of God's law, or the total alienation of his heart from God. He has no just views of the Divine perfections, no adequate sense of his need of a Redeemer; no true perception of the beauty of holiness, or of the excellency of a life entirely devoted unto God.

To himself he lives, and not to God: he is a law unto himself, and does nothing but with a view to the gratification of his own feelings. *Pleasure, selfishness, and honor, are the gods whom he serves: and beyond the things of time and sense he has no object of ambition or pursuit*. In this state he may find what the world calls happiness; but to real happiness he is a stranger. Whatever satisfaction he feels, it is in a forgetfulness of eternal things that he feels it, and not in the contemplation of them. The thought of death and judgment is appalling to him; and is sufficient to make him, like Belshazzar, tremble in the midst of all his mirth; so that "his countenance shall change, and his knees smite one against the other, [Daniel 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.6)."

It is the heart-searching God who says, that there is "no real peace to such persons, [Isaiah 57:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.20-21)," but that "destruction and misery are in their ways, [Romans 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.16-17)."

Nor let it be thought that this is the character of some only whose wickedness has been of a more flagrant nature: for Paul assures us, that it was once his own state, no less than that of others, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3). [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3); and therefore we may be sure that it is common to all. Indeed a very little knowledge of mankind will convince us, that "the whole world lies in wickedness, [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19)," and unconverted men are not only dark, but "darkness" itself, even darkness visible.

***~~But "they are now light in the Lord"—~~***

In their conversion they are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." *Their views of self, of sin, of God, of Christ, of everything around them, are changed!*In consequence of "the eyes of their understanding being enlightened," they come forth from the broad road in which they have been walking, and begin to tread the narrow, and less frequented paths of holiness and truth. Their whole labor now is to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Now they are no longer under bondage to the fear of death, or bowed down with the apprehensions of God's eternal wrath: they see that he is reconciled towards them in the Son of his love; and with "a spirit of adoption they come before him, crying, Abba, Father!" In a word, they now enjoy peace in their souls, even that "peace of God which surpasses all understanding".

All this they have "in the Lord," that is, by virtue of *union*with him, and by *grace*derived from him. Being now members of Christ's mystical body, they possess all that is in him their living Head, according to the measure of the grace they have received from him. "With Christ is the fountain of life; and in his light they see light."

While we contemplate this blessed change, we must not overlook,

***~~II. The obligations it entails upon them—~~***

Consistency is required of all: of course, if we have been made "light in the Lord," it befits us to "walk as children of light." By this expression we are taught:

***~~1. What end we are to pursue—~~***

The commandment of the Lord is a lamp, and his "law is light, [Proverbs 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.23);" and by his law are we to direct our steps. That Holy Spirit who has opened our eyes, and renewed our hearts, marks out for us our path, in direct opposition to that which the unconverted world pursue; as the Apostle tells us in the words following our text: "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." While the ungodly indulge in all the fore-mentioned iniquities, our conduct is to be the very reverse of theirs. In opposition to all unholy tempers, [Ephesians 4:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.31), we are to abound in everything that is "lovely and of good report." In opposition to all that may interfere with the welfare of others, verse 3, we are to do in all things precisely as, in a change of circumstances, we would think it right for our neighbor to do unto us. And in the whole of our deportment towards both God and man, there should be the most inviolable "truth," even a perfect integrity of mind, a spirit that is without deceit.

Perhaps we may get somewhat of an idea of our duty from what we behold among the heavenly bodies. The stars are all irradiated by the sun; and in respect of that great luminary, may be called children of light. These, according to their capacity, reflect the brightness of the sun, and impart to others the light they have received.

So it should be with us: we should make our light to shine before men, so that those who behold us may know how to walk, at the same time that they are constrained to glorify that Sun of Righteousness whose beams we reflect. This is the idea inculcated by the Apostle himself, who tells us, that we must "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16)," and "proving" in our own persons "what is acceptable unto the Lord, verse 10."

But there is yet another idea, and a very important one, suggested in this expression, "children of light." It is the property of light to make things manifest; and consequently, we are to bear our testimony against all the deeds of darkness, not only "having no fellowship with them, (for "what fellowship can light have with darkness, [2 Corinthians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.14).") but reproving them, verse 11, 13," and bearing our testimony for God against all who commit them.

Such then must our conduct be, holy and exemplary, decided and firm.

***~~2. In what spirit we would walk in it—~~***

"Children of disobedience" are such as, from the propensity of their nature, live in willful and habitual disobedience to God's commands.

Just so "children of light," from the impulse of the Holy Spirit, walk cheerfully and habitually in the ways of God. They are not compelled, like slaves, to serve him against their will; but, like dear children, they love their Father's will, and find his ways to be ways of pleasantness and peace.

Nor is it merely on some particular occasions that they obey his voice: they do it constantly, and without reserve: "they delight to do his will;" and "run the way of his commandments with enlarged hearts." This characterizes the angels around the throne: and it distinguishes also the children of the living God: they "do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word, [Psalm 103:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20)," and making every succeeding act a prelude to yet further services.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have never yet experienced this change—~~***

Be assured, it must be experienced before you can ever enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Whether your lives have been more or less polluted with outward sin, you have all equally lived to yourselves, instead of unto God: and your consciences bear testimony against you, that to secure a saving interest in Christ, and to grow up into his image, and to live for his glory, have not been the great objects of your ambition, nor has your departure from this path been any source of humiliation to your souls. What is darkness, if tins be not? It is, in fact, a living "without God in the world:" and this path, if persisted in, will bring you to "the blackness of darkness for ever!"

But I thank God, there is no room for despondency. The Lord Jesus Christ has "come as a light into the world, that whoever follows him would not walk in darkness, but have the light of life, [John 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.12)." For this very end was he given, that "he would be a light to the Gentiles, and say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6); [Isaiah 49:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.9)."

Despair not therefore; but entreat, that, as the Sun of Righteousness, he would "arise upon you with healing in his wings." And hear, for your encouragement, his gracious promise: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight: these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them, [Isaiah 42:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.16)."

But delay not to seek these blessings at his hands. Seek them "before he causes your darkness to increase, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while you are looking for light, he turns it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness, [Jeremiah 13:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.16)."

To this effect our Savior himself charges you: "Yet a little while is the light with you: walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While you have 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)."

***~~2. Those who have an evidence in themselves that it has been wrought in them—~~***

However the world may despise it as enthusiasm, there are many who have "passed from death unto life," and "been brought out of darkness into marvelous light." O rejoice in the Lord, who has done such great things for you!

And now set yourselves to walk worthy of this high calling. Think what manner of persons you ought to be, and what a holy heavenly conduct befits you. Guard against every degree of return to your former state. Guard against those who would draw you back, or impede your progress in the heavenly life. It is your privilege "to walk in the light, as God is in the light, [1 John 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.6-7);" and to have your path like "the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18)."

And while this is really the desire and labor of your souls, fear not—your God will be with you, "causing your light to rise in obscurity, and your darkness to be as the noon-day." Then may you look forward with confidence to that day, when your present light, like that of a candle, shall be eclipsed by the infinitely brighter splendor of the sun; even to that day when, "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end! [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-20)."

***~~#2117~~***

***~~PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY~~***

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

"The fruit of the Spirit consists in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth."

THERE is in the minds of many a prejudice against the writings of Paul, as though they contained nothing but dissertations about predestination and election, and were calculated rather to drive people to despondence than to improve their morals. But there are no writings in the whole sacred volume more *practical*than his. True it is, that he unfolds the whole mystery of godliness more fully and more deeply than others: and he seems to have been raised up of God for that very end, that the theory of religion might be more distinctly known.

But, in all his epistles, he has an especial respect to the interests of morality; the standard of which he elevates to an extent unknown before, and for the practice of which he adduces motives which never until that time were duly appreciated. In no one of his epistles does he maintain more strongly those doctrines which are thought so objectionable, than in this: yet is one half of the epistle occupied with exhortations to holiness, in all its different bearings and relations.

In the words before us we have, what I may call, *a compendium, or summary, of Christian morals.*

And, that we may know what practical Christianity really is, I will,

***~~I. Mark it in its offices—~~***

Sanctification, both in heart and life, is the great end of the Gospel, and a most essential part of that redemption which is there revealed to us. It is here set forth as including,

***~~1. Goodness—~~***

Goodness is the one all-comprehensive character of the Deity, it shines forth in all his works: it meets us wherever we turn our eyes: "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord, [Psalm 33:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 33.5)." The effect of the Gospel is to transform us into God's image, and this it does; creating it in our hearts, and calling it forth in our lives.

Under the influence of this divine principle, we shall seek to promote the happiness of all around us. Whatever is amiable, and lovely, and of good report, in the spirit and temper of the mind, we shall cultivate it to the uttermost, and exercise it on all occasions. There will be no trouble which we shall not labor to alleviate; no need which we shall not endeavor to supply. To "be good, and do good," even like God himself, [Psalm 119:68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.68), will be the summit of our ambition, and the very end of our lives.

***~~2. Righteousness—~~***

While goodness is spontaneous, and acts irrespective of any particular claim which men may have upon us, "righteousness" has respect to the obligations which we lie under to "render unto all their dues." This, also, the Gospel forms within us; stirring us up, both in word and deed, to act towards others as we, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to do unto us.

*There is in the heart of man a selfishness which disposes him to see everything with partial eyes; magnifying his own rights, and overlooking the rights of others.*This disposition the Gospel will subdue and mortify; and, in its place, it will establish a principle of universal equity, that will weigh the claims of others with exactness, and prompt us, under all circumstances, rather to "*suffer*wrong than to *do*wrong, [1 Corinthians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.7-8)."

***~~3. Truth—~~***

This is the perfection of Christian morals, or the bond which keeps all the other graces in their place, [Ephesians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.14). Where the Gospel has had its perfect work, there will be "a spirit that is without deceit [John 1:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.47)." The Christian is a sincere man: he appears as he is—and is what he appears.

You will perceive, that, in immediate connection with our text, the Apostle says, "Walk as children of the light: for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." Now, here the three graces mentioned in the text are represented as constituting light, or, at least, as comprehending all that is contained in that image.

Of all things in the whole creation, light is the most *pure*(for it is incapable of defilement); the most *innocent*(for it injures nothing, which has not, through its own weakness, an aversion to its rays); and the most *beneficial*(for there is not a thing in the universe, possessed of animal or vegetable life, which is not nourished and refreshed by it). Invert the order of these words, and you behold how light beams forth in our text; *embodying all the purity of truth, the innocence of righteousness, and the beneficence of active goodness*.

But, to understand practical Christianity aright, we must,

***~~II. Trace it to its source—~~***

It springs not from nature's stock: the natural man cannot attain unto it. It is "the fruit of the Spirit," even of that very Spirit who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20).

***~~1. It is the Spirit who alone infuses spiritual life into us—~~***

We are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins:" and it is the Spirit who quickens us, that we may live unto our God, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1).

It is the Spirit alone who engrafts us into Christ, as living branches; and causes us to receive from Christ that divine energy, whereby we are enabled to bring forth fruit to his glory. "Christ came that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly, [John 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.10);" but it is by the operation of his Spirit that we receive it; and by the mighty working of that Spirit in our souls that we display its energies, [Colossians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.29).

***~~2. It is the Spirit who suggests to our minds those motives which alone can stimulate us to exertion—~~***

He "reveals the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, [Galatians 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.15-16)." "He glorifies Christ within us; taking of the things that are his, and showing them unto us, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)." "He sheds abroad in our hearts that love of Christ, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)," which alone can constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to him, 2 Corinthians 5:14. Until we receive this impulse, we are satisfied with formal services, and a partial obedience: but, when we are enabled thus "to comprehend somewhat of the unbounded love of Christ, we can rest in nothing, until we are filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

***~~3. It is the Spirit who assists us in all our endeavors—~~***

Whatever we may have attained, we still have no sufficiency in ourselves. We shall indeed put our hands to the work: but we shall accomplish nothing, until the Holy Spirit "strengthens us with might in our inward man, [Colossians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11);" and, taking hold, as it were, of one end of our burden, to bear it with us, "helps our infirmities," and lends us his own effectual aid, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26).

Hence these graces are properly called "the fruit of the Spirit;" since they cannot be produced without him, and are invariably the result of his agency in our souls.

Yet, as it must be confessed that there is a semblance of this holiness found in those who have not the Holy Spirit, it will be proper to,

***~~III. Distinguish it from all counterfeits—~~***

It must be confessed, that in many natural men there are found virtues very nearly resembling the graces before spoken of. There is in many a very diffusive benevolence, a strict regard to equity, and a high sense of integrity: and you will reasonably ask, How are these to be distinguished from those things which we have described as "the fruit of the Spirit?"

I answer: To us, who can only see the outward act, it may frequently be difficult to discern the difference between them; but to God, who sees the heart, they are as different from each other as light from darkness. For of these counterfeits I must say,

***~~1. They proceed from man, and from man alone—~~***

Man needs no particular communication of the Spirit to enable him to perform them. The light of reason points out those virtues as commendable; and the strength of a man's own resolution is sufficient for the performance of them. Hence the persons of whom we speak never pray to God for his Spirit, nor feel any desire after supernatural aid. But the graces mentioned in our text are "the fruits of the Spirit;" and never were, nor ever can be, produced, but by his Almighty agency.

***~~2. They have respect to man, and to man alone—~~***

The *worldling*, however virtuous, acts not to God, nor has any distinct desire to fulfill the will of God. He considers that, as a member of society, he has duties to perform; and therefore he performs them, as far as he sees occasion for them, in the relation in which he stands. He has no other view of them than what an intelligent heathen might have.

But the *Christian*aims at "all goodness, righteousness, and truth." He views these duties in reference to the eternal, as well as the temporal, interests of men. He views them as the Lord Jesus Christ did; and makes the outward discharge of them subservient to higher and nobler ends. As a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, he has to advance Jesus' interests in the salvation of men. He will account it a small matter to exercise kindness to men in a temporal view, that he may also, according to his ability, promote their spiritual and eternal welfare.

***~~3. They are done for man, and for man alone—~~***

A *worldling*seeks only to please man and to establish a good character among his fellow-creatures. If he attains this object, he is satisfied. *To stand high in his own esteem, and in the esteem of others, is the height of his ambition.*

But the *Christian*desires that God, and God only, may be glorified. He seeks not applause from man: he cherishes no fond conceits of his own superior excellence: much less does he go about to establish a righteousness of his own, wherein to stand before God. Instead of admiring himself for his own attainments, he will trace them all to their proper source, and give God the glory of them. Yes, the more he is enabled to do for God, the more he feels himself indebted to God. He accounts himself, after all, an unprofitable servant; and says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise."

Now, whether we can discern the difference, or not, in others, we may easily detect it in ourselves; and, consequently, may easily discern "whose we are, and whom we serve." I must recommend it to all, to be jealous over themselves, lest they mistake the virtues of the flesh for the graces of the Spirit; and lest, "having a name to live, they prove really dead! [Revelation 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1)."

***~~For an improvement of this subject, observe,~~***

***~~1. How excellent a religion is ours!~~***

They form a very erroneous idea of Christianity, who view it as a system of doctrines merely, irrespective of the effects to be produced by them. I will readily grant, that doctrines, however grand, are of little value, if they operate no sanctifying change within us. But let any person contemplate the change wrought by the Spirit on the heart and life of a believer; let him see poor selfish creatures transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus, and walking in the world as he walked; let him go into the world, the family, the closet, and see the dispositions and habits of the true Christian. Will any one obtain even a glance of this, and not admire the religion from whence it flows?

I charge you, brethren, rest not in partial views of Christianity: satisfy not yourselves with looking at it as a system of doctrines, propounded for speculation only. No, view it in all its practical efficiency; and then you will acknowledge that it is worthy of all possible honor, respect, and love.

***~~2. How easily may we ascertain our state before God!~~***

We may surely, without any great difficulty, find what our tempers and dispositions are; and whether we are in the daily habit of imploring help from God for the improvement of them.

There is a great difference in the natural constitutions of men; so that we cannot absolutely say, that a person, comparatively moral, is therefore a spiritual man. This must be learned rather from the internal spiritual conflicts he maintains, and the victories he achieves, under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

At all events, we may be sure, that where there is no delight in doing good to the souls of men; where, in our conduct towards others, there is any willful deviation from the line which we would think right to be observed towards us; and where there is any lack of simplicity and godly sincerity in our motives and principles; whatever we may imagine, we are not Christians *indeed*. I beg you to take this touchstone, whereby to try yourselves, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5); and beg of God also to search and try you, that there may be nothing found at last to disappoint your hopes, [Psalm 139:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 139.23-24).

***~~3. How delightful is the path assigned to us!~~***

I do not say that there are no seasons for humiliation: for no doubt there are, even for the best of men. But, for the daily course of your lives, you need only look to my text. See the Christian in his daily walk: "goodness, righteousness, and truth," are embodied in him; and, like the combined action of the solar rays, he diffuses light and happiness around him.

This is to "walk in the light, as God is in the light;"  
this is to honor God;  
this is to adorn the Gospel;  
this is to fulfill the ends for which Christ himself came into the world;  
this is to possess a fitness for the heavenly inheritance.

Let those who know not what religion is, condemn it, if they will: but I am sure, that, if viewed aright, "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace!"

***~~#2118~~***

***~~AN EXHORTATION TO CARELESS SINNERS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)~~***

"Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

THERE is a harmony in the Scriptures which many overlook and destroy: detached passages are often wrested to establish a favorite theological system. Calls to duty are supposed to imply the sufficiency of man to do the will of God; while the confessions or petitions of the saints, and the promises of Divine aid given to them, are brought to justify a negligence in the use of means. But the various truths of God should be viewed as they stand connected with each other; there would then be diversity indeed, but no contrariety between them.

God gives a command, [Ezekiel 18:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.31). David, knowing his duty, and feeling his inability to perform it, had long before presented this to God in the form of a petition, [Psalm 51:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.10). And God, to encourage such applications to him, promises to work in us that which he requires of us, [Ezekiel 36:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26). This observation will throw light, as on many other parts of Scripture, so on that before us in particular; in which we have,

***~~I. A command—~~***

The Scripture abounds with useful and instructive metaphors. Our state is here represented under the images of *sleep*and *death*.

***~~Sleep implies a state of inactivity and security—~~***

Men are busily employed about their worldly concerns; but a lamentable supineness prevails with respect to spiritual things. The generality do not apprehend their souls to be in any danger: death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell, do not seem worthy of their notice: God's threatenings against them are denounced without effect: they are like Jonah, sleeping in the midst of a storm: hence they are described as "at ease from their youth [Jeremiah 48:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 48.11)." To the same effect is the testimony of Him who searches the heart, [Psalm 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4-5).

***~~Death includes the ideas of impotence and corruption—~~***

An inanimate body cannot perform any of the functions of life: it has within itself the seeds and principles of corruption. The soul also, until quickened from the dead, is in a state of spiritual impotence: it is incapable of spiritual action or discernment, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14); its powers and faculties are altogether vitiated, [Romans 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18); whatever is loathsome and offensive to God proceeds from it, [Mark 7:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 7.21-22). So true is that humiliating declaration, [Job 15:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 15.14-16)!

Yet, notwithstanding this state appears so desperate, we must address, to every one that is under it, the command, "Awake," etc.

Your inactivity and security involve you in the deepest guilt—your corruption of heart and life provokes the majesty of God: nor is your impotence any excuse for your disobedience. It is your love of sin that disables you for duty: nor is God deprived of his right to command, because you have lost your power to obey. Let every one then strive to comply with his heavenly call. Those who exert their feeble powers may expect divine assistance, See [Matthew 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.10); [Matthew 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.13). The man with the withered hand was unable to stretch it forth; but in attempting to obey, he was endued with strength.

To convince us that none shall fail who use the appointed means, God enforces his command with,

***~~II. A promise—~~***

Sleep and death are states of intellectual darkness. Hence light is promised to those who obey the Divine mandate. Light in Scripture imports: *knowledge*[Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20), *holiness*[1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7), *comfort*[Psalm 97:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 97.11),  
and *glory*[Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12).

And all these blessings shall they receive from Christ, the fountain of light, [Malachi 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 4.2). [John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.9).

***~~Knowledge—~~***

Spiritual knowledge every natural man stands in need of: nor is it attainable by the teaching of men, or the efforts of genius, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25); we can receive it from none but Christ, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27). Hence Christ invites us to come to him for it, [Matthew 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.29); nor shall an application to him ever fail of success, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9). [Proverbs 2:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.3-6).

***~~Holiness—~~***

A despair of attaining this deters many from seeking it. They think their inveterate habits cannot be rooted out, [Jeremiah 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.25); but Christ is our "sanctification" as well as our wisdom, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30). His very name encourages us to expect deliverance from him, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21), and he will fulfill the promises which he has made to this effect, [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19). [Isaiah 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.25).

***~~Comfort—~~***

A sense of guilt shall yield to holy joy, [Isaiah 29:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.19); [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3); deplored weakness shall be succeeded by divine energy, [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6). Our delight in him shall be spiritual and exalted, [Isaiah 51:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.11); [Isaiah 58:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.11); it shall far transcend all earthly pleasures, [Psalm 84:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.10); [Psalm 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6-7).

***~~Glory—~~***

Our Lord will not confine his blessings to this world, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11). He will raise his people to thrones of glory, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21); he will cause them to participate in his own inheritance, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17); he will be the ground and object of their joy for ever, [Isaiah 60:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19-20).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

What greater *encouragement*can anyone desire?

What richer *promises*can any one conceive?

How suited are they to our necessities! Let every one consider the command as addressed to himself, "Awake!" let all our powers and faculties be called forth to action. In exerting ourselves let us expect the promised aid. Thus shall we be eternal monuments of Christ's power and grace.

***~~#2119~~***

***~~REDEEMING THE TIME~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.15-16)~~***

"See then that you walk carefully, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

WHILE the Christian has so many corruptions within, and temptations without, he needs to be continually urged to vigilance and activity in the concerns of his soul. It was to the saints at Ephesus, even to the most eminent among them, that Paul addressed the exhortation before us: in which we may notice,

***~~I. The duty of maintaining a careful walk—~~***

We are evidently referred in the text to what had been spoken in the preceding context: from whence we are to gather the precise ideas which the Apostle comprehended in the terms, "Walk carefully."

We should walk carefully,

***~~1. As persons who enjoy the light—~~***

Those who walk in the dark, know not how to order their steps, [John 12:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.35); but those who walk in the noon-day, can see how and where to place their feet with accuracy and exactness. Now we have the light of God's word, verse 8, 13, 14; and should therefore carefully avoid setting our foot in a place where we are liable to slip, or contact defilement.

***~~2. As persons that are afraid of erring—~~***

We are ever is danger of being led astray by the example of those around us. But we should "call no man master;" we should not follow Paul himself, any further than he followed Christ. If any would presume to vindicate what is contrary to the Word of God, we would "take care not to be deceived" by their specious reasonings; and instead of being "partakers with them," we should "avoid all fellowship with their unfruitful works;" yes, instead of conforming to them, we should "reprove them, verse 6, 7, 11."

***~~3. As persons that are anxious to please their God—~~***

Neither the opinions of others, nor selfish interests, are to regulate our conduct. We have but one inquiry to make, *"What will please my God?"*That view, that desire, that purpose, must be the spring of our actions, whether in public or in private, verse 10, 17. With a view to approve ourselves to him, we should as carefully inspect our motives and principles, our dispositions and frames, as if we saw him immediately present, and observed his eye fixed upon our hearts.

From this general view of the subject, we descend to notice,

***~~II. An important instance, wherein, more especially, carefulness should be mentioned—~~***

***~~There is nothing wherein carefulness is more needful, than in the improvement of our time—~~***

It is lamentable to think how much time is lost for lack of a due solicitude to "redeem" it. Even in relation to temporal concerns, there are very few who are good economists of their time. But, in reference to their eternal interests, men let ten thousand opportunities pass them unheeded and unimproved. Many have passed through half their lives, and not yet begun to seek the salvation of their souls.

Of those who have not been altogether so careless, how many are there whose spiritual interests are at a very low ebb! They have not sufficiently watched the lapse of time, or been duly impressed with a sense of its value: and hence, "when for the time they ought to be qualified for teachers, they still need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God, [Hebrews 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12)."

***~~We should therefore set ourselves instantly to "redeem the time"—~~***

We should consider what it is that has robbed us of our precious hours, and guard particularly against it.

Has *pleasure*allured us by its charms? We would renounce its gratifications, as far as they interfere with our spiritual welfare.

Has *business*too much occupied our time? We would apportion to it what is necessary in our respective situations; but not allow it to supersede our religious exercises.

If the duties of our calling are such as to leave but a contracted space for reading and prayer, we should be the more earnest in consecrating the whole of the Sabbath to the service of our God.

Visiting and *company*are found in general to be among the chief destroyers of our time: against these we should resolutely set ourselves; that, if we cannot recover what is passed, we may at least prevent the depredations which we are but too likely to experience in the future.

From *sleep*too we would redeem all that has been allotted to mere indulgence, and all that nature does not require for the renovation of her strength. Our whole time is little enough for the concerns of our souls; and therefore we would suffer as little of it as possible to run to waste, or to pass off in unproductive channels.

To enforce the observance of this carefulness, the Apostle suggests,

***~~III. Motives and inducements to maintain it—~~***

He recommends it,

***~~1. As a proof of wisdom—~~***

No greater folly can be conceived than for persons to be regardless of their eternal interests, and to trifle away that time which they ought to be employing in the concerns of their souls. It is true, that a circumspect walk, and a due improvement of time, are often called preciseness or enthusiasm: but let those who know not the value of the soul, deride these things. Still, in the judgment of every discerning person, to walk with the greatest possible care and exactness, is to "walk, not as fools, but as wise:" for "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding, [Job 28:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 28.28)."

***~~2. As a means of safety—~~***

"The days" of the Apostles were "evil," on account of the persecutions that raged: for every person felt that all his comforts might be speedily withdrawn, and that he might soon fall a sacrifice to his profession. This therefore was urged as a reason for vigilance and circumspection: for if they might so quickly be called to give up their account to God, it befit them to be ever on their guard, and ever ready.

Our lot, through the tender mercy of our God, is cast on happier days: we are not exposed to the fury of persecutors: the utmost that we suffer, is, for the most part, a little contempt, and the loss of some temporal interests. Still however our "days" may justly be called "evil," because of the general prevalence of infidelity and profaneness.

We are as liable to be ensnared by evil examples, as those at Ephesus were to be turned aside by the fear of man. "Iniquity abounds; and therefore there is danger lest the love of many would wax cold." If then we would not be drawn into the vortex of corruption, we should keep at a distance from it; and if we would stand in the day of trial, we would improve each passing hour in preparation for it.

***~~#2120~~***

***~~THE BELIEVER FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.18-20)~~***

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

THAT Christianity has raised the tone of morals in the world, will appear from the admonitions which the Apostles judged it necessary to give to the Churches in their day. It would appear almost superfluous, at this time, to expatiate upon the evil of fornication, in a letter addressed to true believers; or to guard them against yielding to intoxication; there being, in the minds of all, a consciousness of the inconsistency of such evils with the Christian profession.

But the Corinthians had, in their unconverted state, been proverbially dissolute; and the Ephesians, even in their religious rites on some occasions, had addicted themselves to intemperance: and both the one and the other brought with them into the Church their former opinions and habits, against which they needed the most explicit warnings, [1 Corinthians 6:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.13-18) with the words before the text.

On the other hand, the standard of Christian privilege and attainment is sadly lowered in the present day; so that an exhortation to be filled with the Spirit, and to be living under the continual influence of the Spirit, seems to breathe nothing but enthusiasm. But, being well assured that *Christian duties and privileges are precisely the same now as they were in the Apostle's days*, I proceed to set before you,

***~~I. The exalted privilege of believers—~~***

***~~The Spirit of God dwells in the heart of every true Christian—~~***

As the Church at large, so every individual in it, is "the temple of God, 1 Corinthians 6:19," and "the habitation of God through the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.22)." Our blessed Lord promised to send down the Comforter, the Holy Spirit:  
to *abide*within his people, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17),  
to *guide*them into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13),  
to *support*them under their respective trials, [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16),  
and to "*sanctify*them throughout, in body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23."

We are not, indeed, to expect at this time his miraculous operations: but his spiritual influences are continued to his Church; and shall be, even to the end of the world, [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20); and to experience them, is the undoubted privilege of all true believers, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39). Indeed, without them, we can never mortify sin, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13), nor ever fulfill the will of God, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5); and, if we experience them not, we are not true Christians: for it is expressly said, "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)."

***~~Nor need there be any limit to our expectations of his gracious influences—~~***

It is our privilege to "be *filled*with the Spirit," every one of us according to our respective capacities; and to have all our faculties subjected to his control.

By him our *understandings*may be enlightened; so that we shall view everything, in a measure, as God himself views it.

By him, too, our *will*may be regulated; so that it shall be conformed to the mind and will of God.

By him, also, our *affections*may be so inflamed, that the whole soul, as it were, shall be melted, and cast into the very mold of the Gospel.

In relation to this matter we need fear no excess. In the use of strong drink we may easily exceed; and excess will lead to the most pernicious consequences. By intoxication, we may be unfitted for the common offices of life; yes, and be precipitated into the commission of the foulest sins. But the more we have of the Holy Spirit, the more will sobriety and self-government characterize our whole conduct. We need, indeed, to guard against delusions respecting this matter: for there are many in the world who speak of dreams, and visions, and internal suggestions, and numberless other conceits, whereby they deceive both themselves and others. But on these no confidence whatever can be placed: *they are, for the most part, the fruits of a heated imagination, and are as likely to come from Satan as from God*.

I do not mean to say that God may not reveal himself to persons in these ways; for what he has done in times past, he may do again: but I say, that *whatever is not founded upon the Word of God, and leads not to a holy and consistent life, is a mere delusion*. Whatever betrays men into extravagances of any kind, is not of God: for "the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, [1 Corinthians 14:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.32)," and it befits you to be on your guard against everything which, in the mode of its access to your mind, is suspicious, or in its operation upon your mind is disorderly. I say again, therefore, that against delusion you must guard: but from excess in what is really from God, you are in no danger: for *the more you are filled with the Spirit of Christ, the more you will resemble Christ in the whole of his character and deportment*.

Suited to this exalted privilege of believers, will be,

***~~II. Their delightful employment—~~***

Here you see how they are to act,

***~~1. In their fellowship with each other—~~***

In the parallel passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle's meaning is somewhat more clearly expressed: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord, [Colossians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.16)." We would have a happy and peaceful frame of mind, whether alone or in company; and would be expressing our joy in songs of praise.

Not that we would resemble those, whose spirits, being raised with wine, entertain themselves, and each other, with vocal and carnal songs: no; we would "make melody in our hearts to the Lord," and have all our joys an emblem, an foretaste, of Heaven. Such expressions of earthly happiness we observe without any mixture of disapprobation or surprise: they are the natural effusions of a happy and buoyant spirit. How much more, then, would they be put forth in spiritual exercises, to the honor of our God, whose service is perfect freedom!

***~~2. In their more immediate fellowship with God—~~***

Everything should be viewed by them as proceeding from a God of love: not even *chastisement*itself should be regarded as a token of his wrath, but rather as *a mark of paternal tenderness*, whereby he both intimates our relation to him, and seeks to establish and confirm it. Nothing, however penal in its aspect, should be viewed in any other light. We would taste his love in everything, and "give him thanks always for all things." And this we would do "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ:" for, as all God's blessings come to us through him, so all our thanksgivings for them should return to God through him also. It is this which makes them acceptable to God the Father. If these were offered in our own name, they would never enter into the ears of the Lord Almighty: but, being presented in the name of Jesus, they come up with acceptance before him, and are sure to return in blessings on our own souls, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15). [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have never yet experienced these blessings in their souls—~~***

By the greater part of those who *call*themselves Christians, the whole of this subject is accounted visionary and absurd. They have no idea of one person being filled with the Spirit any more than others: and all the joyous frames arising from his presence in the soul, they deem the very essence of enthusiasm. But what, then, can be meant by all those directions which are given us, to "live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit," and "pray in the Spirit," and to "bring forth the fruits of the Spirit?" And why has our blessed Lord so encouraged us to pray for the gift of his Spirit, [Luke 11:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.11-13), if no such communication is to be expected by us?

*Do not*, I beseech you, brethren, *take your own experience as the standard of truth*, or imagine that no one else can possess what you have never received. But look to God for the accomplishment of his gracious promises to your souls, [Proverbs 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.22-23); and never rest, until you have obtained those supplies of his Spirit, whereby alone you can attain the Christian character, or be ever fitted for the realms of bliss, [John 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7-11)."

***~~2. Those who profess to live in the enjoyment of them—~~***

Regard not the contempt with which ungodly men may treat you: but let the Apostle's direction be followed by you daily, with increasing earnestness. Be careful, however, not to give any just occasion for reproach. Let there be nothing extravagant, either in your profession or your practice. Religion, if it has its just influence upon your soul, will render you patterns of sobriety, of prudence, and of true wisdom: it will cause you to "walk wisely before God, in a perfect way." At the same time, it will bring into your soul a peace that passes all understanding and a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

There will be, indeed, occasional changes in your frame, even as there are in the natural world: there will be times for the tears of penitential sorrow to flow down, as well as for the radiance of the noon-day sun. But the more you live on Tabor, the more will you behold the Savior's glory: and the more you survey the promised land from Pisgah's top, the more will you be fitted for the everlasting enjoyment of it!

***~~#2121~~***

***~~WIVES AND HUSBANDS~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:22-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.22-33)~~***

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."

AMONG those who are attached to the peculiarities of the Gospel, it is often a subject of regret that the great mass of nominal Christians are not acquainted with its principles. But I am inclined to think, that there is nearly the same occasion for regret, that many who profess, and actually have attained, somewhat of vital godliness, are but very imperfectly instructed in its duties. *The sublimer parts of morality are really almost as little known as the deeper mysteries of our holy religion*. Take, for instance, the conduct enjoined in the fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: I doubt whether there be many who would have written such a piece of casuistry: and few, I fear, would have approved of it when written, if it had not come forth with the authority of a divine revelation.

What a paradox would it appear to the generality, if I were to tell them, that the very same act, under different circumstances, might be an acceptable service, and a damning sin; and the whole difference consisting in its being done in the presence of one who approved of it, or of one who doubted its lawfulness! Yet such is the Apostle's determination respecting the practice of *things indifferent*in themselves; and which become bounden duties, or fatal sins, according to the views which they have who do them.

I could, if there were time, illustrate the sublimity of the Christian code, in reference to all our most acknowledged duties: but I shall confine myself to the subject more appropriate to the present occasion.

Paul, in this passage, places the duties of man and wife in a light peculiarly simple and beautiful. He comprehends both under one single term: "Wives, submit. Husbands, love." Thus far we are prepared to approve of his requisitions; the duties respectively belonging to the two parties being generally acknowledged. But, if I would proceed to place these requisitions in their true light, and insist upon them in their full extent, I am not sure that I would not excite, among the less-instructed part of us at least, a measure of surprise.

Yet I am not afraid, but that, if in the former part of my observations I would appear to bear somewhat hard upon the female gender, I shall, before I close the subject, find a perfect acquiescence on their part, when they shall see what provision God has made for their happiness in wedded life.

But I shall be careful to speak nothing myself: I shall only bring before you what the Apostle has spoken: and if his demands appear to be too severe, I shall shelter myself under his wing; being well assured that you will all yield to his authority, without gainsaying.

You must have observed, that in all the passages of Scripture where the domestic duties are insisted on, those of the subservient are always stated first. Nor is this without reason: for they are all enjoined by God: and, however difficult they may appear, especially where the superior neglects to perform the duties assigned to him, they must all be observed from a regard to the authority of that God who has imposed them; nor must anyone imagine, that his duties are a whit the less incumbent on him because the superior neglects his.

Power, in whoever it is vested, is God's: and the person bearing it, so far as it is truly committed to him, is God's representative and vice-regent. I conceive, that this is the reason of that order, which, from being uniformly observed in the Scriptures, we may well suppose to have been wisely fixed.

The submission of the wife to her husband must be entire, cheerful, uniform, "as unto the Lord," because the husband is as truly the head of the wife, as Christ is the Head of the Church. I hope I shall not appear to speak too strongly, if I say, that there is no other limit to her submission to her earthly husband, than to her heavenly husband; unless he requires anything that is contrary to the will of God: for then she must yield to that authority which is paramount, and obey God rather than man.

I certainly feel, that, in speaking thus, I may appear to require too much of the wife, and to place her almost on the footing of a slave. But you yourselves shall judge. Tell me what is the meaning of those words, "As the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." I confess to you that this appears somewhat harsh; and I would not have dared to utter it myself. But I am not at liberty to soften it, or to introduce into God's word any qualifying expressions, to lower the standard he has given us.

You yourselves see the comparison which is instituted by God himself, and the extent of the requisition that is made. Had the comparison been omitted, we might possibly have thought that the expression, "everything," was, what is confessedly common in the Scriptures, a universal term put for a general; and that, consequently, it did admit of some modifications and exceptions. But who will so construe the obedience which the Church owes to Christ? If, then, we cannot so limit the requisition in the one case, neither can we in the other: and, consequently, *in our statement of the duties of a wife, we must take the ground which is laid in Scripture, and set forth the will of God as it is plainly declared in the inspired volume.*

But, though so much is required of the wife, that I could not have ventured to state it in any terms but those of Scripture itself, I must candidly acknowledge that I account it a rich mercy to the wife that her duty is thus properly stated and plainly declared. For it must of necessity happen, in a married state, that some differences of opinion would occasionally arise, and a contrariety of inclination also occur, in reference to some points. And if God had not determined beforehand whose judgment would preponderate, and whose will would stand, there might be collisions, which might painfully interrupt domestic harmony. But God, having required unqualified submission on the part of the wife, has cut off all occasion for discord; I may almost say, all possibility of it, where the wife understands her duty, and is ready to perform it.

Of course, a modest statement, both of her opinions and wishes, may be given: but where her husband cannot by these means be persuaded, she has no alternative left: obedience is the course which God has ordained for her; and she would pay it cheerfully, "as unto the Lord."

If this appears, as I fear it will, "a hard saying," I am happy to say, that that impression will soon be removed, by stating, in the next place, the duties of the husband. "Husbands, love your wives." And what difficulty is there in obeying the commands of love, or in submitting to its dictates?

But here we observe, in relation to him, the counterpart of the comparison which has been before made in relation to the wife. Is the wife to submit to her husband as unreservedly as the Church submits to Christ? Then the husband is to love his wife as truly and tenderly, yes, and, as far as it is possible, to the very same extent too, "as Christ has loved the Church." Let us contemplate this a little; and we shall subscribe heartily to all that has been before spoken.

Consider how the Lord Jesus Christ has loved the Church. She was altogether alienated from him, and incapable of adding to his happiness; yet he disrobed himself of all the glory and blessedness of Heaven, yes, and assume our nature, and "bear our sins in his own body on the tree," on purpose to bring his Church into a full and everlasting participation of his kingdom and glory. And now that he has done this, he imposes no one command on her but what conduces to her happiness: and if in anything he thwarts her inclinations, he does it for her good; consulting, in everything, not his own sovereign will, but her present and eternal welfare.

Now, let us suppose a husband to act on this principle: let us suppose him ready to exercise self-denial, to the utmost possible extent, for the good of his wife: let us suppose him so to pant after her happiness, as to be willing to do anything, or suffer anything, in order to promote it: let us suppose him never to propose anything to her, but for her good; and never, in any instance, to thwart her, but with a view to her truest happiness. Methinks she would never complain of the extent of her duty to him; it would be all easy, all delightful.

Let it be remembered, then, that this is the husband's duty to his wife. But as, in the former case, I confined myself to the very words of Scripture, so will I do in this; lest I appear to over-state the duty on the husband's part. "Husbands, love your wives—even as Christ also 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 would be holy, and without blemish." Let there be such tender, affectionate, self-denying exertions on the husband's part, to promote the welfare and happiness of his wife; and what returns will not she readily make to him? Truly, submission to his will, will be not so much her duty as her delight.

There is one thing only that I will add, which will be applicable to us all. Hitherto I have dwelt chiefly on those points which the occasion has suggested: but let us not forget, that the whole Church of Christ is his bride; and that the duty of a wife towards her husband, as set forth in this passage, may serve to show us, in some measure, our duty towards our heavenly Lord.

Does a wife leave her father and mother, and cleave to her husband? So must we forsake all that is dear to us in this world, to cleave unto Christ: for he has expressly warned us, that "if, in coming to him, we forsake not all that we have, we cannot be his disciples." We must also fulfill his will in everything, without hesitation and without reserve. Obedience to him must be our delight: and if, for a moment, a wish arises in our minds that is contrary to his will, we must sacrifice it instantly; and say, "Not my will, but may yours be done." Thus, while "the mystery concerning Christ and his Church" is mystically fulfilled in our dear friends who are about to be joined together in the bonds of matrimony, it will be literally and spiritually fulfilled in us.

***~~#2122~~***

***~~THE PERFECTING OF THE CHURCH IS THE END OF ALL THAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR IT~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27)~~***

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

THE morality of the Gospel, though not more extensive than that of the law, is yet more clearly revealed, and exhibited in a more endearing light. Its obligations are not set forth amidst denunciations of wrath, as those of the law were upon Mount Sinai; but models of perfection are set before us, and we are invited by considerations of love and gratitude to make them the objects of our imitation.

Not only our duty to God, but even our relative duties are set before us in this manner. Paul, instructing wives in their duty to their husbands, tells them, that the Church's obedience to Christ is the fittest pattern of their obedience to them. Then instructing husbands how to conduct themselves toward their wives, he proposes to them Christ's love to his Church as the model for their love to their wives. It is in this connection that the words of our text are introduced.

But the Apostle can never touch upon so glorious a topic as the love of Christ, without expatiating upon it, and being transported, as it were, to a forgetfulness of his proper argument. The view which he here gives us of it, is deserving of peculiar attention. It will lead us to consider,

***~~I. The demonstrations which Christ has given us of his love—~~***

He loved his Church from before the foundation of the world, and he has displayed his love to it in a manner that must fill both men and angels with everlasting astonishment. Every member of it was dearer to him than his own happiness; more desirable to him, if we may so speak, than his own glory. He loved us to such a degree, that for our sakes he gave up the happiness which he enjoyed in his Father's bosom, and the glory which he possessed upon his Father's throne: he gave himself for us, that he might be,

***~~1. A surety for our persons—~~***

The debt which we owed to divine justice could never be discharged by mortal man: nor was there any superior being able or willing to take upon himself our awful responsibility. Our case was desperate, as much so as that of the fallen angels. But the Son of God, of his own infinitely rich grace and mercy, was pleased to undertake for us, [1 Timothy 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.6). What Paul said to Philemon respecting Onesimus, he said to his Father respecting us, "What do they owe you? Put it all to my account; I will repay you. Whatever shall be necessary to ransom them from the hands of incensed justice, let it be exacted of me: I will be answerable for it; I will pay it, to the uttermost farthing! Philemon, verse 18, 19."

***~~2. A sacrifice for our sins—~~***

It was not by corruptible things, such as silver and gold, that we could be redeemed. Satisfaction must be made for all our violations of God's holy law. Death was the desert of man; and death must be endured by the Son of God himself, if he would put himself in the place of sinful man. This was fully known to our adorable Savior; and yet he would not shrink from the conditions. He had set his heart upon his chosen people, and he was prepared to pay the price, even though it were his own life. Accordingly he took our nature for the express purpose of offering it up as a sacrifice for sin. In that nature he made a full atonement for all our transgressions, and satisfied the utmost demands of law and justice. In short, he so gave himself to be an offering and sacrifice to God, that God smelled a sweet savor, and became instantly reconciled to his offending creatures, [Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.8).

What manner of love was this! Who can ever explore "its heights and depths, its length and breadth?" Well may "God commend his love to us" by this particular instance, verse 2; for it is, and ever must be, without a parallel: it as far exceeds our conceptions as it does our deserts.

To assign any adequate reasons for such love is impossible: but the riches of it will appear in a striking point of view, if we consider,

***~~II. The ends for which it has been so demonstrated—~~***

The design of Jesus in the whole of his mediatory work has been, to bring back our fallen race to the enjoyment of all that they had lost by sin. He gave himself for us, that we might enjoy,

***~~1. A restoration to his image—~~***

It was not merely a salvation from *misery*that Christ came to impart, but a salvation from *sin*, which is the cause of misery. He came to set us apart for God as a holy and peculiar people; and to cleanse us by "the renewing of the Holy Spirit." The washing of water in baptism was only the external sign of that spiritual grace which it is the delight of his soul to bestow. "He will sprinkle clean water upon us, and cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols, [Ezekiel 36:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-26)." Without this spiritual renovation, all his other mercies would be in vain. Man could not be happy, if he were not first made holy.

The *instrument*by which this grace is conveyed to the soul, is the Word of God. The word, both written and preached, is that whereby we are begotten of him, [James 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.18); by which also, as newborn babes, we are nourished, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2); and by which the whole work of sanctification is carried on, [John 15:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.3). The Holy Spirit indeed is the agent who renders the word effectual: but the Gospel is "the rod of his strength," and it is by that he renovates and saves the world.

***~~2. A participation of his glory—~~***

When sinners are in a measure cleansed with the washing of water by the word, the ministers who have been instrumental to that change, "espouse them to one husband, and present them as a chaste virgin to Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2). [Psalm 45:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.13-14)." And while the work of sanctification is advancing in them, they are like those virgins who were destined for the embrace of eastern monarchs, who were purified during several months for that end, until they were judged fit for the dignity to which they were to be exalted, [Esther 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 2.12).

The time for their complete honor and felicity is the day of judgment; when the Bridegroom himself shall come to take them home to himself, and to fix them in the mansions prepared for them. Then they will be "without spot or wrinkle; they will be perfectly holy and without blemish." They will be "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy Jude verse 24." What "a glorious Church" will they then be! *Here*their glory is obscured by spots and blemishes: but *there*they will not have "any such thing:" they will be as "pure as God is pure," and as "perfect as God is perfect."

If anything can account for the stupendous efforts of Christ's love, it must be this. This is an end worthy of the Supreme Being. This will be such a display of his power and grace as will forever fill all Heaven with wonder and admiration.

***~~"A word of exhortation," grounded on the foregoing subject—~~***

***~~1. Desire holiness—~~***

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has desired for you. To obtain this for you, he divested himself of all his glory, and endured the accursed death of the cross. He desired this for you, because it was the only medium through which you could arrive at happiness, and because it could not fail of rendering you completely happy. Ah! do not despise it. Do not turn away from it, as inimical to your welfare. Do not consider it as a mere system of restraints, a burden that is intolerable. It is in truth the perfection of your nature, and the most complete liberty: it is a liberty from the thraldom of sin, and from the tyranny of Satan. Desire it therefore, even as Christ has desired it for you; and never think any sacrifice too great for the attainment of it.

***~~2. Use the means of attaining holiness—~~***

The word is the means which God in every age has made use of for the recovery of fallen man. By that he converted thousands in the primitive ages of the Church: and by that he is still carrying on his work in the souls of men. Let the Scriptures then be searched by you, not to gratify curiosity merely, or to exercise a critical acumen, but to obtain the knowledge of God's will, and an increasing conformity to his image. *Read the sacred volume as a book that is to make you holy.*When you hear the word preached to you, hear it with a desire to get a deeper discovery of your sins, and a more perfect victory over them. Whether you read, or hear, or meditate, or pray—let it be with an immediate view to grow in holiness and a fitness for glory.

***~~3. Look forward to the perfection of holiness as the consummation and completion of all your wishes—~~***

Higher than this you cannot look; and lower you ought not. This was the ultimate design of all that Christ undertook for you, and of all that he did and suffered for you. Do but consider how happy you will be when not a spot or blemish can be found in you, even by God himself; when you shall be perfectly like your God; and when you shall enjoy the most intimate and endearing fellowship with your Lord, without any alloy, or intermission, or end. Do not rest in anything short of this. Do not allow any of the pleasures of time and sense to rob you of it. Surely the very prospect of such glory is enough to kindle in your souls the devoutest rapture, and to stimulate you to incessant activity in your Christian course. Yield yourselves sincerely to the Lord, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1), and he will, in the last day, present you to himself, and acknowledge you as his for evermore!

***~~#2123~~***

***~~UNION WITH CHRIST~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30)~~***

"We are members of his body."

THAT the eternal Son of God assumed our nature, and lived and died for the salvation of men, is doubtless the fundamental truth on which we are to build our hopes. But we shall have a very partial view of that truth, if we consider it merely in reference to our acceptance with God. The Apostles state it as the strongest of all motives to obedience, and as the pattern which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we are bound to imitate.

To go no further than the context; Paul is stating the duties of husbands and wives: and, having observed that wives are to be as obedient to their husbands, in all lawful things, as the Church is to Christ. He shows, that husbands are not, however, at liberty to act the tyrant; but that they would at all times be influenced by love, and consult the good and happiness of their wives, as much as Christ himself does of the Church, to whom he stands in a similar relation, verse 22-30.

The words before us are, in this view, deserving of the deepest attention; since they not only unfold a most mysterious and important truth, but tend in the highest degree to meliorate our tempers, and to diffuse universal happiness. Let us consider then,

***~~I. The union which exists between Christ and his Church—~~***

There is a personal union which Christ has with our nature, by means of his incarnation, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14), and which was necessary for the executing of the great work which he had undertaken, [Hebrews 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.11); [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14); [Hebrews 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.16). But in this the whole human race participate, without any distinction. The union which Christ has with the Church is distinct from that, and is,

***~~1. Legal—~~***

There is, among men, a union between a debtor and his surety; insomuch that, if a debt is not discharged, the surety is as much answerable for it as if he had contracted it himself: and if, on the contrary, it is discharged by the surety, the creditor has no further claim on him who contracted it.

Thus it is with respect to Christ and his Church. He is the surety of the New Covenant, [Hebrews 7:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.22); having undertaken for us, he was charged with our debt, "it was exacted of him, and he was made answerable, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7)." Having paid the debt, his payment is put to our account, "By his obedience we are made righteous, [Romans 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.19)." In a word, "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we (who had no righteousness) might be made the righteousness of God in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)."

***~~2. Spiritual—~~***

Very much is spoken in Scripture respecting the spiritual union which exists between Christ and his people.

To mark that they stand by him alone, it is compared to a *foundation and the superstructure*, [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22).

To show that he is the one source of vital influence to them all, it is illustrated by a *root and the branches*, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

To intimate that one Spirit pervades both him and them, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17), it is set forth under the image of a *body*; he being the Head, and they the members, [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16).

To convey some idea of the tender endearments with which it is accompanied, it is shadowed forth by a *marriage union*.

This is the representation given in the text. He is our husband, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5); and we are his bride, [Revelation 21:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.9); and, as Adam said of Eve when she was brought to him, "She is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bones, [Genesis 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.23)," so may we say respecting the Lord Jesus Christ, "We are members of his body."

Whatever beauty there is in all the other figures, methinks there is a peculiar propriety in that which is now under our consideration, because it marks that volition, yes, and those means also, whereby the union is effected. The Lord Jesus Christ displays before our eyes his excellency and glory, his suitableness and sufficiency; and, *by the constraining influence of his love, inclines us to leave all that has hitherto been esteemed by us*, in order to connect ourselves with him, and enjoy his presence, [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11). [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30). We accept that gracious proposal, "You shall not be for another man; so will I also be for you, [Hosea 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.3)." and being thus engaged by a solemn covenant, we surrender up ourselves to him, whether it be for better or for worse in this world, determining through grace to "be faithful unto him, even until death."

We prosecute the idea of a marriage union no further at present, because it will be more fully opened, while we show,

***~~II. The blessings resulting from union with Christ—~~***

It is needless to expatiate upon the comforts and benefits of that relation among men: but we cannot be too minute in specifying the blessings that result from a union with Christ. The chief of them will come under our review, while we observe, that,

***~~1. He has communion with us in all our trials—~~***

One who understands the duties of a husband, and labors faithfully to discharge them, is ever ready to sympathize with his wife in her afflictions of whatever kind, and solicitous to the utmost to relieve them. What is done to her, whether it is good or evil, he considers it as done to himself. Thus it is with our blessed Lord.

Are we tempted? a consciousness of his relation to us calls forth his sympathy, and engages his utmost exertions on our behalf, [Hebrews 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.17-18); [Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.15).

Are we persecuted? He feels in his inmost soul the dagger that pierces us, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8). [Acts 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.4).

Do we labor under distresses of any kind? "In all our afflictions he is afflicted, [Isaiah 63:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.9);" and every attempt made to mitigate our trouble, he accepts, as if he himself were personally relieved, [Matthew 25:35-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.35-40).

***~~2. We have communion with him in all his benefits—~~***

A woman, from whatever rank she be taken, is no sooner united in the marriage-bond, than she is exalted to a participation of all the honors and possessions of her husband.

Thus it is with the Church when united unto Christ.

Is he possessed of a perfect righteousness, commensurate with the highest demands of law and justice? Those who are joined to him by faith, are partakers of it all, and may boldly call him, "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." However sinful they may have been in former times, "in him shall they be justified, and in him may they glory, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25)."

Has he within himself an inexhaustible fountain of grace? [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). They may receive it out of his fullness [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); and having had a measure of it communicated to them, they may go to him for more, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6); yes, whatever supplies they may need, they shall have sufficient for them, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9); sufficient to mortify every sin, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14), to fulfill every duty, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13), to triumph over every enemy, [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37).

Is he enthroned on high, the heir and Lord of all things, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2). Let not his people think that even these things are too great for them: for they shall have:  
a *throne*like unto his throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21),  
a *kingdom*like unto his kingdom, [Luke 22:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.29),  
and a *glory*like unto his glory! [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22).

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

**1. Those who have reason to believe that they are "married to Christ."** [Jeremiah 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.14). [Isaiah 62:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.5)

If we congratulate our friends when they are settled in life with a fair prospect of happiness, shall we not much more congratulate you; you, who by your connection with Christ have become children of the living God, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). What earthly advancement can be compared with this? Who among the children of men is so wise to discern, so tender to regard, so able to relieve, your every need?

We hope that you know your union with him. It is certainly your privilege to know it, and to rejoice in it, [John 14:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.20). "Rejoice then in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice! [Philippians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.4)."

But together with your *privileges*, remember also the *duties*which this high relation brings with it. Would you be unfaithful to him, or grieve him in anything? God forbid. Remember the fervent attachment, [Titus 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.4), the humble reverence, [Ephesians 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.33), the unreserved submission, [Ephesians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.22); [Ephesians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.24). [1 Peter 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1); [1 Peter 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.5-6), which a dutiful wife feels towards her husband; and let these feelings be transferred in the highest possible degree to your revere Head! [Ephesians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.23). [1 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.3)." And be exercised towards him without any intermission or alloy.

***~~2. Those who have no evidence that such a union has been formed—~~***

They who have felt no need of a union with Christ, will be ready to say, like Ezekiel's hearers, "Ah! Lord God, does he not speak parables? [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)." But indeed "we speak forth the words of truth and soberness, [Acts 26:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.25)." You hope to bring forth fruit to God in some other way than by a union with Christ: but you may as well expect a branch to be fruitful, when separated from the vine, [John 15:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-5). The image in the text is applied by Paul in reference to this very thing: he tells us, that "we must be married unto Christ, that we may bring forth fruit unto God, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4)."

Moreover, if you be not united to Christ in this world, you will in vain hope for a union with him in the world to come. This is the time wherein you are to be betrothed to him. Seek then to know him: seek to become an object of his regard: seek to be united to him as intimately as he is to his Heavenly Father, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21); [John 6:56-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.56-57). Be not contented with seeking, but strive—strive to obtain a saving interest in his favor; nor cease from your labor until you can say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his! [Song of Solomon 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 2.16)." Then shall you have the most delightful fellowship with him, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3); you shall have such manifestations of his regard, as the world can neither know nor receive, [John 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-22). And when all earthly connections shall cease, your happiness shall be consummated in the everlasting fruition of his love! [1 Thessalonians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.17).

***~~#2124~~***

***~~UNION BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[Ephesians 5:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.32)~~***

"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

CHRISTIANITY is a mystery altogether—a great mystery. As it is written, "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory! [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)." Every part of it is mysterious:

its *plan*, as concerted between the Father and the Son, [Colossians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.2);

its *propagation*, so as to incorporate in one body the whole world both of Jews and Gentiles, [Romans 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.25). [Ephesians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.9-10);

the *representations*given of it in emblematic types from the foundation of the world.

Among these, the marriage of our first parents is worthy of particular attention. It is that to which the Apostle especially refers in the passage before us. The very words spoken by Adam on that occasion are quoted by him, [Genesis 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 2.23-24) with, verse 30, 31. They appear, indeed, at first sight, to be spoken only in reference to marriage generally: but he declares, and pronounces it "a great mystery," that "he spoke concerning Christ and the Church."

Here it is evident that there was one thing spoken, and another intended; and, consequently, if we would fully enter into the Apostle's mind, we must consider,

***~~I. The subject ostensibly proposed—~~***

He is speaking of the duties which men owe to each other, in the relation of husband and wife, parents and children, masters and servants. That of husband and wife, as existing before all others, is introduced first.

***~~He specifies their duties—~~***

He specifies hers to him, and his to her. Her duty to him is comprised in respect and subjection; in respect to him as her head; in subjection to him as her lord. His duty to her comprehends unrivaled affection, and unbounded care. These were their respective duties, while yet they remained in innocence: for they arose out of the manner in which their union was formed. The man was first formed, the lord and governor of the whole earth. The woman was made afterwards, and taken out of the side of man as a part of his substance; and therefore was properly subject to him. She, too, was made for man, and not man for her: and, consequently, this put her still further under his control. These duties, however, were still further extended after man had fallen: for the woman, having been first in the transgression, was doomed to weaknesses and pains which she would never otherwise have experienced, and was still more entirely subjected to her husband's rule, [Genesis 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.16) with [1 Timothy 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.11-14). But, in proportion as she needed his protection, his obligation to extend it to her was increased, together with all its attendant sympathy and assiduities.

***~~He at the same time illustrates them by a comparison—~~***

The Apostle institutes a comparison between the marriage union and that which exists between Christ and his Church; and again and again reverts to it, in order to mark the correspondence between them in every particular.

In speaking of the wife's duties to her husband, he says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church; and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything, verses 22-24."

Now, here the Apostle states, in the clearest and fullest manner, both the extent of her duties and the ground of them. All the subjection which the Church owes to Christ, she owes to her husband; subordinate only to the paramount obligations which she owes to Christ himself: and she owes them to him for the very same reason; namely, because her husband is her head and protector, just as the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Savior of his whole mystical body, the Church.

Next, in speaking of the husband's duty to his wife, he draws a similar comparison between Christ's love and tenderness to his Church, and that which a man should exercise towards his wife. The object he should have in view also, in all the control which he exercises over her, would be precisely such as Christ has manifested towards his Church; namely, the advancement of her real welfare. To a similar extent, also, should he carry this into effect; willingly denying himself, and submitting gladly to the greatest privations, if only he may attain his end, and promote her best interests.

Hear the Apostle's own words; and mark especially how minutely the Apostle enters into the objects which Christ has accomplished in behalf of his Church, in order the more clearly to show what the husband should aim at in reference to his wife: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also 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 would be holy and without blemish, verse 25-27."

Then, going on with a special reference to Eve, who was a part of Adams own body, he adds, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the Church: for we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife: and they two shall be one flesh, verse 28-31." All this shows us with what intensity of affection a man should regard his wife; and with what tender care he would labor for her temporal, spiritual, and eternal good.

Now, here we would have stopped, as having brought into view all that the Apostle designed. But, what the Apostle has spoken in our text necessarily leads us to the contemplation of another subject, even,

***~~II. The subject covertly intended—~~***

We are perfectly surprised when we hear the Apostle unexpectedly declaring, "I speak all this concerning Christ and his Church." Truly, "this is a mystery." Let us consider,

***~~1. The mystery itself—~~***

Under the image of a marriage union, the Apostle has been speaking of Christ and his Church, between whom there exists the same relation as between a man and his wife. The Lord Jesus Christ is "a Bridegroom, and the Church is his bride." This is the language both of the Old Testament, [Isaiah 54:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.5). and the New Testament, [John 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.29); and between them exists a closer union than ever existed between a man and his wife: for they are, by their union, made "one *flesh*, verse 31;" but Christ and his Church are "one *spirit*, [1 Corinthians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.17)." They too, inasmuch as Christ has taken upon him our nature, may be called one body; so that, in reference to Christ, it may be said of us, "We are members of his body."

But I say again, that, inasmuch as we have a spiritual union with Christ, our connection with him is closer than any that can exist between persons joined in the marriage bond; who, though one flesh, may be, and too often are, far from being united in spirit.

By virtue of the union of Christ with his Church, she partakes of all the privileges which a marriage union can convey. He is entitled to the entire possession of our whole hearts: and we become partakers of all his honors, and all his wealth, and all his influence, and all his love. Nothing can be conceived as enjoyed by a woman in virtue of the marriage relation which she has entered into, that is not imparted to us in the richest possible abundance, as soon as we believe in Christ.

On the other hand, there are the same obligations entailed upon us. The Lord Jesus Christ, if I may so speak, as bound in covenant to us, will order everything for our good: and we, as given up to him in covenant, are bound to "forsake all for him [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33)," and "to live for him, and not for another, [Hosea 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 3.3)." *To serve him, and honor him, and glorify him, must from henceforth be our supreme happiness and our only care.*This its plainly set forth by the Psalmist, who says, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house; so shall the King greatly desire your beauty: for He is your Lord; and worship you him, [Psalm 45:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.10-11)."

***~~2. The greatness of this mystery—~~***

It is indeed "great," whether we consider it as a rational truth, or whether we regard it in its practical importance. As a rational truth, how wonderful is it that the God of Heaven and earth would become a man, and take into union with himself such worthless and corrupt creatures as we; submitting to the lowest depths of misery, in order to raise us to the highest throne of his glory! That he would acknowledge such a relation between himself and us, and make that relation the means of communicating to us all that felicity, is a mystery too big for utterance, too deep for any finite intelligence to explore!

In its practical importance, too, it far surpasses all human comprehension. For to effect this union, is the very end for which the Gospel itself is ministered to man. Paul preached through immense regions, from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum. And what did he labor to accomplish? What was the effect of his ministrations? He says to his Corinthian converts, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ! [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2)."

Now this is our object also, even to solicit, in the behalf of Christ, that you will consent to a union with him, and surrender up yourselves altogether unto him. This union, also, is the only one means by which you can ever bring forth fruit unto God. "Separate from Christ," you can no more bear the fruits of holiness, than a branch can bear grapes when separate from the vine, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

Paul speaks of this, under the very image contained in our text. He represents us as married, in our unconverted state, to the law: but, on our conversion, the law, as far as respects its power over us, becomes dead; so that we are at liberty to be married unto Christ, and to bear fruit to him: "My brethren," says he, "you are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that you would be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we would bring forth fruit unto God, [Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.4)." In no way whatever can the fruits of righteousness be produced by us, except by virtue of union with him: for they are the fruits of his Spirit, communicated to us, and abiding in us, [Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-23). [Romans 6:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.22).

I may further add, that *this union, begun on earth, will be perpetuated in Heaven for evermore*. Earthly connections are dissolved by death: this is cemented and confirmed. In this world we are rather betrothed, than actually united, [Hosea 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19); rather presented for approbation, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2), than brought to a full enjoyment of the nuptial bonds. The consummation of the marriage, with the feast attendant on it, is reserved for the eternal world; and shall take place as soon as the bride is fully prepared for the honors to be conferred upon her!

So says John, respecting a period yet future, when this glorious ceremony is to be completed: "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." [Revelation 19:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.6-9).

Say now, whether anything can exceed the importance of this mystery? You perceive, that to accomplish it is the end of all our ministrations; the actual completion of it is the only means of sanctification to your souls; and the full enjoyment of it in all its inconceivable benefits, is Heaven. Truly, "this is a great mystery;" nor will eternity suffice for its full development.

***~~Let me now, in conclusion, entreat of you these two things:~~***

***~~1. Seek by faith to realize this mystery—~~***

It must be realized by all: and the only way in which it can be realized, is, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is faith which unites us to him: it is faith which interests us in him, and which brings down from him all that our souls can stand in need of. Though the mystery which we have been contemplating is great—yet the means by which we are to have it realized are simple. Only believe in Christ, as becoming man for you, as dying on the cross for you, as giving himself to you in an everlasting covenant; believe in him, I say, as willing to confer on you all the blessings of salvation; and you shall find that you have not believed in vain: for "out of his fullness shall you assuredly receive" all that you can require, and all that he has undertaken to bestow upon you.

And let not the thought of your own unworthiness discourage you: for there are none, however unworthy, whom he will not receive into that relation, if only they will believe in him. See the description given of the Jewish Church previous to her union with him: "When I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you when you were in your blood, Live! Yes, I said unto you when you were in your blood, Live. When I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yes, I swore unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine! [Ezekiel 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.6); [Ezekiel 16:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 16.8)."

What more humiliating condition can you well conceive, than that of a new-born infant, which is here thrice repeated, "polluted in its own blood?" Yet out of that state did he select them, and from that condition did he take them for his Church and people. Know then, that no unworthiness whatever is, or can be, a bar to your union with Christ, if only you will accept his overtures of love and mercy. Nay, if, after having been by profession united to him, you have dishonored him by the basest unfaithfulness, still he says to you, "Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice, says the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married unto you! [Jeremiah 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.13-14)."

Thus you see, that neither unworthiness *before*your union to him, nor unfaithfulness *after*it, need cause you to despair: for "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound, [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20);" and "those who come unto him, he will never cast out, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)."

***~~2. Endeavor, by works, to recommend and adorn it—~~***

Persons who hear of your high pretensions, will naturally ask, "What do you do more than others, [Matthew 5:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.47)." They have a right to ask this question: and we ought to be able to answer it. If we are brought into so near a relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to show the effect which it produces on us. We ought to walk worthy of the new condition into which we are brought, and worthy of Him who has raised us to it, [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1). [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.12). The King's daughter ought to be "all glorious within; and her clothing should be of wrought gold [Psalm 45:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.13)." There would be in us universal holiness, both in heart and life. The whole "spirit of our minds would be renewed, [Ephesians 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23);" and we should be altogether "new creatures in Christ Jesus; old things haying passed away, and all things having become new, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)."

Beloved brethren, see that you answer to this character: see that you "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, [Colossians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.10)," and "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God, [Philippians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.11)." This will honor your divine Husband. This will answer the end for which he has chosen you to himself, and will best prove the truth and excellence of the communications you have received from him. Then will another mystery be seen. Men will wonder how it is that you have been enabled so to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and so to put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22); [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)." But they will have the true solution of the phenomenon, when they know into what close connection you have been brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, and how "mightily his Spirit has wrought within you:" and they will readily receive the mystery which they cannot see, when they are constrained to acknowledge the mystery which they do see. They will be forced to confess that you are a people whom the Lord has blessed, and that he is with you of a truth.

***~~#2125~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)~~***

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

THE Christian's life is frequently represented in the Scriptures under the metaphor of a *warfare*. Christ is called "the Captain of his salvation, [Hebrews 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.10);" and those who have enlisted under his banners, "fighting the good fight of faith, [1 Timothy 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.12)," and enduring cheerfully all the hardships of the campaign, are called "good soldiers of Jesus Christ, [2 Timothy 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.3)." "Like warriors, they do not entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may please him who has chosen them to be soldiers, [2 Timothy 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.4);" but they set themselves to "war a good warfare, [1 Timothy 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.18)," and they look for the rewards of victory, when they shall have subdued all their enemies, [2 Timothy 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.7-8). [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

Paul, standing, as it were, in the midst of the camp, advises the soldiers, telling them what enemies they have to combat, and how they may guard effectually against all their stratagems, and secure to themselves the victory. He begins with an animating exhortation, wherein he reminds them of the wonderful talents of their General, and urges them to place the most unlimited confidence in his skill and power.

The exhortation being contracted into a very small space, and conveying far more than appears at first sight, we shall consider, first, What is implied in it; and afterwards, What is expressed.

***~~I. What is implied in the exhortation—~~***

**The first thing that would naturally occur to anyone to whom this exhortation was addressed, is, that the Christian has need of strength**; for on any other supposition than this, the words would be altogether absurd.

But the Christian will indeed appear to require strength, whether we consider the *work*he has to perform, or the *difficulties*he has to cope with. It is no easy matter to stem the tide of corrupt nature, to control the impetuous passions, to root out inveterate habits, to turn the current of our affections from the things of time and sense to things invisible and eternal. To renew and sanctify our hearts, and to transform them into the Divine image, is a work far beyond the power of feeble man; yet is it indispensably necessary to his salvation.

But as though this were not of itself sufficient to call forth the Christian's exertions, he has hosts of *enemies*to contend with, as soon as ever he addresses himself in earnest to the work assigned him. Not to mention all the sinful propensities of his nature, which will instantly rise up in rebellion against him, and exert all their power for the mastery; the *world*will immediately begin to cry out against him; they will direct all their artillery against him, their scoffs, their ridicule, their threats: his very friends will turn against him; and "those of his own household will become his greatest foes." They would let him go on in the broad road year after year, and not one among them would ever exhort him to love and serve his God: but the very moment that he enters on the narrow path that leads unto life, they will all, with one heart and one soul, unite their endeavors to obstruct his course; and when they cannot prevail, they will turn their back upon him, and give him up as an irreclaimable fanatic.

In conjunction with these will *Satan*(as we shall hereafter have occasion to show) combine his forces. Yes, he will put himself at their head, and direct their motions, and stimulate their exertions, and concur with them to the uttermost to captivate and destroy the heaven-born soul.

And can such work be performed, such difficulties be surmounted, without the greatest efforts? Surely those who are called to such things, had need "be strong."

**A second thing implied in the exhortation is, that the Christian has no strength in himself**; for, if he had, why would he be exhorted to be strong in another?

Little do men imagine how extremely impotent they are, in themselves, to that which is good. It must be easy, one would suppose, to read and understand the Word of God, or, at least, to profit by a clear and faithful ministry of it. But these are far beyond the power of the natural man. The word is "a sealed book" to him, [Isaiah 29:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.11-12), which, for lack of a spiritual discernment, appears a mass of foolishness, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14), a "cunningly devised fable, [2 Peter 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.16) and [Ezekiel 20:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 20.49)."

When it was even explained by our Lord, the Apostles, for the space of more than three years, were not able to comprehend its import, until he opened their understandings to understand it, [Luke 24:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.44-45); and Lydia, like thousands of others, would have been unmoved by the preaching of Paul, if "the Lord had not opened her heart" to apprehend and embrace his word, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14). It would seem, however, that if these things are beyond the power of man, he can at least pray to God to instruct him. But neither can he do this, unless the Spirit of God "helps his infirmities," teaching him what to pray for, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), and assisting him in offering the petitions, Jude verse 20. [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)."

If he be insufficient for this work, it may be hoped he is able to do something. But our Lord tells us, that, without the special aid of his grace, he "can do nothing [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)."

Can he not then *speak*what is good? No, "How can you, being evil, speak good things [Matthew 12:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.34)" says our Lord. And Paul says, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit, [1 Corinthians 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.3)."

Still may he not *will*, or at least *think*, what is good? We must answer this also in the negative: "It is God alone who works in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)." Nor had Paul himself, no, not even after his conversion, an ability, of himself, to "think anything good; his sufficiency was of God, and of God alone, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5)."

Our impotence cannot be more fitly expressed by any words whatever, than by that expression of the Apostle, "You are dead in trespasses and sins, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1);" for, until God quickens us from the dead, we are as incapable of all the exercises of the spiritual life, as a breathless corpse is of all the functions of the physical life.

**There is yet a third thing implied in this exhortation, namely, that there is a sufficiency for us in Christ**; for otherwise the Apostle would not have urged us in this manner to be strong in him.

Well does the Apostle speak of Christ's "mighty power;" for indeed he is almighty, "he has all power committed to him both in Heaven and in earth, [Matthew 28:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.18)." We may judge of his all-sufficiency by what he wrought when he was on earth: the most inveterate diseases vanished at his touch, at his word, at a mere act of volition, when he was at a distance from the patient. The fish of the sea were constrained to minister unto him. Yes, the devils themselves yielded to his authority, and were instantly forced to liberate their captives at his command: they could not even enter into the swine without his permission. The very *elements*also were obedient to his word; the winds were still; the waves forbore to roll; the storm that threatened to overwhelm him, became a perfect calm.

What then can he not do for those who trust in him? "Is his hand now shortened, that he cannot save? or is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" Can he not heal the diseases of our souls, and calm our troubled spirits, and supply our every need? Cannot he who "triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross, and spoiled them, and led them captive in his ascension, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15). [Ephesians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.8)," fulfill his promise, that "sin shall not have dominion over us, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)," and that "Satan shall be bruised under our feet shortly, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)." Doubtless he is "the Lord Jehovah, with whom is everlasting strength, [Isaiah 26:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.4)," and who is therefore "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25)."

These things being understood as *implied*in the exhortation, we may more fully comprehend in the second place,

***~~II. What is expressed in the exhortation—~~***

It is evident that there are two points to which the Apostle designs to lead us: the one is, to rely on Christ for strength, the other is, to "be strong in him", with an assured confidence of success.

***~~1. We must rely on Christ for strength.~~***

In relation to the first of these we observe, that a general must confide in his army full as much as his army confides in him; for as they cannot move to advantage without an experienced head to guide them, so neither can he succeed in his plans, unless he has a brave and well-appointed army to carry them into execution.

It is not thus in the Christian army; there all the confidence is in the General alone. He must not only train his soldiers, and direct them in the day of battle, but he must be with them in the battle:  
shielding their heads,  
and strengthening their arms,  
and animating their courage,  
and reviving them when faint,  
and raising them when fallen,  
and healing them when wounded,  
and finally, beating down their enemies that they may trample them under their feet.

The fullness that is in Christ is treasured up in him for us, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23), that we may receive out of it according to our necessities. As he came down from Heaven to purchase for us all the gifts of the Spirit, so he has ascended up to Heaven that he might bestow them upon us, [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10), and fill us, each according to his measure, with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19); [Ephesians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.7). Hence previous to his death he said, "You believe in God; believe also in me, [John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1);" let that same faith which you repose in God the Father as your Creator, be reposed in me as your Redeemer: let it be full, and implicit: let it extend to every need: let it be firm and unshaken, under all circumstances however difficult, however adverse.

Such was our Lord's direction: and agreeable to it was the experience of the great Apostle, who says, "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)."

It is characteristic of every Christian soldier to receive thus out of Christ's fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16); and to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength! [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

***~~2. We must "be strong in him", with an assured confidence of success.~~***

But the principal point which the Apostle aims at in the text, is, to inspire us with a holy confidence in Christ, so that we may be as much assured of victory as if we saw all our enemies fleeing before us, or already prostrate at our feet.

We cannot have a more striking illustration of our duty in this respect than the history of David's combat with Goliath. He would not go against his adversary with armor suited to the occasion: he went forth in the name of the God of Israel; and therefore he did not doubt one moment the outcome of the contest. He well knew that God could direct his aim; and that he was as sure of victory without any other arms than a sling and a stone from his shepherd's bag, as he could be with the completest armor that Saul himself could give him, 1 Samuel 17:45-47.

What David thus illustrated, we may see exemplified in the conduct of Paul: "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39)."

Thus it is that we must go forth against all the enemies of our salvation: we must "have no confidence in the flesh, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3);" neither must we have any doubt respecting the all-sufficiency of our God: the weakest among us would boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what men or devils can do against me! [Hebrews 13:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.6)." "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

**In applying this subject to the different classes of professing Christians**,

***~~1. We would first address ourselves to the self-confident.~~***

It is the solemn declaration of God, that "by strength shall no man prevail, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9). See also [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16) and [Zechariah 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6) and [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13)." We might hope that men would be convinced of this truth by their own experience.

Who among us has not made vows and resolutions without number, and broken them again almost as soon as they were made? Who ever resolved to devote himself sincerely to God, and did not find, that he was unable steadfastly to pursue his purpose? What folly is it then to be renewing these vain attempts, when we have the evidence both of Scripture and experience that we cannot succeed? How much better would it be to trust in that "mighty One, on whom help is laid, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19)."

Learn, brethren, before it be too late, that "without Christ you can do nothing:" that "all your fresh springs are in him, [Psalm 87:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 87.7);" and "of him must your fruit be found, [Hosea 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.8);" "in him alone shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory, [Isaiah 45:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.25)." If you will not "be strong in him," you will continue "without strength," but if once you truly "know him, you shall be strong, and do exploits, [Daniel 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 11.32)."

***~~2. We would next claim the attention of the timid.~~***

It is but too common for the Lord's people to be indulging needless fears, like David, when he said, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul, [1 Samuel 27:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 27.1)." But surely such deserve the rebuke which our Lord gave to Peter, "O you of little faith, why do you doubt, [Matthew 14:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 14.31)."

If you doubt the Lord's willingness to save you, say, why did he die for you, even for the chief of sinners?

If you call in question his power, what is there in your case that can baffle Omnipotence?

If you are discouraged on account of your own weakness, know that the weaker you are in yourself, the stronger you shall be in him [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10); and that "he will perfect his own strength in your weakness [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)."

If you fear on account of the strength and number of your enemies, he meets your fears with this beneficial admonition, "Say not, A confederacy, a confederacy; but sanctify the Lord Almighty himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread! [Isaiah 8:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.12-13)." Only trust in him,  
and though *weak*, he will strengthen you, [Isaiah 26:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.6);  
though *faint*, he will revive you, [Isaiah 40:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.29-31);  
though *wounded*, he will heal you, [Exodus 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 15.26). [Isaiah 33:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 33.23);  
though *captive*, he will liberate you, [Isaiah 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 14.2); [Isaiah 49:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.24-25);  
though *slain*, he will raise you up again, and give you the victory over all your enemies, [Isaiah 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.4).

"Be strong then and very courageous, [Joshua 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.6-7); [Joshua 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.9);" abhor the thought of indulging a cowardly spirit, as long as "God's throne is in Heaven, [Psalm 11:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 11.1-4);" and assure yourselves, with David, that though your "enemies encompass you as bees, in the name of the Lord you shall destroy them! [Psalm 118:6-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.6-12)."

***~~3. Lastly, let the victorious Christian listen to a word of counsel.~~***

We are apt to be elated in the time of victory, and to arrogate to ourselves some portion of the glory. But God solemnly cautions us against this, [Deuteronomy 6:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 6.10-12); [Deuteronomy 8:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.10-11); [Deuteronomy 8:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 8.17-18); and if, with Nebuchadnezzar or Sennacherib, we take the glory to ourselves, the time is near at hand when God will fearfully abase us, [Isaiah 37:24-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.24-29). [Daniel 4:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.30-32); [Daniel 4:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 4.37).

We cannot do better than take the Psalmist for our pattern: he was enabled to perform the most astonishing feats, and was honored with the most signal victories: yet so careful is he to give the glory to God, that he repeats again and again, the same grateful acknowledgments, confessing God to be the sole author of his success, and ascribing to him the honor due unto his name, [Psalm 18:29-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.29-42). Let it be remembered, that "our enemies still live and are mighty:" and therefore we must not boast as if the time were come for us to put off our armor, [1 Kings 20:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.11). We need the same power to keep down our enemies, as to bring them down at first: we would soon fall a prey to the tempter, if left one moment to ourselves. Let our eyes therefore still be to Jesus, "the Author and the Finisher of our faith;" depending on his mighty power for "strength according to our day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)," and for the accomplishment of the promise which he has given us, that "no weapon formed against us shall ever prosper, [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17)."

***~~#2126~~***

***~~THE MEANS OF WITHSTANDING SATAN'S WILES~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11)~~***

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

TO be possessed of courage is not the only requisite for a good soldier; he must be skilled in the use of weapons; he must be acquainted with those stratagems which his adversaries will use for his destruction; he must know how to repel an assault, and how in his turn to assault his enemy: in short, he must be trained to war. Nor will his knowledge avail him anything, unless he stands armed for the combat.

Hence the Apostle, having encouraged the Christian soldier, and inspired him with confidence in "the Captain of his salvation," now calls him to put on his armor, and by a skillful use of it, to prepare for the day of battle.

To open fully the direction before us, we must show you,  
first, the wiles of the devil;  
and next, the means of defeating them.

***~~I. We shall endeavor to lay before you "the wiles of the devil"—~~***

Satan is the great adversary of God and man; and labors to the uttermost to destroy the interests of both. In prosecuting his purpose, he has two grand objects in view, namely,

to lead men into sin,

and to keep them from God.

We must consider these distinctly; and point out the stratagems he uses for the attainment of his ends.

***~~1. To lead men into sin—~~***

To effect this, he presents to them such temptations as are best suited to their natural dispositions. As a skillful general will not attempt to storm a fort on the side that it is impregnable, but will rather direct his efforts against the weaker parts where he has a better prospect of success; so Satan considers the weak part of every man, and directs his artillery where he may most easily make a breach. He well knew the covetous dispositions of Judas, and of Ananias and Sapphira: when therefore he wanted the one to betray his Master, and the others to bring discredit on the Christian name, *he wrought upon their natural propensities*, and instigated them with ease to the execution of his will, [John 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.2); [John 13:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.27). [Acts 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.3). Thus he stimulates the proud or passionate, the lewd or covetous, the timid or melancholy—to such acts as are most congenial with their temperaments, to the intent that his agency may be least discovered, and his purposes most effectually secured.

Much craftiness is also used in the seasons which he chooses for making his assaults. If a general knew that his adversaries were harassed with fatigue, or reveling and intoxicated amidst the spoils of victory, or separated from the main body of their army, so that they could have no support—he would not fail to take advantage of such circumstances, rather than attack them when they were in full force, and in a state of readiness for the combat.

Such a shrewd general is Satan. If he finds us in a state of great trouble and perplexity, when the spirits are exhausted, the mind clouded, the strength enervated, then he will seek to draw us to murmuring or despair. Thus he acted towards Christ himself when he had been fasting forty days and forty nights; and again, on the eve of his crucifixion. The former of these occasions afforded him a favorable opportunity for tempting our blessed Lord to despondency, [Matthew 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.2-3), to presumption, [Matthew 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.6), to a total alienation of his heart from God, [Matthew 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.8-9); the latter inspired him with a hope of drawing our Lord to some act unworthy of his high character, and subversive of the ends for which he came into the world, [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30). [Luke 22:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.44); [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53).

Again, if we have been elevated with peculiar joy, he well knows how apt we are to relax our vigilance, and to indulge a carnal security.

Hence, immediately on *Paul's*descent from the third heavens, the paradise of God, Satan strove to puff him up with pride, [2 Corinthians 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7), so that he might bring him into the condemnation of the devil, [1 Timothy 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.6-7).

And with more success did he assault *Peter*immediately after the most exalted honor had been conferred upon him; whereby he brought upon the unguarded saint that just rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan; for you savor not the things that be of God, but those that be of men, [Matthew 16:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16-19); [Matthew 16:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22-23)."

Above all, Satan is sure to embrace an opportunity when we are alone, withdrawn from those whose eye would intimidate us, or whose counsel would restrain us. He could not prevail on Lot, when in the midst of Sodom, to violate the rights of hospitality; but when he was in a retired cave, he too successfully tempted him to repeated acts of drunkenness and incest. And who among us has not found that seasons of privacy, or, at least, of seclusion from those who knew us, have been seasons of more than ordinary temptation?

The means which Satan uses in order to accomplish his purpose, will afford us a yet further insight into his wiles. Whom will a general so soon employ to betray the enemy into his hands, as one who by his power can command them, or by his professions can deceive them! Is it not thus with Satan?

If he wants to draw down the judgments of God upon the whole nation of the *Jews*, he will stir up David, in spite of all the expostulations of his courtiers, to number the people, [Numbers 21:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 21.1-4).

If he would destroy *Ahab*, he becomes a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, to persuade him, and by him to lead Jehoshaphat also and the combined armies into the most imminent peril, [1 Kings 22:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 22.21-22).

See the instance also of *Elymas*the sorcerer, who on account of his efforts is called "a child of the devil." [Acts 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.10). Would he have Job to curse his God? There is no fitter person to employ on this service than Job's own wife, whom he taught to give this counsel, "Curse God, and die [Job 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.9)." Would he prevail on Jesus to lay aside the thoughts of suffering for the sins of men? his friend Peter must offer him this advice, "Master, spare yourself, [Matthew 16:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.16-19); [Matthew 16:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.22-23)."

Thus in leading us to the commission of sin, he will sometimes use the authority of magistrates, of masters, or of parents, and sometimes the influence of our dearest friends or relatives. No instruments so fit for him, as those of a man's own household, [Matthew 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.36).

There is also something further observable in the manner in which Satan tempts the soul. An able general will study to conceal the main object of his attack, and to deceive his enemy, [Joshua 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.5-6); [Joshua 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.15); [Joshua 8:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.21).

Thus does Satan form his attack with all imaginable cunning. His mode of beguiling *Eve*will serve as a specimen of his artifices in every age. He first only inquired whether any prohibition had been given her and her husband respecting the eating of the fruit of a particular tree; insinuating at the same time, that it was very improbable that God would impose upon them such an unnecessary restraint. Then, on being informed that the tasting of that fruit was forbidden and that the penalty of death was to be inflicted on them in the event of their disobedience, he intimated, that such a consequence could never follow: that, on the contrary, the benefits which would arise to them from eating of that fruit were incalculable. In this manner he led her on, from parleying with him, to believing him; and from believing him, to comply with his solicitations! [Genesis 3:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.1-6).

And thus it is that he acts towards us—he for a time conceals his full purpose. He pleads at first for nothing more than the gratification of the eye, the ear, the imagination; but is no sooner master of one fort, or station, than he plants his artillery there, and renews his assaults, until the whole soul has surrendered to his dominion.

**2. The other grand device of Satan, is to keep men from God.**If, after having yielded to his suggestions, the soul were to return to God with penitence and contrition, all Satan's wiles, however successful they had before been, would be frustrated at once. The next labor therefore of our great adversary is, to secure his captive, that he may not escape out of his hands. The wiles he makes use of to accomplish this, come next under our consideration.

He will begin with misrepresenting to his captives their own character.

One while he will insinuate that, though they may have transgressed in some smaller matters—yet they have never committed any great sin, and therefore have no need to disquiet themselves with apprehensions of God's wrath.

If he cannot compose their minds in that way, he will suggest, that their iniquities have been so numerous, and so heinous, as to preclude all hope of forgiveness. He will endeavor to make them believe that they have been guilty of the unpardonable sin, or that their day of grace is passed; so that they may as well take their fill of present delights, since all attempts to secure eternal happiness will be fruitless. To such artifices as these our Lord refers, when he tells us, that the strong man armed keeps his palace and his goods in peace, [Luke 11:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21); [Luke 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.26).

Next he will misrepresent to his captives the character of God. He will impress them with the idea that God is too merciful to punish any one eternally for such trifling faults as theirs. Or, if that fails to lull them asleep, he will intimate that the insulted Majesty of Heaven demands vengeance: that the justice and holiness of the Deity would be dishonored, if pardon were given to such offenders as they.

Probably too, he will suggest that God has not elected them; and that therefore they must perish, since they cannot alter his decrees, or save themselves without his aid. He will, as in his assaults upon our blessed Lord, [Matthew 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.6), bring the Scriptures themselves to countenance his lies; and, by a misapplication of difficult and detached passages, endeavor to hide from us the perfections of our God, as harmonizing and glorified in our redemption, 2 Corinthians 4:4. It was in this manner that he strove to discourage Joshua, [Zechariah 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.1-2), and to detain David in his bonds, [Psalm 77:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-9). Such advantage too he sought to take of the incestuous Corinthian, [2 Corinthians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.7); 2 Corinthians 2:11; and, if this stratagem is not defeated, he will prevail over us to our eternal ruin.

But there is another stratagem which, for the subtlety of its texture, the frequency of its use, and its successfulness in destroying souls, deserves more especial notice. When effectual resistance has been made to the foregoing temptations, and in spite of all these misrepresentations, the sinner has attained a just view both of his own character, and of God's—then Satan has recourse to another wile that promises indeed to the believer a speedy growth in the divine life, but is intended really to divert him from all proper thoughts both of himself and of God.

He will "transform himself into an angel of light," and make use of some popular minister, or some talkative professor, as his agent in this business. He will by means of his emissaries draw the young convert to matters of doubtful disputation: he will perplex his mind with some intricate questions respecting matters of doctrine, or of discipline in the Church. He will either controvert, and explode acknowledged truths, or carry them to an extreme, turning spirituality to mysticism, or liberty to licentiousness. Having entangled him in this snare, he will puff him up with a conceit of his own superior attainments, and speedily turn him from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Little do his agents, who appear to be "ministers of righteousness," imagine that they are really "ministers of the devil;" and little do those who are inveigled by them, consider "in what a snare they are taken." But God himself, who sees all these secret transactions, and discerns their fatal tendency, has given us this very account, and thereby guarded us against this dangerous device, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3); [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-15).

Thus have we seen the temptations by which Satan leads men into sin, together with the seasons, the means, and the manner, of his assaults.

We have seen also how he keeps them from God, even by misrepresenting to them their own character, and God's, or by diverting them from a due attention either to themselves or God.

***~~II. Let us now proceed in the second place, to point out the means by which these wiles may be defeated—~~***

This part of our subject will come again into discussion, both generally, in the next discourse, and particularly, when we treat of the various pieces of armor provided for us. Nevertheless we must distinctly, though briefly, show in this place:

What we are to understand by the whole armor of God.

How we are to put it on.

In what way it will enable us to withstand the devil's wiles.

Armor is of two kinds, defensive and offensive: the one to protect ourselves, the other to assail our enemy. Now God has provided for us everything that is necessary for a successful maintenance of the Christian warfare.

Is our *head*exposed to the assaults of Satan? There is "a helmet" to guard it.

Is our *heart*liable to be pierced? There is a "breast-plate" to defend it.

Are our *feet*subject to such wounds as may cause us to fall? There are "shoes" for their protection.

Is our *armor*likely to be loosened? There is a "belt" to keep it fast.

Are there openings, by which a well-aimed dart may find admission? There is a "shield," which may be moved for the defense of every part, as occasion may require.

Lastly, the Christian soldier is furnished with a *sword*also, by the skillful use of which he may inflict deadly wounds on his adversary.

But here it will be asked, How shall we get this armor? And how shall we put it on? To obtain it, we must go to the armory of Heaven, and receive it from the hands of the Captain of our salvation. No creature in the universe can give it to us. He, and he only, who formed it, can impart it to us. As, when God had decreed the destruction of Babylon, we are told, that "the Lord opened his armory, and brought forth the weapons of his indignation, [Jeremiah 50:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 50.25);" so, when he has commissioned us to go forth against sin and Satan, he must supply us with the arms, whereby alone we can execute his will. We must be daily going to him in prayer, that he would furnish us from head to foot, or rather, that he himself would be "our shield and buckler," our almighty protector and deliverer! [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11); [Psalm 18:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.2).

When we have received our armor, then we are to "put it on." It is not given to us to look at, but to use: not to wear for amusement, but to gird on for actual service. We must examine it, to see that it is indeed of celestial temper, and that none is lacking. We must adjust it carefully in all its parts, that it may not be cumbersome and useless in the hour of need. And when we have clothed ourselves with it, then we must put forth our strength, and use it for the purposes for which it is designed.

Our more particular directions must be reserved until we consider the use of each distinct part of this armor. We shall only add at present, that, if we thus go forth to the combat, we shall surely vanquish our subtle enemy. We say not, that he shall never wound us; for the most watchful of us are sometimes off our guard; and the most experienced of us are sometimes deceived. But we can assure the whole army of Christians, that Satan shall never finally prevail against them, [Matthew 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.18).

Their *head*shall be preserved from error, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8).

Their *heart*shall be preserved from iniquity, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14).

Their *feet*shall be preserved from falling, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9). [2 Peter 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10).

What remains then, but that we call on all of you to put on this armor. Let not any imagine that they can stand without it: for, if Adam was vanquished even in Paradise, how much more shall we be overpowered? If the perfect armor with which he was clad by nature, proved insufficient for the combat, how shall we stand, who are altogether stripped of every defense! If Satan, while yet a novice in the art of tempting, "beguiled our first parents by his subtlety," how much more will he beguile and ruin us, after so many thousand years of additional experience! Arise then, all of you, and gird yourselves for the combat.

You careless ones, know that you are already "led captive by the devil at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26);" and the more you think yourselves secure, the more you show that you are the dupes of Satan's wiles.

You weak and timid, "Be strong, and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you, wherever you go, [Joshua 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.6); [Joshua 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.9)." Only go forth in dependence upon God, and "no weapon that is formed against you shall ever prosper! [Isaiah 54:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.17)." But take care that you have on the whole armor of God. In vain will be the use of any, if the whole be not used. One part left unprotected will prove as fatal, as if you were exposed in every part! But if you follow this counsel, you may defy all the hosts of Hell: for "the weakest of you shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, [Zechariah 12:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.8)."

***~~#2127~~***

***~~TO WITHSTAND THE POWER OF SATAN~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12-13)~~***

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

IN persuading men to undertake any arduous office, and more especially to enlist into the army, it is customary to keep out of view, as much as possible, the difficulties and dangers they will be exposed to, and to allure them by prospects of pleasure or honor.

It was far otherwise with Christ and his Apostles. When our Lord invited men to enlist under his banners, he told them that they would have to enter on a course of pain and self-denial, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Thus Paul, at the very time that he is endeavoring to recruit the Christian army, tells us plainly, that the enemies we shall have to combat, are the most subtle and powerful of any in the universe. Deceit and violence, the two great engines of cruelty and oppression, are their daily practice and delight.

In conformity with the Apostle's plan, we have opened to you, in some measure, the wiles of that adversary, whom we are exhorting you to oppose. We shall now proceed to set before you somewhat of his power; still however encouraging you not to be dismayed, but to go forth against him with an assurance of victory.

We shall show you,

***~~I. What a powerful adversary we have to contend with—~~***

As soon as any man enlists under the banners of Christ, the world will turn against him, even as the kings of Canaan did against the Gibeonites, the very instant they had made a league with Joshua, [Joshua 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.4) with [John 15:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.18-19). "Those of his own household will most probably be his greatest foes."

To oppose these manfully is no easy task: but yet these are of no consideration in comparison with our other enemies, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood. The terms "flesh and blood" are sometimes used to signify any human being, ([Matthew 16:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.17),) and sometimes, our corrupt nature, whether intellectual, ([Galatians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.16),) or corporeal, ([1 Corinthians 15:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.50).) Here they denote the world at large," says the Apostle, but "against all the principalities and powers" of Hell.

It is not merely in a rhetorical way that the Apostle accumulates so many expressions, to designate our enemies: the different terms he uses are well calculated to exhibit their power; which will appear to us great indeed, if we consider what he intimates respecting their *nature*, their *number*, and their *office*.

With respect to their nature, they are "wicked spirits." Once they were bright angels around the throne of God: but "they kept not their first estate;" and therefore they were "cast down to Hell, Jude verse 6 and [2 Peter 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4)." But though they have lost the holiness, they still retain, the power, of angels. As "angels, they excel in strength, [Psalm 103:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20)," and are far "greater in power and might, [2 Peter 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.11)," than any human being. They have, moreover, an immense advantage over us, in that they are spirits. Were they flesh and blood like ourselves, we might see them approaching, and either flee from them, or fortify ourselves against them: at least, there would be some time when, through weariness, they must intermit their efforts: but *being spirits their approaches to us are invisible, irresistible, incessant*.

Their number is also intimated, in that they are represented as "principalities and powers," consisting of multitudes who hold, like men on earth and angels in Heaven, [Colossians 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.16), various degrees of honor and authority under one head.

To form a conjecture respecting their numbers, would be absurd; since we are totally in the dark on that subject. This however we know, that they are exceedingly many; because our Lord cast no less than seven out of one woman, [Mark 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.9); and one man was possessed by a whole troop or "legion" at once, [Mark 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 5.9). We have reason there fore to think that their number far exceeds that of the human species; because there is no human being beyond the reach of their assaults, no, not for a single hour.

Nor are they formidable merely on account of their number, but principally on account of their union, and subordination under one leader. We read of "the devil and his angels, [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41)," as of a king and his subjects: and though we know not what precise ranks and orders there may be among them, we know the name of their chief, even "Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, [Matthew 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.24)." It is because of their acting thus in concert with each other, that they are so often spoken of as one, [Luke 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.2-3); [Luke 4:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.5-6); [Luke 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.8); [Luke 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.13); and well they may be; for, the whole multitude of them are so perfectly one in operation and design, that, if one spies out an advantage, he may in an instant have a legion more to second his endeavors: and as this constitutes the strength of armies on earth, so does it give tenfold power to our spiritual enemies.

The office which they execute as "the rulers of this dark world," may serve yet further to give us an idea of their strength. It is true, this office was not delegated to them, but usurped by them: still however, they retain it by God's permission, and exercise it to our cost. Satan is expressly called:  
"the prince of this world, [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31); [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30); [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11),"  
"the god of this world [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4),"  
"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in all the children of disobedience [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)."

He "blinds them" that they may not see, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4), and then, as the prophet led the Syrians, he leads them wherever he will, [2 Kings 6:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.18-20); he takes them captive altogether, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

A few indeed who are brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel, have cast off his yoke: but except them, the whole world, enveloped in worse than Egyptian darkness, lies under him as its universal monarch! [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19). The very elements are under his control, and concur with men and devils to fulfill his will. Would he deprive *Job*of his substance? Hosts of Sabeans and Chaldeans come at his call, to plunder him, [Job 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.12); [Job 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.15); [Job 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.17). Would he destroy all his family? The wind rises at his command to smite their house, and overwhelm them in its ruins [Job 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.19).

Such are the enemies with whom we have to contend. If we desire to prosecute earthly things, we can go on with ease; we can follow them without interruption from day to day, and from year to year. With respect to these things, the devils would rather help us forward, than obstruct our way. But the very instant we begin to seek "heavenly things," all Hell is in alarm, just as all the Canaanites were, when they understood that Joshua's spies had been seen in their land, [Joshua 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.9); [Joshua 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 2.11). If we begin to listen to the Word of God, he will send some emissary, some child of his, whom he has endued with peculiar subtlety, to turn us from the faith, [Acts 13:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.7-10). If the Word, like good seed, be sown upon our hearts, he will send a host of devils, like birds of the air, to pick up the seed, [Matthew 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.4); [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19). If any, in spite of his efforts, take root in our hearts, he will instantly sow tares to grow up with the wheat, [Matthew 13:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.25), and thorns to choke it, [Matthew 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.7); [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22). We cannot go into the presence of God to pray, but "Satan will be at our right hand to resist us, [Zechariah 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 3.1)."

The conflict we have to maintain with him, is not like that which is common to our armies, where a part bear the brunt of the battle, and the rest are reserved for exigencies: in this view it is more properly compared to "a wrestling," where every man meets his antagonist, and must continue the contest, until the fall of one party decides the victory.

Such the Scripture describes our contest to be; and such it is proved to be by every man's experience: there is no man who, if he will only observe the ease with which he enters upon his worldly calling, and keeps up his attention to it; and the comparative difficulty he finds, as soon as ever he addresses himself to the concerns of his soul, shall not see that there is in him an impotence and reluctance, for which he cannot account, unless he acknowledges what the Scripture so fully warns him of—a satanic agency.

But shall we be intimidated by this account, and induced to surrender ourselves to Satan without a conflict? No! Formidable as he is, there is One above him, who circumscribes his powers, and limits his operations. He did, by God's permission, "cast some of the Ephesian church into prison, that they might be tried for ten days, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10);" but, if he could have accomplished all that was in his heart, he would have cast them all into Hell that they might perish for ever. So far from being irresistible, he may be resisted, yes, and vanquished too, by the weakest of God's saints!

To encourage you therefore to fight against him, we will show,

***~~II. How we may effectually withstand him—~~***

The Apostle renews, though with some variation, the directions he gave before, "not thinking it grievous to himself to repeat anything that may conduce to our safety, [Philippians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.1)." Peter also was "careful to put Christians frequently in remembrance of many things, notwithstanding they knew them, and were established in the present truth, [2 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.12)." Well therefore may we call your attention once more to the exhortation in the text. Indeed, if the putting on the whole armor of God was necessary to guard against the *wiles*of the devil, it can be no less necessary as a preservative against his *power*: and the exhortation enforced by this new consideration, cannot reasonably be thought an uninteresting repetition.

But we shall have no need to repeat any former observations, seeing that what is new in the exhortation, will afford abundant matter for profitable and seasonable remark.

The time mentioned in the text as "the evil day," refers to those particular periods when Satan makes his most desperate attacks. Sometimes he retires from us for a season, as he did from our Lord, [Luke 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.13); or, at least, gives us somewhat of a respite from any violent assaults. But he watches his opportunity to renew his efforts, when by bringing a host of demons to his aid, [Matthew 12:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.44-45), or finding us off our guard, [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8), he may exert his power to more effect. Such a season was that wherein David complained, that "his enemies, compassing him like bees, thrust sore at him that he might fall, [Psalm 118:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 118.12-13);" and especially that wherein the Lord Jesus Christ himself was so weakened by him, as to need an angel from Heaven to administer strength and consolation, [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43); [Luke 22:53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.53).

All who know anything of "Satan's devices," must have noticed this in their own experience: there have been times when the enemy appeared unmindful of his work, and other times when "he has come in like a flood; so that if the Spirit of the Lord had not lifted up a standard against him, [Isaiah 59:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.19)," he must have utterly overwhelmed them. The hour of death is a season when he usually puts forth all his power, "having great wrath because his time is short, [Revelation 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.12)."

Now what shall we do in such seasons, if we are not clad in the whole armor of God? What hope can we have of withstanding such an enemy? If he would find us unarmed, would he not sift us as wheat, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31), and reduce us to mere chaff? Would he not scatter us as smoke out of the chimney, or chaff driven by a whirlwind, [Hosea 13:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 13.3). Would he not precipitate thousands of us, as he did the swine, into instantaneous destruction, [Matthew 8:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.31-32), and into the bottomless abyss of Hell?

But if we are armed with the divine panoply, we need not fear; he can have no power against us any further than it is given to him from above, [John 19:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 19.11); and, "howbeit he means not so, neither does his heart think so, [Isaiah 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.5); [Isaiah 10:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 10.7)," his efforts against us shall ultimately conduce to our good, to make us more humble, more vigilant, more expert.

This is particularly intimated in the text; and in this the encouragement given us exceeds what was contained in the former exhortation. There we were taught to expect that we would not be vanquished by our subtle enemy. Here we are encouraged with an assurance, that we shall not only effectually withstand his efforts, even when they are most desperate, but shall "stand" as victors on the field of battle, after having put our enemies to flight. To this also agree the words of James, "resist the devil, and he shall flee from you, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7)." He shall not only not overcome you, but shall be so intimidated by your prowess as to flee from you with the greatest precipitation. Blessed truth! This mighty fiend, who dared to enter the lists with an archangel, Jude verse 9, and to contend even with the Son of God himself, shall be so terrified at the sight of a Christian champion, as not only to "forbear touching him, [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.18)," but even to flee from his presence as for his very life.

It is true, he will never finally give over the contest, until we are got entirely beyond his reach: nor is he at any time so vanquished or intimidated but that he will number another host, like unto that which has been defeated, and renew his attack upon us, [1 Kings 20:22-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.22-26). But his malice shall terminate in his own confusion [1 Kings 20:27-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 20.27-29); he may succeed to bruise our heel, but we shall ultimately bruise his head! [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15). "Our weapons, through God, shall be mighty, though wielded by the feeblest arm, [2 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4)." We shall "go on conquering and to conquer, [Revelation 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.2)." until we set our feet upon his neck, [Joshua 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.24). This was altogether typical of the Christian's victories, and return with triumphant exultation from the combat, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through your name! [Luke 10:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.17)."

Nor is this your greatest encouragement: for as soon as you have "done all" that God has designed for you in this state of warfare, you shall "stand" before God, united to that noble army who are now enjoying their triumphs in his presence. Having "fought the good fight and finished your course, there shall be given to you a crown of righteousness" and glory, [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8); and you shall bear the palm of victory in the courts of Heaven, [Revelation 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-10).

Then shall be fulfilled to you what was spoken by our Lord, "To him who overcomes, I will give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21)." Only "be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life! [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)."

***~~Before we dismiss this subject, we would address a few words,~~***

***~~1. To those who have never yet wrestled with this great adversary—~~***

We hope you are now convinced, that it is not a needless labor to engage in this contest. But you may still be induced to decline it, from the idea that it is a hopeless work. But know this, that you have undertaken a task which is infinitely more difficult than this; for, while you refuse to wrestle with Satan, you are actually wrestling with God himself. He who infallibly discerns, and rightly estimates, your conduct, says, that you "resist the Holy Spirit, [Acts 7:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.51)," and "contend with your Maker, [Job 40:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 40.2)," and your own consciences will inform you, that you have often "fought against God," by resisting the influence of his word and Spirit, [Acts 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.39); [Acts 23:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.9).

Suppose then you gain the victory (which is but too probable), suppose God gives up the contest, and say, "My Spirit shall strive with him no longer, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3);" what will you have to boast of? what cause will you have for joy? Awful will be that day wherein God shall say, "Let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17);" from that hour your condemnation will be sure, and Satan will have perfectly gained his point.

Judge then whether it is not better to contend with Satan, than with God? with him whom you are sure to conquer, to your eternal happiness, than with him, by whose avenging arm you must be crushed for ever! [Isaiah 27:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 27.4). *Consider well which of the two you choose for your enemy, God or Satan?*May God incline you to enlist under the Redeemer's banner, and in his strength to combat all the enemies of your salvation!

***~~2. Let us speak to those who have begun the arduous contest.~~***

Be not afraid of your great adversary. Do not be like the unbelieving Israelites, who, because the Anakim were of such extraordinary stature, and dwelt in cities that were walled up to Heaven, dreaded to go up against them, [Numbers 13:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.28); [Numbers 13:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.31); [Numbers 13:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.33). But rather say, with Caleb, "They shall be food for us, [Numbers 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.9); [Numbers 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.30);" instead of destroying, they shall be an occasion of good to our souls: their spoils shall enrich us; and the opposition that they make shall only be the means of displaying more abundantly the love and faithfulness of our God.

"Take unto you" again and again "the whole armor of God;" and "fight, not as one who beats the air, [1 Corinthians 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.26)," but as one who is determined to conquer or die: and if at any time you be tempted to give up the contest, think of "those who now through faith and patience inherit the promises, [Hebrews 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.12)." Once they were conflicting like you; but now they rest from their labors, and are anxious spectators of your conflicts, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1). It is but a little time, and you also shall be numbered with them. "Greater is he who is in you, than he who is in the world, [1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4)." Only go forth therefore in the name of Christ; and his triumphs shall be the pattern and the pledge of your own.

***~~#2128~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S BELT~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.14)~~***

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist."

IT is not possible to exceed in magnifying the grace of God—to it must every part of our salvation be ascribed:  
grace *begins*the work in our hearts;  
grace *carries it on*;  
grace *completes*it.

No ground of glorying is left for man: his own wisdom, goodness, strength, weigh no more than the small dust upon the balance. All is the work of God; he lays the foundation; and when "the head-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it! [Zechariah 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.6-7); [Zechariah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.9)." But while we are jealous of God's honor, and desirous of magnifying the riches of his grace, we must be careful not to undervalue the work wrought in our hearts.

In point of merit, there is nothing in us that is worthy of the smallest consideration: but in a variety of other views, the work of God's Spirit in our hearts can scarcely be appreciated too highly.

This is manifest from the description which the Apostle gives of the Christian's armor. He is careful in the first place to show us, that we have not in ourselves any inherent strength; and that, consequently, we must depend entirely on God: but in entering more minutely into his subject, he declares that those graces, which the Spirit of God forms in our hearts, are means of defense against our spiritual adversaries: for though as being our graces, they are weak and worthless—yet as being the work of God's hands, they are of great strength and value: they even constitute that armor, in which we are to go forth against the enemies of our salvation, and by which we shall be enabled to defeat all their wiles, and all their power.

The first grace that he mentions, is "truth:" in elucidating which we shall show,

What we are to understand by truth—  
Its use and office in the Christian warfare—

***~~I. What are we to understand by "truth?"~~***

It is a term of extensive signification. It is sometimes put for the Gospel; in which sense the Apostle speaks of "obeying the truth." But in this place, it rather means sincerity. The two terms are often used together as synonymous expressions, "Serve the Lord," says Joshua in his farewell discourse, "in sincerity and truth, [Joshua 24:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.14)," and Paul exhorts us to "keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, [1 Corinthians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.8)."

But sincerity, Christian sincerity, is very little understood. For the most part, it is considered as importing nothing more than a good intention, without any reference to the manner in which that good intention operates. But the sincerity, of which the text speaks, is a Christian grace; and consequently it must include something widely different from that which may be exercised by superstitious bigots, [Romans 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2), or blood-thirsty persecutors, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2).

To mark it as distinctly as possible, we shall notice four things that are implied in it:

***~~First, it implies a desire and intention to please God.~~***

There is one canon, one universal rule of action, prescribed to us in the Scriptures; namely, that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)." Whatever therefore springs from other motives and principles, must argue a lack of sincerity, in proportion as God's honor is superseded by any selfish considerations. When Jehu, in compliance with God's command, extirpated the family of Ahab, [2 Kings 9:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 9.6-7), his obedience was not considered as sincere, because he was actuated rather by vainglory, [2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16), than by a real desire to please God; and the blood that he shed in executing the divine command, was on that very account avenged by God himself upon his posterity, [Hosea 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 1.4).

The Jews also complied with the institutions of Moses in observing their religious fasts and feasts: but because "they did fast and feast unto themselves rather than unto God," and sought rather to cover their own enormities by such observances, than really to honor God, their services were deemed hypocritical, and were rejected with abhorrence, [Zechariah 7:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 7.5-6). Thus must all our duties, civil or religious, have respect to God: we must have "a single eye," if we would please him, [Matthew 6:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.22-23). If we bring forth fruit to ourselves only, "we are empty vines," we are unprofitable servants, [Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.1).

Sincerity implies in the next place, **a serving of God according to the light we enjoy.**

Sincerity will doubtless consist with defective views both of Christian duty, and Christian liberty: but it will not consist with allowed deviations from an acknowledged duty, either in a way of omission, or of commission. "The wisdom that is from above, is without partiality, and without hypocrisy, [James 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.17)." To be "partial in the law" is to dissemble with God: and whether we make outward duties a cloak for inward lusts, or present to God a mere "form of godliness without the power of it," we are really "hypocrites in heart, [Matthew 23:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.23-28); [Matthew 15:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.7-8)," and therefore can have no pretensions to sincerity.

But there is yet a third thing, which is absolutely essential to sincerity, namely, **a desire to know the will of God more perfectly.**

Here it is that many, who have appeared most sincere, have failed. Paul before his conversion "thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9);" and truly he did them with a zeal suited to his persuasion. But can it be said, that at that time he possessed the Christian virtue of sincerity? By no means: for he had opportunities enough of information: the writings of Moses and the prophets were plain enough to convince any man that was not blinded by prejudice, and carried away by his own impetuous passions, [Luke 16:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.31). Besides, he might have gone to the fountain-head, and inquired of Jesus himself, what grounds there were for believing him to be the Messiah. Above all, he lived when the Gospel was preached in all its purity, and attested from Heaven by miracles without number. Why then did he not set himself to inquire more candidly? Why did he not, like the Bereans, search the Scriptures, to see if things were as the Apostles declared them to be, [Acts 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.11). This would not agree with his infuriated zeal: he hated the light, and therefore sought to the uttermost to extinguish it.

How different was the conduct of Nathanael! He participated in the prejudices of his countrymen; and hastily concluded that "no good thing could come out of Galilee." But when he was asked to "come and see" for himself, he availed himself of the opportunity to form his judgment on surer grounds; and, on the very first demonstration which our Lord gave of his Messiahship, he believed in Jesus; and thereby evidenced his right to that title which our Lord had given him, "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit, [John 1:45-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.45-49)."

There is one thing more implied in sincerity, namely, **a determination to serve God without any regard to consequences**. Our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration. When we know what he requires of us, we are not to be diverted from it by any losses or any sufferings. Who does not see the insincerity of those who believed in Christ, but were afraid to confess him, [John 12:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.42-43); and of that amiable youth who turned back from Christ rather than part with his possessions, [Mark 10:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.21-22).

If we are truly upright in heart, we shall say as Paul when he was solicited to shun the trials and afflictions which, as the Spirit testified, awaited him in every city, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus, [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13)." And if the trials be ever so severe, we shall still "hold fast our integrity, [Job 27:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.5-6)," and adopt the language of the same Apostle, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and fulfill my duty to my God, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24)."

This representation of "truth" is both illustrated and confirmed by the conduct of Paul on his first conversion to God. Until that hour, he had been walking blindly "after the course of this world," and "in the way of his own heart:" but as soon as his eyes were opened, even before he had any clear knowledge of Christianity, he desired to know, and determined to execute, the whole will of God: "Lord, what will you have me to do? [Acts 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.6)." 'You need only to show me wherein I am wrong, and to teach me your way, and I will instantly, through your assistance, change my conduct, and devote myself to your service: nor shall any considerations of hope or fear, ever turn me from the path prescribed by you.' Nor was this a vain boast; for "he conferred not with flesh and blood," but set himself without delay to "preach the faith which he had labored to destroy, [Galatians 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.15-16); [Galatians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.23)," and persisted in preaching it even unto death.

The nature of "truth" being thus ascertained, let us proceed to show,

***~~II. The use and office of truth in the Christian warfare—~~***

Among the various parts of a soldier's armor, a "belt" was of importance; and in this view it is frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. The prophet, describing the irresistible fury with which the Chaldeans would overrun Palestine, says, none shall be weary or stumble among them, none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the belt of their loins be loosed, [Isaiah 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.27)." And our blessed Lord, who, as the Captain of our salvation, was arrayed like all the soldiers of his army, is represented by the same prophet as habited in this manner, "Righteousness shall be the belt of his loins, and faithfulness the belt of his thoughts, [Isaiah 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.5)."

The use of the belt was to keep the armor compact, and to strengthen the loins. And these are the offices which "truth" performs for the Christian soldier.

**In the first place, it compacts all the graces with which his soul is armed.**As the different parts of armor with which the body is fortified, would hang loose, and leave many apertures through which a wound might be inflicted, if they were not fastened together by a belt or belt, so would the Christian's graces prove insufficient for his defense, if they were not all compacted together by the belt of sincerity.

Let us look at persons that seemed armed from head to foot, and prepared to defy all the powers of darkness. See Johanan, and the remnant of the Jews whom the Chaldeans had not taken into captivity, coming to the prophet, entreating him to ask counsel for them from God; and vowing in the most solemn manner to comply with any direction which the Lord would give them by his mouth. We have not a more hopeful appearance in all the sacred records. But they dissembled with God: no sooner was the answer given to them, than they showed by their conduct, that they were not sincere in their overtures; and they speedily became the victims of their own hypocrisy, [Jeremiah 42:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.1-6); [Jeremiah 42:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 42.19-22).

Just so, how often are similar failures found among ourselves, from the very same cause! How many appear penitent and determined to serve their God, while they are under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death; and yet discover their hypocrisy, as soon as ever their professions are brought to the test! Yet daily is that account of the Jews realized among ourselves, "When he slew them, then they sought him, and inquired early after God, and remembered that God was their Rock, the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant, [Psalm 78:34-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.34-37)."

On the other hand, how impenetrable to the darts of the adversary were the graces of those who were sincere before God!

*Daniel*not only would not relinquish, but would not so much as abate, or conceal, his devotions, though menaced with a cruel and speedy death, [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10).

Nor would the *Hebrew Youths*comply with the edict of a haughty monarch, though they saw a furnace heated for their destruction, and might have pleaded in their defense the example of a whole nation, [Daniel 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17-18).

Thus shall we also be enabled to brave every danger, and to endure death in its most awful forms, if our hearts be upright before God. As all our graces will be compacted together by sincerity, so every distinct grace will derive from it tenfold solidity, and strength: let our "faith be sincere," our "love without dissimulation," and our "spirit altogether without deceit," and we need fear no assaults, however artful, however violent!

The other office of truth is, **to strengthen our souls under great and long-continued conflicts**. This particular use of the belt is repeatedly mentioned by the Psalmist. In reference to himself, he says, "You have girded me with strength unto the battle, [Psalm 18:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.39)." In reference to the Messiah also he uses a similar expression: "The Lord reigns; he is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, with which he has girded himself, [Psalm 93:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 93.1)."

"Those who have a divided heart, will assuredly be found faulty at the last, [Hosea 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.2)." Numberless are the instances wherein persons who have fought well for a season, have fainted at last through this sad defect. But we will mention only two; one, wherein the failure had nearly terminated in the destruction of many; and the other, wherein it involved one of the most eminent professors in utter and everlasting ruin.

For the former instance we will refer you, not to a man professedly ungodly, no, nor to a mere novice in religion, but to the most distinguished of all the Apostles. With the name of Peterwe associate the idea of courage undaunted, and of piety irreproachable. But behold him on one occasion, when his loins were loosed, and the belt was lacking to complete his armor. This valiant hero, who had acquitted himself so nobly in many spiritual battles, was at last, through fear of offending the Judaizing Christians, guilty of the basest dissimulation; undermining by his influence the most essential doctrine of that Gospel which he was sent to preach; and, by his example, drawing Barnabas also, and a multitude of others, into the most fatal error. And, if Paul had not openly rebuked him before all the Church, and thereby counteracted the effect of his misconduct, it is not possible to say, how far his error might have affected the eternal interests of millions, [Galatians 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.11-14), "to be blamed—dissembled—dissimulation—walked not uprightly."

In the other instance, we must turn our eyes to one, whose eminence drew from Paul himself repeated commendations, even such as were bestowed on the Evangelist, Luke. After years of manly toil, and continued danger, Demas was left to prove how weak the strongest are without sincerity. Wearied with his conflicts, he sought repose in the bosom of the world. Compare [Colossians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.14), and Philemon verse 24 with [2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10); when, if he had fought with more sincerity, he might have endured to the end, and triumphed over all his adversaries. *Unhappy man, to retain one secret lust, which, like a canker, ate out his vitals; or, like a leak unnoticed, sank the vessel wherein he was embarked!*But thus it will be with all whose loins are not girt about with truth: "a double-minded man will be unstable in all his ways, [James 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.8)."

But if we have melancholy instances of failure through the lack of this virtue, we have many noble instances of persevering zeal in others, whose hearts were right with God. Behold the patriarchs sojourning for years in a strange land, when "they had opportunities enough of returning to their native country," if they had been so minded: but they were sincere in "seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly one;" and therefore they willingly lived as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth, [Hebrews 11:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.15-16)."

Behold also the noble army of martyrs, who "out of weakness were make strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens;" yes, and women also, who, notwithstanding their natural weakness and timidity, would "not accept deliverance from their tortures, that they might obtain a better resurrection, [Hebrews 11:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.34-35).

Indeed, where is there one who is truly upright before God, who has not frequently evinced a strength and steadfastness superior to the efforts of unassisted nature? Who has not been called to make many sacrifices of pleasure, honor, self-interest; and to lead a life of continual self-denial, both in the mortifying of inward lusts, and the enduring of outward persecutions? But, "having set his hand to the plough, the Christian will not look back," and having put on his armor, he will not put it off but with his life.

***~~The vast importance of truth and sincerity being made apparent, let the following advice be duly weighed:~~***

***~~1. Let us inquire whether we possess this part of Christian armor—~~***

Perhaps there is scarcely any one who does not imagine himself sincere.

But can we appeal to God that our daily aim is to please him, yes, to please him, not only in preference to ourselves or others, but in direct opposition to the whole world?

Do we labor to approve ourselves to him, forbearing every sinful thing, and doing everything we know to be right?

Do we search the Scriptures daily, and attend on the ministry of God's word, on purpose that we may have our opinions and conduct more entirely conformed to the will of God?

And finally, do we disregard the scoffs of an ungodly world, and determine to sacrifice even life itself, rather than violate the dictates of our conscience?

This is sincerity, this is truth. Doubtless there are infirmities in the best of men; and consequently there will be occasional deviations from the path of duty: but if we are sincere, we shall not allow any sin whatever: we shall endeavor to be "pure as God is pure, and perfect as God is perfect." O that there were in all of us such a heart as this!

***~~2. Let us be on our guard against those devices, whereby Satan would weaken our sincerity, or rob us of the comfort of it—~~***

Satan will put forth all his wiles, and exert all his power, to loosen this belt. He well knows, that, if he succeed in this point, all the rest will be easy: but that until this is effected, we are invulnerable. He will therefore try on all occasions to get advantage against us. He will cover his endeavors with the most specious pretexts, and present his temptations in the most alluring shapes. But let us watch against him: let not the example of an Apostle, or the preaching of an angel, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9), lead us to renounce one single truth, or to transgress one single precept. If we are not continually on our guard, that "serpent will beguile us:" yes, in spite of all our watchfulness will he deceive us, if we are not preserved by God himself. Let us therefore "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."

But, if Satan cannot entice us to lay aside our belt, he will endeavor to deprive us of the comfort of it. He will take occasion from our remaining infirmities to make us think ourselves hypocrites: and thus he will seek to effect that through despondency, which he could not effect through any other temptations.

Let it then be our daily care so to fasten this belt round our loins, that we may have in ourselves, and give to all around us, an indisputable evidence that we both possess and improve it. Then shall we have a consolation arising from it, and "rejoice in the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conduct in the world, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12)."

**3.Lastly, let us "stand" thus armed, and be in constant readiness to oppose our enemy.** Let us not fear him, but resist him manfully. If we fight, we have nothing to fear: it is only when we turn our back, that we are left exposed to any mortal injury: in every other part we are armed sufficiently for our defense. Let us then beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts, [Psalm 51:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.6)." Let us "add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and charity, and keep them all compact with the belt of truth; then have we God's promise, that we shall never fall, [2 Peter 1:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5-8); 2 Peter 1:10." Through his grace, our "integrity and uprightness shall preserve us, [Psalm 25:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.21)." Let us therefore "gird up the loins of our mind, and be sober, and hope to the end, [1 Peter 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.13)." Only let us "be sincere; and we shall be without offense until the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.10)."

***~~#2129~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S BREAST-PLATE~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.14)~~***

"Stand.…having on the breast-plate of righteousness."

AS various parts of armor, however differing in shape, may be formed of the same materials—so among the Christian graces, there may exist a considerable resemblance, while yet there remains between them a manifest distinction.

Righteousness is that particular grace which comes under our consideration at this time. By "righteousness" we understand, that true and universal holiness, which is characteristic of conversion, and constitutes that divine image, after which we are renewed, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24). Now this, though nearly allied to sincerity, differs materially from it:

sincerity relates to the aims and motives of a person;

but righteousness to his actions and habits.

Righteousness is that in actual attainment, which sincerity is in desire and purpose. Righteousness cannot exist without sincerity; but sincerity may, and often does, exist without righteousness; because (as was shown in the preceding discourse) it may be found in blind zealots and bloody persecutors.

The piece of armor to which righteousness is compared, is "the breast-plate;" which was of use to defend the vitals from the assaults of an enemy. Of such importance was it to every one in the time of battle, that all, from the general to the soldier, were clad with it: nor can its importance to us more strongly appear, than from the consideration, that the Captain of our salvation, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, was thus arrayed. The Prophet Isaiah, speaking expressly of him, says, "He put on righteousness as a breast-plate, [Isaiah 59:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.17)."

In the metaphor before us, the Apostle intimates, that without righteousness we would be exposed to imminent peril, yes, to certain death: but that, if we are clad with righteousness, our adversaries will never be able to prevail against us. It is evident therefore that there are two points to be considered by us; namely,  
the *necessity*of righteousness for our defense,  
and the *sufficiency*of righteousness to protect us.

***~~I. The necessity of righteousness—~~***

In order to destroy us, our great adversary uses both *deceit*and *violence*; against both of which it befits us to be armed, in order that we may discover the one, and repel the other.

***~~Righteousness then is necessary in the first place, that we may discover the wiles of the adversary.~~***

It is said with truth by an inspired writer, that "the god of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4);" and it is astonishing to what a degree he deludes their souls. He instigates them to the commission of sin under the idea that it is at least excusable, if not altogether justifiable and right, [1 Chronicles 21:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Chron 21.1-4). He teaches them to "call evil good and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)."

We may see one man carried on by ostentation and vanity, while he thinks himself actuated by zeal for God, [2 Kings 10:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 10.16).

Another yields to a vindictive spirit—yet supposes that he is only maintaining a just regard for his own character, or perhaps for the rights of the church, [Luke 9:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.53-55).

Through the agency of that subtle fiend, *covetousness*assumes the name of prudence, [Luke 12:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.13-15)*;*and *prodigality*is nothing but a commendable excess of generosity. Yes, the most cruel machinations of *bigotry*, are deemed a service well-pleasing to God, [John 16:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.2). Who has not noticed in others this sad infatuation? Who has not seen his neighbors acting under the influence of a bad principle, while they were at the same time as strongly persuaded that they were right, as if there were no room for doubt?

Thus it is more or less with every unrenewed person; and too often with those also who are yet weak in the faith; they go on, "not knowing what spirit they are of."

In vain do ministers set forth the evil of such a state.

In vain do they discriminate, and mark the difference between truth and error.

In vain do they endeavor to persuade men in private, as well as in their public ministrations.

In vain do they confirm every word with the infallible dictates of inspiration: for while men continue destitute of righteousness, "they have eyes, and see not, ears, and hear not, neither do they understand, [John 8:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.43)." Nothing will effectually show men their error, until they are "renewed in the spirit of their minds." Then they have the film removed from the organs of vision. Then they have a spiritual discernment [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18). [Colossians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.9). They are no longer deceived by specious appearances. They taste and see the real qualities of things: being "brought out of darkness into marvelous light," they view everything, in a measure, as God himself views it: and the greater their proficiency is in the divine life, the clearer is their perception of the good or evil that exists, [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14), not in their actions only, but in their motives and principles of action.

Hence it is that the Apostle exhorts us to "be transformed in the renewing of our minds, that we may prove (and discern, not by theory only, but by actual experiment) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2).

***~~Righteousness is further necessary, that we may repel the assaults of our enemy.~~***

*Sin not only blinds, but debilitates the soul.*It is scarcely to be conceived how impotent the natural man is to resist the temptations of Satan. For the most part he makes no resistance at all, but follows the dictates of his imperious master, and yields a willing obedience to his most fatal suggestions. To the ungodly Jews our Lord justly observed, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)." Sometimes *conscience*will make a stand against the wicked one; but it is soon overpowered, and either bribed into consent, or stunned to silence, or forced, in spite of all its efforts, to give way. Conscience may cause one to tremble, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25); another to reform in many things, [Mark 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 6.20); another to become almost a Christian, [Acts 26:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.28); another to make a profession of religion, and openly to join himself to the Church of Christ, [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13).

But Satan has nothing to fear from its exertions, unless it stimulates a man to seek a thorough change of heart: he laughs at the fears of Felix, the reformation of Herod, the acknowledgments of Agrippa, and the professions of Simon Magus. He well knows that, as long as they are unrenewed, they are fast in his chains, and incapable of any effectual exertion. "Ephraim, though armed, and carrying bows, were so enfeebled by sin, that they turned back in the day of battle," nor could Israel stand before their enemies while an Achan was in their camp, [Psalm 78:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 78.9-10). [Joshua 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.8); [Joshua 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.12); [Joshua 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.24); [Joshua 7:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.26).

So neither can he resist Satan, who yields in anything to the dominion of sin. If once we "put away a good conscience, we shall speedily make shipwreck of our faith!" Also [1 Timothy 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.19). But let once the tamest of his vassals feel the influence of divine grace, and instantly he casts off the yoke under which he had groaned, and asserts his liberty. From that moment Satan is constrained to yield to that "stronger power that is come against him, [Luke 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.21-22)," and to relinquish the prey which he can no longer retain, [Isaiah 49:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.25).

The *necessity*of righteousness being thus established, let us proceed to consider,

***~~II. The sufficiency of righteousness—~~***

The Apostle would not have been so urgent in exhorting us to put on the breast-plate of righteousness, if he had not believed that it would answer all the purposes for which it was designed. That it will protect us, we are well assured: that it will secure to us the victory, there can be no doubt: for it will turn:  
depravity to sanctity,  
cowardice to courage,  
and weakness to strength.

***~~First, righteousness turns depravity to sanctity.~~***

It is by our inward corruptions that Satan works. He cannot force us to commit sin: he can only present to us such temptations as are suited to our natural desires; and suggest such considerations to our minds, as are likely to procure our compliance with his will.

When he came to assault our Lord, he could not prevail; because "he found nothing in him, [John 14:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.30)," that in the smallest degree succumbed with his suggestions.

But when he comes to *us*, he finds in us a predisposition to receive him. If he assaults our heart, there are many secret lusts that are ready to betray us into his hands: he has but to strike a spark, and there is within us combustible matter in abundance, that instantly catches fire, and that, if not extinguished by grace, will burn to the lowest Hell.

But when the soul is endued with righteousness, its dispositions are altogether changed: "old things are passed away, and all things are become new! [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17)." We do not say indeed that there are no remains of corruption in the soul; for the old nature still continues, and counteracts in a measure the operations of the new nature. But if "the flesh wars against the spirit, the spirit also wars against the flesh, and gains (not indeed without many conflicts) an ascendant over it, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17);" and hence the temptations, which would once have been irresistible, are repelled with indignant firmness; as we see in Joseph, who, when repeatedly solicited to commit adultery, replied with horror, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God! [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9)."

This then is one way in which righteousness defends the soul—it makes "sin appear exceedingly sinful,, [Romans 7:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.13);" and holiness to be esteemed as the perfection of bliss [Psalm 119:128](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.128). Thus, by weakening the force of temptation, it enables us with success to resist the tempter.

***~~In the next place, righteousness turns cowardice into courage.~~***

Satan gets peculiar advantage over men by means of their carnal fears. In whatever degree men are endued with natural fortitude, their courage fails them when they are called to bear the cross of Christ. When our blessed Lord ministered on earth, Nicodemus, though a ruler and governor, was afraid to come in open day, lest he would be thought to favor his cause, [John 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.1-2). Nor did "the Pharisees who believed in him, dare to confess him, because 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)."

In instances without number have men who were able to brave death itself on the field of battle, shown themselves unable to endure the scorn and contempt that universally attach to pious characters: so true is that declaration of Solomon, "The fear of man brings a snare [Proverbs 29:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.25)."

But righteousness emboldens the soul; and enables it to meet the hatred and menaces, or (what is still worse) the sneers and ridicule, of an ungodly world with a holy indifference. Yes, it causes the soul to rejoice in these things as tokens for good, [Luke 21:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 21.12-13), and as testimonies of the Divine favor, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29) and [1 Peter 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.14) and [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41).

Behold the astonishing change that was wrought on Peter! When he had inconsiderately laid aside his armor, he was intimidated by the voice of a maidservant, and induced to deny his Lord with oaths and curses. But when he had put on his breast-plate, he was undismayed in the presence of the whole council of the Jews: he boldly charged upon the rulers that were before him, the guilt of murdering their Messiah: and when they endeavored to silence him with threats, he undauntedly replied, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard, [Acts 4:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.18-20)."

Such was the courage also of the Hebrew Youths, who, unawed by the fiery furnace, and unmoved by the example of a whole nation, disdained to comply with the royal edict; and resolutely exposed themselves to a cruel death, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience, [Daniel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.18).

Thus wherever the soul is clad with righteousness, it is emboldened both to do and suffer the will of God. Consequently, Satan's engine of persecution, whereby he has destroyed myriads, being divested of its power to intimidate the righteous, his dominion over them must for ever cease.

***~~Lastly, righteousness will turn our weakness to strength.~~***

The powers of man, independent of divine grace, remain the same after conversion as before: of himself he can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). But that divine principle which actuates the godly, is mighty in operation: however numerous or powerful their enemies may be, the "grace of Christ is sufficient for them, 2 Corinthians 12:9;" and the weakest in the universe may say, "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)." Their inherent weakness does not at all militate against this assertion; for when they are weakest in themselves their strength is at the height: and when they look unto their Lord for help, "he will perfect his strength in their weakness. See [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14)."

Survey for a moment the Christian's conquests:  
his lusts are subdued, condemned, crucified, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24);  
the world is overcome, and put under his feet, [1 John 5:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4-5). [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14);  
the powers of darkness are put to flight, [James 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.7);  
and he is triumphing daily in the God of his salvation, [2 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.14).

So "strengthened is he with might in his inward man, [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16). [Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3)," and so "mighty are his weapons to destroy the strong holds of sin and Satan, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5."

What shall we now say to you who are destitute of this armor? Shall we congratulate you on your prospects of victory? Shall we even flatter you with hopes of escaping with life? We cannot; we dare not. There is a possibility, that you might vanquish an armed host with a broken pitcher, [Judges 7:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.19-22); or make the walls of an impregnable fortress to fall with the sound of rams' horns, [Joshua 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.4-5); [Joshua 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 6.20)—but to succeed without righteousness in your spiritual warfare is impossible: for the truth of God is pledged that you shall perish, if you continue in your unrighteous state! [1 Corinthians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9). "Awake then to righteousness, and sin not! [1 Corinthians 15:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.34)." Let your earnest prayer ascend up before God, that you may be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10), and be turned effectually from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18).

But do not mistake: do not imagine, that any righteousness which you can attain in your own strength, will thus protect you; or that even that which is wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, has in itself such mighty efficacy: that to which such glorious powers are ascribed, is wrought in you by the Spirit of God: and after all, it is not your inherent goodness, but the grace of God, that must preserve you from your enemies. Your inherent righteousness will indeed be made use of by him; but still God must be acknowledged as the only Author of all that is done either in, or by you; and the glory must be given to him alone.

To you who have "the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, [2 Corinthians 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.7)," we say, "Stand fast in the Lord! [Philippians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.1)." Let nothing prevail upon you to lay aside your breast-plate for one moment: the instant you part with it, you are shorn of your strength, and are become as weak as other men, [Judges 16:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 16.19-20). "Hold fast then what you have, that no man take your crown, [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11)." Thus shall your subtle adversary be foiled in all his attacks: he shall never be able to inflict on you any deadly wound. "Then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all God's commandments, [Psalm 119:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.6)." As "the righteousness of Christ sustained him, [Isaiah 59:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.16)," amidst the fiercest assaults of his enemies—so shall you be preserved while fighting under his banners, and following his commands. His express promise to you is, "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, shall never be moved! [Psalm 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.2); [Psalm 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.5)." And again, "The Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly, [Psalm 84:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 84.11)."

***~~#2130~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S SHOES~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.15)~~***

"Stand…having…your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

THERE are many things which the art of war has rendered necessary for the success of an army, besides those crude weapons which an untaught savage would employ: and though they may be of inferior and subordinate use, still the lack of them may prove as fatal as the lack of things that are of primary importance. It would have been to little purpose, in some situations, for soldiers to have their vital parts covered with armor, if they had not also shoes to protect their legs and feet against the sharp stakes that were fixed in the ground to obstruct their progress. That this was a part of armor in the days of old, the sacred history informs us. Goliath "had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.

[1 Samuel 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.6)." And, when the irresistible success of the Chaldeans was foretold, it was particularly said, that "the latchet of their shoes would not be broken [Isaiah 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.27)."

In reference to this part of a soldier's accouterments, the Apostle exhorts us to have our feet guarded; and intimates that as the military shoes gave to him who wore them a readiness to march over any obstacles that might lie in his way, so "the Gospel of peace" gives to the Christian soldier a "preparation," or readiness, to prosecute his warfare without halting. This it does,I. As bringing peace into the conscience; and  
II. As producing a peaceful disposition in the soul.

***~~I. The Gospel of peace gives us a readiness to march, in that it brings peace into the conscience—~~***

The Gospel is the one source of peace to sinful man. If he obtains peace from any other source, he "heals his wounds slightly, and says, Peace, peace, when there is no peace, [Jeremiah 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.14)." It is in the Gospel alone that a Savior is revealed. But there we are informed, that God's only dear Son became our surety and our substitute. There we behold our adorable Emmanuel bearing our sins in his own sacred body upon the tree, and effecting by the blood of his cross our reconciliation with God. Through him peace is proclaimed to a guilty world [Acts 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.36); and all who receive into their hearts the record concerning him, have their iniquities blotted out as a morning cloud: their burdens are from that time removed; they have "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness! [Isaiah 61:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.3).

Without a measure of this peace, a person finds but little ability to exert himself in his Christian calling. The more difficult duties will be considered as irksome, and impracticable. This arises from the natural constitution of the human mind: for, what readiness can he have to forego the pleasures of time, who cannot look forward with a comfortable hope to the eternal world? Will not his "hands hang down, his knees be feeble, and his heart be faint?" Yes, will not Satan take advantage of his weak state to make him weary of well-doing; and to "turn him utterly out of the way, [Hebrews 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.12-13);" and to make him say in despondency, "There is no hope: I have loved idols; and after them will I go! [Jeremiah 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.25)."

To what a degree the boldest champion may be enervated by apprehensions of God's displeasure, we may see in the conduct of Joshua. There was but one found in all the thousands of Israel so courageous as he: yet when he had reason to think that God had withdrawn his favor from him, "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! [Joshua 7:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 7.6-7)." Thus will "our spirit fail," and our progress be stopped, if "the peace of God keeps not our hearts and minds, [Isaiah 57:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.16)."

But let "the love of God be shed abroad in the heart," and instantly "the rough places become plain, and the crooked, become straight, [Isaiah 40:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.4);" the "paths of religion become paths of pleasantness and peace." The most self-denying precepts are not then regarded as "hard sayings, [John 6:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.60);" "nor are any of the commandments grievous, [1 John 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.3)." And though affliction cannot, in itself, be joyous, yet, as endured for the sake of Christ, it becomes a ground of joy: "having peace with God," says the Apostle, "we glory in tribulations also, [Romans 5:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.1-3)."

Let us look into the Scriptures and see how *prompt for obedience the saints were made by a sense of God's pardoning love*.

No sooner had a live coal from off the altar been applied to the lips of the *Prophet Isaiah*, in token of his acceptance with God, than he was willing, yes desirous, to undertake the most difficult and self-denying services, [Isaiah 6:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.6-8).

The *Thessalonian converts*were inferior to none in their attachment to Christ; and, if we inquire what was the source of their distinguished zeal, we shall find that "the Gospel had come to them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance;" and from that moment they became the most eminent followers of Christ, and his Apostle, [1 Thessalonians 1:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5-7).

It was no easy service which *Mary Magdalen*performed in washing the Savior's feet with her tears; especially in the presence of such a company: yet, "much having been forgiven her, she loved much;" and therefore testified her love in the best manner she was able, notwithstanding she was likely to meet with nothing but derision and contempt from the proud Pharisee, in whose house she was, [Luke 7:44-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 7.44-47).

But on this subject we naturally turn our eyes to the Apostle Paul, who "labored more abundantly than all the Apostles, [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)." What the main-spring was of his activity, we are at no loss to determine: it was "the love of Christ that constrained him!" He had been redeemed from death by the death of Christ; and therefore to Christ he consecrated all his time, and all his powers, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15).

A readiness for suffering also arises from the same source. The "peace" which *Moses*enjoyed "through believing," rendered him so superior to all the pleasures of sense, that "he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt; and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)."

*Paul*is yet a more illustrious example, as indeed might well be expected, considering how exceeding abundant had been the mercy shown towards him, 1 Timothy 1:14." He had already endured far more than any other Apostle for the sake of Christ; yet when the Spirit testified that bonds and afflictions still awaited him where he was going, and the Christians besought him not to proceed on his intended journey to Jerusalem; he replied, "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! [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13)."

And is it not thus also with ourselves? If our souls are animated with faith and love, we shall "count it all joy when we fall into various trials, [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2);" yes, we shall "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41);" and the very things which were intended by our enemies for the destruction of the spiritual life, will tend rather to its furtherance and establishment, [Philippians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.12).

The same preparation for prosecuting our warfare is imparted to us by the Gospel,

***~~II. In that it produces a peaceful disposition in the soul—~~***

The soul of man is naturally proud, irritable, and vindictive, [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3). An injurious act, or an insulting word, is sufficient to call forth all our angry passions, and, in many instances, creates within us a resentment, that can be pacified with nothing less than the blood of our antagonist.

Behold *David*, when Nabal refused to administer to his wants! This one act of churlish ingratitude must be expiated by the life of the offender, and not of the offender only, but of all the males belonging to him; and David himself goes forth to execute the murderous sentence, [1 Samuel 25:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 25.21-22). What a solemn picture of human nature does this exhibit!

But the Gospel lays the axe to this "root of bitterness," and, by showing us how much we have been forgiven, inclines us to exercise forgiveness. It teaches us to "turn the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right cheek, [Matthew 5:39-41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.39-41);" and "never to render evil for evil, [Romans 12:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.17)." It enjoins us rather to love our enemies; and, instead of retaliating their injuries, to relieve their needs, [Romans 12:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.19-20) and [Matthew 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.44).

Without this disposition, we are but ill prepared to surmount the obstacles which our subtle adversary will place in our way. The scorn and contempt that we shall meet with, will dismay us. Our feelings will be wounded every step we take: and we shall soon be weary of well-doing.

In order to judge of the consequences that will ensue, if we are destitute of this part of Christian armor, let us only look at the most eminent saints, when, through haste and inadvertence, they had neglected to fasten on their shoes aright:

*Moses*, the meekest of mankind, was inflamed with wrath; and, by his angry, unadvised words, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan, [Numbers 20:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 20.10-12).

*Peter*, when he beheld his Lord apprehended in the garden, began to fight after the manner of ungodly men; and brought on himself that just rebuke, "Put up your sword; for all who take the sword shall perish with the sword, [Matthew 26:51-52](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 26.51-52)."

*Paul*himself too, on one occasion, was so irritated with the injustice of his judge, that he broke forth into passionate revilings against his ruler and governor, and was constrained to apologize for his conduct in the presence of his enemies, [Acts 23:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.3-5).

If then these holiest of men were thus sorely wounded through their occasional impatience, then what advantage will not Satan gain over those whose spirit is altogether lofty and unsubdued? Doubtless he will harass them in their march, until they turn back, and recede from the field of battle, [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.21).

But let the Gospel have its due effect; let it render us meek, patient, forbearing, and forgiving; let it transform us into the image of the meek and lowly Jesus, who 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)—and those who antagonized us before, will appear unworthy of any serious regard. When our enemies persecute us, we shall be ready to weep over them for the evil which they bring upon themselves, rather than be incensed against them for the evil which they do to us, [Luke 19:41-42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 19.41-42). We shall use no other weapons against them than "faith and patience, [Hebrews 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.12);" "being defamed, we shall entreat; being persecuted, we shall suffer it, [1 Corinthians 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.12-13)." Instead of being "overcome by evil, we shall endeavor to overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21);" and by "letting patience have its perfect work, we shall be perfect and entire, lacking nothing, [James 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.4)."

It may be objected, perhaps, that, while we conduct ourselves in this way, we shall be trampled under foot of all, and be vanquished by all. But to this we answer, that, though we would be trampled under foot, we would not be vanquished. On the contrary, though "we are killed all the day long, and are as sheep appointed for the slaughter—yet in all these things shall we be more than conquerors! [Romans 8:36-37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.36-37). We may, like Stephen, be stoned to death: yet, if like him, we can pray for our murderers, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60), we have the noblest of all victories—that of overcoming a vindictive spirit: and, though we fall in the conflict, we maintain the field against all our enemies.

Who, do we suppose, was victor, the Jews, who, at Satan's instigation, put our Lord to death—or Jesus, who expired as a victim on the cross? We cannot doubt; for we are told in the Scriptures, that, "through death, Jesus overcame death, and him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14); yes, "on his very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it, [Colossians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.14-15)."

Nor can we more effectually manifest our superiority to all the powers of darkness, than by "resisting unto blood in our strife against sin, [Hebrews 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.4)." Were we to become our own avengers, we would "give place to the devil, [Ephesians 4:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.27);" but by suffering with our Lord, we become partners of his victory, [Revelation 12:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.10-11), and partakers of his glory, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12) and [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17).

What remains now but earnestly to exhort you to get "your feet shod with" this blessed Gospel? Consider how many devices Satan has to wound your feet, and to cast you down. We have already noticed *persecution*, as a very principal engine used by him to obstruct your progress. But there are other means whereby he frequently effects his deadly purpose: many whom he could not stop by persecution, he has turned out of the way by *error*. Look into the epistles of Paul, and see how many Satan has "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, [2 Corinthians 11:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3)." He has his ministers, as well as Christ; and in outward appearance they are "ministers of righteousness;" nor are they themselves conscious that they are his agents. They propagate what they themselves believe, and oftentimes with a zeal worthy of a better cause. But they themselves are blinded by him; and then are used as his instruments to overthrow the faith of others, [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.13-15), [Revelation 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.9). Such false ministers with their hearers are "the synagogue of Satan," who is their teacher, their instigator, and their god. Which of the Churches, planted in the apostolic age, was free from their influence? In which were there not "some who perverted the Gospel of Christ? [Galatians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.7)," and some who, by their means, were "turned aside after Satan! [1 Timothy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.15)."

At *Rome*there were those who made it their business to "cause divisions; and by good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple, [Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.17-18)." At Corinth, the Church was so distracted by them, that Christian love was almost banished; and nothing but "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, tumults," prevailed among them, insomuch that the Apostle threatened to exert his apostolic authority, and to inflict on them some signal judgments, if they did not reform their conduct before he visited them again, [1 Corinthians 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.10-11); [1 Corinthians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3-4) and [2 Corinthians 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.20-21); [2 Corinthians 13:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.2); [2 Corinthians 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.10).

As for the *Galatian Church*, such an ascendency had the false teachers gained over them, that there was scarcely one who retained his integrity. Almost all of them had embraced, what Paul calls, "another Gospel;" and, so entirely had they transferred their regards from him to their new teachers, that notwithstanding "they would, not long before, have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them unto him," they now considered him in no other light than "an enemy, [Galatians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.6); [Galatians 4:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9-11); [Galatians 4:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.15-17); [Galatians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7-8)."

At *Ephesus*also there were some who, like "children, were tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, while others, by sleight and cunning craftiness, were lying in wait to deceive them, [Ephesians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.14)."

At *Philippi*too, there were "dogs and evil workers, of whom it was needful for them to beware [Philippians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.2)."

But time would fail us to enumerate the heresies that were propagated, and the apostasies that were occasioned by them, even in the purest ages of the Church. The epistles to Timothy and Titus are full of complaints respecting these deceivers, and of cautions to avoid all fellowship, either with them, or with their followers, [1 Timothy 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.3-4); [1 Timothy 1:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.6-7); [1 Timothy 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.19-20); 1 Timothy 4:1; [1 Timothy 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.6); [1 Timothy 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.12); [1 Timothy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.15); [1 Timothy 6:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.3-5), ("from such withdraw yourself,") 20, 21 and [2 Timothy 1:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.13-15); [2 Timothy 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.16-18); [2 Timothy 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.23); [2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5), ("from such turn away,") 6-9, 13 and 4:3, 4, 14, 15. [Titus 1:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.9-11); [Titus 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.13-14); [Titus 3:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.9-11). See also [Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.17-18). before cited, "avoid them;" and [2 Peter 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1-2) and [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19); [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1) and 2 John, verse 7, 10, 11. "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed," etc and 3 John, verse 10 and Jude verse 4 and [Revelation 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.14-15); [Revelation 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.20); [Revelation 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.24).

Now let any one say, whether, after so many sad examples, he himself needs not to be well established in the true Gospel, lest he be "led aside by the error of the wicked, and fall from his own steadfastness, [Hebrews 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.9). [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)."

But it will be asked, How shall I know the true Gospel from those counterfeits which are proposed for my acceptance? To this we answer, The true Gospel is a "Gospel of peace." It is a Gospel which sets forth Jesus as our hope, "our peace," and our all! [1 Timothy 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.1). [Ephesians 2:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14-17). [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11). It is a Gospel which leads us to "show all meekness, [Titus 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.2)," and, "as much as lies in us, to live peaceably with all men, [Romans 12:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.18)."

Particularly also will it prompt us to seek the welfare of the Church, and to "follow the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another, [Romans 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.19)."

Whoever therefore would turn us from Christ as the foundation of our hope; or would "cause divisions and offenses in the Church," in order to "scatter the flock of Christ, and to draw them" from their proper fold, [Acts 20:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.29-30); we have reason to think him no other than a "wolf in sheep's clothing, [Matthew 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.15);" a minister of Satan in the garb of a "minister of righteousness:" and we would beware, lest, by listening to such a one, our "unstable souls be beguiled, [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)," and we "fall so as never to be renewed unto repentance, [Hebrews 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.6)." We must not only take heed *how*we hear, but *what*we hear, [Luke 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.18) with [Mark 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 4.24); for if "whole houses were subverted, [Titus 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.11)." in the days of the Apostles, and "all the Christians in Asia were turned away from" the ministry of Paul, [2 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.15), then there is no minister whom we may not be induced to forsake, nor is there any one so established in the truth but he has need to pray that he may be kept from error!

Surely we need no stronger arguments to enforce the exhortation of the text. Let us get the knowledge of the Gospel: let us receive it, not as a theory merely, but as a practical and living principle that shall influence our hearts and lives. And when we have received it, let us be tenacious with it; let us "hold fast the form of sound doctrine that we have received, [2 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.13)." Let us make use of it to keep us firm in the midst of difficulties, and steadfast in the midst of errors. Let us "be ever on our guard, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble us, and thereby many be defiled, [Hebrews 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.15)." Finally, let us "stand fast in the Lord, [Philippians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.1);" so we shall, like our Lord himself, "endure the cross, despise the shame, and sit down as victors on the right hand of the throne of God! [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)."

***~~#2131~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S SHIELD~~***

**[Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16)**

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."

NOTWITHSTANDING the armor of the ancients was generally so constructed, that it could repel any weapon that might come against it, the warrior did not conceive himself to be completely armed without a shield.

In reference to the Christian soldier, this observation may be applied with still greater propriety; because, however excellent the different pieces of his armor may be, not one of them will suffice for his protection, unless it is itself also covered with the shield of faith. As "without faith it is impossible to please God," so *without faith it is impossible to withstand Satan*. That powerful adversary will soon pierce through our "truth" and "righteousness," if they be exposed to his assault without any additional defense. On this account the Apostle directs, that "above all," and in addition to all, we should "take the shield of faith."

In illustrating this divine injunction we propose to show,  
I. The office of faith in the Christian's armor—  
II. Its transcendent excellence—

***~~I. The office of faith in the Christian's armor—~~***

The particular use of a shield is to ward off a blow from any part of the body that may be attacked; and for that end it is to be applied in every direction, as occasion may require.

Now Satan strikes sometimes at one part, and sometimes at another, according as the different parts may seem most open to his attack. And the temptations with which he makes his assault, are as "fiery darts," which fly with incredible velocity, and are calculated to inflame the soul with their deadly poison.

The office of faith, and its power to repel these darts, will distinctly appear, while we show how it enables the Christian to foil Satan in all his attempts to wound either his head, or heart.

Satan has many fierce and fiery temptations, whereby he endeavors to wound the **head**. There is not anything so horrid or blasphemous, which he will not suggest to the mind. Even atheism itself is not so shocking, but he is capable of impressing the idea of it upon the mind, and of leading men to an adoption of it in practice, at least, if not also in theory and judgment, [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1).

From the apparent inequality that there is in the dispensations of Providence, Satan raises a doubt whether there is a God; or, at least, whether he intervenes at all in the concerns of men, [Psalm 73:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.12-13), or will judge the world in righteousness at the last day, [Zephaniah 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 1.12). He will take occasion also from the difficulties that there are in Scripture to draw men to infidelity: "How can that be the Word of God which is so full of contradictions? And who can know with any certainty what it declares to us, when those who profess to believe it, are of such opposite opinions?" By such temptations as these he assaults chiefly the avowed enemies of God.

But there are other temptations whereby he labors (and with too much success) to turn from the faith those who confess the divine authority of the Scriptures. He will draw them into *errors*of various kinds, and thus undermine the *principles*which he could not destroy by open assault. Time would not suffice to point out the innumerable errors to which he has given birth, and by which he has destroyed the souls of men: but there is one way in which almost all of them have been produced and propagated—he induces men to take someone truth of Scripture, and to magnify its importance beyond all due bounds, and to exalt it, not only above all other truths, but to the utter exclusion of them! And thus he founds error upon truth, and the most "damnable heresies" upon the sacred records. Mark the different heresies, and examine them by this test, and the truth of the observation will immediately appear.

Because our blessed Savior was a man, and both lived and died as an example to his followers, therefore the Socinians affirm that he was *only*a man, and that he died only as an example; and thus they set aside both his divinity and atonement.

Because the Spirit of God is represented as dwelling in believers, therefore the Mystics reduce all religion to a vain conceit about the light within them; from a regard to which, they overlook the work of Christ for them; yes, and supersede the plainest institutions of religion, and, in a very great degree, the Scriptures themselves.

In the same manner the *Antinomian*advocate for faith excludes good works from his system. While the *Moralist*, from an ignorant zeal for good works, discards all concern about the Christian faith. The rigid *Predestinarian*asserts the sovereignty of God to the subversion of man's freedom and responsibility; while the contender for the freedom and sufficiency of *man's will*, obliterates the decrees of Heaven, and denies his dependence on God.

To enter more minutely into these various heresies would lead us too far from our subject. The point to be illustrated is, How does faith enable us to avoid them? But previous to this inquiry, it will be proper to show briefly, that *these errors do indeed proceed from Satan as their author; and that they are not unfitly compared to fiery darts.*

Nothing can be plainer in the Scriptures than that Satan is the great author of error, not only because he is "the father of lies, [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)," and "the deceiver of the world, [Revelation 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.9)," but because the propagators of error are expressly called his children, [Acts 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.10). His ministers, [2 Corinthians 11:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.15); and those who have embraced error, are said to have been "tempted of the tempter, [1 Thessalonians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.5)," and to have "turned aside after Satan, [1 Timothy 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.15);" and to be "of the synagogue of Satan, [Revelation 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.9)."

This point will receive additional confirmation, by observing with what propriety his temptations are compared to "fiery darts;" for how suddenly do they strike the mind! How deeply also do they penetrate! and with what venom do they inflame the soul! Truly "they set on fire the whole course of nature; and themselves are set on fire by Hell, [James 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.6)." Paul speaks of those who are turned from the truth as being "bewitched, [Galatians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.1);" and indeed, when we see what infatuation seizes them, how their understandings are blinded, their judgments warped, their conscience perverted, and how they are carried away by their own pride and self-sufficiency, without ever considering what spirit they are of, or conceiving it possible that they would be misled; we cannot but confess that they are the unhappy victims of Satanic agency.

Now we come to the point proposed, to consider how faith repels these fiery darts.

Faith, provided it be a true and living faith, receives the Word of God simply on the authority of him who revealed it, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13). It staggers not at any difficulties either in the dispensations of his providence, or the declarations of his grace. Conscious of man's inability to comprehend even the most common matters in their full extent, the believer submits his reason to God, and receives without gainsaying whatever divine wisdom has revealed, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21). Now the intervention of God in the government of the world, even in the falling of a sparrow, [Matthew 10:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.29), or of the hairs of our head, [Matthew 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.30), is most clearly asserted in the inspired volume; and, on that account, no occurrence whatever is allowed to weaken the conviction that all things are under his immediate and entire control! [Isaiah 45:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.7).

Nor do the difficulties that are in Scripture at all lessen its authority in the believer's eyes: whatever he cannot account for as arising from the circumstances under which the Scriptures have been handed down to us, he puts to the score of his own ignorance, and contentedly says, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter, [John 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.7)."

As to all the heresies that have been broached in the Christian Church, he has one way of repelling all: he "compares spiritual things with spiritual, 1 Corinthians 2:13;" not hastily rejecting any plain declaration of God, because he cannot discern its harmony and agreement with some other declaration: he rather looks to God for the teachings of his Spirit; and keeps his mind ready to embrace whatever may tend to his own humiliation, or to the glory of God.

If it is thought that still he will be as open to receive error as truth, we answer, that God has promised to "guide him into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13);" and that every believer has within himself the witness of all the fundamental doctrines of our religion, [1 John 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.10). So that, "though he be a mere fool" in all other matters, "he shall surely be kept from error" in the concerns of his soul, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8) with [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9).

We must next call your attention to the temptations with which Satan assaults the heart. Under this term we include both the will and the affections; the will of which he endeavors to weaken by terrors, while he corrupts the affections by the allurements of sense.

As soon as that wicked fiend beholds any turning unto God, he will suggest to their minds the comforts they must sacrifice, the reproaches they must incur, the losses they must sustain, and the insuperable difficulties they must encounter; so that he may shake their resolution, and divert them from their purpose. It was thus that he prevented the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan, [Numbers 14:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.1-4). It was thus also that he succeeded in damping the ardor of that wealthy youth, who, from love to his great possessions, relinquished all hope of a saving interest in Christ, [Matthew 19:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.21-22). And in the same manner does he prevail with thousands of the present day, who would gladly participate in his blessings, if they could retain together with them their carnal attachments, [Matthew 8:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.19-22).

If he cannot succeed by these means, he will represent their case as hopeless; and dissuade them from prosecuting their course by the consideration that their efforts will be in vain, [Jeremiah 18:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 18.12).

To others he will propose the pleasures of sense. He will set before them, as he did before our Lord, [Matthew 4:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.8-9), the glory of the world; he will draw their attention to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16)." He will represent these things in the most fascinating view; well knowing, that if he can but induce them to love either the *pleasures*, or the *riches*, or the *honors*of the world—he has accomplished his purpose, and effectually alienated their hearts from God, [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24) with [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Now these also are as "fiery darts," which, if they once enter into the soul, will burn up all the good that is within it, and destroy it utterly.

But faith is as useful to protect the heart, as to defend the head. As it obviates every difficulty that may perplex the understanding, so it wards off everything that may intimidate or defile the soul.

To the temptations that assault the *will*, faith opposes the importance of eternal things: 'Be it so; I must endure much if I will adhere to my purpose of serving God: but what shall I have to endure if I do not serve him? It is not a matter of mere choice, but of absolute necessity; for "what shall it profit if I gain the whole world, and lose my own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul, [Matthew 16:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.26)." Let me not then hear of difficulties; for if Nebuchadnezzar's furnace were before me, it were better to suffer martyrdom at once with the Hebrew Youths, than to renounce my allegiance to God, [Daniel 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.18). With respect to the hopelessness of my case, nothing but destruction can result from despair: for "to whom can I go, if not to Him who has the words of eternal life, [John 6:68](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.68)." God helping me therefore I will go forward; and if I perish, I will perish, (alluding to [Esther 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 4.16) and to [2 Kings 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 7.4)) at the foot of my Redeemer's cross, crying for mercy as the chief of sinners.'

Then to the temptations that assault the affections, faith approves the excellency of eternal realities: 'True; I might enjoy the pleasures of sin; but would they equal the pleasure of serving God, and especially those "pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore?" Are not "the unsearchable riches of Christ," together with "the honor that comes from God," sufficient to counterbalance any riches or honors that I may forego for Christ's sake? Avaunt Satan! for what you offers me is poor, transient, delusive. Whereas the blessedness of the saints, both in this world and the next, is substantial, exquisite, everlasting.'

Thus it was that Moses argued, when he "refused to be called 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:" and the principle that dictated the argument, was "faith, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)." This was his "shield;" and the same will enable us also to repel the darts of Satan, however fiercely they be hurled, and however formidably they may come against us.

Having thus illustrated the office of faith, we proceed to point out,

***~~II. The transcendent excellence of faith—~~***

Somewhat of this has already appeared: but the high praise which the Apostle bestows on this piece of armor in particular above all others, manifestly demands a more distinct consideration.

We may observe then in commendation of faith, considered as the Christian's shield, that:  
its use is universal;  
its application is easy;  
its success is sure.

***~~First, its use is universal—~~***

All the other parts of armor have their distinct province, to which they are confined. "Truth" and "righteousness" defend the heart; but they are of no use at all to protect the head. But faith is universally applicable to every species of temptation.

Faith discerns the truth of the Gospel, and is thereby fitted to preserve the head from error.

Faith discerns also the importance and excellence of the Gospel, and is therefore proper to preserve the heart from sin.

Faith is no less useful to the feet; for we "stand by faith, 2 Corinthians 1:24," and "walk by faith, [2 Corinthians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.7)." Every step we take is safest under the guidance of faith, because it both affords us the best light, and enables us to walk without stumbling even in the dark, [Isaiah 50:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.10). [Micah 7:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.8).

Let this consideration then operate on all, and stir us all up to seek faith. Let us not hastily conclude that we possess this principle; for "not all men have faith, [2 Thessalonians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.2)." "Faith is the gift of God, [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29);" nor can we have it, unless it have been given to us from above. O that all would seek it at the hands of a reconciled God!

Beloved brethren, be not satisfied with "the belt of sincerity," or "the breast-plate of righteousness," or "the shoes of Gospel peace." They are all good and useful in their place; but it is faith, that gives even to them their chief strength; and it is faith, by which alone you can ever be victorious.

Does the *world*tempt you? "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith! [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4)."

Does *corruption*harass you? you must "purify your heart by faith, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9)."

Does the *devil*as a roaring lion threaten to devour you? It is by being steadfast in the faith that you must resist and vanquish him, [1 Peter 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8-9).

Do your *graces*languish? It is faith alone that will set them to work in a way of love, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6).

Think then of the use and efficacy of faith; and pray to our adorable Savior in the words of his Apostles, "Lord increase our faith! [Luke 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.5)."

***~~In the next place we observe, that its application is easy—~~***

A shield is easily transferred from one position to another as occasion may require. Just so, faith also quickly moves to the protection of any part that is attacked. We do not say that it is an easy thing to produce faith; for it requires no less power than that which was exerted in raising Christ from the dead, to create faith in the heart! [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20). But when a person has faith, then, we say, it is easy for him to apply it for his defense. Suppose that our head were attacked with subtle heresies, and we had nothing but reason to counteract the temptation; how weak, how tardy, how uncertain would be its operation! The greater part of mankind would not have either time or ability to follow Satan in all his arguments; nor would those of the strongest intellect ever arrive at certainty; they could rise no higher than opinion at the last; while those of inferior talents would be lost in endless perplexity.

Suppose again that our heart were attacked with some fiery lust, and we had no better defense than that which reason could afford; would passion listen to the voice of reason? As well might we attempt to extinguish flames that were consuming our house, by a slight sprinkling of water with the hand, as to stop the course of our passions by the efforts of unassisted reason. But in either of these cases, one single word from Scripture will suffice. How was it that our great Captain repelled the fiery darts that were cast at him? "It is written!" "It is written!" "It is written! [Luke 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.4); [Luke 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.8); [Luke 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.10)." Thus he fought; and his vanquished enemy fled from before him.

Thus also must we fight; and by opposing to our enemy this shield, the weakest and most ignorant is as sure of victory, as the strongest and most intelligent. In some respects the poor and ignorant have an advantage over the rich and learned; because they exercise faith, for the most part, in a more simple manner; whereas the others are ever trusting, more or less, to their own reason: and it is expressly with a view to confound the pride of reason, that God has given this superiority to the poor, and "chosen them, in preference to others, to be rich in faith, [James 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.5)."

Let this then operate as a further inducement with us to seek faith, since none of us can get the victory without it [Isaiah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.9); and by it the very weakest on earth shall be able to move mountains, [Matthew 17:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 17.20).

***~~Lastly, we may affirm, that its success is sure—~~***

But for their faith, the most eminent of God's saints would have been destroyed. "I would have fainted," says *David*, "if I had not believed, [Psalm 27:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.13)." *Peter*would have been driven away as the chaff, if our Lord had not secured his faith from failing, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32).

On the other hand, we have a host of saints upon record, "who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised! [Hebrews 11:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.33-39)."

Further, if we search the annals of the world, we shall not find one single instance wherein believers were ultimately vanquished. On many occasions they have been wounded, and sorely too: even the father of the faithful himself was not so expert in the use of his shield as to ward off every blow, [Genesis 12:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 12.12-13); [Genesis 20:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 20.2); but true believers are secured from any fatal stroke. Our Lord himself has pledged his word that they shall never perish! [John 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.24); [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28); that, if they fall, they shall be raised up again to renew the contest, [Psalm 37:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.21); [Psalm 145:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 145.14); and, that "Satan shall finally be bruised under their feet! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Remarkable in this view are the expressions of the text. The idea of "quenching" the fiery darts of the wicked one, may perhaps refer to the custom of making shields sometimes of raw hides, that, in case a poisoned arrow would perforate them, the wound, which on account of the poison must otherwise have been fatal, might be healed.

But perhaps the true meaning may be that by faith we shall as completely defeat the malignant efforts of Satan, as by the extinguishing of fire we shall be delivered from its fury. Nor is this true of some temptations only; it extends to "all" without exception. Nor can it be said of *some*believers only, who are of the highest class; for *all*who are armed with the shield of faith, whether they be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, "shall be able" perfectly, and for ever, to subdue their adversary.

To all then we say, "Have faith in God, [Mark 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 11.22);" if "you have believed in the Father, believe also in Christ, [John 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.1)." "Believe in the Lord, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall you prosper! [2 Chronicles 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.20)."

***~~#2132~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S HELMET~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.17)~~***

"And take the helmet of salvation."

THE generality of mankind have very inadequate ideas of the Christian warfare. They know but little of the enemies with whom we have to contend, or of the imminent danger to which we are exposed through their continual assaults. But, as some conception might be formed of the power of an enemy, by viewing the extensive preparations that were made to oppose him, so may we learn to estimate the difficulties of the spiritual warfare, by surveying the various parts of armor which God has prepared for our defense. We have already noticed the belt and breast-plate, for the body; the shoes, for the feet; the shield, for the head, in common with the rest of the body. But yet the head is not sufficiently protected; it must have a peace of armor more appropriate; a piece suited to its necessities, and fitted for its use. In the account given us of Goliath, we read that "he had a helmet of brass upon his head, [1 Samuel 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.5);" and such a piece of armor is provided for us also; we are required to "take the helmet of salvation."

In opening this subject we shall show,  
I. What we are to understand by "salvation"—  
II. Its use and importance in the Christian warfare—

***~~I. What are we to understand by the term "salvation?"~~***

It is evident that the expression is elliptical; nor would we know how, with any certainty, to complete the sense, if the Apostle himself had not supplied the defect in a parallel passage: but all doubt is removed by that exhortation in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, [1 Thessalonians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.8), "Let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." From hence we see that Hope is the Christian's helmet.

Yet, because there are various kinds of hope, and only one that will afford the Christian any effectual protection, we must enter more particularly into the subject, and distinguish the scriptural hope from every other that may be mistaken for it.

***~~In the first place then, true hope has salvation for its object.~~***

This is very strongly marked in different parts of Scripture: for we are said to be "saved by hope, [Romans 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.24);" and salvation itself is sometimes called hope; those who look for salvation, are said to be "looking for that blessed hope, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13);" at other times, hope is called salvation: we are exhorted in the text to take the helmet of salvation.

There are many, whose hopes have respect indeed to eternal life; but they are unmindful of their lost estate; they are regardless of that way of deliverance, which God has provided for them through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. They expect to go to Heaven, because they have done nothing to forfeit it: if they have sinned, they have not sinned in such a degree as to deserve the wrath of God; they have committed only common and trivial faults; they have, moreover, done many things to counterbalance their evil deeds; and therefore *they hope for Heaven as the reward of justice, rather than as a gift of unbounded grace*. This, for distinction sake, we may call a self-righteous hope: whereas *the hope of every true Christian is founded altogether on the merits of Christ*, and has respect to salvation, as purchased for us by his obedience unto death.

**Further, true hope has God for its author.**

There is scarcely a person to be found in the world, who, if the question were put to him, Do you hope to go to Heaven if you die in your present state? would not answer in the affirmative. If we would proceed to inquire, Whence did you get that hope? they would tell us, that they had always had it. But this is a presumptuous hope, the offspring of ignorance and conceit.

Widely different from this is the Christian's hope. He has trembled for his sinful state: he has seen his guilt and danger: he has "fled for refuge to the hope set before him." God has revealed to him the riches of his grace; and has shown him that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound." The Holy Spirit has "taken of the things of Christ, and shown them unto him:" yes, he has convinced him, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse him from all sin;" and that "all who believe in Christ, are justified from all things."

In this way God has inspired him with hope, that, notwithstanding all his past iniquities, he shall obtain salvation: and though there may be a considerable difference as to the degree of fear or terror that may precede this hope—yet this is the way in which it is invariably wrought in the soul. Hence it is said, that "God begets us unto a living hope, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3);" and "gives us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, [2 Thessalonians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.16);" and that "he fills us with joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13)."

***~~Again, true hope has holiness for its inseparable companion.~~***

Whatever may be imagined to the contrary, there is no salvation to those who continue to live in sin. Christ came to "save us *from*our sins," but not *in*them. We are expressly told that "the grace of God which brings salvation, teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, [Titus 2:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-13)."

There is a hope of Heaven that will consist with the indulgence of secret lust, and with a total lack of holy dispositions: but that is "the *hope of the hypocrite*which perishes, and shall be swept away with the broom of destruction, [Job 8:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 8.13-14). But the hope of the upright is far different from this: it will admit of no allowed sin, whether of omission or of commission: on the contrary, we are told, that "he who has this hope in him, purifies himself even as God is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3);" he will retain no bosom lusts; he will not so much as wish for any *exceptions*and *reserves*in his obedience to God: he will desire, and endeavor, to be "holy as God is holy, and perfect even as his Father in Heaven is perfect."

This then may serve to distinguish the Christian's hope from that which is self-righteous, presumptuous, or hypocritical; and consequently to determine with considerable accuracy, what that hope is, that is connected with salvation. And though the text itself does not so much as mention hope, and much less discriminate between its different kinds—yet the very omission of these things points out the evident propriety of marking clearly what the import of salvation is, and what that is which alone deserves the name.

We may now, with much greater advantage, proceed to show,

***~~II. The use and importance of the helmet of salvation in the Christian warfare—~~***

The importance of this helmet is not obscurely intimated in that prophecy respecting Christ, wherein it is said "He put on righteousness as a breast-plate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head, [Isaiah 59:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.17)."

But, to mark it more distinctly, we may observe that hope: *prepares*us for conflicts, *sustains*us in them, and  
brings us *victorious*through them.

**Hope *prepares*us for conflicts.**

A man armed with a helmet, feels himself ready to battle: he fears not to meet his adversary, because he has a defense, which he trusts, will prove sufficient for his preservation.

Thus a man that has a hope of salvation, enters into the combat with holy confidence. He is not intimidated by the frowns of an ungodly world, because he "knows in whom he has believed, and that God is able to keep that which he has committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)." He says with David, "Though an army would encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war would rise against me, in him will I be confident! [Psalm 27:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 27.3)."

This subject cannot be more strongly illustrated than in Caleb and the whole nation of the Israelites. The nation was terrified at the report of the spies, and, instead of proceeding to fight against the Canaanites, proposed to appoint a captain, and go back again into Egypt; but Caleb, whose hope was lively, stood unmoved, and strove to animate his countrymen with an assurance of easy victory, [Numbers 13:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 13.30-31); [Numbers 14:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.1-4). And thus, while the hearts of others are failing them for fear, and they "turn back unto perdition," rather than contend with their adversaries, the true Christian, "encourages himself in his God, 1 Samuel 30:6," and makes up his mind to die or conquer.

***~~Further, a true hope will sustain us in conflicts.~~***

Many who have shown courage at first, have yet fainted when their trials were severe and of long continuance. But he who has a hope full of immortality, will never yield, however painful the conflict may be, and however heavy the pressure. "The patriarchs continued to sojourn in the land of promise as mere pilgrims, notwithstanding they had frequent opportunity to return" to their own country and kindred: but they accounted the trial as nothing, because "they looked for a better country, that is, a heavenly one;" and expected in due time to arrive at "a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, [Hebrews 11:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.8-10); [Hebrews 11:13-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.13-16)." Many women also who were tortured by the most ingenious cruelty even unto death—yet declined accepting deliverance upon dishonorable terms, that they might be accounted worthy to obtain a better resurrection, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35).

Paul too, that bright pattern of all virtues, assigns this as the reason why he did not faint under his unparalleled afflictions: "his outward man decayed; but his inward man was renewed day by day:" and *his afflictions appeared to him light and momentary, because he looked from the vanities of time and sense to the invisible realities of eternity!* [2 Corinthians 4:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.16-18).

Thus shall our trials rather confirm, than weaken, our hope, provided it be scriptural and genuine: "our tribulation shall work patience; our patience, experience; and our experience, hope, [Romans 5:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-4)."

***~~Lastly, true hope will bring us victorious through our conflicts.~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ himself in this respect fully verified the prophecies respecting him; and set us an example, which it is our privilege to follow. The Prophet Isaiah represents Jesus as speaking in these triumphant strains: "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. 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 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9)."

Thus will hope enable us also to anticipate the victory, while yet we are fighting on the field of battle: through it, we may defy all the powers of earth or Hell ever to "separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, [Romans 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39)," Yes, such "an anchor shall it be to our souls," that we shall be steadfast, [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19), in the midst of this tempestuous world, and be enabled to outride the storm, which causes many to "make shipwreck of their faith, [1 Timothy 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.19)," and ultimately sinks them to everlasting perdition! [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39).

***~~Let me then entreat you:~~***

***~~First, to get this helmet.~~***

Be not satisfied with a delusive hope that will fail you in the day of necessity; but bring it to the trial: see whether it be able to endure the assaults of your adversary: compare it with the description which God himself gives of that which is true and saving. Look well to it that your hope is not *self-righteous*, *presumptuous*, or *hypocritical*. Be well assured that your hope is of a heavenly temper: and let daily experience show, that it enables you to "lift up your head above all your enemies," whether outward or inward, terrestrial or infernal.

Think with yourselves, how awful it would be to find, either in the hour of death or in the day of judgment, that you had deceived yourselves with some phantom of your own imagination, and formed expectations of happiness that cannot be realized. O do not expose yourselves to such a dreadful disappointment.

Remember the fate of the foolish virgins: they hoped that their lamp of profession would suffice, though they were destitute of the oil whereby alone they could make their light to shine. Through this they perished, [Matthew 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.4); [Matthew 25:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.8-11), as thousands of others have done, by resting in their religious privileges, or their outward conformity to the Divine will—when they had not the inward principle of renewing, sanctifying grace, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23). But let it not be so with you. "Judge yourselves, that you may not be judged by the Lord, 1 Corinthians 11:31." And beg of God to give you that "hope that shall never make you ashamed, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5)."

***~~Next, we would urge you to keep on this helmet in all your conflicts.~~***

Constant will be Satan's endeavors to deprive you of it; and great is his triumph if he succeed. Above all things, be careful that you "cast not away your confidence, but hold fast the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end, [Hebrews 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.6); [Hebrews 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.14)." If at any time you begin to be distracted with doubts and fears, instantly check yourselves as David did, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11)."

Though you are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)," you must "not run as uncertainly, or fight as one that beats the air, [1 Corinthians 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.26);" you must remember who is engaged for your support; and that "he is faithful who has promised, [Hebrews 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.23)." It is true, "you have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise, [Hebrews 10:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.36);" but "if you hope for that you see not, such a hope implies, that you will with patience wait for it, [Romans 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.25)."

James proposes to you the example of the gardener: "Behold," says he, "the gardener waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain. Be also patient: establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draws near, [James 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7-8);" and then shall your confidence be richly rewarded, [Hebrews 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.35). "Gird up then the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.13)." This is the way, the sure way, to conquer. "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing assuredly, that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! 1 Corinthians 15:58."

**Lastly, let that which is your defense, be also your ornament.**

There is not a more ornamental part of the soldier's armor, than the helmet. *Nor is there anything that more adorns the Christian, than a lively, steadfast, and consistent hope*. In the exercise of hope, he stands, as it were, on the top of Pisgah, and surveys the land of promise, the land that flows with milk and honey, [Deuteronomy 34:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 34.1). He longs to leave this dreary wilderness, and to "enter into the joy of his Lord." Knowing that "when his earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved, he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens—he groans, earnestly desiring that mortality may be swallowed up in life! [2 Corinthians 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-4)."

If he had crowns and kingdoms in his possession, still he would account it "far better to depart and to be with Christ, [Philippians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.23)." He is "looking for, and hastening to, the coming of the day of Christ, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12);" and thus has "his citizenship in Heaven," while yet he remains a sojourner upon earth, [Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20).

View the Christian in this frame, and confess, that the sun shining in his meridian strength, glorious as it is, "has no glory, by reason of the Christian's glory that excels." This, this, Christians, is the state in which you ought to live. Were you more habitually in this frame, your years of warfare would seem as nothing, for the greatness of the prize for which you contend, [Genesis 29:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 29.20). You can scarcely conceive what an energy such a frame would give to your souls.

Do but consider, how weak will Satan's temptations be, when you thus abound in hope! How little will anything be able to move you, when you are thus, by joyful anticipation, "sitting already with Christ in heavenly places! [Ephesians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.16)." Beloved brethren, this is your goal: "you will come behind in no gift, when you are thus waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Compare 2 Corinthians 13:9 with [1 Corinthians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.7)." Whatever you have to do, you will do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance, [Colossians 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.22)." *May God enable you thus to live, until faith shall be lost in sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment!*

***~~#2133~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S SWORD~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.17)~~***

"Take.…the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

THE Christian's warfare is principally of the defensive kind; yet not so entirely, but that he must follow up the advantages which he has at any time gained, and seek the utter destruction of those enemies which infest his soul: after sustaining their assaults, he must himself become the assailant; having resisted the world and sin—he must proceed to overcome, condemn and crucify his foes, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4), [Hebrews 11:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.7), [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24); [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). Having withstood Satan, he must go on to "bruise him under his feet, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)." That he may be enabled to carry this into effect, God has provided for him an offensive weapon, which, if skillfully used, shall accomplish the ruin of all his enemies. To the consideration of this we are led by the text; in elucidating which we shall notice,  
I. The *description*given of the Christian's sword—  
II. Its *usefulness*to him in all his combats—

**I. Let us notice the description given of the Christian's sword—**

What the sword is to a warrior—that the Scriptures are to a child of God; they enable him to inflict a deadly wound on his adversaries, and to subdue them before him.

Now the appellation here given to the *Scriptures*is deserving of particular attention. They are called, "the Word of God," and "the sword of the Spirit."

***~~The Scriptures are called with great propriety, "the Word of God."~~***

First, because they were *inspired*by him. They were indeed written by men; but men were only the agents and instruments that God made use of: they wrote only what God by his Spirit dictated to them: so that, in reality, the whole Scripture was as much written by the finger of God, as the laws were, which he inscribed on two tables of stone, and delivered to his servant Moses. And to this the Scriptures themselves bear witness; for in them it is said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, [2 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16);" and again, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.21)."

But they are called the Word of God, not merely as being *inspired*by him, but also as being a *revelation of his mind and will*to man. In them his eternal counsels are opened to the world. In them he has declared in what way he will be reconciled to his offending creatures. In them he has displayed all the riches of his grace; and exhibited all his perfections as united and glorified in the person of Christ. In short, whatever could lead to the establishment of truth, or the refutation of error, [2 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16). To the correction of sin, or the promotion of righteousness, all is contained in that inspired volume, in which there is nothing superfluous, nothing defective: which therefore may be wholly, and exclusively, called, "the Word of God."

But there is yet another, and a very important, ground of this appellation, namely, that the Scriptures are the voice of God which apply to every person. It is thought by some, that the Scriptures are a mere record of transactions that passed many hundred years ago; and that, however true and authentic they may be, they are no otherwise interesting to us, than as matters of curiosity and pleasing instruction. Even the epistles are supposed to relate only to the particular Churches to which they were written: and thus the use of the Scriptures with respect to ourselves is wholly superseded. But we are abundantly guarded against this fatal error by the application which the inspired writers themselves make of numerous passages, which at first sight appear to be as remote from us as any in the Bible. Let us select a few, that will place this matter in its true light.

First, take a historical fact.

A contention arose in Abraham's family. His child by Hagar mocked and insulted the child which he had by Sarah. Sarah took part with her son; and desired that Hagar, with her son Ishmael, would be cast out, and no longer be allowed to dwell in Abraham's house. Now what could the children's quarrels, and the mother's revenge, have to do with us? The Apostle tells us, that the casting out of the bond-woman and her son was intended to show that those who were yet in bondage to the law, would not have any part in the inheritance of those who were made free by the Gospel. Compare [Genesis 21:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.10); [Genesis 21:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 21.12) with [Galatians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.30).

Next, take an occasional declaration.

Abraham had exercised faith in God; and God declared, that his faith would be counted to him for righteousness. In what respect, it may be asked, can this apply to us? We answer with Paul, that this declaration was recorded, not for Abraham's sake alone, but for ours; to inform us, that the way of justification before God was not by works, but by faith alone. Compare [Genesis 15:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.6) with [Romans 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.3); [Romans 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.23-24).

Next, take a personal promise.

God, who had commissioned Joshua to destroy the Canaanites, told him that he would not leave him, nor forsake him in this arduous attempt. Would anyone conceive, that that promise had any respect to us? Yet it did; and, in dependence upon it, every believer may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me! 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)."

Lastly, take as insignificant an ordinance as any that is to be found in all the Mosaic ritual.

"You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn." Now the utmost that this might be supposed to teach us, is, mercy to our animals. But it had a further reference: God's concern was, not for oxen, but for us; and this ordinance was intended to declare, that all who serve at the altar, would live of the altar, Compare [Deuteronomy 25:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 25.4) with [1 Corinthians 9:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.9-10).

Let this suffice to illustrate the point in hand. You see from a historical fact, an occasional declaration, a personal promise, and an insignificant ordinance—that whatever the Scripture speaks, it speaks to us. There is not a *precept*which is not as binding upon us as on those to whom it was delivered: there is not a *threatening*, at which we have not cause to tremble; nor a *promise*, on which we are not warranted to rely, if only we believe in Jesus Christ.

***~~We come now to notice that other appellation given to the Scriptures, "the sword of the Spirit."~~***

In a variety of views this description of them is just and appropriate.

It is by the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks to men. He did indeed in the early ages of the world enlighten men by dreams and visions; but since the publication of the written word, and especially since the completion of the sacred canon, he has called men to the law and to the testimony, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20), "they have Moses and the prophets," says our Lord, "let them hear them, [Luke 16:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.29);" and again, "Search the Scriptures; for in them you have eternal life, [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39)." We do not say indeed, that the Holy Spirit never uses any other means of quickening or comforting the souls of men: but the Scriptures are the means by which he usually works, [Ephesians 5:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.26); nor does he ever work at all, but in a perfect conformity to them.

The Scriptures are further called the sword of the *Spirit*, because they derive all their power from the Spirit. In themselves, the Scriptures are like a sword sheathed and lying upon the ground: they are a dead letter: they convey no spiritual light: they impart no spiritual energy: they carry with them neither conviction, nor consolation: whether read or preached, the Scriptures are equally without effect.

Paul was conversant with the Scriptures before his conversion; but could not see in them that Jesus was the Christ; nor could he learn from them the temper and disposition of a child of God. The ministry of Christ was attended with but small success: nor did the number of those who were converted by the Apostles bear any proportion to that of those who rejected their message: and, in the instances wherein they did succeed, the success was "not owing to Paul who planted, or to Apollos who watered, but to God who gave the increase, 1 Corinthians 3:6." The Word then only came with any beneficial influence, when it came, not in word only, "but in the Holy Spirit, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5)," and "in demonstration of the Spirit's power, [1 Corinthians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4)." Lydia would have remained as unconcerned as others, if "the Lord had not opened her heart to attend to the things that were spoken, [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14)."

But there is yet another reason why the Scriptures are called the sword of the Spirit; namely, that by them he has wrought the most stupendous miracles in the *conversion*of men. They are indeed, "the rod of his strength [Psalm 110:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.2);" and have effected far greater miracles than ever the rod of Moses did. By them he has changed the hearts of men instantaneously, thoroughly, abidingly. By them, in the space of one hour, he transformed three thousand sinners into the very image of their God, [Acts 2:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.41). In his hands, "the word was living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword: it pierced even to the dividing of the joints and marrow: it laid open the inmost thoughts of men, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12);" and "through God it is still mighty to destroy the strongholds" of sin and Satan! [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5); and when "it shall have free course and be magified in the world, [2 Thessalonians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.1)," when he shall "gird it on his thigh, and ride on prosperously" in his career, it shall be "very sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, [Psalm 45:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.3-5)," and all nations shall be subdued unto the obedience of faith, [Psalm 72:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.9-11).

This is the weapon with which the Christian is armed; and with which he shall conquer. To the eye of sense, indeed, he goes forth only like David, with his sling and a stone against Goliath, [1 Samuel 17:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.40); but, like him, "he shall be strong, and do exploits! [Daniel 11:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 11.32)." With this he is "thoroughly furnished unto all good works, [2 Timothy 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.17);" "nor shall any of his enemies be able to stand before him, [Joshua 10:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.8)."

To illustrate the virtues of this sword, we shall proceed to show,

***~~II. Its usefulness to him in all his combats—~~***

It is needless to make any remarks on the utility of a sword in general, since every one must of necessity be well acquainted with it. But the particular manner in which the Scriptures answer the end of a sword to the Christian, is not so obvious. We may therefore examine this point with care and accuracy, in order that we ourselves may be enabled to "handle the weapon" provided for us, and use it with dexterity and success.

The Christian's enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Scripture enables him to defeat them: first, by its clear directions.

Does the *flesh*plead for any unhallowed indulgence? The Scripture says, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good, [Romans 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.9)."

Does the *world*solicit his embrace? The Scripture says again, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, [1 John 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15)."

Does *Satan*exert his wiles in order to deceive? The Scripture says, "Him resist, [1 Peter 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.9)."

And it is worthy of remark, that it was by means of the directions of Scripture that our Savior himself vanquished his wicked adversary.

Did Satan recommend him to turn stones into bread for his support? He answered, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, [Matthew 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.4)."

Did Satan then urge him to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple with an assurance of miraculous preservation? He replied again, "It is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God, [Matthew 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.7)."

Did Satan once more assault him with solicitations to fall down and worship him? He smote the fiend yet a third time with the same irresistible weapon: "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve, [Matthew 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.10)."

Thus Jesus conquered: and thus his people in all ages have subdued their enemies. *David*tells us whence his success arose: "I have hidden your word within me, that I might not sin against you [Psalm 119:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.11);" and, "by the word of your lips, I have kept from the paths of the destroyer, [Psalm 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.4)." To *us*also be recommends an adoption of the same plan, "How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to your word [Psalm 119:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.9)."

The Scripture aids us, in the next place, by its powerful motives.

As for all the motives that human reason can suggest, the experience of all ages has proved them weak and inefficient. But *the Scripture sets before us the happiness of Heaven and the misery of Hell: and thus with irresistible efficacy addresses itself to our hopes and fears*. "He who overcomes shall inherit all things! [Revelation 21:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.7)," says the Lord, "but if any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him: he draws back unto perdition, [Hebrews 10:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38-39)."

When an enemy would allure us by the prospect of pleasure, or alarm us by the apprehension of suffering, with what indignation shall we spurn him from us, if we advert for one moment to the concerns of eternity! *Shall I forego the blessedness of Heaven for a momentary sinful gratification? Shall I consign myself over to all the torments of Hell rather than endure some momentary evil?*What if the acquisition is ever so precious; or the loss be ever so severe? Had I not better pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right hand, than be cast into hell-fire for retaining them? [Mark 9:44-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.44-49). "Depart then from me, all you wicked; I will keep the commandments of my God! [Psalm 119:115](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.115)."

There is yet another motive that operates more strongly on a sincere soul than either the hope of Heaven, or the fear of Hell: I mean, a *concern for the Divine glory*. 'Has God committed to me such a sacred trust? Is the honor of God himself dependent upon my conduct? Will my fall occasion "his name to be blasphemed;" and my stability be the means of exalting his glory? How then shall I give way to the tempter? How shall I so violate my obligations to God, and bring dishonor upon him, whom I ought to love and serve with my whole heart?'

Many of God's saints have found this a counterpoise to the strongest temptations, [Genesis 39:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 39.9); [Genesis 42:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 42.18) and [Nehemiah 5:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 5.15); and it is obvious that these considerations united together, are well calculated to defeat our enemies, and to secure us a decisive victory over all.

The Scripture gives us a further advantage over our enemies by means of its rich encouragements.

Not to mention the eternal rewards that have been just adverted to, the Scripture promises that God will be with us in every conflict, and beat down our adversaries before our face. "Fear not," says he, "for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you by the right hand of my righteousness! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10)." "Fear not, worm Jacob, for you shall thresh the mountains! [Isaiah 41:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-15)." Now what can withstand a man that is armed with such promises as these? What can oppose any effectual obstacle in his way?

Are his enemies numerous? He says, "They are more that are with me, than those who are against me! [2 Kings 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 6.16)."

Does he feel himself weak? He says, "God will perfect his own strength in my weakness, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)."

Under these circumstances he is like *Gideon*, when going against the confederate hosts of Midian and Amalek. God had promised him the victory even without the intervention of a human arm: this promise he had confirmed by repeated signs, and even by an attestation from the enemy themselves. In dependence on God, he surrounded their camp with his little band of three hundred men; and, with no other weapons than a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet, gained the most signal victory, [Judges 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judg 7.19).

Just so, the Christian, "encouraging himself in his God," and depending on his promised aid, goes forth with power and effect. The very end for which such "great and precious promises were given him was, that by them he might be a partaker of the divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and he does improve them to this end; and finds that by means of them he is enabled to "cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

The last advantage which we shall mention as derived from the Scripture, is that which it affords us by means of its instructive examples.

How can any one relax his determination to destroy sin, when he contemplates the destruction which sin has brought on those who yielded to its baneful influence? When he reflects on the doom of the apostate angels, or on the deluge that overwhelmed the world, or on the fire and brimstone that consumed the cities of the plain—can he trifle with that which has so greatly provoked the Majesty of Heaven? [2 Peter 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.4-6); [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9).

If it is to despondency that he is urged by Satan, will he not repel the tempter instantly, as soon as he recollects the character of thousands who have found acceptance with God? Can he despair, who considers for one moment the case of David, or Manasseh, [2 Kings 21:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 21.1-9), or the dying thief? Can he despair, who sees the persecuting Saul arrested in his career; or who reads the catalogue of crimes of which the Corinthian converts had been guilty? [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-11).

It may be that he is induced to think there is something peculiar in his case, which justifies in an extra-ordinary degree his desponding fears. But when he hears, that "no temptation can overcome him but that which is common to man, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)," and then surveys that cloud of witnesses who were once conflicting like himself, but are now in Heaven attesting the power and faithfulness of a redeeming God, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1), he cannot but say, "Get behind me, Satan, [Matthew 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.10);" "you were a liar, and a murderer, from the beginning! [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44)." Shall I credit your lies to the disparagement of my God?

In this way it was that the saints of old triumphed: "Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over? (Now mark the inference,) Therefore the ransomed of the LORD (and we among them) will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away!" A completer triumph than this cannot possibly be conceived. Yet thus will the Scripture enable us to triumph, if we duly mark the examples which it sets before us.

***~~In concluding this subject, we would impress upon your mind two important reflections.~~***

***~~First, How thankful should we be for the Holy Scriptures!~~***

One of the greatest advantages that the Jews possessed above the Gentile world, was, that to them had been committed the oracles of God, [Romans 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.2). This advantage we enjoy in a still higher degree; inasmuch as we have the light of the New Testament in addition to that of the Old Testament. To judge properly respecting this, we should put ourselves in the situation of unenlightened heathen. They are all "led captive by the devil at his will:" and no wonder, since they see no means of escape from his assaults, or of resistance to his power. But we, if it is not utterly our own fault, are asserting our liberty, and victoriously contending with him. Even those who are far from having attained their full growth, if only they are skilled in exercising this potent weapon, "have overcome the wicked one, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14)."

Let then the Scriptures be precious to us, "sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb, [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10)," and "dearer than our necessary food, [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12)."

Let "our meditation be in them day and night, [Psalm 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.2)."

Let them be "a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths, [Psalm 119:105](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.105)."

Let them on all occasions be "our delight and our counselors, [Psalm 119:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.24)."

Then may we be assured that they shall be "the power of God to our salvation, [Romans 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.17);" for God's promise to Joshua is, in fact, addressed to every one of us, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do all that is written therein; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success! [Joshua 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 1.8)."

***~~Next, How earnestly would we seek the influences of the Holy Spirit!~~***

Many, instead of handling the sword for the subjugating of their enemies, are really using it in their defense: they draw from the Scriptures only what shall appear to countenance their lusts and errors; and thus "twist them," as the Apostle says, "to their own destruction, [2 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.16)." And if "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be not given to us, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18)," to guide us into all truth, [John 16:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13)—we shall derive no greater benefit from the sacred volume than they. We may perhaps adopt the *opinions*contained in it; but we shall never experience its *power*to transform the soul, until "the Spirit of God writes it on the fleshly tables of our hearts, [2 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.3)." It is "the Lord alone who gives wisdom; and therefore, while we search the Scriptures as for hidden treasures, we must also lift up our voice to him in prayer for knowledge and understanding, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)."

Let us look then to the Savior, "out of whose mouth goes a two-edged sword, [Revelation 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.16)," even to him who is "the Captain of the Lord's army, [Joshua 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 5.13-14);" and beg, that he would both use that sword to slay the enmity of our hearts, [Ephesians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.16), and enable us also to wield the same for the destruction of our enemies.

Let us pray that "the arms of our hands may be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, [Genesis 49:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 49.21)." And let us go forth, like David, "not with carnal weapons, as a sword, and a spear, and a shield, but in the name of the Lord God Almighty! [1 Samuel 17:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45)." Then shall we "smite our enemies until the sword even cleaves to our hands, [2 Samuel 23:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 23.10);" and we shall experience, in its fullest extent, the import of that significant question, "Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly? [Micah 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 2.7)."

***~~#2134~~***

***~~THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER~~***

***~~[Ephesians 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.18)~~***

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

IT is graciously ordained of God that none of his creatures would be independent of him: however richly they may be furnished with either gifts or graces, they are under the necessity of receiving continual supplies from him, and of acknowledging him, from day to day, as the one source of all their benefits. Hence, in addition to the armor with which the Christian is arrayed from head to foot, it is necessary that he wait upon God in prayer, agreeably to the direction given him in the text.

To enter into the full meaning of the Apostle's words, as connected with the foregoing context, it will be proper to show,  
I. The aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare—  
II. The particular kind of prayer that will ensure to us the victory—

**I. In considering the aspect which prayer in general bears on the Christian warfare**, it would be noticed, that prayer is the medium of communication between God and man. Prayer is that whereby man ascends to God, and makes known to him his wants, and gains from him whatever he stands in need of.

**It is by prayer that we must obtain the armor provided for us.** No one part of the divine armor can be formed by an arm of flesh: from the first infusion of faith and hope into the soul, to the perfect transformation of the soul into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness—all is of God. He is the only "giver of every good and perfect gift, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17);" and all his children in all ages have acknowledged their obligations to him in this view. The evangelical prophet confesses, "You have wrought all our works in us, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)."

But how must this armor be obtained from God? Hear his own direction: "Ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you, [Matthew 7:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.7)." Desirous as he is to impart to us all spiritual blessings, "he yet will be inquired of by us, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37)," that he may bestow them on us as the reward of importunity, [Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6). Not that he needs to be informed of our needs, for "he knows what things we have need of before we ask, [Matthew 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.8)." Nor does he need to be prevailed upon by the urgency of our requests; for he is far more ready to give than we are to ask, and he stirs us up to ask, because he had before determined to give, [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10).

But there is a propriety in this divine appointment: prayer necessitates us not only to feel our wants, but to confess our inability to relieve ourselves: prayer compels us to acknowledge God as the one source of blessedness to man, and to adore him for everything we receive at his hands. Prayer cuts off from us all possible occasion of glorying; and obliges us, when most completely armed, to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

Again. **It is by prayer that we must learn how to use this armor aright.**Men are disciplined to the use of arms: it is not deemed sufficient only to clothe them with armor; they must also be taught how to guard themselves against the assaults of their adversary, and at the same time to inflict on him a deadly wound.

Such instruction must the Christian receive from God. If he "leans to his own understanding," he will as surely be foiled, as if he trust in his own strength, or go unarmed to the field of battle. Many are the devices of the wicked one, of which the uninstructed Christian cannot be aware. He alone, "to whom all things are naked and open," knows his plots, or can put us sufficiently on our guard against them. He alone can tell us when, and where, and how to strike, [2 Samuel 5:23-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 5.23-25). With him alone is that "wisdom that is profitable to direct, [Ecclesiastes 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 10.10)." But if we call upon him, "he will guide us by his counsel, [Psalm 73:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.24);" he will "give us a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and will make us quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)." He will inform us of the designs of our enemy, [Luke 22:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.31), and show us how to counteract them, [Joshua 8:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 8.6-8). And though in ourselves we are "unskillful in the word of righteousness Hebrews, 5:13," yet will he "give us the tongue of the learned, [Isaiah 50:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.4)," and the arm of the mighty, [2 Samuel 22:33-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.33-35). He will fight in us, as well as for us, [Isaiah 49:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.25);" and will give us reason to adopt the grateful acknowledgments of that renowned warrior, "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to fight, [Psalm 144:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 144.1)."

Still, however, all of this must be sought from him in prayer. His promise is suspended on this condition, that we pray to him for the performance of it: on our fulfilling this duty, he will interpose, "he will be very gracious unto us at the voice of our cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer us:" and then it is that "our ears shall hear a voice behind us, saying, This is the way, walk in it, [Isaiah 30:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.19); [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21)." We must first "acknowledge him, and then he will direct our paths, [Proverbs 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.5-6)."

Once more. **It is by prayer that we must bring down the Divine blessing on our endeavors.** Many noble purposes are formed in the minds of unregenerate men, which yet are "as the grass that grows on the house-tops, with which the mower fills not his arms, neither he who binds up the sheaves, his bosom." Nor is it any wonder that those efforts would be blasted, which are undertaken without a reference to God, and which, if they succeeded, would confirm men in a conceit of their own sufficiency. God is a jealous God: and "his glory he will not give to another." Hence he is interested, as it were, in disconcerting the plans of those who disregard him, and in prospering the concerns of those who humbly implore his aid. Agreeably to this, we find in the sacred records that the most powerful armaments, and best concerted projects, have been defeated, when God was not acknowledged, [Isaiah 37:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 37.36). [2 Samuel 17:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 17.11-13); and that the weaker have triumphed gloriously, when they sought the Divine favor and protection, [2 Chronicles 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.12); [2 Chronicles 20:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 20.25).

In one instance more particularly we see the prayer of faith blended with human exertions: and it was made manifest, for the instruction of that and all future generations, that, whatever means God himself might use, *prayer was the most powerful of all weapons*. When the hands of Moses hung down through weariness, Amalek prevailed over Israel; but when he held up his hands, Israel prevailed over Amalek, [Exodus 17:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 17.11); so that, in fact, it was the prayer of Moses, rather than the sword of Joshua, that gained the victory.

It is in this way also, that we must vanquish our spiritual enemies. We must fight against them indeed, and seek their utter destruction; but our reliance must be altogether upon God, whose blessing we must obtain in a way of prayer. In vain shall we attempt to combat Satan in any other way. He laughs at an arm of flesh; and yields to Omnipotence alone. To him may be justly applied that lofty description of Leviathan, "Can you fill his hide with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? If you lay a hand on him, you will remember the struggle and never do it again! Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a bridle? Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth. Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him. When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin. Iron he treats like straw and bronze like rotten wood. Arrows do not make him flee; sling-stones are like chaff to him. A club seems to him but a piece of straw; he laughs at the rattling of the lance. Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud, Job 41."

But he cannot withstand prayer; the man who fights upon his knees is sure to vanquish him: and the weakest Christian in the universe, if he has but a heart to pray, may say with David, "I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised, and so shall I be saved from my enemies, [2 Samuel 22:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 22.4)."

To prevent mistakes, however, it will be proper to show,

***~~II. What kind of prayer that is, which will secure to us the victory—~~***

Much that is called prayer is utterly unworthy of that sacred name. That which alone will prevail to the extent of our necessities, must be *comprehensive*, *spiritual*, *persevering*.

***~~Prayer must, in the first place, be comprehensive.~~***

In the text, mention is made of supplication, and of intercession: both of which are necessary in their season.

Of supplications, there are some stated, such as those which we offer regularly in the Church, the family, and the closet; others are occasional; and are presented to God at those intervals, when any particular occurrence, whether prosperous or adverse, renders it necessary to obtain some special interposition of the Deity.

Intercessions are those prayers which we offer for others; and which are intended to bring down blessings either on the world at large (for God commands "intercession to be made for all men, and more especially for kings, and all that are in authority, [1 Timothy 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.1-2).") or on the saints in particular, with whom we have a common interest; and among whom, as among soldiers in the same army, there would exist a solicitude to promote to the uttermost each other's safety and welfare.

Now it is by a regular application to God, in all these ways, that we are to procure from Heaven those seasonable supplies which we stand in need of.

Respecting the customary devotions of the prayer closet, both in the morning and the evening, corresponding to the sacrifices that were daily offered to God under the Mosaic law, [Exodus 29:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.38-39); [Exodus 29:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 29.42), there can be no doubt. A man who neglects them has no pretension to the Christian name. Instead of being in a state of friendship with God, he must rather be numbered among his enemies; for the very description given of his enemies is, that they call not upon God, [Psalm 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.4); whereas the character of his friends is, that "they are a people near unto him, [Psalm 148:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 148.14)."

Nor is it less necessary that we should worship God in our families: for, as we have family wants, and family mercies, it is proper that we would "offer the sacrifices of prayer and praise" in concert with our families. Abraham is commended for his attention to the religious concerns of his family, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19); and Joshua's noble resolution to maintain, both in his own soul and in his family, the worship of the true God, [Joshua 24:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 24.15), clearly shows, how important this part of a Christian's duty was considered among the saints of old. Nor can any expect the blessing of God upon their families, who will not unite with them in acknowledging the mercies they have already received. As for the public worship of God, none who have any regard for God's honor in the world can possibly neglect it.

The importance of occasional prayer may perhaps be not so clearly seen. But are there not frequent occasions when we need in a more especial manner the assistance of God? If anything has occurred that is gratifying to flesh and blood, do we not need to call upon God for grace, that we may not, Jeshurun like, "wax fat, and kick" against our heavenly Benefactor? If, on the contrary, we are suddenly involved in any afflictive circumstances, do we not need to implore help from God, in order that we may bear with patience his paternal chastisements, and that the trial may be sanctified to our eternal good? Sometimes indeed the seasons occur so instantaneously, that we have no time or opportunity for a long address to God: but then we might lift up our hearts in an ejaculatory petition; and in one short moment obtain from God the support we require.

Look at the saints of old, and see how they prospered by a sudden elevation of their souls to God:

*David*, by one short prayer, "Lord, turn the counsels of Ahithophel into foolishness," defeated the crafty advice he gave to Absalom: and caused him, through chagrin, to put and end to his own existence, [2 Samuel 15:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 15.31) with 17:14, 23.

*Jehoshaphat*, by a single cry, turned back his pursuers, who, if God had not instantly interposed on his behalf, would have overtaken and destroyed him, [2 Chronicles 18:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 18.31).

*Nehemiah*, by a silent lifting up of his soul to God, obtained success to the petition which he was about to offer to his royal master, [Nehemiah 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 2.4-6).

*Thus we would blunt the edge of many temptations, and defeat innumerable machinations of Satan, if we habituated ourselves on all occasions to make known our requests to God.* Nor would prayer be less successful, if offered for others. Who can behold *Moses*repeatedly arresting the hand of justice, and averting the wrath of God from the whole Jewish nation, [Exodus 32:10-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.10-14); or contemplate Peter's deliverance from prison on the night preceding his intended execution, effected as it was in a way that appeared incredible even to the very people who had been praying for it, [Acts 12:5-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 12.5-16), and not confess the efficacy of intercession, whether of people for their minister, or of ministers for their people? Indeed we need no other instance than that of *Abraham's*intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah, [Genesis 18:23-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.23-32), to convince us, that it is our most glorious privilege to "pray for one another, [James 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.16);" and that in neglecting this duty, we "sin against God, [1 Samuel 12:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.23)," and against our brethren, and against our own souls.

Such then must be our prayers, if we would be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," or exert ourselves with effect against our great adversary.

***~~In the next place, our prayer must be spiritual.~~***

Were our devotions multiplied in ever so great a degree, they would be of no avail, unless they came *from the heart, and were offered up "through the power of the Holy Spirit*." God has warned us, that "those who draw near to him with their lips while their hearts are far from him, worship him in vain, [Matthew 15:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.8-9)."

Indeed how can we imagine that God would regard a mere repetition of words, when we ourselves would reject with indignation a petition offered to ourselves in a similar manner, [Malachi 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 1.8). Our "supplications must be in the Spirit," or, as Jude expresses it, "in the Holy Spirit, Jude verse 20." The Holy Spirit must teach us what to pray for, and must assist our infirmities in praying for it, [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26), quickening our desires after God, emboldening us to draw near to him with filial confidence, and enabling us to expect at his hands an answer of peace.

As there is but one Mediator through whom we can have access to God, so there is only one Spirit by whom we can approach him [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18). But we need not on this account be discouraged: for the Spirit is promised to us for these ends, [Joel 2:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.29); [Joel 2:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.32); and in whoever he is "a Spirit of grace, he will be also a Spirit of supplication, [Zechariah 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 12.10)."

***~~Lastly, our prayer must also be persevering.~~***

We must pray "always, watching thereunto with all perseverance." It is by no means sufficient that we pray to God, as too many do, just under the pressure of some heavy affliction, [Isaiah 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.16), or be fervent for a time, and then relapse again into our former coldness and formality, [Job 27:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 27.10). We must be "instant in prayer, [Romans 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.12)," "stirring up our souls to lay hold on God, [Isaiah 64:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.7)," and "wrestling with him," like Jacob, until we obtain his blessing, [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28) with [Hosea 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.4).

There is a holy importunity which we are to use, like that of the Canaanite woman, [Matthew 15:22-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 15.22-27), or that of the two blind men, who became more urgent in proportion as others strove to repress their ardor, [Matthew 20:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.30-31). And because Satan will do all in his power to divert us from this course, we must watch against his devices with all possible care, and persevere in it without fainting, [Luke 18:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.1), even to the end.

If we notice our frames at the returning seasons of prayer, we shall perceive that there is often a most unaccountable backwardness to this duty. Any concern, however trifling, will appear a sufficient reason for delaying it, until, from weariness of body or indisposition of mind, we are induced to omit it altogether, or perhaps we fall asleep in the midst of it. We sometimes think in the evening, that we shall be fitter for it in the morning; and then in the morning we expect a more convenient season at noon-day; and at noon-day we look forward with a hope of performing our duty to more advantage in the evening.

Thus we deceive ourselves with delays, and rob our souls of the benefits which God would bestow upon them.

But who ever found himself the more ready for prayer on account of his having neglected it the preceding day? Do not such neglects "grieve the Holy Spirit," and increase, rather than diminish, our indisposition for prayer? Most assuredly they do: and therefore we would "watch" against all excuses, all neglects, all formality; and "persevere" in a steady, uniform, and conscientious performance of this duty.

It is not necessary indeed that we should at all times occupy the same space of time in our devotions; for "we shall not be heard for our much speaking, [Matthew 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.7);" but we would endeavor at all times to maintain a spirituality of mind in this duty, and improve in a more particular manner those seasons, when God stretches out to us, as it were, his golden scepter, [Esther 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Esther 4.11) with 5:2, 3, and admits us to a more than ordinary "fellowship with himself and with his Son Jesus Christ, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)."

***~~We shall conclude this interesting subject with an address,~~***

***~~1. To those who neglect prayer altogether—~~***

What easier terms could God have prescribed, than those on which he has suspended the communication of his blessings? Or what could you yourselves have dictated to him more favorable than that condition, "Ask, and you shall have?" Do but consider, what will be your reflections as soon as ever you enter into the invisible world! When you see the door of mercy forever shut, and begin to feel the judgments which you would not deprecate, how will you lament, and even curse, your folly in neglecting prayer! When you call to mind that Heaven with all its glory was open to you, and you had nothing to do but to ask for it at the hands of God, you would not give yourselves the trouble to call upon him! What can you expect, but that the threatening, already recorded for your instruction, shall be executed upon you, "But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes! [Proverbs 1:24-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-31)."

O let not this awful period arrive! "Arise, you sleepers, and call upon your God [Jonah 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 1.6)." Is not Heaven worth asking for? *Is it not worth your while to escape the miseries of Hell?*What if diligence and self-denial be necessary; will not the prize repay the labors of the contest? Perhaps you are saying in your hearts, that you will begin to pray at some future and more convenient season, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25); but dream not of a more convenient season, lest that season never arrive.*Procrastination is the ruin of thousands, and of millions.*It is Satan's grand device for keeping you from God. Would he tempt you to say, "I will never pray at all," he knows you would revolt at the idea; and therefore he prompts you only to defer it in hopes of finding your mind better disposed to the employment on some future day.

But let him not deceive you. Delay not a single hour. Yes, at this very moment lift up that ejaculatory petition, "Lord, teach us to pray! [Luke 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.1)," and embrace the first moment to begin that work, which if prosecuted with fervor and perseverance, shall outcome in present peace, and everlasting triumphs.

***~~2. To those who are daily waiting upon their God, we would also address a few words—~~***

That you find much cause for humiliation in your secret walk with God, is highly probable: for *though nothing would be easier than prayer, if you were altogether spiritual, the remaining carnality of your hearts renders it inexpressibly difficult.*Nor can we doubt but that Satan labors to the uttermost to increase your discouragements, both by distracting your minds in prayer, and by insinuating, that your labor will be in vain. And too often are you inclined perhaps to credit his suggestions, and to say, like the unbelieving Jews, "What profit would we have, if we pray unto him? [Job 21:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 21.15)." He will not hear, "he has shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure." But rest assured that he will not allow you to seek his face in vain. His answers may be delayed; but they shall come in the best time. You have only to wait; and the vision, though it may tarry for a season, will not ultimately disappoint you, [Habakkuk 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.3). Sooner or later, "God will assuredly avenge his own elect, [Luke 18:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.7)." *There is no situation so desperate but prayer will relieve us from it*, [Jonah 2:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah 2.2-7). There is no object is so far beyond the reach of human influence, but prayer will attain it, [James 5:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.17-18). *The efficacy of prayer is as unlimited as Omnipotence itself, because it will bring Omnipotence to our aid,*[John 14:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.13-14).

But some are ready to say, "I have prayed, and earnestly too; and yet have obtained no answer to my prayer." It may be so; because you have "asked amiss, [James 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.3);" or because the time for answering it is not yet arrived. But it often happens, that persons think their prayers are cast out, when they have indeed received an answer to them; yes, the best answer that could have been given to them. Perhaps, like Paul, they have prayed against a thorn in their flesh; and, instead of having it removed, have received strength to bear it, and grace to improve it to their spiritual good, [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9). But is this no answer to their prayer? Is it not the best that could possibly be given? A trial may be removed in wrath, [Isaiah 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.5); but it cannot be sanctified from any other principle than love, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10). The removal of it may produce present ease; but its sanctified operations will ensure and enhance our everlasting felicity, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17).

Let us then "tarry the Lord's leisure, and be strong," knowing that the prayer of faith can never go forth in vain; nor can a praying soul ever perish. Let us "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make our requests known unto God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus! [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7)."

**PHILIPPIANS**

***~~#2135~~***

***~~A WORK OF GRACE~~***

***~~[Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)~~***

"Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

THERE is a just mixture of hope and fear, which every Christian would cherish in contemplating his own experience, and the state of the Church of Christ. On the one hand there certainly is ground for fear, whether we judge from analogy, or from what we behold with our eyes:

What multitudes of blossoms are annually cut off by frost!

Of those that set, how many are blighted by an eastern wind!

Of those that grow, how many are blown off by storms and tempests!

Of those that hang upon the tree, how many, when gathered, prove rotten at the core!

Thus it is seen in the religious world:

Many make a fair show for a little while, and then fall off from their profession.

Others are blighted, and come to naught.

Others look well for a season, but are beaten down by storms of persecution and temptation.

And of those who maintain their profession to the end, how many will at last be found unsound at heart!

If this casts a damp upon our joys, and teaches us to moderate our expectations, it need not, it ought not, to rob us of all our confidence: for though sound fruit may be blown off from a tree, no sound Christian shall ever be separated from the Lord Jesus! Of this the Apostle was fully persuaded: and, under this conviction, he thanked God for the converts at Philippi, whose sincerity he had no reason to doubt, and of whose perseverance in the divine life he therefore entertained the most optimistic hopes.

To make a just improvement of his declaration before us, we shall show,

***~~I. When a good work may be said to be begun in us—~~***

It is not an easy matter to draw the line between those high attainments of religion of which we may fall short, and yet be confident that a good work is begun: and those low attainments, which will warrant us to hope well, at the same time that they are by no means a sufficient ground of confidence. But, taking Paul for our guide, we trust, that we shall so discriminate, as neither to make sad the heart of the righteous, nor to countenance the delusions of the wicked. Those evidences, from whence he "knew the election" (and, of consequence, the perseverance also) of the saints at Thessalonica, will serve as a sure criterion whereby to judge of our own state, [1 Thessalonians 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3-5). *We may be assured then that a good work is begun in us, when faith, hope, and love, show themselves to have been formed in our hearts*; that is,

***~~1. When our faith is operative—~~***

That faith which is without works, is dead; and is of no more value that the faith of devils! [James 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.19-20); but the faith which stimulates us to resist and mortify all sin, and to be conscientious in the practice of all duties, is, beyond a doubt, the gift of God, the workmanship of an almighty Agent! [Philippians 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.29). [Ephesians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19).

***~~2. When our love is laborious—~~***

Our "love is not to be in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth:" nor must it have respect to men's bodies merely, but to their souls; leading us to consult their spiritual welfare to the utmost of our power, at the same time that we gladly deny ourselves to relieve their spiritual needs. The voice of inspiration assures us that he who exercises such love is born of God, [1 John 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7).

***~~3. When our hope is patient—~~***

The Christian's hope will have much to try it; but it is to be the anchor of his soul, that shall keep him steadfast, [Hebrews 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.19). in this tempestuous world. He will often experience "fightings without, and fears within:" but beyond and "against hope, he must believe in hope, [Romans 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.18)," saying, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)." And every one who has such a living hope, may be sure that he has been begotten to it by God himself! [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3).

To enter fully into the Apostle's assertion, we must show,

***~~II. On what grounds we may be confident that he who has begun this good work will finish it—~~***

If this work were wrought by man, the Apostle would never express such confidence respecting his completion of it; since no dependence can be placed on the stability of man's virtue. But since he who accomplishes this great work is God, verse 3-5 and [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5) and [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13), we may be assured, that "he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

We may be assured of it:

***~~1. From the declarations of his word—~~***

Numberless are his declarations to this effect, that having once been the "author of a good work within us, he will be the finisher of it, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2)." "He will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22)." He has promised in the strongest possible manner, that "he will never never leave them, never never forsake them, [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)." True, they have many enemies: but "he will allow none of them to pluck them out of his hands, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)." Have they manifold temptations? They shall "have none without a way to escape, that they may be able to bear them, [1 Corinthians 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.13)." Not even their unbelief shall prevent Jehovah from executing his gracious purposes towards them, [2 Timothy 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12-13). As for "Satan, he shall be bruised under their feet shortly, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)." Through weakness they may occasionally fall: "yet shall they not be utterly cast down, [Psalm 37:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.23-24)." "God will restore their souls, [Psalm 23:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 23.3);" and make their very falls the means of augmenting their future caution and stability. Compare [Luke 23:31-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 23.31-34) with [1 Peter 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8).

The sun may occasionally be covered with a cloud; yet shall it advance to its meridian height: and such shall be the path of all the servants of God, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18), "they shall hold on their way, and their hands shall wax stronger and stronger, [Job 17:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 17.9)." This is the portion of them all without exception, for "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)."

***~~2. From the perfections of his nature—~~***

In speaking on this subject, we would proceed with great caution; for we know not what will consist with his perfections: and, if we would presume to speak dogmatically respecting them, we would only betray our own weakness and folly. Yet methinks his wisdom affords us some ground of confidence: for, if he has created us anew, in order that we may show forth the power of his grace, will he allow his enemies so to counteract his purposes as to make us only occasions of greater dishonor to him? If a man would begin to construct a house and leave it unfinished, he would only expose himself thereby to a greater measure of derision, [Luke 14:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.28-29); how then would Satan cast reflections on the Deity, if he would fail in accomplishing so great a work as man's salvation!

In like manner the goodness of God is some ground of hope and confidence. For God has surely never accomplished in us so good a work in order to leave us ultimately to perish under a more aggravated condemnation!

But in speaking of such things which infinitely exceed our comprehension, I can lay no stress on the conjectures of man; nor can I give weight to anything that does not proceed clearly and immediately from God himself. But in speaking of the truth of God, I feel that I stand on firm ground. God has entered into covenant with us; and has confirmed that covenant with an oath: and has expressly declared that he did so confirm it, 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, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)." He is as unchangeable in his *word*as he is in his *nature*; and "because he changes not, therefore we are not consumed! [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6)."

We, alas! are variable in the extreme; but "with him is no variableness neither shadow of turning, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." Now if we look into his covenant we shall see that he gives all, and we receive all, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27); and that he engages, not only "not to depart from us, but to put his fear in our hearts that we may not depart from him, [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40)," We may be sure therefore that he will not cast off his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22).

If indeed he had chosen any of us because we were holy, or because he foresaw that we would be holy, he might abandon us as not answering his expectations. But he chose us that we might be holy, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4), and predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29); and therefore what he has undertaken we may be sure he will perform, [Psalm 89:30-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-36). It is on this ground alone that we can account for Paul's confidence, in which every one in whom God has begun a good work, is fully authorized to join.

***~~I beg permission now to add a word,~~***

***~~1. Of inquiry respecting the commencement of this work—~~***

I am fully aware that persons so blinded by self-love as we, are greatly in danger of forming too favorable a judgment of our state: and I must warn all of you that God will not be put off with:

such a *feigned*repentance as Ahab's,

or such a *partial*reformation as Herod's,

or such a *hypocritical*attachment as that of Judas.

Examine then, I beg you, with all imaginable care, respecting the quality of your faith, and hope, and love:

Is your *faith*operative in purifying your heart?

Is your *love*laborious in all kind offices, not to the bodies of men only, but to their souls?

And is your *hope*such as carries you forward through all difficulties towards the attainment of the heavenly prize?

Remember, it is no outward work that is here spoken of, but a work *in*us: and a work which nothing less than Omnipotence can effect! To deceive yourselves in relation to it, is vain, since you cannot deceive the heart-searching God. Be careful then to try your work, of what kind it is; and be satisfied with nothing that does not evidently bear the divine stamp and character upon it.

***~~2. Of admonition in reference to its continuance—~~***

There is nothing at which I tremble more, than at a hard, bold, presumptuous confidence respecting the application of this doctrine to a man's own state, while in his spirit and temper and conduct he shows himself to be far from the mind of Christ. In fact, wherever such a confidence exists, there is great reason to doubt whether a good work has ever been begun in the soul.

*Confidence, if truly spiritual, will be attended with humility, watchfulness, gratitude, and zeal*. See to it then, that you manifest on all occasions a deep sense of your utter unworthiness; a fear lest in anything you grieve the Spirit of your God; an admiring and adoring sense of God's mercy to your soul; and a determination of heart to live only to your God. This is the true way in which the good work is to go forward in the soul: and, in so walking, you will best justify your confidence to the world, and will give the best proof of the doctrine of perseverance by actually persevering. Moreover, in this way you will not only enjoy the most exalted peace on earth, but will have an abundant entrance ministered unto you in due season into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

***~~#2136~~***

***~~GROWTH IN GRACE~~***

***~~[Philippians 1:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.8-11)~~***

"God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God."

THE connection existing between a pastor and his flock is set forth in the Scriptures under the most endearing images. While they are spoken of as his beloved children, he is represented as the father that begat them, and as the nursing mother who cherishes them in her bosom. Even these images seem to have been too faint to depict the tender regard which Paul bore towards those who had been converted by his ministry. He longed for their welfare with more than human affection. He could compare his feelings with nothing so justly as with the yearning of the Savior's affections over a ruined world.

Nor was he actuated by partial and personal attachments: his regards were universal: they extended to every member of Christ's mystical body: yes, he could appeal to God himself, that he felt the deepest interest in the prosperity of "all," whether more or less distinguished by worldly rank or spiritual attainments.

Among the various ways in which he manifests his concern for them, he was especially mindful of prayer and intercession; and though in these benevolent exercises he was solicitous only to approve himself to God—yet he thought it proper on many accounts to inform them of the means he used for their benefit; and to declare to them the particular things which he sought for in their behalf.

From the prayer before us, we see that he desired,

***~~I. Their intellectual improvement—~~***

"Love" is absolutely essential to a Christian: without that, whatever else we may possess, we are only as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals. Love is the characteristic feature of God: and in this all his children resemble him. By this mark we are made known to others as the disciples of Christ: by this we ourselves also are assured, that we have passed from death unto life. In this amiable quality the Philippians "abounded." But the Apostle wished them to abound in it "yet more and more." He was solicitous that it would display itself in a befitting manner. He prayed therefore that their "love might yet more and more abound,"

***~~1. In knowledge—~~***

Knowledge is properly the foundation of love. Whatever we fix our affections upon, we love it for some real or supposed excellence that is in it. If we are unacquainted with the qualities of any person or thing, it is not possible that we would feel any real attachment to him or it. Our love to God therefore, and to his people, would be daily nurtured and strengthened by an increasing acquaintance with them.

Our views of the Divine perfections are, at best, but very narrow and contracted. So little are we acquainted with his providence, that we can only faintly guess at either the reasons or outcome of his dispensations. The mysteries of redemption are very superficially discovered by us. What we know of Christ, is extremely partial and defective. The nature, extent, and beauties of holiness are very dimly seen. The privileges and blessedness of the Lord's people are but little understood. Wherever we turn our eyes, we are circumscribed by very narrow limits. On every side there are heights and depths, and length and breadth, that cannot be explored. To be searching into these things is our imperative duty, our exalted privilege. If "the angels desire to look into them," much more should we. It is by more enlarged views of them, that our love to them must be confirmed and advanced. We would therefore labor incessantly to form a just estimate of heavenly things, and to have our affections regulated by an enlightened understanding.

***~~2. In a spiritual perception of the things known—~~***

Merely *speculative*knowledge is of little avail: it is only like the light of the moon, which dissipates obscurity indeed, but communicates neither heat nor strength. The knowledge which alone will augment our love, is that which produces suitable impressions on the mind; it is that which, like the sun-beam, enlivens and invigorates our whole frame.

Now there is a great difference, even among good men, with respect to their perception of divine truths. There is, if we may use the expression, *a spiritual taste*, which is acquired and heightened by exercise. As, in reference to the objects of sense, there is an exquisite "judgment" attained by some, so that their eye, their ear, and their palate can discern excellencies or defects; where others, with less discriminating organs, perceive nothing particular; so is there, in reference to spiritual things, an exquisite sensibility in some persons, whereby their enjoyment of divine truth is wonderfully enhanced, [Hebrews 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.14). Now this is the knowledge which we would aspire after, and in which our love would progressively abound.

*We should not be satisfied with that speculative knowledge which may be gained from men and books; but would seek that spiritual discernment, which nothing but the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul can produce*,[1 Corinthians 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.9-10); [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12); [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). Whatever be the particular objects of our regard, we should get a realizing sense of their excellency, and be duly impressed with their importance.

These views and impressions the Apostle desired for them, in order to a further end:

***~~II. Their moral improvement—~~***

*Love, when duly exercised, is the main-spring of all acceptable obedience.*When abounding in knowledge and in all judgment, so as to be suitably affected with everything, love will improve the whole of our conduct.

***~~1. Love will make us more judicious—~~***

We are very apt to be misled by what is specious. Hence many embrace erroneous principles, or rest in delusive experiences, or justify an unfitting conduct. Even in the apostolic age, many were turned from the faith by the sophistry of false teachers: and every day presents some to our view, who are ready to admire and applaud themselves for those very things which more unselfish persons see to be their characteristic failings. Yes, plain and palpable faults are not unfrequently committed by persons unconscious of acting wrong, in whose eyes the very faults they commit appear not only innocent, but praiseworthy.

It is not the world only which puts darkness for light; even the godly themselves are apt to confound good and evil; and it is no inconsiderable part of Christian wisdom to distinguish them from each other.

The Apostle was anxious that his Philippian converts would form a correct judgment, and so try the things that differed from each other, as to be able to discern the more excellent; just as a refiner proves his metal in the furnace, and thus ascertains its real worth. This seems to be the precise idea contained in the Apostle's words.

But how shall this be done? We answer: By having our love to divine things more under the influence of an enlightened and spiritual mind. We shall then have within ourselves a faculty, as it were, whereby we may discern the things submitted to it. Our views being more comprehensive, and our judgment more spiritual, we shall be able to weigh everything in a juster balance, and to discriminate with far greater exactness. As the different senses are fitted to give us a right estimate of the things on which they are exercised; so the mind, imbued with ardent love, extensive knowledge, and spiritual discernment, will rightly appreciate whatever presents itself to its notice, and calls for its decision.

***~~2. Love will make us more steadfast—~~***

Though sincerity is ever an attendant on true religion—yet is there much hypocrisy still remaining in the renewed heart. We do not mean that there is any allowed deceit; for that would at once determine a man to be no true Israelite.*But every grace in man's heart is imperfect, and admits of growth; and, consequently, sincerity among the rest.*Moreover, as long as we continue in the body, we are liable to err; and not only to stumble ourselves, but even to become stumbling-blocks to others. Not the attainments of Peter himself could place him beyond the reach of sin.

We may appeal to all who "know the plague of their own hearts," whether they do not still feel within themselves a proneness to act with an undue reference to the good opinion of their fellow-creatures; and whether they have not still *reason to lament the existence of manifold defects in their deportment towards God and man!*Now it is of infinite importance, to the honor of religion and the comfort of our own souls, that these defects be remedied as much as possible; that we be more and more delivered from the influence of corrupt passions; and that we be kept sincere and upright until the day of Christ.

But how shall this steadfastness be attained? We can prescribe no better means than those referred to in the text. *A loving spirit, abounding in clear, spiritual, and impressive views of divine truth, will assist us greatly in the whole of our conduct. A feeling sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts will fortify us against every temptation; it will make our walk circumspect, our conscience tender, our zeal ardent, our obedience uniform.*

***~~3. Love will make us more diligent—~~***

In estimating a fruit-tree, our principle inquiry respects its *fruit*; its foliage and blossoms are objects comparatively unimportant. Thus the principles and professions, the experiences and habits of a Christian, are no further valuable, than as they are connected with the substantial fruits of righteousness. *His love, whether to God or man, must lead to active exertions, and must show itself in the practice of universal holiness.*He would be like a tree whose boughs are laden with fruit. Such a Christian adorns his profession, and recommends religion to all who behold him. And the fruit which he bears, by virtue derived from Christ, does, through the merits of Christ, ascend up with acceptance before God; and tends exceedingly to exalt the honor of God in the world. Such fruitfulness, I say, is the great end of all the mercies given unto him, and of all the love which he professes to feel towards Christ and his people.

But how shall this be secured? We can recur to nothing more effectual than that already mentioned. If we increase in a spiritual perception of the excellency and importance of the Gospel, we cannot fail of being stirred up to activity and diligence in the ways of God: we shall not be satisfied with bringing forth thirty or sixty-fold, but shall labor to bring forth fruit a hundred-fold, and to be "filled with" it in all seasons, and under all circumstances. "Give me understanding," says David, "and I shall keep your law, yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

While we admire the Apostle's tender solicitude for the souls of men, let us nourish a just regard for our own souls; and, by mutual exhortations and fervent intercessions, endeavor to the utmost to advance the interests of religion in each other, and in the world at large.

***~~#2137~~***

***~~DECISION OF CHARACTER RECOMMENDED~~***

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

"I am appointed for the defense of the Gospel."

*THE Gospel is a revelation of mercy to sinful man, and the most stupendous display of God's wisdom and grace that ever was given to his intelligent creation!*It might naturally have been expected that such tidings would have been invariably welcomed with unbounded joy: but, in every age, and every place under Heaven, has it excited the fiercest opposition. On the other hand, it has been maintained with firmness by God's faithful servants, and has triumphed over all the opposition that either men or devils could raise against it. In truth, it has been assailed no less by subtlety than by force; and its very doctrines have been propagated with a view to undermine its influence.

Paul tells us, that, on his imprisonment, many rose to the occasion, and proclaimed the Gospel with augmented fortitude; but that some had preached it for no other end than that of drawing away his disciples, and thereby adding affliction to his bonds. He, however, whether under prosperous or adverse circumstances, "was set for the defense of the Gospel," and was determined to maintain it, even unto death.

In him we see,

***~~I. What place the Gospel should hold in our estimation—~~***

***~~Nothing is of importance in comparison with it—~~***

Nothing can vie with it in certainty as a record, in richness as a system, or in value as a remedy.

Whatever can be conceived as necessary to establish its authority as a divine record, is found in it in such abundance, that no record under Heaven can be received, if this is not. Its evidences, both external and internal, are so clear and numerous, that it is not possible for a candid mind to withstand their force.

*What wonders of love and mercy does the gospel bring to our view: the substitution of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, in the place of his rebellious creatures, to bear the wrath which they had merited, and fulfill the law which they had broken, and thereby to work out a righteousness wherein they might find acceptance with God!*The sending also of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-adorable Trinity, to impart to men the knowledge of this salvation, and to prepare them for the enjoyment of it! *Such a mode of restoring man to his offended God infinitely surpasses all finite conception: nor will eternity suffice to explore the wonders of love and mercy contained in it.*

To the weary and heavy-laden soul nothing else is lacking. It provides for sinful man all that his necessities require—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory:

*pardon*of all his sins, however great or numerous they may have been;

*peace*with God, and in his own conscience;

*strength*for the performance of every duty; and

*everlasting happiness*at the right hand of God.

Never was there a case which the gospel did not reach; never a want for which it was not an adequate supply.

Nothing, therefore, should equal it in our esteem.

*How vain and empty does the world appear, when viewed by the eye of faith!* Paul, speaking of the cross of Christ, says, that, "by it the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world." This expression of his will set this matter in its true light. Suppose a person suspended on the cross, and in the very article of death: what are the world's feelings in relation to him, and his in reference to the world? His dearest friends and relatives feel their connection with him altogether dissolved; and he, even if he has possessed crowns and kingdoms, feels no further interest in them; but bids them, without regret, an everlasting farewell.

Precisely thus are the bonds which once subsisted between the believer and the world burst asunder; they no longer regarding him as theirs, and he no longer regarding them as his. *The concerns of eternity have taken possession of his mind; and he has no longer any taste for the things of time and sense.*This, I hesitate not to say, should, in the main, be the experience of all who embrace the Gospel: "they would count all things but rubbish, that they may win Christ."

Nor would personal ease be deemed of any importance in comparison with fidelity to Christ. The fiery furnace would not intimidate us, and the den of lions would not deter us from the path of duty. Whatever we may have suffered, or may be threatened with, for the Gospel's sake, we would be ready to say, with the Apostle, "None of these things move me! Neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but fulfill my duty to my Lord and Savior".

It is scarcely needful to say, that we must be ready to relinquish for it, our own righteousness: for though self-righteousness cleaves closer to us than to anything else, a just view of the Gospel will dispel it all, as a morning cloud; and we shall be ready to seek our all in Christ; making him, and him alone, "our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

From hence, then, we may easily see,

***~~II. What firmness the Gospel should produce in our conduct—~~***

The Apostle "was set for the defense of the Gospel," in the midst of greater difficulties and trials than ever were encountered by mortal man, [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28). And a similar firmness should we manifest,

***~~1. In our adherence to the gospel—~~***

The gospel is, indeed, "our very life, [Deuteronomy 32:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.47);" and should occupy our whole souls. It should be to our souls what our souls are to our bodies: it should live, and move, and act in every part. Our every act, and word, and thought, should be directed by it; and we would be as tenacious for it as of life itself. It is justly said, "Skin for skin; yes, all that a man has will he give for his life, [Job 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 2.4);" and in this light we would view the Gospel: in comparison with it, everything in the whole universe should be considered as of no account: and, if all the world endeavors to wrest it from us, we should be ready to lay down our life in its defense; well knowing, that "whoever will save his life, shall lose it; but that whoever will lose it for the Gospel's sake, the same shall save it! [Matthew 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 16.25)."

***~~2. In our profession of the gospel—~~***

There were, in the Apostle's days, some who "preached Christ out of envy and strife;" and who affected a union in sentiment with him, only with a view to subvert his influence. And such preachers exist at this day; adopting and proclaiming the Gospel itself, for the purpose of diminishing the influence of those:

whose *principles*are more pure,

whose *aims*are more exalted,

whose *lives*are more heavenly.

Indeed, there is scarcely anything more common, than for the people of the world to point out to their friends, men as patterns of sound doctrine and of correct conduct, with no better view than to draw away from more zealous ministers their followers and adherents.

But we should be alike on our guard against pretended friends and avowed enemies. I mean not to say that we would not listen to counsel of any kind: for certainly we ought to suspect our own judgment, and to lend a willing ear to good advice; but we should guard against seduction, from whatever quarter it may come; and should "prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good."

As to concealing our love to the Gospel, we would not attempt it, or even endure the thought of it for a moment. We should not be afraid of having it known "whose we are, and whom we serve." We should shine as lights in the world; holding forth, in our lives, as well as with our lips, the word of life:" and would so make "our light to shine before men, that all who behold it may glorify our Father who is in Heaven." It was a matter of public notoriety that the Apostle was "set for the defense of the Gospel:" nor should our devotion to it be unknown by those around us, who have an opportunity of observing our life and conduct.

***~~3. In our propagation of the gospel to the world—~~***

This is the duty both of ministers and people; each of whom, in their respective places and stations, should advance the knowledge of it to the utmost of their power. The whole mass of converts, when driven from Jerusalem by the persecution which had consigned Stephen to martyrdom, "went everywhere preaching the word [Acts 8:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.4)." And, in like manner, all, of every description, though not called to the ministerial office, are, in a less ostensible manner indeed, though scarcely less effectual, to bear testimony to the truth, and to commend the Savior to all around them. To "put our light under a bushel "should be the greatest injustice both to God and man: to God, who has imparted it to us for the good of others; and to man, who can by no other means be guided into the way of peace. To the pious zeal of others we are indebted for all that we know; and, "having freely received, we should freely give."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have no regard for the Gospel—~~***

In what a pitiable state are you! How awfully has "the god of this world blinded your eyes!" Perhaps you think that the opposition which it meets with is a just ground for questioning its real worth. But I would rather say, that that very opposition is a presumptive evidence in its favor; because it has been so opposed from the days of Cain and Abel until now; and because it declares what reception it shall ever meet with from an ungodly world.

May I not add, that the firmness of holy men in its support is a further testimony in its behalf? I know, indeed, that many have died in the defense of error: but where, in the annals of the world, will be found such a frame of mind as that of Stephen, except under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and in attestation to the truth of God? Let not then that Gospel, which has been so esteemed by others, be any longer slighted by you.

Be careful, indeed, that you receive the true Gospel: guard against all perversions of the doctrine of Christ: see to it, that, in your view of it, the sinner is laid low, even in the dust, and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is exalted. And, having once embraced that, let it "be all your salvation, and all your desire."

***~~2. Those who, knowing the Gospel, are yet afraid to confess it—~~***

No sin is more severely reprobated in the Gospel, than the being ashamed of Christ, [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38). And as none is more fatal, so none is more foolish: for the very persons who hate us for the sake of Christ will honor us more, in their minds, for adhering to our principles, than for renouncing them, or acting unworthy of them. But, supposing it were not so, what is man's displeasure, in comparison with God's; or his favor, when compared with God's? To all, then, I say, "Fear not man, who, when he has killed the body, has no more that he can do: but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell! Yes, I say unto you, Fear Him."

***~~3. The sincere followers of our Lord—~~***

If you suffer even unto bonds, care not for it: let your only fear be, lest by any means you would dishonor the Gospel of Christ. Instead of being intimidated by opposition, let it be to you rather an occasion for manifesting your fidelity to Him, whose servant you are. And in proportion as persecution rages, let your courage rise, and your efforts be increased; and, if called to lay down life itself for him, rejoice that you are counted worthy to do so; and have no concern whatever, but that "Christ may be magnified in your body, whether by life or death."

***~~#2138~~***

***~~PREACHING OF CHRIST, A GROUND OF JOY~~***

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

"The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."

WHEN our blessed Lord came into the world, it was said concerning him, that he was "set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed, [Luke 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.34-35)." And certainly *his Gospel has been an occasion of displaying, in a far greater degree than at any former period, the extreme wickedness of the human heart, and, at the same time, the astonishing efficacy of divine grace to renew and sanctify the soul.*The virulent opposition made to the Gospel by its professed enemies may, in some measure, illustrate the former. But the subtle contrivances of its professed friends to adulterate its truths and to subvert its influence, showed a degree of malignity perfectly Satanic: while the virtues which have, by these means, been drawn forth into exercise, have been no less illustrative of the power and grace of Christ.

In several of the apostolic Churches, there were not only some who perverted the Gospel by a mixture of self-righteous doctrines, but some who actually preached the Gospel for the very purpose of undermining its proper influence. In the context, this intricate device is fully developed, and the mask is taken from the faces of these base hypocrites; while the effect of their endeavors on the Apostle's mind is plainly declared.

By the Roman magistrates, Paul had been sent to Rome, and imprisoned. This, which seemed likely to stop the progress of the Gospel, had, in reality, turned out to the furtherance of it; because the zeal of many others was called forth, in a much greater degree, to advance its interests. But some who sought only their own glory, took occasion, from his imprisonment, to influence the minds of his followers, and to draw them away from him. Paul's converts, however, were too well instructed to be wrought upon by false doctrines: and, therefore, these teachers preached the true Gospel itself, so that they might insinuate themselves into the affections of their simple-minded hearers, and thus form them into a party against the Apostle himself, and ultimately establish their own authority on the ruin of his.

Hear the Apostle's own account of it: "It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, [Philippians 1:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.15-18)"

In discoursing on these latter words, I will show,

***~~I. What we are to understand by preaching Christ—~~***

This is a term frequently made use of to express the preaching of the Gospel. In the passage before us, it is repeated no less than three times; and it is admirably adapted to convey at once to the mind the whole complex idea of proclaiming, in all its parts, the great mystery of redemption. Under this term is comprehended a full exhibition of,

***~~1. Our need of Christ—~~***

The fall of man, and the consequent guilt and misery of the human race, form the ground on which a Savior is necessary. The angels that have never fallen, have no Savior offered to them. But, as we have fallen, and are wholly incapable of restoring ourselves either to the image or favor of God, we need one to do it for us. This, then, must be fully opened, in order to preach Christ with effect: and all our hearers must be fully informed:

that they are under the wrath of God,

that they can never atone for their own sins,

that it is impossible for them to renew their own natures,

that their hope must be altogether in God's mercy, through Christ.

***~~2. Christ's suitableness and sufficiency to save us—~~***

Not all the angels in Heaven were competent to save us. But the Lord Jesus Christ was God equal with the Father, and therefore was capable of accomplishing what no finite power could effect. By assuming our nature, he could suffer in our place and stead; while his Godhead imparted to those sufferings a value sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. Besides, having now in himself essentially all the fullness of the Godhead, and a communicative fullness expressly treasured up in him, as our mediator, for the benefit of his Church—he can impart to every one of his members all that he sees to be needful for them in this state of trial and probation. And he has actually promised to all who believe in him, a supply of all spiritual blessings according to their necessities.

Now, this must occupy a very large share in the ministries of those who would preach the Gospel aright. On the Godhead of Christ depends his sufficiency for the work assigned him: and on the discharge of all his offices, of Prophet, Priest, and King, depends the hope of all who trust in him. In these offices, therefore, he must be held forth to the faith of his people; that through him:

their minds may be enlightened,

their iniquities cancelled, and

their enemies subdued.

In a word, a full exhibition of Christ in his mediatorial character is that which chiefly constitutes what we call the Gospel: and if we would preach it aright, we must "determine, with Paul, to know nothing among our people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified!"

***~~3. The nature and blessedness of his salvation—~~***

We shall preach Christ to little purpose, if we do not hold him forth as a Savior from sin. He had the name *Jesus*assigned to him for that express purpose, that he might be recognized by all in this particular view, as "saving his people from their sins." To deliver them from wrath would be a small matter, if he did not also deliver them from sin: for sin, if allowed to retain dominion over them, would itself create a Hell within them. I would speak it with reverence; but I would not speak too strongly, if I would say, that God himself could not make a man happy, while he continued under the power of his sins.

*There is a beauty and a felicity in holiness; a beauty, in that it assimilates a man to God's image; and a felicity, in that it is a foretaste of Heaven itself.*This requires to be opened, in order to guard against a misapprehension of the Gospel salvation, as though it were nothing more than a deliverance from death and Hell; and at the same time to give a right direction to every follower of Christ; and to make him aspire after holiness, as the perfection of his nature, and the completion of his bliss.

But my text leads me to mark particularly,

***~~II. With what different views this preaching may be maintained—~~***

The Apostle speaks of some as preaching Christ "in pretense," and of others "in truth." And certain it is, that Christ is sometimes preached,

***~~1. From unworthy motives—~~***

One would scarcely suppose this possible. But what has been, may be: and, as in the Apostles' days, so now also, *Christ is sometimes preached only as the means of advancing some personal and carnal ends*.

Some, alas! preach Christ for gain; and make the proclamation of his Gospel an office, in the discharge of which they are to obtain a livelihood. Yes, "for filthy lucre sake" do multitudes engage in this service, and not "of a ready mind." And, if there were nothing but a bare subsistence to be gained by it they would leave the whole world to perish, rather than go forth to enlighten and to save them.

Under this head, I must rank those also who engage in the sacred office as a mere profession (like that of law or medicine), in which they may occupy somewhat of an ostensible post, and sustain a respectable character in the world, at the same time that they desire only to pass their days in polished ease and carnal indolence.

There are others who preach Christ for popularity. It is found that there is nothing which so interests the feelings of mankind, as the Gospel; and wherever that is preached with any degree of clearness and energy, there people will flock to hear it.

Now, to our fallen nature, distinction of any kind is gratifying: and, if a person can see himself followed by multitudes who hang on his lips, and express delight in his ministrations, he will feel himself repaid, quite as well as by financial compensation. That many are actuated by this kind of ambition, while they profess to be led on by higher motives, there is too great reason to fear. Few, indeed, would acknowledge that they were influenced by such vanity as this; but, if they would mark what inordinate satisfaction they feel in a crowded audience, and what disappointment in a thin attendance—they might see, that, to say the least, their motives are very questionable. And, indeed, this very motive often gives a tone and direction to the ministrations of men, who will gratify a particular taste, not because they judge that style of preaching to be most scriptural, but because they see it to be most accordant with the public feeling: and they dare not to enter fully into what they themselves would think most needful, lest they would give offense to their hearers, and lessen the popularity which they supremely affect. Base is this motive, which prefers the estimation of men to the real welfare of their souls.

But there are others who more exactly resemble the persons whom the Apostle describes as "preaching Christ out of contention." Yes, even at this day it is no uncommon thing to preach Christ chiefly with a view to undermine the influence of some popular minister. Let a pious minister arise in the Established Church, and what labors will be used to draw-away his people: preachings, prayer-meetings, societies, will all be formed for this very end; and persons of popular talent will be brought from a distance to further the base design. And, if a minister outside of the establishment be extensively useful in converting souls to Christ, similar efforts will sometimes be made, not so much to save the souls of men, as to keep them from attending the ministry of another church. I do not by this mean to say, that a minister in the establishment ought not to labor to keep his people firm to the establishment; for I conceive this to be his bounden duty, to which he has pledged himself in his ordination vows: but to make this his main object in extending his ministrations, is to tread very close upon the heels of those who "preached Christ of envy and strife."

But there are others, blessed be God, who preach Christ,

***~~2. From motives that are befitting a Christian minister—~~***

Yes, there are some, at least, who are like-minded with the Apostle; who know, by experience, what an evil and bitter thing it is to be under the guilt of sin, and the wrath of God. They know, too, by the same blessed experience, what it is to have found a Savior, and to have obtained peace through his blood. And they desire to be instrumental in imparting this knowledge to their fellow men, and in bringing them to a participation of the same benefits. They feel, too, a love to that Savior, who has so loved them, and given himself for them. They desire to make him known, and to exalt his name in the world. Gladly would they see the whole earth subjected to his dominion, and all the kingdoms of the world united under him, as their common Lord.

Hence it is that they preach him with ardor and with zeal. These were the motives by which the Apostle Paul was actuated; and, through the tender mercy of God, a goodly number of ministers are raised up to tread in his steps, and to "be followers of him, as he was of Christ."

But, whether the motive of the preacher is good or bad, we must say of the preaching,

***~~III. That, under any circumstances, it is a ground of joy—~~***

It is doubtless *much to be regretted that any person would execute such a sacred office from unworthy motives*; and over the man who does so, we would weep with the deepest sorrow. Yet, while we mourn over him as involving his own soul in perdition, we cannot but rejoice in his act, on account of the consequences that flow from it.

We rejoice in it,

***~~1. Because it diffuses truth—~~***

Truth, under any circumstances, is better than error, even as light is better than darkness. But if truth be viewed in its consequences, its importance will be found to exceed our utmost conceptions. The preachers who proclaim not the Lord Jesus Christ, disseminate error. Whether it be in denying the fallen state of man, or in establishing man's righteousness, or in inculcating merely heathen morals, or in whatever way it is that men go beside the Gospel, or come short of it—the effect is the same: the preacher betrays the hearers to their ruin; and the people, so deceived, must "perish for lack of knowledge." Contrast, then, with such a ministry, the preaching of one who exalts Christ among his people, and points him out as "the way, the truth, and the life;" and the difference between them will be found exceeding great.

As to the *motives*and *principles*by which the preacher may be actuated, the hearer has nothing to do with them: he is not called to judge of them: nay, he has no right to judge of them: he must leave that matter to Him who alone can search the hearts of men: but, in the truth exhibited to his view, he has the very same interest that he would have if it were declared by an angel from Heaven: his mind is enlightened by it; and his feet are guided into the way of peace.

However unworthy the preacher of it may be, God may work by his word; as we have no doubt he did by the ministry of Judas, as well as by the other Apostles: and, in as far as truth is diffused instead of error, "we do rejoice in it, yes, and we will rejoice in it."

***~~2. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted—~~***

I well know that Christ would not allow the demoniacs to confess him. I know also, that, as far as the preachers themselves are concerned, Christ is dishonored, rather than glorified, in those who preach him from unhallowed motives. But when he is truly preached, whatever be the motives of the minister himself, he is, on the whole, honored, for:

his salvation is made known;

his kingdom is enlarged;

his authority is established;

and his name is glorified.

This ought to be a matter of sincere joy to all. The angels, when they announced his advent to the shepherds, said, "Behold, we 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." If, then, the advent of Christ, while he was yet but a new-born infant, was so replete with joy to all people, much more must the full exhibition of his mediatorial work and offices be a source of joy; since in them is the whole mystery of his love unfolded, in all its height and depth, and "length and breadth.

***~~3. Because the souls of men are benefitted—~~***

Men, I say again, have nothing to do with the *motives*of the preacher. But if they receive the truth in the love of it, they enter at once into the full liberty of the Gospel, and enjoy all the blessings of a finished salvation.

Among the Jews, many who rejected Christ were empowered to cast out devils: and the persons dispossessed were as much liberated from the bonds of Satan as if the work had been wrought by the most distinguished Apostle. In like manner, the person who was instructed in the truth by the ministry of Judas, felt the power of the word as much as if he had received it from Peter or from John. The traveler is not less refreshed by a fountain in a desert, because he was led to it by the feet of beasts: nor are the waters of life deprived of their efficacy, because they have not been first tasted by him who puts the cup into our hands. *It is the truth, and not the minister, that makes us free: it is Christ, and not the preacher, that saves the soul*. Say, then, whether it be not a just ground of joy that the saving doctrines of the Gospel are proclaimed, even though it be by one who is a stranger to their power? Yes, "if Christ be preached," by whoever it may be, and from whatever motive, "I therein do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

***~~May we not, then, from hence observe,~~***

***~~1. How unlike the Apostles are those who hate the preaching of Christ!~~***

There is no other subject in the world so odious to the ungodly as the gospel. We may preach the Law as strictly as we please, and men will hear us with delight: but let us preach the Gospel, and men will be sure to be offended with us: and if this effect does not follow, we may be sure that we do not preach as Christ and his Apostles preached it. But what shall we say of those who thus take offense? Paul rejoiced in the Gospel, though so unworthily propagated from envy and strife: but these persons are grieved at it, even when delivered with the utmost sincerity and love. "They know not, alas! what spirit they are of:" but this they may know, that if they are not brought to an entire change of mind, so as to love the Gospel as the Apostle did, they can never hope to participate with him, in its joys in the eternal world.

***~~2. What cause have they for sorrow, who, though they hear the Gospel, make no suitable improvement of it!~~***

We are responsible for what we hear: and, if we hear of Christ, and receive him not into our hearts by faith, "it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for us." Are there any of that character here present? How would the Apostle weep over you! He tells us, that "he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, on account of his unbelieving brethren," and that is the feeling which I would cultivate in your behalf, and which I would recommend you to cherish in your own bosoms.

***~~3. How happy are those who, while they have the Gospel faithfully ministered to them, experience in their souls its saving power!~~***

Truly, you are the blessed of the Lord. You have that in your souls which will turn every sorrow into joy. The Apostle quite forgot his own bonds, and the malignity of those who sought to add affliction to them. *The honor of Christ and the welfare of immortal souls, swallowed up all personal considerations, and filled him with ineffable delight*.

Let the Gospel operate in this very way on your minds. Live not below your privileges in this respect. Show, that if men can bind the body, they cannot fetter the soul. Show that your joys are altogether independent of them, and out of their reach. This is the way to prove what the preaching of Christ will effect; and will encourage all who behold you to live for Christ, and to suffer for his sake.

***~~#2139~~***

***~~CHRIST MAGNIFIED IN OUR BODY~~***

***~~[Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20)~~***

"Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death."

WHILE the great mass of mankind, like a ship driven with fierce winds and tossed upon tempestuous waves, are uncertain what may be the outcome of their trials, the true Christian is like a ship at anchor: he beholds the storm, but defies its power. He knows that every effort, either of men or devils, to destroy him, shall outcome in his own welfare, and in their confusion.

Paul was in prison at Rome, uncertain whether he would be set at liberty or put to death. He had adversaries also among the professed followers of Christ, who labored to increase his affliction, by weakening his influence in the Church, and drawing away his converts to their own party. But he knew that the more his afflictions abounded, the more were the prayers of God's people offered up on his behalf, and the more would a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ be poured out upon him. He was therefore satisfied, that, however matters might terminate with respect to temporal deliverance, they would outcome in his final "salvation;" and that he would be so strengthened from above, as never to "be ashamed" of his profession, but rather that, as in past times, so to the last hour of his existence, "Christ would be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death."

This expression is very singular, and deserves more than ordinary attention. We propose therefore to consider.

***~~I. In what sense Christ may be magnified in our body—~~***

We may easily conceive that Christ would be served, or honored by us; but how can he be magnified?

Can we add anything to his essential dignity? No, he is "God over all, blessed for evermore."

Can we add to his mediatorial honors? No, we cannot augment his *kingly*power, or give virtue to his *priestly*sacrifice, or enlarge his influence as the great *Prophet*of the Church.

Can we add to the glory that he possesses in Heaven? No, the angels and glorified saints are already glorifying him, day and night, with all their faculties and all their powers.

Surely then (it may be said) this is a proud, if not a blasphemous expression. No, we must not so hastily condemn an inspired Apostle. You ask then, How can we magnify Christ? We answer, that he may be magnified by us both in word and deed: "O magnify the Lord with me," says the Psalmist, "and let us exalt his name together." This shows what may be done by our voices: and as to our actions, we may be said to magnify him, when in our conduct we set forth,

***~~1. The purity of his law—~~***

It is not only in "bearing one another's burdens," but in obeying all the precepts of the Gospel, that we are to "fulfill the law of Christ." Now the extent of this law is not in any degree imagined by the world at large: they have no idea of the motives, the principles, the conduct which the Christian code inculcates. But when a child of God is enabled to act up to his profession, he shows to all around him the beauty of holiness: he commends to them the law which he obeys: he constrains them to see and acknowledge its transcendent excellence: and in advancing thus the honor of the law, he honors also the Lawgiver: "In adorning the doctrine of God our Savior," he adorns and magnifies the Savior himself.

***~~2. The perfection of his character—~~***

*The Christian follows the steps of his Divine Master, and endeavors to "walk as he walked."* Now if his path be luminous, what must that of the Lord Jesus have been? The most eminent of our fallen race was no more in comparison with him, than a glow-worm in comparison with the meridian sun. If therefore the effulgence of a poor and sinful creature like ourselves be such as to attract the admiration of all that behold it, much more must the splendor of Emmanuel's holiness exceed in glory; insomuch that the attainments of Paul himself have no glory by reason of his glory that excels.

***~~3. The blessedness of his service—~~***

If we see a person grudging every labor that be performs, we naturally conclude that his task is irksome, and that the master whom he serves is not (in his esteem at least) worthy of any high regard. But if we behold a person straining every nerve, and exerting himself day and night in the most arduous services, and, after all, complaining only that he cannot perform one half of what he wishes to do for his master—we conclude, of course, that he loves both his work, and his master too. When therefore we behold an exemplary and laborious Christian devoting all his powers to the service of his God, and all the while taking shame to himself as an unprofitable servant—we are constrained to say, that (in his eyes at least) his Lord is worthy of all honor, and the work in which he is engaged is perfect freedom. The devotedness of the servant is a high and public commendation of his Lord.

***~~4. The power of his grace—~~***

It is to this chiefly that the Apostle refers: and it is by a display of this that Christ is chiefly magnified. A river flowing with a rapid and majestic current to the sea, would defy the efforts of the whole world to turn it back again to its source; yet by the returning tide it is not only arrested in its course, but driven up again with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head.

It is thus that a sinner, when rushing with the whole current of his affections towards this present world—is stopped in his career of sin, and turned back with an irresistible impulse towards high and heavenly things. Let men, yes, let all the angels in Heaven, attempt to effect this change, and their united efforts would be in vain. Who then that witnesses this change, and beholds the believer's victories over sin and Satan, and his progressive advancement in the ways of holiness, must not adore that power by which so great a miracle is wrought? In this Christ is indeed magnified: "the exceeding greatness of his power is made known;" and the sufficiency of his grace is incontrovertibly established.

Let us now proceed to inquire,

***~~II. By what means Christ may be magnified in our body—~~***

Paul knew not whether his present imprisonment would outcome in life or death: but in either case he hoped and expected that Christ would be magnified in his body; that is, either by the renewed services of his body, or its protracted sufferings unto death. In order then to magnify Christ in our body, we must,

***~~1. Use our body as an instrument to fulfill his will—~~***

The Apostle was a fit pattern for us.

Were his feet at liberty? he traveled from Judea round about into Illyricum, that he might carry to heathen nations the glad tidings of the Gospel.

Were his hands at liberty? he worked by night, that he might be able to preach by day.

Was his tongue at liberty? he preached Christ incessantly, and encouraged all to put their trust in him.

It is thus that we also would act. We are not indeed called to execute the apostolic office, and, consequently, not to tread precisely in the Apostle's steps: but we are called to walk in the same spirit, and to employ all the faculties of our body in the same manner. We would "yield all our members instruments of righteousness unto God." *We would consider our eyes, our ears, and all our powers, as consecrated to him, and to be used for him*.

And though our sphere may be very contracted—yet may every one of us find abundant scope for the exercise of piety and benevolence, if we will only put forth the powers that we have, and embrace the opportunities that are afforded tous. Dorcas was limited in her means of doing good; yet were her exertions so great, that the whole Church at Joppa wept and deplored her loss: and we also may endear ourselves to multitudes, and greatly magnify the Lord, if in our respective places we improve the talents committed to our care.

***~~2. Endure cheerfully whatever we may be called to suffer for his sake—~~***

There is a kind of suffering which we would account no suffering at all: we would "mortify our earthly members," and "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," and cut off the right hand, or pluck out the right eye, that is an occasion of offense to us. But there are other sufferings, which though we may deprecate, we must expect and submit to, saying, "Not my will, but may your will be done."

*Reproaches, persecutions, imprisonments, and death, are, more or less, the portion of all who follow Christ.* Doubtless they are not pleasing to flesh and blood: yet, as they may be the means of displaying the power and grace of Christ, we may not only bear them, but even "take pleasure in them." Paul cheerfully submitted to them in this view: "We bear about," says he, "in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our body, [2 Corinthians 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.10-11);" and, to manifest the importance of that thought, he repeats it almost in the same words in the very next verse. Let us meet our trials in the same way; and then, as he has told us, His strength shall be perfected in our weakness, and His name be magnified in our obedience.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The self-indulging world—~~***

You seem to think that your body is made only that you might adorn, pamper, and gratify it. What resemblance then have you to the Apostle? Until you know the true use of the body, and employ it in its only legitimate exercises, you have no pretensions to the Christian character, [Daniel 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 5.23) and [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20).

***~~2. The inactive professor—~~***

Paul intimates that there is but one alternative; you will either "be ashamed," or "magnify Christ with your body:" if by any considerations you are deterred from glorifying Christ, you so far renounce all your principles, professions, and expectations: but if you value Christ as you ought, you will live and die for him. Judge which is better for yourselves, and more suitable to your obligations to him.

***~~3. The advancing Christian—~~***

What a noble ambition is yours, [2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11-12). You are not contented to serve or enjoy Christ, but must also magnify him. Go on; and he will soon "make your vile body like unto his glorious body" in the eternal world: and whatever others may be, you shall "not be ashamed before him at his coming."

***~~#2140~~***

***~~PAUL'S DILEMMA~~***

***~~[Philippians 1:21-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.21-24)~~***

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

THE way to ascertain the real excellence of religion, is to see what it can do for us in the hour of trial, when all other helps and comforts fail us. If it can support us then, and make us to triumph over all the feelings of nature—then its power must be confessed to be exceeding great and highly beneficial. Now that it has that power, is evident from the example before us.

Paul was in prison at Rome, confined there in order to be brought forth for execution, whenever Nero, the Roman emperor, would issue the command. Contentious teachers in the mean time were taking advantage of his confinement, to draw away disciples after them, and seeking thereby to add affliction to his bonds. And what effect had these upon him? As for his own sufferings, from whatever quarter they came, he was persuaded they would outcome in his everlasting salvation; while the efforts of the teachers, notwithstanding the corruptness of their motives, would outcome in the salvation of others: his mind therefore was kept in perfect peace, and he was equally willing either to live or die, assured that Christ would certainly be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. This blessed state of equanimity is admirably depicted in the words of our text. In order to take a fuller view of it, we shall point out,

***~~I. The prospects of the Apostle—~~***

These were truly blessed both in life and death:

***~~1. In life—~~***

Two objects were near his heart; namely, to honor Christ, and to benefit the Church. "To him to live was Christ." To exalt Christ, to make known his salvation, and to extend the boundaries of his kingdom—was his constant aim and his sole employment. To further the welfare of the Church also, by confirming the faith, and advancing the happiness, of the disciples—this was the office that had been delegated to him by God himself, and which he had now for many years endeavored to execute to the utmost of his power.

He had already succeeded to an astonishing extent in promoting these objects; and he had no doubt but that, if his life were prolonged, they would continue to be advanced by means of his ministrations.

***~~2. In death—~~***

Having fled for refuge to the hope set before him, he was well assured that be was accepted in the Beloved. He had already for many years been with Christ by faith, walking as before him, depending upon him, holding sweet fellowship with him, and receiving continually out of his fullness. But he expected, immediately on his departure from this world, to be with him in a more intimate and immediate manner, beholding his glory, and enjoying the fullest possible communications of his love.

Not that these prospects were peculiar to him. The weakest Christian enjoys the same, only in an inferior degree: for every one who truly believes in Christ, will assuredly seek the advancement of his kingdom, and may firmly expect a participation of his glory.

Though these prospects were so glorious—yet they created some embarrassment in his mind. He proceeds to mention,

***~~II. The straits and difficulties to which they reduced him—~~***

He speaks not indeed of any serious difficulties, but only of a dilemma to which he was reduced by the contrary desires within him. We apprehend that the 22nd, verse would rather be translated thus: "But whether it be worth my while to live in the flesh, and what I shall choose, I know not." This not only renders the verse intelligible, but the whole passage luminous.

***~~For his own sake he wished to die—~~***

"To die," he says, "would be gain to him." And a glorious gain indeed it must be to one so prepared for death as he!

To get rid of sin, and sorrow, and temptation, and suffering, of every kind;

to have all the faculties of his soul perfected, all its capacities enlarged, all its wishes accomplished;

to behold all the glory of his God and Savior;

to join with all the hosts of Heaven in songs of joy and triumph; and to enter upon a state of unalienable everlasting felicity;

well might he say, "This is far better:" for even his exalted happiness while on earth, must fall infinitely short of such a state as that.

***~~We do not wonder therefore that he wished to exchange his present trials for that unutterable bliss.~~***

***~~For the sake of others he wished to live—~~***

It certainly was very desirable, and, in some sense, "needful" for the Church, that his labors would still be continued to them. They still needed his instruction to guide them, and his influence to preserve them, in the right way. Doubtless God could have guided and preserved them, without the intervention of any human being: but He has ordained men to be the instructors of his Church, and has connected the prosperity of his people with the labors of their ministers: and therefore the Apostle's labors were of infinite value to those who could enjoy them. This he felt: he had reason to think, that, if he were spared to come to them again, their faith would be strengthened, and their rejoicing in Christ Jesus would be more abundant "through him, verse 25, 26." Indeed *the Church is a great hospital, in which experienced physicians regularly attend to the needs of the patients, and administer to them respectively from the inexhaustible storehouse of God's word, whatever they judge most suited to their necessities.*

From this consideration, he was as willing to live, as from other views he had been desirous to die: and he was for a while perplexed by the opposite attractions of the public benefit on the one hand, and his own personal advantage on the other.

But benevolence soon triumphed, and formed,

***~~III. The ultimate decision of his mind—~~***

Whether God made any revelation to him on the subject, or he inferred the purposes of God from the effects of divine grace operating on his soul, we know not: but he knew that he would abide and continue with the Church for some time longer; and he cordially acquiesced in this appointment. His mind was instantly assimilated to the mind and will of God: and *he was willing to bear more, that he might do more; and to postpone his own enjoyment even of Heaven itself, that he might bring others to enjoy it with him.*

Blessed disposition of mind! how honorable to the Christian character! how worthy to be imitated by all who name the name of Christ! Yes; thus would we all "seek not our own things, but the things of Jesus Christ;" and "not our own wealth, but the wealth of others".

***~~This subject furnishes abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. For painful reflection—~~***

How few are there, even of the people of God, who attain to this heavenly state of mind! As for the ignorant ungodly world, they are indeed often reduced to a strait, not knowing whether it is better to protract their miserable existence on earth, or to terminate it at once by some act of suicide. And if they choose life rather than death, it is not from love to God and to their fellow-creatures, but from the fear of that vengeance which awaits them on their departure hence. Ah! terrible dilemma! yet how common!

The people of God, it is true, are, for the most part, far enough removed from this. What they may for a moment be brought to, under some extraordinary weight of trial and temptation, we presume not to say: for Job, that holy and perfect man, has sufficiently shown us what is in the human heart. But peace and joy are the usual attendants on a state of acceptance with God: and it is the believer's own fault, if he possess not such foretastes of Heaven, as to make him long for death, as the door of entrance into perfect bliss.

O my brethren, why is not this your state?

Is it not owing to your retaining too much the love of this world in your hearts?

Is it not owing to secret declensions from God, and to your not meditating sufficiently on the glories of Heaven?

Let me entreat you to gird up the loins of your mind, to take continual surveys of your future inheritance, and so to live in habitual fellowship with Christ, that death may be disarmed of its sting, and be numbered by you among your richest treasures! [1 Corinthians 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.21-22).

***~~2. For interesting inquiry—~~***

How are we to obtain that blessed state of mind? The answer is plain: Let it be "to us Christ to live;" and then it will assuredly be "gain to die:" and, however great our desire after that gain, we shall have a self-denying willingness to live, for the honor of Christ, and the benefit of his people. Let us then seek a due sense of our obligations to Christ, that we may be constrained to live entirely for him. Let our first inquiry in the morning be, *What can I do for my Lord this day?*And in the evening, Have I rendered to him this day according to the benefits I have received from him? By such exercises we shall get our hearts inflamed with holy zeal for his glory; and shall be made willing to forego even our own happiness in Heaven for a season, that we may serve him the longer on earth, where alone we can render him any effectual service. We shall lay out ourselves to make Christ more known, and his people's joy in him more abundant.

In short, if we get the principles of the Apostle rooted in our minds, we shall exhibit a measure at least of his holy practice in our lives.

***~~#2141~~***

***~~A HOLY CONDUCT RECOMMENDED~~***

***~~[Philippians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.27)~~***

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel."

THE interests of immortal souls should be dear to everyone, but most of all to the ministers of Christ. Neither the height of prosperity, nor the depth of adversity, should ever induce us to forget them.

Our blessed *Lord*, when in the bosom of his Father, could not rest, (if we may so speak,) until he had undertaken our cause; nor in the midst of all his sufferings did he relax his solicitude in our behalf.

*Paul*also, in every diversity of state, was so intent on the salvation of his fellow-creatures, that he counted not even his life dear to him, if only he might be instrumental to their eternal welfare. He was now in prison at Rome—yet what employed his thoughts? He had a request to make to the Philippian Church; and what was it? Did he desire that they would endeavor to liberate him from his chains? No, he was unmindful of himself, and solicitous only that they would adorn the Gospel. For this "only" did he labor; and this "only" did he desire.

We notice, in the words before us,

***~~I. His general exhortation—~~***

*The standard at which the Christian is to aim, is widely different from that with which the rest of the world are satisfied.* We can easily understand that different modes of living would befit a prince and a beggar, or a philosopher and a child: we can readily conceive also, that if a company of angels were sent down to sojourn upon earth, and a direction were given to them to live suitably to their high station, it would import pre-eminent sanctity in the whole of their conduct. From hence we may form some idea of the exhortation in the text.

The Christian is a citizen even of Heaven itself: and he is to order his life in such a way, as befits the society to which he belongs. The Gospel is the charter of their privileges, and the directory of their conduct; and they are to walk as befits,

***~~1. Christians are to walk worthy of the wonders which the gospel unfolds—~~***

Contemplate the great mystery of redemption;

contemplate the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of *Christ*, together with the offices he still continues to execute for his people's good;

contemplate the favor with which the *Father*regards them in and through his beloved Son;

contemplate the love of the *Holy Spirit*, who condescends to make their polluted bodies and souls his habitation, in order that through his gracious influences they may be made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.

What kind of a life do such mysteries of love and mercy require? Should not our souls be lost, as it were, in wonder, love and praise!

***~~2. Christians are to walk worthy of the profession which the gospel calls us to—~~***

We profess to be "as lights in the world," "as cities set on a hill:" we profess to be "born from above," to be "transformed into the Divine image," yes, to be "changed into the Divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God." In a word, we profess to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;" insomuch that no one can behold us, without seeing the mind and will of God exhibited in living characters before his eyes.

What then is the conduct suited to such a state? Is a mere negative holiness sufficient, or a lukewarm performance of religious duties? Who will behold God in such a conduct as that? If we are to exhibit Christ to the world, we must "walk altogether as Christ walked:" his temper, his spirit, his conduct, must be ours.

**3.** **Christians are to walk worthy of the *benefits*which the gospel confers—**

Take a distinct view of these, survey:

the pardon of sins unnumbered,

the peace that passes understanding,

the strength for every duty,

the access to God on all occasions,

the joy unspeakable and full of glory,

the prospects opened in a dying hour, and

the crowns and kingdoms reserved for us in the eternal world!

What manner of persons ought we to be, who have such mercies given unto us! Does it become such persons to be weighing out their services by grains, if we may so speak? Should we not "love and serve God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul, and all our strength?" The continual habit of our minds should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord?".

But, that we may not spend all our time in mere general truths, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. His particular directions—~~***

A Christian minister is not like the ostrich, which having laid her eggs in the sand, pays no further attention to them; but like a tender mother, who, after having brought forth her infant, travails with it in birth a thousand times, through her fond solicitude for its welfare, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19). If present with his people, he watches over them with care; if absent from them, he anxiously inquires respecting their state. To see good in them, and to hear it of them, is, next to his personal enjoyment of God, his chief happiness. He can say with truth respecting them, "I live, if you stand fast in the Lord." Now, among the various blessings which he desires them to enjoy, there are two in particular, to which we would call your attention:

***~~1. A union of heart among themselves—~~***

This is essentially necessary to the welfare of any Church: if there be dissensions and divisions among them, there will soon be confusion and every evil work. And where shall we look for union, if not among the household of God? Have they not all one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father? Are they not all members of one body, all animated by the same Spirit, all heirs of the same glory? It was from these very considerations that the Apostle urged the Ephesian Church to cultivate a humble, meek, forbearing, and forgiving temper, and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and, as in the text, made it his one request to them, when he was a prisoner at Rome, [Ephesians 4:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1-6). Of how much importance he thought this temper to be, we may judge from what he himself says in a few verses after the text: we cannot conceive language more tender, or motives more powerful, or entreaties more urgent, than he there addresses to them, [Philippians 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1-2); and the one point that he there presses upon them is that they would be "like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind."

This then we would impress upon your minds as a matter of indispensable necessity. There will of course, among a number of persons whose former views, habits, and dispositions have been so different, arise many occasions of difference, perhaps also of dissatisfaction and disgust. But Christians should regard the smallest symptom of disunion, as they would the beginnings of a conflagration in the house wherein they dwelt: every one would have his personal feelings swallowed up in an attention to the common cause. All would have one object, and unite their efforts to accomplish it, and banish in an instant whatever might obstruct their exertions for the general good. That this will sometimes be attended with difficulty, is implied in the very exhortation to "stand fast in one spirit;" but it may be done; and, if our hearts be right with God, it will be done.

***~~2. A zealous attachment to the Christian faith—~~***

Many things there are which may operate to turn us from the Christian faith. That which the Apostle more especially had in view, was the dread of persecution, verse 28; and certain it is, that the fear, not only of death, but even of an opprobrious name, causes many to draw back from their holy profession. But we must "take up our cross daily, and follow Christ." Yes, we must "follow him boldly outside the camp, bearing his reproach." In this holy fortitude we would all unite: for the defection of one has a tendency to weaken all the rest. "With one mind therefore we should strive together for the faith of the Gospel." We should endeavor to preserve in our own souls a love of the truth, and in every possible way to recommend it to those around us. We would bear in mind the benefits which we hope to receive from the Gospel, and the obligations we have to hold fast our profession of it: and we would determine, through grace, to seal it (if need be) even with our blood.

We must be careful, however, not to spend our zeal about the circumstantials of religion, or to cloak a bigoted attachment to a party under a pretense of love to Christ. It is the Gospel itself, and the blessed truth which it unfolds, that we are to contend for; and for that we are to be ready to lay down our lives.

To hear of these two things, an orderly and affectionate agreement among themselves (like that of a well-disciplined army), and a steadfastness in the Christian faith, is the greatest joy of a minister, when, by the providence of God, he is for a time removed from them [Colossians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.5); in reference to both of them, therefore, we would address you in the language of the Apostle, "Brethren, dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved, [Philippians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.1)."

***~~#2142~~***

***~~SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, A GIFT OF GOD~~***

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

"Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer*for his sake."

*THE chief obstacles to a holy and consistent conduct arise perhaps from within, from the evil propensities of our own hearts.* But very serious difficulties are occasioned by the frowns and menaces of an ungodly world. We are naturally afraid of suffering; and are easily deterred from those things which would subject us to heavy trials. But if we considered the cross as a badge of honor, as a source of good, and as a high favor conferred upon us by God himself, we would feel less anxious to avoid it, and be more emboldened to walk as befits the Gospel of Christ. It is by this view of sufferings, that the Apostle encourages the Philippians to hold fast their profession without wavering. His expressions are singularly bold and striking: they show us,

***~~I. That suffering for Christ's sake, is a favor conferred on us by God himself—~~***

***~~Believers are called to suffer for Christ's sake—~~***

In addition to the sufferings which are common to others, the believer is called to endure contempt, and reproach, and persecution, for the Gospel's sake. He is taught to expect them, [Matthew 5:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.10-12). 1 Corinthians 4:18. [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12); and experience proves that *however amiable, or useful, or discreet he may be—he cannot avoid the odium attaching to true religion*.

***~~But his sufferings are a gift from God himself—~~***

As far as respects his *persecutors*, his trials arise from a malignant effort of men and devils to obstruct the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom. But as far as respects *God*, they are a special gift from him. As the faith, on account of which he suffers, is given him, so also are the sufferings themselves, together with the ability to endure them patiently. They are bestowed purely for Christ's sake. We may conceive Christ soliciting the greatest of all favors on behalf of a beloved disciple; and, on being asked by his Father to specify it, replying, "Father, I ask that he may have the *honor of suffering*for me." This the Father graciously condescends to grant; and are appointed in number, weight, and duration, so as to conduce most effectually to his eternal welfare.

We may observe further concerning his cross,

***~~II. That it is a richer gift than even faith itself—~~***

Faith is certainly an inestimable gift; yet the gift of suffering for Christ's sake is far greater—

***~~1. Suffering is a higher privilege in itself—~~***

In believing, we receive from God all the blessings which we stand in need of. But in suffering, we give to God: we give our name, our property, our liberty, our life, to be disposed of in any way which may tend most to his glory.*What an honor is this, for a poor creature, a worm of the earth—to confer a gift on God himself!*Surely, as much as we are indebted to God for the gift of faith, the giving us an opportunity to honor him should be esteemed a far richer obligation, nor should anything that we possess be of any value in our sight, if we may but have the honor of sacrificing it for his sake.

***~~2. Suffering is a nobler testimony for God—~~***

When we *believe*, we bear testimony for God that his word is true, and that not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail. But when we *suffer*for him, that testimony is far more plain and unequivocal. We then declare, not only that God is good and true, but that he is deserving of all that we can possibly do for him; that there is no *service*so hard, but we would cheerfully engage in it; no *suffering*so severe, but we would cheerfully endure it for his sake. Hence it is said, that while "by his enemies God is evil spoken of, on the part of his suffering friends he is glorified."

***~~3. Suffering is a more instructive lesson to the world—~~***

We cannot exercise faith in Christ, but we must by that very act convey instruction to those around us. We exhibit somewhat of that change which takes place in the converted; and are, as it were, "epistles of Christ, known and read by them" who would not read the Scriptures themselves, [2 Corinthians 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2-3). But by suffering patiently for Christ's sake, we speak more loudly in their ears: we force them to inquire, what inducements we can have to make such sacrifices? and, whence we derive our ability to sustain such trials? And so efficacious have been the examples of many while enduring the torments of martyrdom, that their very persecutors have been overcome, and converted to God.

***~~4. Suffering is a clearer evidence of grace—~~***

Many have believed the Gospel, while yet their hearts were not upright before God. They have been convinced in their judgment, but not converted in their souls, [John 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.23-24). [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13); [Acts 8:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.20-21). The same observation may apply also to some who have suffered for the Gospel's sake, [Galatians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.4). *But a patient enduring of trials for Christ's sake is certainly a very strong test of sincerity.*It gives reason to hope, that we have attained some measure of conformity to Christ, and that "the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us, [1 Peter 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13-14) with, verse 28. There may indeed be some corruptions yet remaining to be mortified, which leave room for doubt respecting the present safety of the soul; but if we combine a zealous endeavor to mortify them, with a cheerful submission to the cross of Christ, we shall have a favorable testimony from God, [Revelation 2:2-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.2-7), and a happy outcome to our present conflicts.

***~~5. Suffering is a richer means of glory—~~***

The smallest portion of real faith has the promise of eternal life [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36); and in this view it may be thought superior in value to everything else. But suffering for Christ's sake is the means of augmenting that glory: it brings a recompense proportioned to the sufferings that are endured, [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26). [Mark 10:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.29-30), and "works out for us, as light and momentary as it is, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, [2 Corinthians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17)."

Now as health is a richer blessing than life, because it implies well-being as well as mere existence, so a patient suffering for Christ's sake must be accounted of more value than faith, because of the super-eminent degrees of happiness to which it eventually exalts the soul.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. To those who fear sufferings—~~***

It is painful to flesh and blood to bear the cross: but what must be the consequence of shunning it? Will not our ease be dearly purchased? Ah! think of the fate that awaits "the *fearful*,[Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)," and tremble lest the preservation of your life for a season outcomes in the loss of it to all eternity, [Mark 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.35).

***~~2. To those who feel sufferings—~~***

Faint not, nor be discouraged. Would you deprecate what Christ has asked of you, and what is given you in his behalf! He who confers on you the honor of suffering for him, will endue you with strength to bear your trials—yes, to rejoice and glory in them! [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9-10). Only view your sufferings in their true light, and you will rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear them, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). [James 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.2); [James 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.12). And, when you shall be joined to that blessed company "who came out of great tribulation, [Revelation 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14)," you shall not regret one loss that you sustained, or one pain that you endured. The approbation of your judge, and the increased weight of glory which shall be awarded to you—shall soon wipe away your tears, and turn all your sorrows into joy!

***~~3. To those who cause sufferings—~~***

Little do you think against whom you fight. You imagine that you are only opposing weak enthusiasts; but so thought Saul, when, in fact, he was persecuting Christ himself! [Acts 26:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.15). Know, that "whoever touches the Lord's people, touches the apple of his eye! [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8);" and that "it were better for you to have a millstone hung about your neck, than that you would cause one of his little ones to stumble, [Matthew 18:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.6)." Be sensible then of your guilt and danger: embrace the doctrine which you have been laboring to destroy, [Galatians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.23); and, instead of opposing—labor to advance, the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom.

***~~#2143~~***

***~~UNITY RECOMMENDED~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.1-2)~~***

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

THE Church of Christ is one great family; all its members being children of one common Parent, and partakers of one common interest. To consult the good of the whole is the duty of each; no one regarding his own personal gratification, but all combining for the common welfare.

This was a favorite topic with the Apostle Paul. The care of all the Churches having been committed to him, he had constant occasion to inculcate the necessity of union among the multifarious and discordant characters of which the different churches were composed. The manner in which he inculcates it in the words before us, is very remarkable, and deserves particular attention. In opening the passage to your view, we shall be led to notice,

***~~I. The object of his desire—~~***

He was now in prison at Rome: but his sufferings caused no diminution in his concern for the welfare of the Church of God. He saw with grief the efforts which were made by the enemies of Christ to turn aside the Philippians from the faith they had embraced; and he therefore urges them the more carefully to preserve among themselves a unity of sentiment and affection, in order that they might give no advantage to their adversaries by internal divisions. The object, I say, which he desired to promote, was unity of sentiment and affection.

This appears to be the true scope and import of his words: Being joined together in love, be united also in sentiment: and being joined together in sentiment, be united also in love, so as to have one soul penetrating the whole body. A unity in these respects is, it is true, very difficult to be attained.

Considering how the human mind is constituted, it is scarcely to be expected men would be perfectly agreed upon any point; and least of all upon religion, where the subjects themselves are so deep and mysterious, and where so great a scope for difference of sentiment is afforded by the terms in which the truth is revealed. There is not unfrequently in appearance an opposition between the things that are revealed: (I say in appearance; for it is not possible that there would be any real contrariety in things which have been delivered by inspiration of God,) and it may be expected that different persons will lean to different sides, according to the weight which the different positions appear to have in the general scale of truth.

Besides, the deep things of God are discerned only by means of a spiritual perception imparted to us by the Spirit of God: and of course they will be more or less justly viewed, according to the measure of grace that has been given to us, and according as our visual organs have been purified from the films that obscure or distort the truth.

Of course, a unity of affection must be considerably impeded by these circumstances: for we naturally agree best with those whose opinions we approve: and if there is any great diversity of sentiment on important topics, we are apt to feel a proportionable alienation of heart from the person in whom it exists.

But though a perfect union in these respects is difficult, it is, as far as is necessary for all practical purposes, certainly attainable.

We are expressly taught, that it should, and may, exist in the different members of Christ's mystical body, [1 Corinthians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.10); The way to attain it is to *confine ourselves to the fundamentals of religion; and to make them the bonds of union; while the less evident or less important truths are left as neutral ground, open alike to either party, and to be occupied or not by each, as they see fit*.

What the fundamentals are, may, it is true, be differently stated: but, if Christianity is viewed in its true light as a remedy, and we agree in the depth of the malady it is proposed to cure; the means of healing through the sin-atoning blood of Christ, and the influences of his Spirit; and the duty of those who are healed, to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of their God. If, I say, Christianity is viewed in this light, there will be very little difference of sentiment between those who have ever felt its efficacy.

It is by going beyond these plainer truths; *by laying an undue stress on some obvious doctrines, without allowing them to be tempered with those which are of an opposite aspect*; by wresting from their plain import those passages which we cannot reconcile with our favorite systems; and, in a word, by exercising a dogmatic spirit on points which are beyond our comprehension, and forming them into the shibboleth of a party; it is by these things that the Church of Christ is divided: and never until we return to the simplicity of the day of Pentecost, shall we regain its unity. But when we return to the docility of little children, we shall, to all practical purposes, "see eye to eye."

On the attainment of this object his heart was set, as appears from,

***~~II. The urgency of his request—~~***

***~~The first consideration which he urges is, the happiness which such a union would confer on him—~~***

He had rejoiced in their first conversion to God; as a mother does over her new-born infant: but his joy was blended with much concern for their future welfare. That welfare was now endangered by the efforts which were made to separate them from each other, and to turn them from the faith. Nothing but their steadfastness could comfort him; but, if he would see them cordially united together in sentiment and affection, it would complete his joy.

Hence he says to them, "Fulfill my joy." *His very life seemed to be bound up, as it were, in the prosperity of their souls*; so that in effect he says to them, as he does to the Thessalonian Church, "Now I live, if you stand fast in the Lord." If therefore they felt in any degree their obligations to him, they could not but labor to carry into effect the object which would so conduce to his happiness.

***~~To this he adds all the most powerful pleas that could operate upon the human mind—~~***

"Is there any consolation in Christ?" As believers they could not but know that there was in him a fund of consolation; a mine, the treasures of which were altogether unsearchable. Who can contemplate the covenant which he entered into for the redemption of a ruined world, together with all that he did to accomplish this stupendous work; his mysterious incarnation, his holy life, his meritorious death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, his intercession for us at the right hand of God, and his exercise of all power as the Head of his Church, and as the life of every believer in it. Who can contemplate all this, and not be comforted in the thought of such a Savior, and in the hope of such a salvation?

The greatness of his person,

the suitableness of his undertaking,

the sufficiency of his work, and

his fidelity to all his promises—

where can consolation be found, if not in these?

But what enjoyment can any have of these things, if their minds are distracted with controversies, and their hearts embittered with discord? Whatever any may profess to the contrary, it is only when the mists of controversy are dispelled, that the cheering rays of the Sun of Righteousness can penetrate and revive the soul.

The same may be said respecting "the comfort of his love." That there is unspeakable comfort in the existence and exercise of love, what Christian does not know? The presence of love argues, and, if I may so speak, constitutes, the in-dwelling of the Deity in the soul: as the loving Apostle has said, "God is love; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." But sweet as is the harmony of kindred souls, it cannot long exist, when once the discordant strings of controversy are touched. The voice which but lately delighted with its sounds the ravished ear, loses its interest, when once it has begun to make the Savior's name a subject of dispute. *Diversity of sentiment on such important matter as religion soon creates coolness in the affections, and alienation in the heart.*Shall we then willingly admit among us a disposition of mind so adverse to our best interests, and so destructive of our truest happiness?

Nearly allied to this is "the fellowship of the Spirit," for the Church of God is not merely one family, but one body, every member of which is animated and enlivened with the same soul. The Holy Spirit who pervades them all, produces a holy fellowship between them; between not those only that are contiguous to each other, but those also which are most remote; it unites in one the inhabitants both of Heaven and earth. But this also is interrupted by the introduction of discordant opinions; and the magnetic attractions, by which it brought all under one common influence, cease to operate with effect, and leave the mass of Christians as unconnected and indifferent to each other as the world around them.

Of "tenderness and compassion" also, the true Christian is possessed. He has felt towards himself the compassions of his God; and he desires to manifest towards all his brethren a measure of the same tender care. But discord shuts up all these tender emotions, and banishes from the mind this affectionate solicitude; so that hostility will take the place of love, and anathemas be hurled, where nothing but mutual endearments have before prevailed.

Paul probably had more particularly in view the effect which their dissensions would produce upon his own mind: they would be as a dagger to his soul. And could the Philippians, who had so richly participated his love, make such a return? No, if they had any tenderness and compassion existing in them, they would avoid a conduct which would so augment the distresses which, for their sakes and for the sake of the whole Church, he was now enduring.

God had promised to his people, to "give them one heart and one way, that they might fear him for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them," and this unity he besought them, if they valued either their own welfare or his happiness, most strenuously to maintain. He would have them all to be not only one body, but to have one soul, and one spirit, pervading all.

***~~Earnestly desiring that the same heavenly disposition may abound in you also, I would, with most affectionate entreaty, recommend,~~***

***~~1. That you guard against every disposition that may interrupt this harmony—~~***

The Apostle particularly cautions the Philippians against "strife and vain-glory," and exhorts them "in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than themselves." So would I also caution you against the indulgence of a proud, conceited, self-sufficient spirit, which is the bane of all social harmony and Christian love. These malignant dispositions have been at the root of all those animosities which have in different ages disturbed and divided the Church of God, [James 3:14-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14-18). Only let *self*be mortified and subdued, and love will reign; yes, it will so reign, that your union with your brethren shall resemble that which exists between the Father and Christ himself, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21).

***~~2. That you seek those blessings which have a sanctifying efficacy on the soul—~~***

What will not love do to inspire the consolation that is in Christ? What will not a person who tastes "the comfort of love" do to preserve love? What will not one who enjoys the "fellowship of the Spirit," do to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? If you yearn over the desolations of Zion, and have your "tenderness and compassion" moved at the distresses of those around you—you will never willingly contribute to disturb the harmony of the Church by doubtful disputations. You will strive for peace; and in that exercise of love will reap in your own souls the richest reward.

Such is the exhortation of Paul to the Colossian Church; and such is that with which I shall conclude the present, "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. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity, [Colossians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-14)."

***~~#2144~~***

***~~ESTEEMING OTHERS ABOVE OURSELVES~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3)~~***

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

IT is a common and universally approved saying, that the tree may be known by its fruit. Now we would have the Gospel brought to this test: and we are willing that it would be accepted or rejected, according to the outcome of this trial. That good things have been spoken by uninspired men on the subject of humility, we readily admit: for modesty, and a deference to the opinions of others, necessarily commend themselves to the judgment of every considerate mind. But we apprehend that the precept before us is peculiar to Christianity; and, as a maxim in morals, it stands unrivaled in the whole world. In support of this injunction, I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. Its import—~~***

Certainly it must be understood with some kind of qualification and exception: for it can never be meant, that a philosopher is to esteem an illiterate peasant wiser than himself; or that a man of strict morals is to regard a notorious drunkard or libertine as more holy than himself. We can never be required to entertain opinions so entirely repugnant to truth and fact. We must suppose some kind of parity between the persons so compared; namely, that both of them profess a regard for God, and both maintain a measure of consistency in their outward conduct. But where there is nothing outward and visible to contradict the sentiment, there it should be entertained; and we each would conceive of others as better than ourselves:

***~~1. As more pure in their principle—~~***

We would give persons credit for sincerity in what they profess; and not, without the strongest evidence, accuse them of hypocrisy. But every man that is acquainted with his own heart has seen in himself a sad mixture of motive, which he cannot but acknowledge before the heart-searching God; and, consequently, he will do well to regard himself as inferior to those whom he cannot convict of any deceit, in comparison with what he knows to have existed and operated within his own bosom.

***~~2. As more consistent in their practice—~~***

Of his own inconsistencies, who among us has not reason to complain? Who, for one deviation which he sees in others, may not discern a great many in himself? We are not at liberty to indulge all manner of evil surmises, in order to reduce others to a level with ourselves; but would put ourselves below others, in proportion as we appear to have fallen short of the measure of their attainments.

***~~3. As more advanced in proportion to the advantages they have enjoyed—~~***

We all are responsible for the advantages that have been given unto us: "To whom much has been given, of them will the more be required." Now, of the opportunities with which we have been favored, we must be conscious; and respecting the length of time that we have professed to seek after God, we must be sensible. But, in reference to others, we must be comparatively ignorant: and therefore, even if, in point of attainment, we appear to stand on a par with them, we ought to take a lower place than they, because, *from the superiority of our advantages, we ought to have been advanced far beyond them*.

Though, in explaining the import of this injunction, I have in some measure anticipated my second head—yet I will proceed more fully to point out,

***~~II. Its reasonableness—~~***

The reasonableness of it appears from this, that we know incomparably more concerning ourselves, than we do, or can do, respecting others.

***~~1. We know more of our own Motives—~~***

There are workings of mind, of which even we ourselves are scarcely sensible; and which, while they appear good at the time, we find afterwards to have been evil. The two Apostles who would have called fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village, gave themselves credit for a holy and befitting zeal; while, in fact, they were actuated by pride and revenge. Our blessed Lord told them, that "they knew not what spirit they were of."

In examining our own hearts, we shall find, that, on different occasions, there has been much amiss in relation to our motives, where our actions have appeared most excellent and praiseworthy. But of the motives of others we could judge only by the actions themselves: and therefore it is but reasonable that we would account others, of whom we know no evil, better than ourselves, who have been conscious of much that has been contrary to the mind of God.

The mixtures which we have discovered in ourselves of pride and vain-glory, of self-seeking and self-delight, and of many other hidden abominations, would make us ever to lie low both before God and man.

***~~2. We know more of our own Exertions—~~***

We cannot but blush and be ashamed when we look back upon the sloth and indolence which we have indulged, especially when engaged in holy exercises. How slight has been our application, when reading the Word of God! How languid our frame, when drawing near to him at the throne of grace; our confessions being destitute of all contrition; our prayers being destitute of fervor; our thanksgivings being destitute of gratitude! In the house of God, how have our minds wandered to the very ends of the earth; yes, and sometimes too, perhaps, been filled with all evil, when we have professed to have been engaged in the service of our God!

In short, we cannot but be conscious that we have but too often trifled with God and our own souls, when we should have been running as in a race, and striving, as in a contest, for our very lives. But in reference to others, we know not these things: and therefore it is in the highest degree reasonable that we would "prefer them in honor before ourselves, [Romans 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.10)."

***~~3. We know more of our own Advantages—~~***

We have been conscious of the strivings of God's Spirit within our own souls; while respecting the experience of others, we know nothing. The inward fears that have been excited in us, and the hopes we have cherished, and the consolations that have been imparted to us; the assistances, too, that we have received from Almighty God for the subjugation of our lusts, and the renovation of our souls; the discoveries, also, which have been given us of Christ, and of the great mystery of redemption; these, and a thousand other blessings which have been given to us for the furthering of our spiritual welfare, should have been productive of a suitable and correspondent advancement in the divine life. But how little have we availed ourselves of them, and profited by them! The knowledge of this may well humble us in the dust.

But, respecting other persons, we are altogether in the dark, as to their advantages, or their improvement of them: and therefore we should take the lowest place, as that which properly belongs to us, on account of our great unprofitableness.

***~~4. We know more of our own Defects—~~***

What do we know respecting the corruptions of others, in comparison with our own? Who does not blush at the recollection of much which has passed within him, which, if known to man as it is known to God, would render him an object of pity or contempt! Who does not see, in his own temper, and spirit, and conduct, that there has been abundant occasion for shame and contrition before God? But we know but little of these things in relation to others, and therefore in reason are bound to esteem them better than ourselves.

Not to dwell any longer on the reasonableness of this injunction, I will pass on to mark,

***~~III. Its excellency—~~***

Suppose it to be obeyed; and then behold its influence,

***~~1. On societies—~~***

It cannot have escaped our notice, how much evil arises, in the world and in the Church—from a proud, envious, self-exalting spirit. "Whence come wars between nations, and strife and contentions between neighbors, but from the lusts that war in our members," even from a desire to advance ourselves at the expense of others?

"Strife and vain-glory" are, in my text, put in immediate contrast with "the lowliness of mind" which is there recommended. Suppose that all were actuated by the spirit of which we have been speaking; the little offenses which occur would be scarcely noticed as worthy of a thought. A charitable construction would be put upon the motives of others, and the wounds inflicted by them would be healed in a moment. Truly, there would be nothing but love and harmony, where now exists nothing but animosity and discord, [Ephesians 4:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.2-3)."

***~~2. On our own soul—~~***

O! if pride were mortified, and self-love were put away, and charity were exercised, and the soul were humbled under a sense of its own unworthiness; then how many sources of pain would be cut off! How many fountains of holy pleasure would be opened to us! The trials of life, whether from God or man, would be as nothing to us; because they would appear infinitely less than our desert, and would be regarded as medicines to heal the sickness of our souls.

On the other hand, our *mercies*, how unmerited would they appear; and what admiring and adoring gratitude would they excite within us! Every little attention from man, instead of operating to foster our vanity, would abase us rather as unworthy of such love, and stimulate us to make to him every return in our power. The whole of our frame would resemble that of the Lord Jesus Christ, "whose meekness and lowliness" were alike conspicuous, amidst the acclamations of friends, and the assaults of the most envenomed enemies.

***~~3. On the interest of religion in the world—~~***

The world are eagle-eyed in spying out the faults of those who profess religion; and when they see a vain, conceited, talkative, obtrusive, uncharitable professor, they despise him in their very souls. And truly he deserves to be despised; for "he is a stench in the nostrils of God" himself, [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.5).

But the world do wrong in identifying these dispositions with the Christian religion: for the Christian religion disclaims them utterly, and altogether condemns them.

On the other hand, they cannot but admire in their hearts the man who is of a meek and humble mind. True, they will not love him, because "they hate the light" which such a character reflects: but they have an inward conviction that he is right; and a wish, that, though they live not his life, they may "die his death." They know, in their souls, that God approves such characters, and that he will distinguish them with his favor, both here, [1 Peter 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.5), and in the eternal world, [Luke 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 18.14). They see in such characters, religion adorned and honored, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4). Would you then, brethren, recommend religion? Then cultivate this spirit, and account yourselves the lowest of all and the least of all, [1 Corinthians 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.9).

***~~#2145~~***

***~~THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5-8)~~***

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!"

This subject might well be treated thus:

1. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

2. What he expects us to do for him; that is, to have the same mind toward others as he has had toward us and to manifest it, as far as possible, in the same way; accounting nothing too much to do or suffer for the salvation of men.

*ONE of the strongest characteristics of our fallen nature is selfishness. The one desire of an unregenerate man is to gratify self. Even those actions in which he seems to have most respect to God or to his fellow-creatures, will, if carefully examined, and weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, be found to have self for their principle, and self for their end.*

This disposition being so deeply rooted in the heart, we cannot but expect that it would operate to a certain degree, even after the evil of it is discerned, and after its allowed dominion has ceased. Doubtless there were many pious Christians in the Church at Rome, as well as Timothy: yet Paul complained that all of them, excepting him, were in some degree under the influence of a selfish spirit, and "sought their own things rather than the things of Jesus Christ." Against this thing therefore he cautioned the Philippians in a most affectionate manner; beseeching them, with all earnestness, to "fulfill his joy," in "being all of one accord and of one mind;" exhorting them to "esteem others better than themselves;" and "not to look every man on his own things, but also on the things of others."

To give the greater weight and efficacy to his exhortations, he then reminded them of the conduct of Christ towards them, and recommended it as the best pattern for their conduct towards each other: "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

The words of the Apostle lead us to consider the humiliation of Christ in a twofold view—As a fact to be believed, and as a pattern to be imitated.

***~~I. Let us consider the humiliation of Christ as a fact to be believed—~~***

***~~The two leading steps of Christ's humiliation were, his incarnation and his death—~~***

Previous to his incarnation, he existed in a state of inconceivable glory and bliss. He "had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made." He "was in the bosom of the Father" from all eternity. He was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." It was in and by him that God, on various occasions, appeared to men; and hence it is that the Apostle calls him "the Image of the invisible God;" not only because he bore a peculiar resemblance to the Deity, but chiefly because the Godhead, which was never seen in the person of the Father, was seen by many in the person of Christ.

We are informed, in the text, that Christ was not only in the form "of God," but that "he thought it not robbery to be equal with God," or, as the words more strictly mean, to be as God. He assumed to himself all the titles, attributes, and perfections of the Deity. He claimed and exercised all the divine prerogatives. He performed by his own power all the works which are ever ascribed to God. And in all this he was guilty of no presumption; because he was truly 'One with the Father, in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.'

To understand the Apostle as saying, that Christ, while he was only a mere man, did not think of the robbery of being equal with God, is to represent him as commending a creature for his humility in not aspiring to an equality with God; a greater absurdity than which could not enter into the human mind.

As Christ, when he took upon himself "the form of a servant," became really man, so when, previous to his incarnation, he was "in the form of God," he was really and truly God. To this the Scriptures bear ample testimony: they declare that before he was "a Child born and a Son given, he was the mighty God," even "God over all, blessed forever." And therefore, when he became incarnate, ho was "God, manifest in the flesh;" he was "Emmanuel, God with us!"

But this glory he, in infinite condescension, laid aside. Not that he ceased to be God; but that *he veiled his Deity in human flesh*. As, previous to his descent from Mount Tabor, he divested himself of those robes of majesty with which he was then arrayed; so, for the purpose of sojourning among men, he emptied himself of all his divine splendor, either hiding it altogether from human eyes, or only allowing a ray of it occasionally to beam forth for the instruction of his disciples; that while others saw him but as a common man, they might "behold his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father." He did not, however, assume our nature in its original state, while yet it bore the image of its Maker; but in its fallen state, encompassed with infirmities: "he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh;" and was "in all points like unto us, sin only excepted."

But there was yet a lower state of degradation to which our blessed Lord submitted for our sakes, which also is mentioned in the text, and which was the very end of his incarnation, "being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death."

When our Lord came to take our nature into an immediate union with himself, he became from that moment subject to the law, even as we are. More especially, having substituted himself in the place of sinners, he was bound to fulfill the precepts which we had broken, and to endure the penalties which we had incurred. He was to be the servant of *God*in executing his Father's will; and the servant of *man* in performing every duty, whether of obedience to his earthly parents, or of subjection to the civil magistrate.

He knew from the beginning how arduous a course he had to run; he beheld at one view all that he must do, and all that he must suffer, in order to accomplish the purposes of his mission; and yet he freely undertook our cause, saying, "I come, I delight to do your will, O my God; yes, your law is within my heart." And with the same readiness did he persevere "even unto death."

When the extremity of his sufferings were coming upon him, he implored indeed the removal of the bitter cup, provided it could be removed consistently with his Father's glory and man's salvation. But this he did, to show that he was really man; and to instruct his followers how to conduct themselves in seasons of deep affliction. By this we see, that it is our privilege to make our requests known to God, and to implore such a mitigation of our troubles as shall render them more supportable, or such an increase of strength as may enable us to endure them. Cheerfully however did he resign himself to the will of his heavenly Father; and though twelve legions of angels were at his command to deliver him—yet he continued fixed in his purpose to give his own life a ransom for us.

Notwithstanding the death of the cross was the most painful and ignominious of any—yet to that did he submit for us; nor did he cease from filling up the measure of his sufferings, until he could say, "It is finished!"

This then is the fact affirmed by the Apostle; a fact, which we would have considered as absolutely incredible, if God himself had not plainly declared it, and confirmed his testimony by the most indubitable evidence. We are now therefore warranted to affirm, that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." And though the frequency with which it is mentioned causes it in too many instances to be heard without any emotion, we are sure that the more it is contemplated, the more it will fill us with wonder and amazement. If we would but consider that the God of Heaven and earth assumed our sinful nature, and died the accursed death of the cross, in order to redeem us from death and Hell; if we would but allow this thought fully to occupy our minds, methinks we would become like those in Heaven, who cease not day and night to make it the grand subject of their united praises.

**II.** The more immediate view with which the Apostle introduced the subject of our Lord's humiliation, to which we also wish at this time to draw your attention, was, that he might set it before the Philippians as **a pattern to be imitated**.

It is not possible for us in all respects to imitate this bright original, since we have no glory which we can lay aside; nor is it optional with us whether we will become subject to the law or not. But, though we cannot perform the same act that Christ did, we may "have the same mind which was in him," and beyond all doubt we ought to resemble him in these two particulars:

in feeling a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls;

and in being ready to do or suffer anything for their good.

**1. We should feel a tender regard for the welfare of men's souls.** When, in consequence of the fall of man, there remained no possibility of his restoration to God's favor and image, by anything which he could either devise or execute, this blessed and adorable Savior looked upon us with pity: his affections yearned over us; and though he had not savingly interested himself on behalf of the angels that sinned, yet, he determined to interpose for *us*, and by a marvelous effort of his grace to save our souls.

Let me ask then, what is now the state of the heathen world? Is it not that very state to which the whole race of man was reduced by the transgression of Adam, and by their own personal iniquities? They are under a sentence of eternal death and condemnation. They know of no way of reconciliation with God. Being without Christ, they are altogether without hope. We must affirm that their condition is most pitiable, and that the notions which obtain in the world respecting the extension of God's mercy to them, are awfully erroneous. For if they can be saved without Christ, then why could not we? And then why did Christ ever come into the world? If it is said, that Christ has purchased mercy for them though they knew him not, then we ask: Then why did the Apostles go forth to preach to the Gentile world? Why did they submit to such numberless hardships and labors at the peril of their lives, to bring the heathen into the fold of Christ, if they thought that they could attain salvation in their present state, or that any considerable number of them would be saved?

The Apostles knew little of that which we falsely term, charity. They believed that "there was no other name given among men whereby we *must*be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ:" and therefore they felt towards the heathen world as they would have done towards a crew of mariners perishing in the ocean: they went forth at the peril of their own lives, willing to endure anything themselves, if they might but succeed in saving some of their fellow-creatures.

Ought not we then in like manner to compassionate the heathen world? Should not "our head be waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" for their perishing condition? What infidelity must there be in our minds, or what obduracy in our hearts—if we can look upon their state without the tenderest emotions of pity and grief!

**2. But to our compassion, we must add also a willingness to do and suffer anything for their good.**When our blessed Lord beheld our misery, he flew from Heaven on the wings of love to rescue us. And though in order to effect his purpose he must disrobe himself of his majesty, and become like one of us, a poor, weak, necessitous creature; yes, and in our nature he submitted to death, even the accursed death of the cross; he accounted nothing too valuable to forego, nothing too painful to suffer, in order to rescue us from destruction. He undertook even to be "made a curse for us," in order "to redeem us from the curse of the law."

Thus should we not rest in listless wishes for the good of the heathen, but exert ourselves to the utmost to save their souls. What if we cannot all go forth like the Apostles; cannot some of us give liberally of our substance in order to provide them the means of instruction? Cannot others afford their time and attention in order to concert measures for the establishing and conducting missions? Cannot others testify their readiness to devote themselves to this great work, saying, like the Prophet Isaiah, "Here am I, send me!" But in the disposition to fulfill this last, this most essential and urgent, duty—there is among us a general, a lamentable deficiency.

After inquiries made in every part of England, few have as yet been found by us, endued with that union of talents and of zeal which is requisite for the work. Many, who in some respects appear fit for the office of missionaries, are so fond of their ease and worldly comforts, so fearful of encountering difficulties and dangers, so ready, like Moses, to plead their lack of fitness, when their backwardness, it is to be feared, arises rather from cowardice or sloth; that there is danger lest the ardor of those who are zealous to promote the object of missions would be dumped, through a lack of opportunity to exert itself with effect.

It is true, (and blessed be God it is so!) that of late years several societies have arisen to promote this glorious work: and fears have been entertained, lest one would interfere with another. But what are the efforts of all of them combined, when compared with the demand there is for such exertions? If the millions of heathen who are yet in darkness be considered, the endeavors used for their instruction are scarcely more than as a drop to the ocean.

It may be said perhaps: Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labors of all at home? I answer: It is well for us that the Apostles did not argue thus: for if they had not turned to the Gentiles until there remained no unconverted Jews for them to instruct, the very name of Christ would probably long since have been forgotten among men. We confess there are great multitudes in our own land as ignorant as the heathen: but yet they have the Bible in their hands; and there are in every part of the kingdom, some who are both able and desirous to instruct them. However ignorant therefore, or abandoned, thousands are among us, there is hope respecting them, that sooner or later their feet may be guided into the way of peace.

But as for the heathen, what hope can there be respecting them? for "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher?" Besides, the more our love abounds towards the heathen, the more will "the zeal of others be provoked" for the salvation of our neighbors; and the more confidently may we hope for the blessing of God upon their pious endeavors.

Let then all such excuses be put away; and let all exert themselves at least in prayer to the great "Lord of the harvest," and entreat him day and night "to send forth laborers into his harvest."

***~~To enforce what has been said, we would call your attention to some additional considerations—~~***

Consider then, first, what would have been the state of the whole world, if the same mind had been in Christ that is in us? Had he been as indisposed to effect the salvation of mankind as we are to promote that of the heathen:

Would he have left his glory for them?

Would he have relinquished all the blessedness which he enjoyed in the bosom of his Father?

Would he have debased himself to such a degree as to take upon himself their fallen nature?

Would he have substituted himself in their place, and borne all their iniquities in his own person, and have become a curse for them? for them who, he knew beforehand, would murder him as soon as they would have it in their power?

No! Then where would Adam, and all the generations that have passed in succession to the present hour, have been at this moment? They would all, without one single exception, have been wailing and gnashing their teeth in Hell; and all future generations to the end of time would have lived only to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and to receive at last their tremendous doom.

But, adored be his name! He "looked not on his own things so much as on the things of others:" and, in consequence of his self-denying exertions, millions are already before his throne, and myriads, countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, shall yet be added to their number, to be monuments of his love, and heirs of his glory. Shall we then any longer persist in our supineness? Shall we not rather exert ourselves to the utmost to imitate his love?

Consider, next, how we are indebted to the benevolence of our fellow-creatures. We forbear to notice the kindness of the Apostles, because they were expressly commissioned to preach the Gospel to every creature, whether of their own, or of any other nation.

We will rather advert to an instance more immediately parallel to our own case. For many centuries after Christianity was promulgated, our ancestors were bowing down to stocks and stones; as we ourselves also would have been, had not some pious Christian come, at the peril of his life, to bring us the glad tidings of salvation. Suppose he had argued, as we are apt to do: 'What can I do among that savage race? There are people enough of my own country to occupy all my care; and I may fulfill my duty to God among them, without encountering all the difficulties, and exposing myself to the dangers which I must expect to meet with in such an undertaking.'

How awful, in that case, would have been our present condition! O Christians! think of all that you enjoy in Christ Jesus, your present consolations, your future prospects; think of these things, and say, 'I owe all, under God, to him who first set his foot on our inhospitable shores to show unto us the way of salvation; his example stimulated others; and thus "the handful of grain that was scattered on the tops of the mountains, has grown up like the woods of Lebanon, or the piles of grass upon the earth." Blessed, for ever blessed, be God for his labors of love!'

Who can tell then what may arise from the labors of one society, or even of a single individual? We may not see very extensive benefits in our day: and probably this was the case with respect to him who first visited Britain. But could he now behold from Heaven the fruit of his labors, how would he rejoice! Would he think that he had exercised too much self-denial, or patience, or diligence, in the cause of God? Would he repent of his exertions? would he not rather repent that he had not stepped forward sooner, and been more earnest in this blessed work?

Be then in earnest, my beloved brethren. We have lost too much time already; and millions, though unconscious of their needs, are now crying to us, as it were, "Come over to India—to Africa—and help us." O that a holy zeal might this day inflame our bosoms; and that we might requite the labors of those who have instructed us, by endeavoring to extend the benefits derived through them, to the remotest corners of the earth!

Consider, further, how kindly Christ will accept such labors at your hands. He tells us respecting things of a mere temporal nature, that what we have bestowed on others for his sake, he will accept as conferred on himself: "I was hungry—and you fed me; naked—and you clothed me; sick and in prison—and you visited me." And will he not much more acknowledge himself indebted to us for the spiritual blessings we confer on others? 'I was in darkness—and you enlightened me; I was far from God—and you brought me near; I was perishing, and you saved me.' O what a thought is this! how animating! how impressive!

Are there any among us that will not seek such an honor as this? Stir up yourselves then, my brethren; and let us all join with one heart to secure at least this testimony from our blessed Lord, knowing assuredly that "we shall receive our reward," not according to our success, but "according to our labor."

Lastly. Consider, how necessary it is to resemble Christ, if ever we would participate in his glory. *It is not by our profession that we shall be judged in the last day, but by our true character exhibited in our practice*. Do not think that the formal, the careless, the supine, shall meet with tokens of God's acceptance: it is the man who abounds in "works and labors of love for Christ's sake," who shall be honored with the approbation of his Judge. It is not he who bears the name of Christ, but who has within him the mind of Christ, who shall be counted worthy to dwell with him for ever. He himself tells us, that "not he who merely says, *Lord, Lord*, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of our Father who is in Heaven."

If then you cannot be moved by more sincere considerations, reflect on this: and tremble, lest after all your profession of Christianity, you prove only to be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Let those whose consciences condemn them for their past inactivity, cry mightily to God for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their souls. And may God pour out upon us this day a spirit of faith and love; that we may feel a holy ambition to engage in his service: and may all the endeavors, whether of this or any other society, be abundantly blessed, to the enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and to the salvation of many souls! Amen and Amen.

***~~#2146~~***

***~~THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11)~~***

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

WE are told by an inspired Apostle, that the great scope of the prophecies related to "the *sufferings*of Christ, and the *glory*that would follow." To the same points our attention is continually turned in the New Testament. Sometimes they are stated:

as an accomplishment of prophecy, or

as proofs of Christ's Messiahship, or

as grounds of our *hope*before God, or

as motives to stimulate us to *duty*, or

as *models*, according to which God will work in us, or

as *examples*, which we are bound to follow, or

as *encouragements*to follow those examples.

It is in this last view that we are to contemplate this stupendous mystery at this time. The Apostle had said, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." To illustrate and enforce this exhortation, he shows how the Lord Jesus Christ had emptied himself of all his own glory, and endured death, even the accursed death of the cross, for the salvation of men: and that in consequence of it he had received such tokens of his Father's approbation as were commensurate with the sacrifice which he had made. In considering this testimony of his Father's love, let us mark,

***~~I. The height to which he was raised—~~***

The Lord Jesus Christ, as God, was incapable of elevation: but, as man, he was raised from the lowest degradation to the highest degrees of glory.

***~~Amidst the depths of his humiliation he was greatly exalted—~~***

At his *baptism*he received an audible testimony from Heaven, together with a visible communication of the Spirit of God, in attestation of his Messiahship. In all the *miracles*he wrought, a further testimony was borne to him by the Father. And in his last hours, when in appearance he was even deserted by his heavenly Father, *universal nature bore witness to him*; the sun going down, as it were, at noon-day; the earth rending and quaking to its very center; and the most convincing evidence being given to all, that he whom they crucified was indeed the Son of God.

***~~But it was not until after that period that the exaltation spoken of in the text commenced—~~***

At his *resurrection*, he was declared to be the Son of God with power. At his *ascension*, he led captivity itself captive, and, surrounded with myriads of holy angels, went to take possession of his Father's throne. Seated on that, he is elevated above all the works of God's hands; above men, so as to be "higher than the kings of the earth," even "King of kings and Lord of lords! [Psalm 89:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.27). [Revelation 19:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.16)." And above angels also, "all the principalities and powers of Heaven being made subject unto him, [1 Peter 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.22). [Hebrews 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.5); [Hebrews 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.8-9); [Hebrews 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.13)."

The text requires us particularly to notice,

***~~II. The reason of his exaltation—~~***

It was in consequence of his previous humiliation: it was,

***~~1. As a reward of his sufferings—~~***

In this view it had been promised to him, [Isaiah 52:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.13-15); [Isaiah 53:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-12). In this view he himself looked forward to it with intense desire [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2). [John 17:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4-5). And in this view it was actually conferred upon him, [Daniel 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.13-14). [Hebrews 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.3-4).

***~~2. As the means of completing the work he had undertaken—~~***

He was to redeem us, both by price, and by power. On this account, after he had paid the price of our redemption, he was invested with "all power both in Heaven and in earth;" and "all things were given into his hands," that he might order everything for the accomplishment of his own will, and the furtherance of the work which he had begun. In him was all fullness treasured up, that he might impart unto his people all needful supplies of grace, [Ephesians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.20-22); and to him was all authority committed, that he might put all enemies under his feet, [1 Corinthians 15:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.25). [Psalm 110:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.1-2). Thus, by his elevation, are his triumphs and the triumphs of all his people, finally and eternally secured.

But we have further to notice his exaltation in reference to,

***~~III. The end of it—~~***

It was that he might be the one object,

***~~1. Of universal adoration—~~***

Of this he is most worthy, as all the hosts of Heaven testify, [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13). And it must be paid to him: for God has sworn with an oath, that it shall be paid to him by all in Heaven, earth, and Hell, [Romans 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.11) with [Isaiah 45:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.23). Or if we will not yield it to him as the voluntary expression of our love, we shall be constrained to acknowledge his right to it, while we are suffering under the stroke of his avenging rod, [Psalm 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.1-3); [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6); [Psalm 2:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.9-12).

***~~2. Of unlimited affiance—~~***

By confessing him to be both Lord and Christ, I understand such a confession as proceeds from sincere faith, [Romans 10:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.9-11). And to this full affiance is he entitled, both according to his essential nature as God, and in his mediatorial capacity as the Savior of the world, [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22). In what way it is to be manifested, the prophet tells us: "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24)."

As "the Christ," who died for us, he is our righteousness; and as "the Lord," who is the Head and Governor of all, we receive out of his fullness all needful supplies of grace and strength.

Nor let it be thought that this direction of our regards to him will derogate at all from the honor of the Father: for, on the contrary, it will be "to the glory of God the Father," whose wisdom has devised, and whose love has executed, so wonderful a plan for the salvation of men. On this subject we can have no doubt; since our Lord himself has told us, that God's very design in the whole of this stupendous mystery was, "that all men would 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 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22-23)."

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

***~~1. How awful is the state of those who submit not to him!~~***

We are equally rebels against him, whether we oppose him as Lord, or as Christ; whether we refuse to submit to his righteousness, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3), or to his government. O reflect, you who are going about to establish a righteousness of your own: What will you answer to him, when he shall call you to an account for usurping his office, and making void all that he has done and suffered for you?

And you, who, while professing to trust in him as your Savior, live in disobedience to his commands: Where will you hide your heads, when he shall say, "Bring hither those my enemies who would not that I would reign over them, and slay them before me?" Whatever you may now think, you cannot invalidate the oath of God: he has sworn that unto him every knee shall bow; and, if you do it not willingly, you shall do it against your will, to your everlasting sorrow!

***~~2. How blessed is the state of his obedient people!~~***

Shall Christ be exalted to the right hand of God in vain? or will he refuse to impart to you out of his fullness? Fear not—you are committed to his care; and he will not lose one of you, "not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands." Whatever you need, it is treasured up for you in him; and "his grace shall be sufficient for you." It may be, that in his service you may be called to endure many things; but if now "he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied," be assured that before long it shall be no grief to you that you were humbled for a season: for, "if you suffer with him. you shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together with him, [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12). [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17)" in his kingdom for evermore!

***~~#2147~~***

***~~GOD ASSISTS THE DILIGENT~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13)~~***

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

THERE is no person, however eminent his attainments in religion may be, who does not need to be exhorted and urged to press forward. The Philippians, in the judgment of the Apostle, had had "the good work begun in them;" yes, they had "obeyed the word while he was with them," and had made a still greater proficiency since his departure from them: yet he animates them to further exertions, and enforces his exhortation with the strongest arguments. Thus would all Christian ministers "put their people in remembrance of these things, notwithstanding they may already know them, or even be established in the truth." Let us then receive the Apostle's words as addressed to ourselves in particular, while we consider,

***~~I. The exhortation—~~***

God commands us to "work out our salvation"—

We are not to imagine that salvation is either the reward of our merits, or the effect of our unassisted exertions; for if, as our Lord assures us, "without him we can do nothing," it is evident that we are far enough from being able to keep the whole law of God; which yet we must do, if we are to receive Heaven on the ground of our own righteousness. Nevertheless we have a work to do, a work of infinite importance, in performing which we are not mere machines, but voluntary agents: and on our performing of that work our salvation depends. See [Acts 27:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.25); [Acts 27:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.31). We must consider our ways, repent of sin, believe the Gospel, and devote ourselves to God—not indeed as conceiving ourselves sufficient for these things, but in dependence on that aid, which God will afford to all who seek him in sincerity and truth.

***~~But we must engage in this work "with fear and trembling"—~~***

The terms "fear and trembling" do not import a slavish dread and terror, but a holy vigilance and circumspection. This is the meaning of it in every place where it occurs. See [1 Corinthians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.3). 2 Corinthians 7:15 and [Ephesians 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.5). That it cannot mean slavish fear is evident from [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15); [Romans 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.6). And there is great need of this "fear and trembling" in working out our salvation. Let us only consider:

how many *lusts*we have to mortify,

and how many *duties*to perform,

how many *temptations*we have to withstand,

and *adversaries*to overcome,

how prone we are to *err*, and

how many *devices*Satan uses in order to deceive us,

how *insufficient*we are of ourselves for this great work, and

how awful would be the *consequences*of miscarrying in it;

and we shall readily acknowledge that our utmost caution is little enough. Paul felt the force of these considerations; and notwithstanding he knew himself to be a chosen vessel unto God, he "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)."

That we may all be led to comply with this advice, let us consider,

***~~II. The argument with which it is enforced—~~***

To see the full force of this argument we must view it,

***~~1. As a call on our gratitude—~~***

Having commended the Philippians for their obedience to God, he reminds them why it was that they were made to differ from others. They were by nature as destitute of any ability or inclination to serve God as any other people upon earth: but God, of his own good pleasure, and without respect to anything in them, had given them both to will and to do what was acceptable in his sight. Now this sovereign act of grace laid them under a tenfold obligation to love and serve him: they must be vile indeed, if such love did not constrain them to obedience.

Have any of us then been converted by the grace of God, and been "made willing in the day of his power?" Let us consider this mercy as the strongest of all motives for yielding up ourselves as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to him, as our reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

Are we "a chosen generation, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy?" Let us exert ourselves to the utmost to "show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light! [1 Peter 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9-10)."

***~~2. As an antidote to our fears—~~***

It is difficult to feel the importance of eternal things, and not give way to secret fears and misgivings, respecting the final success of our present exertions. And indeed, if we were required to work out our salvation by our own strength, we might well yield, not only to fear, but to utter despondency. But the argument urged by the Apostle removes our apprehensions by assuring us that He who has given us the will, will also give us the power, to obey him. Compare the text with [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10). It is not to mock us that God has created in us a disposition to what is good: it is not to abandon us at last that he has hitherto given "grace sufficient for us." His past favors are a pledge of others yet to come: he will continue to "strengthen us in our inward man," and will "perfect his own strength in our weakness, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13) with [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." Let us then acknowledge the force of the argument in this view; and, assured that "our strength shall be according to our day," let us "be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord! [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~3. As an incentive to vigilance—~~***

Since it is "God who gives us both to will and to do, and that entirely of his own good pleasure," we must of necessity be altogether *dependent*on him; if he keeps us, we shall stand: if he leaves us, we shall fall. Now God is a jealous God; and will surely manifest his displeasure if we walk unwatchfully before him. We may easily "grieve his Spirit, [Ephesians 4:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.30);" yes, if we continue in willful habits of neglect, or in any allowed sin, we may "quench his Spirit, [1 Thessalonians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.19);" for he has warned us that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man, [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3);" and that, "if we rebel and vex his Holy Spirit, he will turn and become our enemy, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10). [Exodus 23:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 23.21)."

The Israelites, who, notwithstanding they were brought out of Egypt, and fed with manna from Heaven, perished in the wilderness, are set forth as examples to us [1 Corinthians 10:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.11). And to many under temporal or spiritual afflictions may that pungent question be addressed, "Have you not procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken the Lord, when he led you along the way? [Jeremiah 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 2.17)." Well may this consideration stir us up to watchfulness and circumspection, lest by intermitting our labors, and relaxing our exertions in the work of our salvation, we bring upon ourselves his heavy displeasure, [2 Chronicles 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.2).

***~~From hence we may see,~~***

***~~1. The beauty and harmony of Scripture doctrines—~~***

*Our entire dependence on divine grace, together with the absolute sovereignty of God in the distribution of his favors, are here clearly stated. Yet the necessity of our working out our own salvation is as strongly declared, as if everything depended on our own efforts.* Now these are often set in opposition to each other, as though they were contrary and inconsistent doctrines. But God sees no inconsistency in them; nor shall we, if we only once learn to receive the Scriptures with the simplicity of little children, instead of presuming to be wise above what is written.

On the contrary, the two doctrines are perfectly harmonious; nor is there any stronger argument for exertions on our part, than the freeness and sufficiency of God's grace. Let us not then set doctrine against doctrine, but join in our experience those things which God has indissolubly united, and which are equally essential to our eternal welfare.

***~~2. The folly of the excuses which men urge in justification of their own supineness—~~***

One says, It is in vain for me to attempt working, unless God works in me both to will and to do what he commands. But will any man forbear to plough and sow his ground, because he cannot ensure a harvest? We are to work out our salvation to the utmost of our power, and to call upon God for all necessary assistance. It is in activity, and not in sloth, that we are to expect his aid, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead; and Christ will give you light;" and if we will not put forth the little strength we have, we must reap to all eternity the bitter fruits of our own supineness!

Another says, I need not concern myself much about the present state of my soul; for if God has ordained me to life, I shall live; and if he has begun the good work in me, he will carry it on. But to what purpose has God enjoined fear and trembling, if we are at liberty to indulge such a presumptuous confidence, as this? It is true, that "God will keep the feet of his saints;" but it is by fear and trembling that he will keep them; his injunctions are, "Be not high-minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)." And, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall, [1 Corinthians 10:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.12)."

Let not then the doctrines of grace be so perverted and abused: but *let us exert ourselves, as if we could do all; at the same time let depend on God, as knowing that, without him, we can do nothing*.

***~~3. The firmness of the believer's hopes—~~***

While the believer is maintaining continual watchfulness and care, he still enjoys peace in his soul, and oftentimes "a full assurance of hope." But on what is his hope founded? Is it on his own resolution, zeal, and steadfastness? Nothing is further from his mind: he relies on the sovereignty, the power, and the faithfulness of his God. God's grace is his own, and he disposes of it according to his own good pleasure; therefore the believer, while he feels himself the most unworthy of the human race, hopes that "God will show forth the exceeding riches of his grace in acts of kindness towards him." God is able to keep him from falling; and therefore the believer says, "I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)."

And lastly, God has confirmed his promise with an oath; and therefore those who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus, have strong consolation; because it is impossible for God to lie; and he is faithful who has promised, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18). Thus we see that the weakest Christian stands on a rock which defies all the storms and tempests that ever can assail it. "Let us then be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and look to him to "fulfill in us all the good pleasure of his will," and to "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom!"

***~~#2148~~***

***~~PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED~~***

***~~[Philippians 2:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.14-16)~~***

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life--in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing."

THERE are times for laying the *foundations*of religion; and there are times for raising the *superstructure*. Neither the one nor the other must be neglected, since they are both equally necessary to the completion of the sacred edifice which is to be erected in the soul.

Paul paid due attention to them both. "As a wise master-builder, he laid the foundation" with all possible care, declaring, that though an angel from Heaven were to announce any other ground of hope than the Lord Jesus Christ, he could not be saved, but rather must be held accursed. So extreme was his jealousy upon this point, that, when the Apostle Peter sanctioned, by his conduct, a sentiment that militated against the doctrine of salvation by faith, he rebuked him openly before the whole Church.

On the other hand, this holy Apostle was not at all less jealous respecting the performance of good works. In all his epistles, he inculcates the indispensable necessity of them, in order to our final happiness; and in most of them he enters very minutely into the different duties which we are to perform to God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

In the beginning of this chapter he had recommended lowliness of mind, verse 3, 4; which he afterwards enforced from the example of Christ, verse 5-8. He here continues the same subject, and inculcates a constant exercise of humility towards both God and man, as the best means of adorning our profession, and of securing to ourselves the blessedness which we look for in the eternal world.

*Pride fosters in the soul, a murmuring disposition towards God, and a contentious disposition towards man.*Humility counteracts them both. Hence he says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings;" engage in everything with a mind full of submission to God, and of love to man; that whatever difficulties you may have to contend with, there may be nothing in your conduct unworthy of your high and holy profession, nothing that shall endanger your eternal welfare.

To enter properly into the subject before us, it will be necessary for us to consider,

***~~I. The principles which are here assumed—~~***

Notwithstanding his jealousy on the subject of faith, he does not hesitate to declare,

***~~1. That the practical outworking of religion should be the chief object of our attention now that we are saved—~~***

It was so to the Jews of old. They possessed the highest privileges as God's chosen people, and had ordinances divinely appointed for their stated observance. Yet neither their privileges nor their observances availed them anything without holiness of heart and life: their circumcision, while they were disobedient to the law, was as uncircumcision. To those who boasted that they were Abraham's seed, and therefore children of God, our Lord said, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham;" and, "If God were your Father, you would love me."

To the same test must our professions also be brought. It is in vain for us to "cry, *Lord, Lord*, if we do not the things which our Lord commands." It is by our obedience to his will that our blessed Lord estimates our love: "He who *has*my commandments, and *keeps*them, he it is that loves me:" and again, "If you *love*me, *keep*my commandments." On keeping of God's commandments, so great a stress is laid, that it is made the one discriminating point between the children of God and the children of the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness, is not of God, [1 John 3:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.6-10)." Nor is any profession or privilege available for our eternal welfare without it: for "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God, [1 Corinthians 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.19) and [1 John 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.6); [1 John 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.7)."

***~~2. That our works will be the chief object of inquiry at the day of judgment—~~***

If the Gospel produce not this effect, it is preached in vain; and those who dispense it, "labor in vain." As now the tree is judged of by its fruits, so will it be "at the day of Christ." In the account given to us by our Lord himself, we are forewarned what will be the grounds of his decision, when he shall judge the world: those whose religion was productive of good works, will be approved and rewarded in proportion to their works: but those who lived in the neglect of good works, will be disapproved and punished.

Whatever *professions*any may have made of faith and love, they will be brought to this test; and according to it they will be justified or condemned. Doubtless respect will be had to the *principles*from which their works have proceeded: for "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" but *the works of all will be viewed as evidences of their internal dispositions*, and will form the ground of the judgment which shall be pronounced upon them.

These principles being established, let us proceed to consider,

***~~II. The practice which is here inculcated—~~***

We must not undervalue what may be called *negative holiness*; for, in truth, it is that which constitutes in a great measure the excellence of the saints. The *absence*of a murmuring disposition, is to a certain degree the same as positive contentment; and the *absence*of a contentious disposition as positive love. But it is not a low degree of these virtues that we are to seek after:

***~~We would walk as lights in a dark world—~~***

It would ill befit "the children of God" to walk as children of Belial: on the contrary, they should be patterns to the whole world; and would "give no occasion whatever to their enemies to speak reproachfully." They should be "blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse world." Nor let this be thought a low attainment. Considering what an ensnaring world we move in, and what depraved and perverse creatures we have to deal with, it is no easy matter so to walk that no man may have any fault to find with us but concerning the law of our God. Such conduct requires incessant vigilance and circumspection on our part, and no small measure of grace from the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way we would shine as lights in a dark world, "holding forth" in the whole of our conduct and conversation "the word of life."

On every side of us there are rocks and quicksands, which prove destructive to thousands, who navigate this tempestuous ocean of life: and, while endeavoring to avoid them ourselves, we would so steer our course, as to perform the office of lights, or light-houses, to others; that they, following our luminous path, may escape the dangers that surround them, and reach in safety the haven of rest.

This is the true view in which Christians should consider themselves: they are intended to be witnesses for God, and "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." They are so to walk, that others may see clearly in them a transcript of the mind and will of God; and that, conforming themselves to their example, they may advance daily in the paths of righteousness and grace**.**

***~~This alone will answer the end of ministerial exertions—~~***

Pastors are appointed for the perfecting of the saints: and unless this is accomplished by the word, it is preached in, vain: instead of proving to the hearers "a savor of life unto life, it will be to them a savor of death unto death." Until a minister beholds this change wrought in his people, he must of necessity stand in doubt of them, [Galatians 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.11); [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20); but when it is wrought in them, he may well rejoice over them, seeing that they shall surely be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day, [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20). Yes, blessed indeed will be the meeting which he will have with them in that day: he will recognize them as his spiritual children, and present them unto God, saying: Here am "I, and the children you have given me!"

***~~In conclusion, I will,~~***

***~~1. Guard against any misapprehension of this subject—~~***

Though we affirm that our works will be the ground of God's judgment in the last day, we would not be understood to intimate, that there is, or can be, any merit in our works. It is not for any worthiness in them that we are saved, but solely for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for our justification before God.

Our works, it is true, will be the test by which our sincerity will be tried, and the standard to which the measure of our reward will be conformed: but it is not for our blamelessness that we shall be accepted by God; nor will anything be conferred upon us on the ground of merit: the whole will be a reward of grace, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through his obedience unto death. It is highly necessary that this matter should be clearly seen, lest our very virtues become a snare to us, and we perish at last by rejecting the salvation provided for us.

***~~2. Give directions for attaining the state to which we are called—~~***

It can be attained only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: for it is only by faith that we can be united to him, and only by union with him that we can bring forth fruit to his glory. He himself tells us, that "without him, that is, separate from him, we can do nothing." If we attempt anything in our own strength, we shall fail. But "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things." To him therefore we must look; and of him we must say, "In the Lord I have *righteousness*and *strength*."

Relying on him, we shall never be confounded. Our *trials*may be great; but we shall be enabled to bear them. Our *difficulties*may be great; but we shall be enabled to surmount them. Nothing shall be impossible to us, if only we live by faith in him. In the midst of temptations we shall "be preserved blameless," and our "light shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

***~~#2149~~***

***~~MINISTERIAL ZEAL DEPICTED~~***

**[Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18)**

"But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me."

THE hope of benefitting immortal souls is most delightful to a benevolent mind; and a successful outcome to our labors is replete with joy. The disciple who was honored with his Master's love beyond all others, even he knew "no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth, 3 John verse 4." This accounts for the extreme earnestness with which Paul labored for the salvation of men, and for their sake. He knew, that, even in the eternal world, it would augment his happiness to see that he had been instrumental in saving others; and that "he would rejoice in the day of Christ, when he found that he had not labored in vain, or run in vain, verses 15, 16." Indeed, so entirely was he swallowed up in the prosperity of his converts, that he was ready even to die for them, if need be; yes, and to welcome the most cruel death as a blessing, rather than to deprecate it as an evil, if only it might be subservient to the welfare of their souls. This is a most remarkable assertion: and, for the purpose of unfolding it, I will show,

***~~I. What was the event which is here so gladly welcomed—~~***

***~~The event itself was martyrdom—~~***

The terms in which he speaks of martyrdom need explanation among us; but to Christians of that day, conversant as they were with the Jewish ritual, they would convey his meaning in a most intelligible and striking form.

The Jews had sacrifices offered every morning and every evening throughout the year. Upon these sacrifices were offered a meat-offering of flour mingled with oil, and a drink-offering of wine, [Numbers 28:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 28.3-7). Now, these sacrifices represented, not only the Great Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered for the sins of men, but Christians themselves, who, at the time of their conversion, are given up to Almighty God to serve him, and to glorify his name. The ministers who were instrumental in bringing them to Christ were, so to speak, the priests who offered them up: in conformity with which idea, Paul speaks of being the "minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, [Romans 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.16)."

But, in the passage before us there is a peculiar beauty: for the people are regarded, not only as the sacrifice that was offered, but as the priests that offered it; since, in the very act of believing, they performed that service, which, in other sacrifices, was performed by the priest. And this is the very thing noticed by Paul in another place, when he beseeches men to "present their own bodies as a living sacrifice unto God, as an acceptable and reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)."

'Now,' says the Apostle, 'since I have seen you so willingly present yourselves as sacrifices to the Lord, I am willing to have my own blood poured forth as a libation or drink-offering, so that every one of your sacrifices may be complete, and God may be glorified in us all. And, whoever be the instrument to draw forth my blood, or with whatever horrors the shedding of it may be accompanied, I account that not worth a thought: I am in daily expectation of suffering martyrdom; and I am willing to suffer it for your sake, in any way that God himself shall see fit.'

***~~This he was ready to welcome as a ground of joy—~~***

Doubtless, to flesh and blood, the prospect of a cruel death was terrifying. But the Apostle was borne up far above all the feelings of unassisted nature, and was enabled to contemplate the deepest sufferings with joy: he could look forward to death itself, not as an object of terror, but as a ground of universal joy.

For, with respect to his *converts*, though it would deprive them of his instructions, and rob them of their dearest friend—yet it would tend to confirm them in the faith they had received, and would embolden them to serve the Lord without fear, yes, and with tenfold greater earnestness than ever.

With respect to *Jehovah*, too, it would reflect on him the highest honor: for by the victim he would be glorified; since it would be made obvious to all, how worthy he is to be loved and served, and how able he is to support his tempted people under all that they may be called to suffer for his sake.

And with respect to *himself*, death in such a cause would be the highest honor that could be conferred upon him, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41); and he had no doubt but that a proportionably augmented weight of glory would be awarded to him at the tribunal of his God, [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.17-18). [Matthew 5:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.11-12). [Hebrews 11:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.26).

Under these circumstances, death had no terrors for him: on the contrary, however his blood would be shed, he called on them to rejoice, both with him and for him; since the event, properly viewed, would be no other than a ground of mutual thanksgiving.

Let us next consider,

***~~II. What the welcoming of such an event would teach us—~~***

The Apostle's spirit and conduct differ widely from that patriotic ardor which has wrought up many to the contempt of death. *Pride has been in them the chief incentive, and the hope of immortalizing their own memory.* As for the love of immortal souls, it has never once entered into their minds; nor have they shown any desire that God would be glorified in them. But, in the Apostle, piety to God, and love to man, were the great principles in operation; and self was as much forgotten, as if he had known that the record which he had given of his views would perish with him. His exalted feelings on this occasion show us,

***~~1. The value of the soul—~~***

Of what incalculable value must their souls have been in the Apostle's eyes, when, for the advancement of their welfare, he was ready to welcome even martyrdom itself! Yet were his views perfectly correct: for the soul of any individual whatever is of more value than the whole world.

Beloved brethren, if another person could do and suffer so much for you, what ought not you to do or suffer for the welfare of your own souls? Would it be any difficulty to you to devote yourselves to God? or would you regard, for one moment, the contempt or obloquy which you may incur for His sake? Methinks you are blushing for your lukewarmness and cowardice—you are ashamed, that the things of time and sense can retain such influence over your minds. And, in truth, well may the most diligent among us be ashamed, when we think how near we are on the borders of eternity; and what a sacrifice they must become to the justice of God hereafter, who have not surrendered themselves as living sacrifices to his honor in the present world.

***~~2. The wonderful love of the Lord Jesus Christ to our sinful race—~~***

This which is spoken of in my text has been done for us by our Lord Jesus Christ; of whom it is said, "He poured out his soul unto death! [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12)." He even came from Heaven for this very purpose, and assumed our nature that he might be capable of doing it. And this he did too, not merely as a witness for the truth, or as an example to the Church, but as an atonement for the sins of mankind. On him were laid the iniquities of us all: and, when he saw what a bloody baptism he was to be baptized with, he was quite straitened until it would be accomplished; so ardently did he desire the wished-for period.

Nor was it for friends and brethren that he poured forth his blood, but for his very enemies, even for the very people who nailed him to the cross: and this too, not in the midst of consolations and supports, but under a sense of God's wrath, and in the depths of dereliction.

O! who can fathom what manner of love this was! Truly, its height and depth, and length and breadth, are utterly unsearchable, and incomprehensible. Brethren, you contemplate with wonder and gratitude the example of Paul: but what must you think of our Lord Jesus Christ? I charge you, beloved brethren, be not insensible of this: but set it before you, and meditate upon it, until it has penetrated your inmost souls, and "filled you with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

***~~3. What is the proper character of a Christian minister—~~***

Even a private Christian ought not to fall short of the example before us: for John says, "Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)." What then becomes the Christian minister, who has consecrated himself to the service of the sanctuary, and bound himself, by the most solemn ties, to live only for his God! The union of love and zeal which the Apostle manifested on this occasion should be visible in the whole of his walk before God; so that at all times he may appeal to his people as the Apostle did, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children; so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us, [1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8)." O that there were in us, such a heart as this! What blessings would we be to the places where our lot is cast!

And how ready would we be to go forth, wherever our God may call us; accounting nothing of the trials that may await us, even though life itself were the sacrifice that we were called to make. Dear brethren, let it not be said of you, "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ, verse 21;" but beg of God that you may rise to your proper character; and be enabled to "follow the Apostle, as he followed Christ."

***~~#2150~~***

***~~THE SELFISHNESS OF MAN~~***

**[Philippians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.21)**

"For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

Candor is a virtue that should be held in the highest estimation: but, if pressed beyond its proper limits, it will degenerate into indifference, and be productive of incalculable evil. It ought not to confound all distinctions between good and evil; or to betray the interests of religion, through a tenderness for the character of those who violate its dictates. Its office relates rather to the motives, than to the actions, of men. Their *actions*are to be tried by the standard of God's law: their *principles*are known to God alone: and it is the part of candor to make due allowance for the frailties of men; and to ascribe everything to good motives, as far as the actions themselves, and the circumstances attending them, will admit of it.

As for that *latitudinarian principle*which is falsely called candor, the Scriptures know nothing of it; nor do they countenance it in any degree. They uniformly assign to good and to evil their true and proper characters, without any respect to those who commit them: and oftentimes they speak in broad, unqualified terms, where they might, if God had seen fit, have made limitations and exceptions. In applying such passages, however, to existing circumstances, there is undoubtedly just scope for the exercise of candor. And this we shall have occasion to show, in discussing the subject before us.

Paul was now a prisoner at Rome, not knowing whether he would be liberated or put to death. In this state, he was extremely anxious about his converts at Philippi, who were themselves in a state of great suffering from enemies, while they were exposed to the more fatal assaults of pretended friends, who labored to turn them from the faith. He longed exceedingly to know how they stood their ground; and wished to draw his information from a source which he could fully depend on. But he had only Timothy with him; and how to part with so dear a friend, under his present circumstances, he knew not. Yet, on the whole, he determined to exercise this self-denial; and to send Timothy to encourage them, and to bring him the desired information: for he had "no man with him that was like-minded with Timothy, who would naturally care for their state; for all others who were around him sought their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ."

It may be asked, How then came he to bestow such commendations on Epaphroditus, and to send this letter by him? I answer, Epaphroditus was "a messenger," who had come to him from Philippi; and who could not be expected to come back again to Rome, to bring him the desired information: and therefore he was not included in the foregoing censure; which was intended only to be applied to the Christians at Rome, who, in his deepest extremity, had forsaken him; and had thereby shown that they felt a greater regard for their own safety, than for the honor of their Lord, 2 Timothy 4:16.

That we may do justice to all, in our treatment of this subject, we will consider the Apostle's assertion,

***~~I. In reference to the ungodly world—~~***

To these it is applicable in its full extent. Fallen man is wholly departed from God; and has become altogether selfish; seeking at all times his own things,

***~~1. Supremely—~~***

One would have supposed, that man, however fallen, would at least have given a precedence to his God: but he chooses rather to be a God unto himself, and to consult, in the first place, what will be most conducive to his own ease, or interest, or honor. If the gratification of self, in any respect, be found contrary to the declared will of God, the authority of God is set at nothing; the honor of is God overlooked, as unimportant; and the pleasure, whatever it may be, is pursued, without restriction or remorse. From their fellow-man, indeed, they feel some restraint; but from God, none at all. As far as he is concerned, they say, "Our lips are our own: Who is lord over us? [Psalm 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 12.4)." Nor is this on some particular occasion only: it is the prevailing habit of their minds: and, whenever the will of God is opposed to theirs, they do not hesitate to say, "Who is the Lord, that I would obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice! [Exodus 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 5.2)."

***~~2. Exclusively—~~***

In truth, man in his fallen state does not admit any competition between God and him. He chooses rather to "cast God behind his back, [Ezekiel 23:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 23.35)," and to live "without him in the world, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." "The things of Jesus Christ" do not at all engage his thoughts. He never asks himself, 'What would the Lord Jesus Christ wish me to do? What will please him? What will honor him? What will advance his glory in the world?' These are considerations which never enter into his mind. Nor is this the case with any one particular description of persons only: it is the same with all persons, of every age, of every country, of every condition. *From infancy to old age there is the same regard for self, to the utter exclusion of everything that relates to Christ.*

There may be indeed, and often is, in ungodly men, a great concern about their own sect or party in the Church; which they, perhaps, would call a regard for Christ himself. But this is nothing more than a carnal principle, precisely similar to that which actuates men in relation to their own society or country. There is in it no real regard for the Lord Jesus Christ himself, but only for the particular party to which they belong: and, whatever construction they may put upon their actions, God, who tries the heart, will comprehend them under the censure of my text, as "seeking their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ." "They are empty vines, because they bring forth fruit only to themselves! [Hosea 10:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 10.1)."

But the Apostle had very different persons in view. To understand his assertion aright, we must consider it,

***~~II. In reference to the professing Church of Christ—~~***

Beyond all doubt, he referred, in his own mind, to all the Christians at Rome. But we are not to suppose that there was not one among them that was possessed of true piety: we must rather suppose, that their piety was of an inferior order, and that there was not among them any one duly qualified for the work which he would gladly have assigned him. They were all too timid, and too selfish, for the office to which, for lack of any other suitable person, he had destined his beloved Timothy. Hence, in somewhat strong terms, he complained of them, as "seeking their own things, and not the things of Jesus Christ;" not intending thereby to deny their piety altogether, but only to intimate that it was at a low ebb. And how applicable this reproof is to the professors of our day, will clearly appear, while we observe how little there is among us,

***~~1. Of self-denial—~~***

In whatever is gratifying to self, we are all forward enough: but if we foresee that the path of duty will involve us in difficulties and trials, we are ready to make any excuse for declining to pursue it. *We dread the thought of sacrificing our present comforts, and of encountering hardships of any kind.* Instead of "counting all things but loss for Christ," we pause long before we will part with anything: and we desire, for the most part, to have as cheap a religion as we can.

The Apostle, giving us a catalogue of his sufferings for Christ, (in which he far exceeded any other of the Apostles,) says, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked, [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-27)."

But what effect did they produce on him? Was he deterred by them from following the Lord? No! "None of these things move me," says he, "neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24)." And is this the spirit that rules among us? Alas! alas! if we were called to endure but a twentieth part of his difficulties, it is much to be feared that the generality among us would utterly faint and fail; and, like John Mark, would turn back from the service of our God, [Acts 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.13); [Acts 15:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.38).

***~~2. Of zeal for God—~~***

In persons redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, one might expect that there would be one constant inquiry, "What shall I render to my Lord?" and that the performance of one service would be regarded only as an introduction to another. Laborious as was the Apostle Paul, he never thought that he had done anything, as long as anything remained for him to do. "Like a racer in his course, he forgot what was behind, and reached forward to that which was before." Whatever the service was to which he was called, "he conferred not with flesh and blood," and said immediately, "Here am I; send me! [Isaiah 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.8)." But how little of this ardor do we see in the great mass of professing Christians! The advancement of Christ's kingdom appears to them a matter too remote to engage their attention; and they cloak their own indifference under the specious garb of conscious inability.

***~~3. Of love to man—~~***

This was particularly in the mind of the Apostle as a very chief ground of his censure: "I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state." A concern for the welfare of men's souls was scarcely found among them, especially such a tender concern as a person feels for the welfare of his dearest relative. Were we to behold one who was dear to us in imminent danger, we would feel acutely for him: but *we see millions perishing in their sins, and yet lay it not to heart, and are scarcely more grieved about them than if we had reason to believe them in a state of perfect safety*.

Far different is the manner in which we regard our own things. If we were doomed to suffer the loss but of a finger only, it would press with considerable weight upon our minds: but we can behold persons, on every side of us, going down to perdition, without making any serious effort to deliver them.

***~~See then, here, what ground we have,~~***

***~~1. For inquiry—~~***

How has it been with us? What has been the state of our minds towards the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we found our own concerns swallowed up, as it were, in a concern for him and his glory? Can we adopt, even in the most qualified sense, that expression of the Psalmist, "The zeal of your house has consumed me! [Psalm 69:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 69.9)." Remember, I beg you, that everything should be subordinated to Christ, and be regarded only as dung and dross in comparison with him. Our blessed Lord tells us, that "if we hate not father and mother, yes, and our own life also, in comparison with him, we cannot be his disciples! [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26)." Surely, after such a declaration as this, we should examine our state with all diligence, and never rest until we can say, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides you!"

***~~2. For humiliation—~~***

Let us turn our eyes to our great Exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich—yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich! [2 Corinthians 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.9)." To this the Apostle particularly adverts, in the preceding context: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! [Philippians 2:3-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.3-8)."

Here, you see, is our pattern. But what resemblance do we bear to him? The leaving of all the glory of Heaven, the taking of our nature with all its sinless infirmities, the dying under the weight of our sins, were not too great acts of self-denial for him to perform; and that, too, even for his enemies. But we, what have we done? *What have we suffered for the glory of Christ, and the salvation of men?*Say, whether we all have not reason to blush and be ashamed at our extreme lack of conformity to him in these respects?

***~~3. For watchfulness—~~***

*Selfishness is a peculiarly subtle evil, and veils its own malignity under the most specious names and pretexts.* We may see this in the persons who came to our Lord, professing a great regard for him, and a fixed determination to serve him. One said, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go;" but was deterred from executing his purpose, when our Lord told him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay his head!" Another, when bidden by our Lord to follow him, requested that this might be dispensed with for a season, that he might go home and bury his father. A third made great professions of his readiness to follow Christ; but desired, that he might first go home, and bid his friends farewell, [Luke 9:57-60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.57-60).

To all of these our Lord gave such replies as were calculated to expose and counteract the delusions by which they were blinded. And were our excuses tried, as they will before long be, by the same touchstone, how vain would they appear! Pleas of duty or affection are often brought forth to justify the secret backwardness which we feel to encounter difficulties for the Lord. *But the mask will soon be taken off, and our selfishness will appear in all its naked deformity.*

Beware then, brethren, lest you deceive your own souls; and, while the fidelity of others is questioned, let it be said of you as it was of Timothy, "You know that Timothy has proved himself, verse 22." Let your whole life be a commentary on that declaration of the Apostle, "None of us lives to himself; and no man dies unto himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's! [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8)." Only take care that, in your experience, it be "Christ to live;" and you need never fear but that it shall be "gain to die! [Philippians 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.21)."

***~~#2151~~***

***~~THE TRUE CHRISTIAN DELINEATED~~***

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

"For it is we who are the true circumcision, we . . .

who worship by the Spirit of God,

who glory in Christ Jesus, and

who put no confidence in the flesh."

*IT is much to be lamented that the nature of genuine Christianity is but little understood.* An assent to the fundamental articles of our faith, and a conformity to certain rites and ceremonies, are thought sufficient grounds for concluding ourselves real Christians, notwithstanding we are plainly warned by God himself, that religion does not consist in these things, [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29). *Persons may be, and often are, very zealous advocates for the externals of religion, while they are altogether destitute of its life and power*. Such were those whom Paul calls, not the sheep of Christ, but "dogs;" not saints, but "evil-workers;" not the true circumcision, but, in a way of contempt, "the circumcision," because all their piety consisted in a zeal for the cutting of the flesh. Against such persons he thrice enjoins us to "beware;" and then contrasts with theirs the character of the true Christian.

There are three discriminating points which distinguish the true circumcision, or the true Christians, from all who are Christians only in name and profession:

***~~I. They worship God in the Spirit—~~***

Many never bow their knees before God at all. What they are, they themselves shall judge. Others observe the *form*of prayer both in public and in private; but their hearts are not engaged; nor is there any difference in their frame, whether they confess their sins, or ask for blessings, or acknowledge benefits received. All their services are without life, and without devotion.

The true Christian, on the contrary, though not always in the same frame, "worships God in the Spirit," that is, not only with the inmost affections of his soul, but through the direction and assistance of the Holy Spirit, Jude verse 20. [Romans 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.15); [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26). If we could see him in his closet before God, we would often behold him bathed in tears, and with hands and eyes lifted up to Heaven imploring mercy at the hands of God. His thanksgivings too are not an unmeaning compliment, but a heartfelt grateful acknowledgment, suited in a measure to the mercies he has received. He "pours out his soul before God, [Psalm 42:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.4). [1 Samuel 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.15)," and "stirs up himself to lay hold on God, [Isaiah 64:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.7)," and says, like Jacob, "I will not let you go, except you bless me! [Genesis 32:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.26)."

Let us examine to which of these classes we belong: and we may know infallibly what is our state before God.

***~~II. They rejoice in Christ Jesus—~~***

The world has their joys, such as they are, arising from the things of time and sense:

Some know no happiness but in lewdness and intemperance.

Others, moving either in a continual round of fashionable amusements, or in the pursuit of wealth or honor—find all their pleasure in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

Others more rationally seek their happiness in the acquisition of knowledge.

While others seem contented to move, like a horse in a mill, in the same round of daily occupation, without aiming at anything further than an exemption from trouble, and an easy passage through life.

But the true Christian, while he is alive to all the joys that are possessed by others, as far as they are pleasing to God, and profitable to his soul—has joys of a far higher nature. He has felt his need of mercy, and has found mercy through Christ Jesus. Hence the very name of "Jesus is precious to him:" and the richest gratification he can possibly enjoy is to contemplate the glory and excellency of his Beloved. He does not indeed always feel the same delight in the Savior; but his richest consolations and sublimest joys arise from this source, insomuch that all the pleasures of sense are nothing in his eyes in comparison with one hour's fellowship with the Son of God, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6). Indeed he would not wish to be happy when he is at a distance from his Lord: in such a state he would consider happiness rather a curse than a blessing. But in whatever state he is with respect to temporal things, a sight of his adorable Savior will render him completely happy, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8).

Here again let us inquire into our own experience. We need no surer test of our state than that before us. Let us examine ourselves with care, and may "the Lord give us understanding in all things!"

***~~III. They have no confidence in the flesh—~~***

The ungodly world, if in prosperity, "make gold their confidence, [Job 31:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.24)," and "trust in their uncertain riches, [1 Timothy 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17)." If, on the other hand, they are in adversity, they look no higher than to their own exertions, or than to their earthly friends to deliver them. The same creature-confidence pervades all their spiritual concerns: they "lean altogether on an arm of flesh," and trust in their own goodness or repentance to recommend them to God, and their own strength and resolution to fulfill his will.

The true Christian is the very reverse of this. We do not say that he has no bias towards these evils, for his old nature still remains within him: but his views with respect to these things are altogether altered; and, though he neglects not any means which are proper to be used, he trusts in God only to maintain his prosperity, or to restore it when he has been pleased to afflict him with any calamity.

With respect to his soul also, he has no hope but in God. To the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus he trusts for every blessing. In the sin-atoning sacrifice and prevailing intercession of Jesus he confides, as the ground of his acceptance with his reconciled God. On the all-powerful grace of Christ he relies, as that which alone can enable him to subdue his enemies, and to serve his God. Feeling that he is in himself ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved—he renounces all self-confidence, and makes Jesus his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and redemption.

Surely there can be no difficulty in ascertaining our proper character, if only we will make this point also a matter of serious self-examination.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who, according to these distinctions, must be considered as devoid of real Christianity—~~***

Remember who it is that cuts you off from the number of true Christians: it is not man, but God, even that God who will judge you in the last day according to his own word. O continue not in such a state; but seek that circumcision of the heart which, though condemned by men, shall ultimately have praise of God.

***~~2. Those who have reason from the foregoing remarks to hope that they are Christians indeed—~~***

What reason have you to bless God for the mercies that have been given to you! But remember, it is not by past experience merely you are to judge, but by the continued habit of your mind. Rest not satisfied with anything you have known; lest you "begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh." The text does not characterize the Christian by what he has done, but by what he yet does: and therefore "press forward, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto what is ahead" and "as you have received how to walk and to please God, so endeavor to abound more and more."

***~~#2152~~***

***~~THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST~~***

**[Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8)**

"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ!"

MANKIND in general are agitated by various and contending passions, while the true Christian enjoys serenity and composure: he is indeed tempted like others to gratify his corrupt nature; but he has one supreme desire which overcomes and regulates all the rest. He is compared to a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sells all that he has and buys it. Whatever stands in competition with the welfare of his soul will be renounced by him; and, with the Apostle, he will "count all things but loss for Christ." To impress this truth more deeply on our minds, we shall consider,

***~~I. What things Paul had which were gain to him—~~***

Among all the sons of men there never was any in whom so many and so great excellencies combined, as in the Apostle Paul—

In respect of *civil distinctions*, he was highly dignified by *birth*, being "a Hebrew of the Hebrews, [Philippians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.5)."

He was also eminent for *learning*, having been "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and profited above many of his equals, [Acts 22:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.3). [Galatians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.14)."

Nor was he less distinguished in respect of *moral*qualities. Such was the strictness of his principles, that he joined himself to the Pharisees, the strictest sect among the Jews, [Acts 26:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.5).

His uprightness of *conduct*was irreproachable; for he had "lived in all good conscience before God from his very youth, [Acts 23:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 23.1)."

His *zeal*also, though not according to knowledge, was peculiarly earnest; insomuch that, touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless; and he opposed the Gospel to the uttermost, because he thought it subverted the law of Moses, [Philippians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.6). [Acts 26:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9-10).

But however illustrious he was as a Jew, he was still more so as a Christian and an Apostle. His religious attainments were never equaled by any mere man. His exertions in the cause of Christ surpassed those of all the other Apostles, [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10). He also suffered more than any for the sake of the Gospel, [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28); yes, he was "in deaths often," "not counting his life dear to him, so that he might finish his course with joy."

***~~These things might well be accounted gain to him—~~***

His civil distinctions might recommend him to his countrymen, and augment his influence, [2 Corinthians 11:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.21-22). [Acts 22:25-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.25-29). And though he would not make a parade of his learning, he found it useful on some occasions. Thrice he quoted the Greek poets in confirmation of the truth: and took advantage of his knowledge of the Greek language to oppose more successfully the heathen idolatry, [Acts 17:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.23). His *moral*qualities also might well be valuable in his sight: for though no strictness of principles, uprightness of conduct, or zeal for religion, could recommend him to God—yet they were ample testimonies of the integrity of his heart.

His *religious*attainments were still more deserving estimation; for though not meritorious in the sight of God, they tended greatly to the glory of God, and the edification of the church, and were undoubted evidences of his fitness for Heaven. Well therefore might he rejoice, as he did, in the testimony of a good conscience, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12).

But he possessed something of incomparably greater value than these things, as will appear, if we inquire,

***~~II. What that was which he preferred before them—~~***

***~~The Apostle had happily attained the knowledge of Christ—~~***

A mere general *notional*knowledge of Christ would not have been very high in his esteem: that, which he possessed, was distinct and *experimental*. He saw Christ as God, equal with the Father, though appearing in the form of a servant, [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7); he beheld him sustaining various offices in the economy of redemption, and executing them for his people's good. He beheld him as the "Christ," "anointed by the Spirit to preach glad tidings to the meek;" as "Jesus" the person commissioned to "save men from their sins;" and as "the Lord" who was constituted the living Head, the Supreme Governor, and the righteous Judge of his redeemed people.

But not even this distinct knowledge would have been valued by him, if it had not also been *experimental*. The expressions following the text respecting his "winning Christ, and being found in him, and knowing him in the power of his resurrection," evidently imply that he tasted a sweetness, and felt a peculiar efficacy, in this knowledge. He found by happy experience that he had communion with Christ in his offices, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3). He saw Christ not merely as a Prophet, a Priest, or a King, but as that very Teacher who had opened his eyes; that very Lamb that had taken away his sins; that very Head, to whom he himself was vitally united, and from whom he derived all his supplies of grace and strength. Hence in speaking of Christ he calls him, "Christ Jesus my Lord."

***~~This it was which he esteemed beyond all other things—~~***

In comparison with this, his *civil distinctions*, his *moral qualities*, and even his *religions attainments*, appeared to him "as dung and dross." He clearly perceived that none of those things could ever justify him at the tribunal of God; and that, if ever he were saved, he must "be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ:" hence he accounted his former gain to be not only dung, but "loss," that is, not only useless, but prejudicial, if it diverted his eyes from Christ, or weakened his dependence upon him.

Nor did he entertain the smallest doubt respecting the justness of his views; but repeated his assertions in the strongest and most decisive terms, "yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss." Nor did his confidence proceed from inexperience; for repeating the same thing a third time, he adds, "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung."

The propriety of his judgment will be seen by considering,

***~~III. The grounds of his preference—~~***

There was an "excellency" in that knowledge that far surpassed everything else.

***~~The object of it was truly wonderful—~~***

*Who can think of the incarnate God bearing the sins of his rebellious creatures, and not stand amazed?*Who can view the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, as exhibited in the face of a dying Savior, and not confess, that "great is the mystery of godliness?" The consideration of this alone had been a very sufficient ground for his declaration in the text.

***~~The effects of it transcend all that eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived—~~***

The knowledge of this adorable Savior will comfort us under all troubles. None ever endured greater bodily trials than Paul; yet "none of them could move him; and he was exceeding joyful in all his tribulation, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24). [2 Corinthians 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.4)." The trials of his soul were far greater; yet while he was groaning under their utmost weight, a view of Christ instantly turned his mourning into thanksgivings and the voice of melody, [Romans 7:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24-25); and, on another occasion, while he was cruelly buffeted by Satan, an answer of peace from Christ enabled him to glory in his infirmities, and even to take pleasure in the most dire distresses, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

***~~Moreover, this knowledge will transform the soul into the image of God—~~***

Before his conversion, his zeal showed itself in persecuting unto death the greatest friends both of God and man: how unlike the conduct of Jesus, who died for his very enemies! But when converted to the faith, he had "continual sorrow in his heart on account of his brethren's obstinacy, and wished himself even accursed from Christ for their sake, [Romans 9:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.2-3)." He, like his Divine Master, was willing to die for his enemies, and rejoiced exceedingly in the prospect of being sacrificed for the good of the Church, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18). To what can we ascribe this change, but to the knowledge of Christ, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14); [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18). And if to that, what reason had he to prize it!

***~~Lastly, this knowledge will avail for the salvation of all who possess it—~~***

Paul, though he thought himself "alive" before his conversion, found at last that he was really "dead, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9);" but after his conversion, he was no longer dead, either in reality, or in his own apprehension: he frequently speaks with the fullest assurance respecting the safety of his state, [2 Corinthians 5:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.1-4); and teaches all who know Christ to expect with confidence a crown of righteousness in the day of judgment, 2 Timothy 4:8.

On such grounds we must not only approve the Apostle's judgment, but account it madness to differ from him.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

*All of us possess something which we account to be gain.* Some are more elevated by birth or fortune, others by education and learning: some value themselves on their moral qualities; others on their religious attainments: let us freely acknowledge the gain which may be found in these things; but let us never forget that there is one thing of infinitely greater value than all those together, and for which our gain must be accounted loss. To have a distinct experimental knowledge of Christ, to be able to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me" is of more value than ten thousand worlds! It is that, and that alone, which can ever comfort, sanctify, or save the soul. Let us then seek to know Christ and him crucified, and to "grow in the knowledge of him," until we "see him as we are seen, and know him as we are known!"

***~~#2153~~***

***~~CHRIST, GAIN TO THE BELIEVER~~***

***~~[Philippians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8-9)~~***

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

RESPECTING doctrines, as mere subjects of controversy, we need not be anxious; it is as *influential principles*that we are called to examine and maintain them: and, in this view, we cannot too "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." That which is, above all other subjects, important to the soul, demands our attention at this time: and the Apostle's zeal, in relation to it, shows with what holy jealousy we would conduct our investigation of it, and with what determination of heart we would hold fast that which shall approve itself as the truth of God. The two points to be noticed are,

***~~I. The way of salvation, as stated by the Apostle—~~***

He speaks of being "found in Christ," clothed in a righteousness not his own. Let us consider what he means.

***~~The Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out a righteousness for sinful man—~~***

He has come from Heaven for that purpose: he has assumed our nature, that he might suffer and obey for us: for us he has suffered the full penalty due to our sins; and obeyed in all respects that law which we have violated. All this he has done as our Substitute and Surety; so that if the law requires its penalties to be enforced, we can reply, that we have already sustained them in the person of our Lord. And if it requires perfect obedience to its commands, we can reply, that we have already obeyed it in the person of our Lord: so that it has no ground whereon to condemn us: on the contrary, supposing us to be "found in Christ," and to be "one with Christ," which every true believer is, we may look up to God with confidence; having a righteousness of his own appointment; a righteousness commensurate with all the demands of law and justice; a righteousness wherein we may stand before him without spot or blemish.

***~~This righteousness is to be apprehended by faith alone—~~***

In no other manner can it be apprehended. It exists not in us, but in the Lord Jesus Christ; whose it is, and by whom it is imputed to us; and who is therefore called, "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)." If it is said, that, though it is Christ's righteousness, and not ours, we yet may earn by our good works a saving interest in it; I answer, that we may as well earn salvation itself, as earn a saving interest in that righteousness whereby we are saved. The effect will be the same in either case: salvation will be of works, and not of grace; and every person who shall be saved, will have a ground of glorying in himself, as having purchased that whereby he is saved. But the Gospel salvation utterly excludes glorying, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27); and "it is by faith, on purpose that it may be by grace, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16)."

In truth, any attempt to purchase it would utterly make it void; and, however glorious it be in itself, it would profit us nothing, [Galatians 5:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2-4). The Apostle, in our text, carefully excludes all his own righteousness from bearing any part in his salvation, and declares his reliance to be only and exclusively on that righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ. We say, then, respecting this righteousness, that it is "the righteousness of God:" it is the "righteousness of God without the law:" it is "the righteousness to which both the law and the prophets bear witness:" it is "the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ: and it is unto all, and upon all, them that believe, [Romans 3:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.21-22)."

***~~All who are united to Christ by faith, shall be saved by it—~~***

By faith we are united unto Christ; and become one in law with him, even as a wife becomes one with her husband: and exactly as "he was made sin for us who knew no sin; so we, who had no righteousness of our own, are by faith made the righteousness of God in him, [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21)." There is no exception of persons: all, whether Jews or Gentiles, and whether their sins have been of greater or less enormity, shall be equally accepted, if only they believe in him: for "his blood cleanses from all sin, [1 John 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.7);" and "all who believe, shall be justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

Such being the way of salvation, as stated by the Apostle, let us notice,

***~~II. His feelings in relation to it—~~***

***~~To obtain a saving interest in the righteousness of Christ was his supreme desire—~~***

If any man who ever lived might have had a righteousness of his own, the Apostle Paul might. His conduct previous to his conversion, though mistaken, was yet as exemplary, and as strictly conformable to the dictates of his conscience, as any man's could be, verse 4-6. And, subsequent to his conversion, his whole soul was so entirely given up to his God and Savior Jesus Christ, that he was not in any respect "a whit behind the very chief Apostles." Yet, so conscious was he of the defects which accompanied his best services, that he disclaimed utterly all dependence on his own works, and desired to "be found in Christ; not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but the righteousness which was of God through faith in Christ." And why did he desire this, but because he knew that no other righteousness than that of Christ could ever justify him before God?

He was perfectly convinced of this; so convinced, that when the Apostle Peter acted in a way that was likely to bring this truth into doubt, he reproved him openly, before the whole Church! [Galatians 2:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.11-16). Nay more; so strenuous was he in vindicating this truth, that he denounced a curse even against an angel from Heaven, if one would be found ignorant or impious enough to maintain any doctrine that was opposed to it, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9). He knew that the salvation of every human being was bound up in it; and therefore he would "not give place, no, not for an hour," to any created intelligence in relation to it, [Galatians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.5).

***~~In comparison with this, he regarded all other things with the utmost contempt—~~***

All other things "he counted but dung, that he might win Christ." A stronger expression he could not have used. He not only willingly sacrificed, but held in perfect abhorrence, everything that would stand in competition with a saving interest in the Redeemer's righteousness. And he spoke not this as a hopeful man, who knew not what difference might take place in his mind, when he would be put to the trial. No; he had been brought to the test; and had actually "suffered the loss of all things," and yet counted them but dung. He had actually experienced what he was now affirming; and he gave this testimony with an assurance that would not admit of a moment's doubt. He was like a man, who, "having found the pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it;" and never regretted for an instant the sacrifice he had made.

The terms which he here uses in opposition to each other, "loss and gain," are such as may lead us to a yet more appropriate illustration; that of a ship-wrecked mariner, who as Paul himself advised, casts out the tackling, and the very food from the ship, in order to preserve the lives of those who are on board, [Acts 27:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.19); [Acts 27:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 27.38). He takes no account of that which he loses: he is intent only on his gain: and, if he may but secure safety to the crew, he is content. Thus the Apostle, having gained Christ, considered as no better than dung, all that he had parted with to secure so rich a portion.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The worldly professing Christian—~~***

What a contrast is there between the Apostle Paul and you! He counted the whole world but dung for Christ; and you count Christ himself as of no value, in comparison with the world. The things of this world you will have, whatever you may be necessitated to pay for them. Pardon of sin, peace of conscience, yes, and all prospects of eternal glory, you will sacrifice for the things of time and sense. Your own soul, and the Lord Jesus Christ, are held cheap, in comparison with some fleeting vanity. The language of your heart is, 'Let me gain pleasure, riches, honor; and then it signifies nothing what I may lose!'

Judge my brethren, whether these desires of yours can be right. Truly, either Paul must have been a wild, deluded enthusiast, or you are unworthy to "name the name of Christ." Reflect, I beseech you, before it be too late: and choose, not those "things which perish with the using," but "that good part which shall never be taken away from you."

***~~2. The self-righteous professing Christian—~~***

And what greater resemblance have you to this Holy Apostle? He utterly discarded all hope in his own righteousness, that he might be found in Christ; but you are holding fast your own righteousness, and accounting the idea of being saved by another's righteousness as a dangerous delusion. This pride of yours is harder to subdue than any corporeal lust. It was this which caused the Pharisees to reject the Savior, "They would not submit to the righteousness of God." Hence they perished, while millions of idolatrous and ungodly Gentiles embraced the Gospel. I beg you to think what you are doing; and before you determine to persist in your self-righteous views, see whether your righteousness be better than that of Paul. He had no slight ground of glorying, as a Jew: but what had he as a Christian? There he was surpassed by none: none ever did more for their Lord than he; none ever suffered more: yet could he find nothing in himself wherein to trust, and therefore he sought to be found in Christ alone. Thus also must you do: nor, if you refuse to do it, can you ever behold the face of God in peace.

***~~3. The lukewarm professing Christian—~~***

Many, alas! embrace the principles of the Gospel as principles, but never feel that personal interest in them which the Apostle did. They have suffered no loss for Christ, because they have never manifested such love to him as condemns an ignorant and unbelieving world. Had Noah never built an ark, he would never have been made such an object of derision as he was to the antediluvian world; and, if Lot had never "vexed his righteous soul with the ungodly deeds" of those who lived in Sodom, he would never have incurred, as he did, their contemptuous displeasure.

You too, if you followed the Lord fully, would find, that the offense of the cross has not ceased: but that now, as formerly, "those who are born after the flesh will persecute those who are born after the Spirit." In a word, if you valued and served the Lord Jesus Christ as the Apostle Paul did, you would surely be called to make some sacrifices for him: for "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Deceive not yourselves, my dear brethren: it is not a divided heart that Jesus will accept—you must feel "the constraining influence of his love," and be animated by it to "live to Him who died for you, and rose again." Then only will you be approved of him, when you "give yourselves wholly to him in body, soul, and spirit."

The lukewarm follower he will cast off with abhorrence, [Revelation 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16). And let me ask, Is this unreasonable? *Did he give up the glory of Heaven for you; and will you account much of any sacrifice you may be called to make for him?*Did he endure the curse of the law for you; and will you grudge to suffer anything for him? Be in earnest, then: first, to form a proper estimate of Christ; and, next, to give up everything that may stand in competition with him. So shall his righteousness be yours, and his glory be given you for an everlasting possession.

***~~#2154~~***

***~~THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION~~***

***~~[Philippians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.10)~~***

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection!"

MANY think that religion is not an object of choice, but rather of compulsion and constraint: and hence they frequently suggest to the godly, that the measure of piety to which they aspire is not necessary. But true Christians do not regard God as a task-master, standing over them with a rod; but as a Father, delighting in the happiness of his children: and they desire to act the part of duteous children, fulfilling his will to the utmost of their power. They are not satisfied with "winning Christ, and being found in him:" they would serve him, and honor him, and resemble him: and, like Paul, they desire to "know him, and the power of his resurrection."

To elucidate this truth, I will show,

***~~I. What is meant by "the power of Christ's resurrection"—~~***

As the death of Christ has an efficacy, so his resurrection also has an influence,

***~~1. On our justification—~~***

The death of Christ was not of itself sufficient. Under the law, the high-priest must not only offer sacrifice, but must take the blood of that sacrifice, and enter with it into the holy of holies, and sprinkle it there upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat, and offer incense also there: nor, until these things were done, was he authorized to deliver his blessing to the people, [Leviticus 16:11-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lev 16.11-15). Just so, the Lord Jesus must not only offer himself a sacrifice for sin; but must enter into Heaven with his own blood, there to present it, in our behalf, before his God and Father, [Hebrews 9:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.24); nor without this would his work have been complete. Hence our justification is not only ascribed to his resurrection in conjunction with his death, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25), but even in preference to his death, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34); since *it was the completion of that which by his death was only begun*.

***~~2. On our sanctification—~~***

None but the Spirit of God can sanctify the soul. But the Spirit would never have been given, if Jesus had not risen, [John 16:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7). At his ascension to Heaven, he received the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39), and received him for the express purpose of sending him down into the hearts of his people, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18). That he might begin and carry on his work in their hearts, he ascended to Heaven; as it is said, "To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living, [Romans 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.9)."

***~~3. On our exaltation to glory—~~***

If Christ had not risen, neither would we have risen, 1 Corinthians 15:21; for he burst the bands of death for us, and thereby destroyed its power to retain us under its dominion. He, in his resurrection, was "the first-fruits;" and his people will be the harvest, 1 Corinthians 15:20. While he was yet with his disciples, he pointed out to them the connection between his removal from them, and their exaltation to Heaven: "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, [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3)." In a word, "he was the Forerunner" of his people: and all of them shall follow him in their season, [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20).

Let me now proceed to show,

***~~II. What it is to "know Christ" as exercising this power—~~***

It is not a speculative knowledge that is here spoken of, but a knowledge that is *practical*and *experimental*, and that enters into the very essence of true and vital religion. To "know Christ" as the Apostle desired to know him, we must have such views of him in his *risen*, and now *living*state as shall operate,

***~~1. To confirm our faith—~~***

Certainly the proper ground of faith is God's revealed word: but an experience of that word in our own souls gives a degree of assurance that never is, or can be, attained without it. I believe, from the testimony of Scripture, that Jesus is an almighty and all-sufficient Savior. But I find, from the peace which he has infused into my soul, and the power he has given me to mortify my lusts, and from the delight which he has enabled me to feel in communion with himself—that there is a reality in the Gospel, which a mere speculative believer has no conception of. A man, who has heard men's testimony respecting the existence and influence of the sun, may be fully assured that such an orb does really exist. But the man who beholds its light, and feels its genial rays, will have a widely different conception of it. The former may argue better respecting it; but it is the latter alone who is really competent to appreciate it aright. And, in like manner, *he alone knows Christ, who knows him experimentally, by the actual enjoyment of him in his own soul*.

***~~2. To animate our hope—~~***

There is "a full assurance of hope," which he alone who knows Christ experimentally can possess. I see him dying for me; risen for me; interceding for me; and carrying on his work within me. Can I doubt his love, his power, his grace, his truth, and faithfulness? Has he done so much for me, in order to forsake me at last, and to abandon me to deeper ruin? Has he done so much for me when I was living in direct hostility to him; and will he leave me, now that I seek his face, and desire to glorify his name? No! I can trust him, and I will.

Well do I know my own sinfulness, but I know also the virtue of his sin-atoning blood. I know my weakness also: but I know also the sufficiency of his grace to save me even to the uttermost. I know, too, the treachery of my heart: but I know how sure his promise is; and that "where he has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it to the end, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." And therefore will I "hope, even against hope," and "hold fast my confidence firm unto the end."

***~~3. To sanctify and transform the soul—~~***

I see my Lord. I call to mind what he has designed in all the wonders of his love. He desires to have "a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works." Now, shall I counteract all his gracious designs? Shall I crucify him afresh, by continuing in my sins? Shall I not rather desire him to accomplish in me "all the good pleasure of his goodness;" and to "sanctify me throughout, in body, soul, and spirit?" Yes, for him will I live; and to him will I devote all the powers of my soul. There was nothing which he declined to do or suffer for me. Just so, there is nothing which, with his help, I will not do and suffer for him.

***~~Thus we see,~~***

***~~1. What a practical thing religion is—~~***

Had there been any one truth in it that was merely speculative, methinks the doctrine of the resurrection might have been supposed to come under that particular class. But it has been seen how extremely practical this doctrine is; not merely as affording ground for faith and love, but as generating in the soul all that is amiable and praiseworthy. If then, anyone objects to religion, as consisting in abstract notions, or in any peculiar tenets, let its true nature be remembered, and its intrinsic excellence be extolled.

***~~2. That, in the practice of religion, the true Christian will know no limits on this side of absolute perfection—~~***

Of the Apostle's attainments none can doubt: yet did he desire to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, as much as if he had lived an entire stranger to piety even to that very hour. And so will every true Christian, like one in a *race*, forget all the ground that he has passed, and be intent only on that which is before him: nor will he ever be content, until he is "holy as God himself is holy, and perfect as his Father who is in Heaven is perfect." Then only will he be fully "satisfied, when he shall awake up with the perfect likeness of his God! [Psalm 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 17.15)."

***~~#2155~~***

***~~HOLY AMBITION ENCOURAGED~~***

***~~[Philippians 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-15)~~***

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too, God will make clear to you."

TRUE religion affords such perfect satisfaction to the mind, that from the time we become possessed of it, we lose our relish for other things, and feel ourselves at rest, as having attained the summit of our ambition, [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35). But though we cease to hunger or thirst after the vanities of time and sense, our appetite for spiritual blessings is ever increasing: nor can the richest acquisitions content us, as long as there remains anything further to be enjoyed. This was Paul's experience. He had been apprehended and arrested, as it were, by the Lord Jesus, in order that he might be made to possess all the treasures of grace and glory: and, from that hour, he could never be satisfied with anything short of the full enjoyment of them, verse 12. And, while he cherished this holy ambition in his own bosom, he recommended it earnestly to all others.

There are, in the words before us, two things which he recommends from his own example:

***~~I. A humble sense of our present attainments—~~***

***~~Paul, though so eminent, entertained but low thoughts of himself—~~***

Never was there a man more distinguished than he, whether we consider in general his love to God, [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14). [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13); and man, [Romans 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-3). [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17), or examine the particular graces that adorned his soul:

Sympathy, [2 Corinthians 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.29);

Contentment, [Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12);

Deadness to the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14);

Zeal, [Romans 15:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.19);

Self-denial, [1 Corinthians 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.15).

He not only was not inferior to any other Apostle, 2 Corinthians 11:5; [2 Corinthians 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.11), but he labored more abundantly than they all, [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10). Yet, from an impartial view of himself, as compared with the requirements of God's law, and the example of his Divine Master, he was constrained to confess that he had not yet attained that measure either of knowledge or of holiness, which it was his duty and his privilege, to possess. This, I say, he found from an exact computation, and has recorded it for the instruction of the Church in all ages.

***~~In this respect he proposes himself to us as an example—~~***

The word "perfect," in the close of the text, is not to be understood in the strictest sense, (for then it would contradict what he had before said, verse 12,) but as signifying that degree of maturity at which the generality of Christians arrive, [1 Corinthians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.6); 1 Corinthians 14:20 and [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13). To persons of this description he says, "Be thus minded:" and surely it is impossible not to feel the propriety of the exhortation.

Let any one of us, even the best among us, compare himself with the perfect law of God, or with the spotless example of our Lord, and will he not find in himself deficiencies without number? Let him even compare himself with Paul, a man of like passions with ourselves, and will he not appear a dwarf, a very child in comparison with him? Let him examine himself with respect to every Christian grace, and see whether he does not fall very far short of that bright pattern? Well then may all of us confess, that "we have not yet apprehended that for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus."

This however is not to discourage us, but to stimulate us to,

***~~II. A diligent pursuit of higher attainments—~~***

***~~Glorious was the ardor with which the Apostle was animated in his high calling—~~***

He considered himself as "called by a reconciled God" to enter into the Christian race, and as now actually contending for the prize. Much of his ground had he already passed over; but like the racers in the Olympic games, he "forgot what was behind," and was mindful only of that which yet remained for him to do. He saw the prize in full view, and strained every nerve in order to obtain it: and the nearer he approached the goal, the more earnestly did he "press forward," desiring nothing but to "finish his course with joy." This was "the one thing which he did." Nothing else occupied his mind, nothing else was deemed worthy of one moment's attention. Nothing could, in his apprehension, be lost, if that prize were gained; nor anything gained, if that prize were lost.

***~~In this way he exhorts us also to pursue the great concerns of our souls—~~***

The same prize which was set before him is held up to us also: and we are called by God to run for it. It may be that we have both done and suffered much for God already: but we must not think of anything that is passed (except for the purpose of humbling ourselves, or of glorifying God) we must be intent only on present duty, and engage in it with all our might. To be advancing must be our constant uniform endeavor. It is "the one thing needful." As persons running in a race find no time for loitering or diversion, but distinguish themselves from mere spectators by the exertions they make; so must we manifest to all around us that we have but one pursuit, with which we are determined that nothing shall interfere, and which we will never relax until we have reached the goal.

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

***~~1. For reproof—~~***

How are they condemned who have never yet begun the Christian race! Do they expect to win the prize without running for it? This cannot be: "the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent must take it by force."

Still more are they condemned who would discourage others that are engaged in the contest. Are they "like-minded" with the Apostle, who are constantly endeavoring to dampen the ardor which they will not emulate?

Nor are they less worthy of reproof who have relaxed their diligence in the ways of God. To such Paul says, "You did run well; who has hindered you? [Galatians 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.7). Yes, inquire diligently who or what has hindered you: for you had better be stripped of all that you possess, than be impeded by it in your Christian course.

Shake off then the thick clay from your feet, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6); put aside the garment that obstructs your progress, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1); mortify the flesh that pleads for indulgence, [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.24-27); and "run with patience the race that is set before you!"

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

Some perhaps are faint, and ready almost to give up the contest. *But behold the prize!* Will not that repay your efforts? And is not the attainment of it certain, if you hold on your way, [Matthew 24:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.13). Yes more, shall not your strength be renewed, if only you wait upon your God, [Isaiah 40:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.29-31). In a few more steps you will reach the goal—and will you stop when the prize is already, as it were, in your hands? O press forward: follow the Apostle: endure to the end; and receive "the crown of glory that never fades away!"

***~~#2156~~***

***~~OF FOLLOWING GOOD EXAMPLES~~***

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

"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

**[Philippians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20)**

"But our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ!"

*Great is the force of example, either to vitiate or improve the morals of those around us.* There are few, even of real Christians, who do not, in some considerable degree, yield to its influence. The church at Philippi was, on the whole, distinguished for its attainments: yet even there, hypocrisy was found, and error had its advocates. The example of some worldly and sensual professors was likely to prove extremely injurious: while therefore the Apostle declares his grief occasioned by their misconduct, he exhorts the Church to unite in following rather the example that he had set them, and to notice with approbation all who conducted themselves agreeably to his advice.

The words that are in verses 18 and 19, being included in a parenthesis, those which are united in the text are properly connected with each other. In discoursing on them, we shall consider,

***~~I. The Apostle's example—~~***

***~~Paul considered himself as a citizen of Heaven—~~***

To be a citizen of Rome was deemed a high honor; and it was an honor which Paul possessed by virtue of his being a native of Tarsus, on which city this privilege had been conferred, [Acts 22:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.28). But Paul's name was enrolled in a more glorious city, even in Heaven itself, [Luke 10:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 10.20). He belonged to the society of saints and angels, who were united under Christ, their common head, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10); [Ephesians 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.15); and he had a communion with them in all their honors, their interests, and their enjoyments, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6).

***~~In the exercise of his rights, he had his daily converse in Heaven—~~***

As a person is daily conversant with that society to which he belongs, maintaining fellowship with them, and ordering his life according to their rules, so the Apostle lived, as it were, in Heaven: his thoughts and affections were there continually: and he was encouraging those around the throne by his constant endeavors to glorify God, and by walking habitually in the light of his countenance.

While he mentions his example, he shows us,

***~~II. The use that we should make of it—~~***

***~~We should imitate him ourselves—~~***

We are already joined to the society in Heaven, [Hebrews 12:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.22-23), provided we be united unto Christ by faith: and it behooves us to "walk worthy of our high calling." Though we are *in*the world, we are not to be *of*it. "We have here no continuing city:" we are to be in this world as pilgrims only and sojourners: we must ever consider ourselves as strangers and foreigners, who, though living on earth are indeed fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19).

If we were traveling in a foreign land, we would regard the concerns of that land rather as objects of curiosity, than as matters in which we felt any deep interest. Whereas the affairs of our own country, where our estates were situated, and our relations lived, would be regarded by us as matters of great consequence. Thus *we should be indifferent, as it were, to all the vanities of this life, and be wholly intent on our spiritual and eternal interests*. We should be maintaining communion with our Head in Heaven, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3), and growing up into a fitness for the exercises and enjoyments of the invisible world.

***~~We should also "mark those who" imitate him—~~***

All of us would unite in following his example, and emulate each other in his holy employment. And, when any make higher attainments than ourselves we should not be ashamed to imitate them: we would observe particularly what it is wherein they excel us, and how it is that they have been enabled to outstrip us. We would endeavor to encourage them; and together with them to press forward towards perfection, [Proverbs 15:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 15.24).

***~~We may make use of this subject,~~***

***~~1. For reproof—~~***

How widely do the greater part of professing Christians differ from the Apostle! Nor is it only the profane, or the formal, who are condemned by his example, but even the godly also. Let all of us then be ashamed of the low sense we entertain of our privileges, and of the coldness with which we prosecute our eternal interests. Let us seek to have our views and dispositions more conformed to those of the saints of old; that at the second coming of our Lord we may behold him both with confidence and joy! verse 20, 21 with [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28).

***~~2. For encouragement—~~***

It is not to Apostles only that these attainments are confined: they were common to many others in the Church at Philippi, who, together with the Apostle, are proposed as patterns unto us. Let none then imagine that this blessed state is beyond their reach; but rather let all aspire after it, as the one object of their ambition, verse 13, 14. Let all seek to know what a gloriously rich inheritance, [Ephesians 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.18), they are even now permitted to enjoy; and, having by faith gained access into this grace, let them stand in it, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God! [Romans 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.2).

***~~#2157~~***

***~~A WARNING TO THE EARTHLY-MINDED~~***

***~~[Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)~~***

"For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

Notwithstanding the utter extinction of vital godliness from the heart of man, through the introduction of sin into the world, there remain within him some principles of goodness, weakened indeed, but still operative and lively. Among these we may notice humanity and compassion, which often work in the bosoms of the unregenerate, so as even to shame those who are endued with a principle of true religion. There is, however, one essential difference between this disposition as it is exercised by unconverted men, and the same as cultivated by the godly: in the former, it extends no further than to the *temporal*condition of mankind; but in the latter, it terminates chiefly on their *spiritual*and eternal state.

Hence we frequently see both Prophets and Apostles expressing with tears their concern for the souls of those around them. In the passage before us, Paul was filled with the tenderest emotions of pity, while he beheld the state of many in the Christian Church, whose character and end he most pathetically describes.

In illustrating his statement, we shall consider,

***~~I. The lamentable state of some professors—~~***

James speaks of a principle that is "earthly, sensual, and devilish, [James 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.15)," and such is that, by which too many, who profess godliness, are actuated.

***~~1. "Their stomach is their god"—~~***

By "the stomach," we understand the sensual appetite, [Romans 16:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.18); and to make "a God" of it, is to yield ourselves up to its dominion. And must we go to heathen countries to find persons of this description? Are not "many" such to be found in the Christian Church? Many, alas! are addicted to *gluttony*, to *drunkenness*, and to *lust!* And among those who are free from these gross excesses, how *many are there who have no higher end of life than to consult their own ease and pleasure*, and whose labors in all their younger years, are with a view to provide these very enjoyments for them in the decline of life! What is this but to put the gratification of their sensual appetite in the place of God, whose will should be the only rule, and whose glory, the ultimate end, of all their actions?

***~~2. "They glory in their shame"—~~***

Whatever proceeds from a corrupt principle, whether it be approved or not among men, is really a ground of shame! Yet how many will boast of their vilest excesses, perhaps, too, even of crimes which they have never committed! How many will glory in the insolence with which they have treated their superiors; the resentment they have shown towards those who injured them; and the cunning they have exercised in a way of business; when, if they viewed these things aright, they would rather blush for them as vile iniquities, and mourn over them in dust and ashes!

Perhaps the Apostle had a more especial reference to the Judaizing teachers, who sought to distract the Church of God, and gloried in the number of their proselytes. Such he justly calls "dogs, and evil workers, verse 2;" and too many such there are also in this day, whose whole delight is to spread some favorite notions of their own, and who care not how many of Christ's flock they scatter and destroy, if they can but increase their own party.

Now what is this but their sin and their shame? And to glory in sin, of whatever kind that sin be, is the very spirit of Satan himself, who accounts himself happy in proportion as he can weaken the kingdom of Christ, and establish his own empire over the hearts of men.

***~~3. "They mind earthly things"—~~***

To a certain degree earthly things must be minded: but we are not to savor, to relish, or to set our affections upon them. See [Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2). This would be as contrary to the mind and will of God, as to make a god of our stomach, or to glory in our shame. Yet *how many professed Christians are there who live under the habitual influence of an earthly mind, without ever conceiving that there is anything wrong in their conduct!*In spiritual employments they experience nothing but a stupid uniformity: but in temporal concerns they have many fluctuations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, according as their prospects of success brighten, or their apprehensions of disappointment increase. Whence arises this, but from the decided preference they give to carnal and earthly things, above those which are spiritual and heavenly!

Fidelity requires, that, having delineated the conduct of these professors, we would set before you,

***~~II. The warning here given them—~~***

It is a painful task to rob any of their hopes, and to denounce the terrors of the Lord: and while we engage in it, we should, like the Apostle, proceed with the utmost tenderness and compassion. But we must, at the peril of our own souls, endeavor to undeceive those who are blinded by these delusions. Let such then know,

***~~1. Their real character—~~***

Many, who are of this description, imagine that they are friends of the Gospel, and that they have a great regard both for Christ and his people. But indeed, "they are enemies of the cross of Christ!" They withstand its influence over themselves: and obstruct its influence over others.

What was the intent of the death of Christ but to redeem us from all iniquity, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14), and to deliver us from this present evil world, [Galatians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.4), and to establish the dominion of Christ over our whole souls, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5). This was the effect it produced on others, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14); and would on us, if we thoroughly submitted to its influence. Whatever therefore we may imagine or profess, we really are enemies of the cross of Christ, as long as, in our spirit and conduct, we continue hostile to its main design.

The injury which such professors do to the cause of Christ, is incalculable. If they are openly profane, they explode religion altogether, and deter others from regarding its dictates. If they be more decent in their conduct, *they lead men, both by their conduct and example, to suppose that religion consists in mere forms or notions—instead of an entire subjugation of the soul to Christ*. In what light then must they appear before God? If "he who gathers not with Christ, is as one that scatters abroad, [Matthew 12:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.30)," much more must they, who are thus actively engaged in scattering the flock, be deemed his enemies. Yes, brethren, such persons, whatever they may profess, (with grief and sorrow I declare it,) they are no other than enemies of the cross of Christ!"

***~~2. Their certain end—~~***

It is no wonder that those who mistake their own character, would deceive themselves also with respect to the state to which they are fast approaching. They conclude that their eternal interests are safe: but God declares, that "their end is destruction!" Yes indeed! "their end must be according to their works."

Do not the Scriptures abundantly confirm this melancholy truth? "If you live after the flesh, you shall die! [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13)."

"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)."

"To be carnally-minded is death! [Romans 8:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.6)."

Dear brethren, in vain will be all pleas and pretenses at the judgment-seat of Christ. To every worker of iniquity, whether he have been an *open sensualist*, or *hypocritical professor*, it will be said, "Depart from me, I never knew you! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23)."

***~~We would add a word or two of advice—~~***

***~~1. Beware lest you rest in an external profession of religion—~~***

It is easy to adopt the creed of Christians, and to conform our lives to that standard which generally reigns in the world. But*it is no easy matter to be a consistent Christian*. *To maintain an uniform course of self-denial, and of deadness to earthly things, and to glory only in the Lord, these are hard lessons!* Yet nothing less than this will prove us Christians indeed. It is not by our creed, or our professions, that we shall be judged; but by our "walk." By that therefore we must judge ourselves, if we would not be deceived to our eternal ruin.

***~~2. Be not offended with the Gospel on account of any misconduct in its professors—~~***

There were some even in the Apostles' days who "walked" unworthy of their high and holy calling; yes, there were "many" But was the Gospel to be blamed for this? As for those who gave the occasion of offense, it was to them a ground of aggravated condemnation: but the Gospel itself was not a whit less "worthy of all acceptance." So at this day, whatever the conduct of any professors of godliness may be, the Gospel which we preach is the "wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation" to all those who sincerely embrace it. Instead therefore of being offended at it ourselves on account of the misconduct of others, let us study to adorn and recommend it by a consistent "walk" and a heavenly conduct.

***~~3. Watch over one another with care and tenderness—~~***

None are at liberty to say, "Am I my brother's keeper? [Genesis 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 4.9)." We all should feel a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures: and especially when we behold those who profess to have the same faith and hope with ourselves, manifesting by their conduct the delusion of their minds, we would weep over them, and, with a mixture of fidelity and compassion, declare to them their danger. We are expressly told to "exhort one another daily, while it is called today, [Hebrews 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.13);" and though we shall not always give satisfaction to the persons whom we warn—yet shall we really perform towards them the kindest office, and perhaps save them from the eternal destruction to which they were hastening! Then shall we have reason to rejoice over them, as they also will have to bless God for us, to all eternity.

***~~#2158~~***

***~~STEADFASTNESS IN GOD~~***

**[Philippians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.1)**

"Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"

PAUL was a man of feeling, a man of love. He felt for all: for those whom he saw perishing in sin, he would willingly have endured all that men or devils could inflict, if only it might be instrumental to their salvation, [Romans 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.3). For those who belonged to Christ, even though they had never seen his face in the flesh, he had great conflicts, striving if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare. But towards those who had been converted by his ministry, he felt as a father towards his children: he could say, "God can testify how greatly I long after you all in the affections of Jesus Christ, [Philippians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.8)."

To such is this epistle addressed; as indeed the words of our text clearly evince. Such an accumulation of tender expressions can scarcely be found in the same space in all the Book of God. But what is the drift of them all? Why does he so labor to convince the Philippians of his love, and to conciliate their regards to him? it was, that they might be stirred up to give the more earnest heed to his exhortations, and to "stand fast in the Lord."

To be "in the Lord" is the character of every believer: he is united unto Christ by faith, and is engrafted into him as a branch of the living vine. But our blessed Lord cautions us again and again to "abide in him," and warns us against the danger of separation from him, [John 15:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.1-6). In like manner we are frequently exhorted to "stand fast in the Lord;" and so to continue in the faith grounded and settled, that we may not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel."

To you then we would now address the exhortation, and say,

***~~I. Stand fast in your allegiance to him—~~***

***~~Many things will conspire to draw you away from Christ—~~***

The world, with its vanities on the one hand, and its terrors on the other, will assault you continually.

The flesh also will operate to bring you into subjection to all its basest lusts.

Nor will the devil be idle: he, with all his confederate hosts, will strive, by innumerable wiles and temptations, either to subvert your principles, or to vitiate your practice.

It is a *warfare* into which you are brought, when once you enlist under the banners of Christ; and you must expect all manner of conflicts to your dying hour.

***~~But you must be steadfast in your adherence to him—~~***

You must be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never cease to fight until you have obtained the victory. Neither hopes nor fears, neither joys nor sorrows, must be allowed to alienate you from him, or to dampen your zeal in his service. True it is that the Lord gives you many great and precious promises, that he will keep you, and that nothing shall ever separate you from his love, [Romans 8:35-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.35-39). But this is not to encourage laziness; but rather to make you more earnest in your application to him for protection and support.

With the example of *Demas*before you, you should never cease to fear, lest you also should "fall from your own steadfastness, [2 Peter 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17)," and "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, 2 Corinthians 11:3." Aware of your danger, you must "fight the good fight of faith," and "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." "You must be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain the crown of life!"

***~~II. Stand fast in your dependence on him—~~***

***~~From this also you are in danger of being drawn—~~***

There is in us a continual proneness to self-confidence and self-dependence. We are ever ready to lean to:

our own *understanding*to guide us,

our own *righteousness*to justify us,

our own *strength*to preserve us.

It is a great matter to have the soul brought to a simple reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ for everything.

***~~But we must live altogether by faith in Christ—~~***

He is "Head over all things to his Church," and has all fullness of blessings treasured up in him for our use, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23). [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). "He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;" and from him must we receive them all, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16), that in, and by, and for all, His name may be glorified, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25). Nor must anything be allowed to weaken.

***~~III. Stand fast in your expectation of his future advent—~~***

To that day there is a particular reference in the preceding context, [Philippians 3:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.20-21).

***~~We are apt to lose sight of that solemn day—~~***

This is evident, from the remissness and negligence with which the things of eternity are pursued. Could we be dull and slothful with that day before our eyes? Could the allurements or terrors of the world have any influence upon our hearts, if we knew and saw that the Judge was at the door?

***~~But we must stand continually in a state of preparation for it—~~***

To wait for Christ's second coming is the habit of mind to which every believer is brought, [1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.9-10); and in proportion as it is formed in the mind, is the progress which we have made in the Divine life, [1 Corinthians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.7). We should not give way to sloth, like the foolish virgins; but have "our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and ourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lord." We should look forward with a holy longing for that day, as the termination of all our conflicts, and the consummation of all our joys, [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13). [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12); and comfort ourselves with the assured expectation that then we shall be forever with the Lord, [1 Thessalonians 4:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.17-18). With that period before our eyes, we shall "be diligent to be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless, [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14)."

Permit me, in conclusion, to urge this matter, after the example of the Apostle in my text.

***~~#2159~~***

***~~CHRISTIAN MODERATION~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.5)~~***

"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

TO lay the foundation of a sinner's hope, is the first duty of a minister: but he must proceed to raise the superstructure also, even such a *practice*as the Gospel is intended ultimately to produce. The Apostle doubtless felt it a privilege to insist on joy in the Lord, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice:" but he felt no less the importance of inculcating the duty of moderation with respect to all the things of time and sense; since without that it would be impossible for anyone to maintain that high exercise of mind which joy in the Lord imports.

It is by a conformity to this latter precept, no less than by his obedience to the former, that the true Christian will be distinguished. In fact, this precept enters very deeply into the divine life: and it is only in proportion as its influence is exhibited in our lives, that we have any satisfactory evidence of our conversion to God.

That it may operate effectually on our hearts, let us consider the two parts of which it consists;

***~~I. The duty enjoined—~~***

The word which we translate "moderation," imports such a kind of meekness and gentleness as results from *an indifference to the world, and a superiority to all the things of time and sense*. Perhaps our language does not contain any word of precisely the same import: but the Apostle's meaning is sufficiently conveyed by the term that is here used. We should have a calm composed state of mind in reference to all things here below.

***~~1. We are to maintain a constant moderation in~~***

***~~our hopes and fears—~~***

We are apt to magnify the importance of approaching events, and to have our feelings agitated by prospective good or evil, far beyond what they would be by the actual existence of the things foreseen. Good is regarded by us without its manifold circumstances of alloy; and evil without its attendant consolations. In reality, as it is something future that is the mainspring of action to the whole world, so it is by anticipation, rather than by actual experience, that the happiness of mankind is chiefly affected. We do not say this in relation to things *spiritual*and *eternal*; for in reference to them the very reverse is true: *the circumstance of their being future and invisible diminishes, and almost destroys their influence upon the mind*. But in reference to things of a temporal nature it is so: upon them our imagination exerts all its energies: it paints them in colors of the liveliest or deepest hue; and draws from them by far the greatest portion of its pleasures or its pains.

The man whose ambition is fired by prospects of distinction, the heir who looks forward with uncertainty to the possession of an inheritance, the lover who seeks to be assured of a reciprocity in the object of his affections—what pictures do these persons draw of happiness, if they shall attain, or of misery, if they shall loses the object of their desire!

But such extravagant feelings ill become the Christian; *his desires should be curbed by a sense of the vanity of all earthly things, and their utter insufficiency to make us happy*. He should commit himself, and all that pertains to him, to the disposal of an all-wise Providence: and leave it to God "to give, or to take away," as he shall see fit; prepared in either case to bless and glorify him for the dispensation. In a word, he should "be without anxiety," "casting all his care on God who cares for him." This lesson our blessed Savior teaches us in his Sermon on the Mount, [Matthew 6:25-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.25-34); and to have a practical experience of it in our souls is one of the highest attainments of the Christian.

***~~2. We are to maintain a constant moderation in~~***

***~~our joys and sorrows—~~***

Though it is true, that the mass of mankind are chiefly influenced by what is future—yet there are circumstances wherein a few give up themselves altogether to their present desires. The voluptuary imagines that he cannot drink too deep of the cup of pleasure; and the mourner, that he cannot yield too much to the anguish of his mind. Both are alike deaf to good advice: the one refuses to be counseled; the other, to be comforted.

But "moderation" is the frame which best befits the Christian. He is not insensible to the feelings of humanity; nor is he forbidden to rejoice or grieve, according as the one or other of these emotions is suited to his state. But an evenness of mind is that which he would cultivate under all circumstances: he would not allow himself to be too much elevated or depressed by present things. His joy would be in God: his sorrows would be chiefly called forth by his own short-comings and defects: and he would be so filled with a sense of the infinite importance of things eternal, as to rise superior to all the vanities of this lower world. Paul, in a few verses after the text, informs us how he was affected by the changes which he experienced: "I have learned," says he, "in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need, verse 11, 12." Thus it should be with us also: we should be like men of another world, mere pilgrims and sojourners here; thankful for the accommodations which we meet with on the road; and not cast down, if we find some inconveniences; but mainly intent on our journey to a better country, and studious to improve all present circumstances so as most to advance us in our fitness for the heavenly inheritance.

***~~3. We are to maintain a constant moderation in~~***

***~~our spirit and conduct—~~***

There is in mankind at large, a very undue degree of confidence, both as to the opinions they embrace, and the line of conduct which they pursue. Everyone is ready to imagine himself infallible, and to account all who differ from him to be deceived. Hence arises, in the generality, a vehemence in asserting their own opinions, and an intolerance towards those who differ from them. But this disposition of mind must be studiously avoided by every true Christian. There should be in the whole of our opinions and demeanor, a diffidence which inclines us to suspect ourselves, and a candor which disposes us to make all due allowance for others. Doubtless it befits us to be thoroughly persuaded in our own minds, and to act agreeably to that persuasion: but still *we should allow to others the same liberty which we claim for ourselves, and be content that others should think and judge for themselves, without desiring to impose upon them any restrictions of our own*.

How happy would it have been for the Christian world, if such moderation had obtained in the Church, from the period of its first establishment in the apostolic age! But man is a tyrant, and loves to give law to his fellow-men. Few are disposed to distinguish aright between things *essential*, and things *indifferent*. If it were said to them that contrarieties may both be right, it would appear an inexplicable paradox. But so it is, and so it is declared by God himself to be, in many things which have most divided men, and called forth against each other their bitterest invectives. The disputes about observing days, or eating things offered to idols—how violent they were in the apostolic age! How severely did the weak condemn the strong! And how acrimoniously did the strong despise the weak! Yet both the one and the other, so far as they acted unto the Lord, were accepted of him, whether they exercised, or forbore to exercise, the liberty which they possessed, [Romans 14:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.1-6).

The same thing at this moment prevails among the various denominations of Christians throughout the world. It were difficult to enumerate them all; yet all are as confident of their own exclusive opinions and habits, as if they had a special revelation from Heaven that they alone were right: and the very idea of a unity of action among them, even in things wherein they are all agreed, is by many reprobated as an unfitting indifference towards their own peculiar party.

But is this the "moderation," that is productive of meekness, and gentleness, and love? No! it is a spirit most contrary to real Christianity, and most studiously to be shunned by all who would adorn their Christian profession. The true temper to be cultivated, is that of the Apostle Paul, who, "though he was free from all, became the servant of all, that he might gain the more, [1 Corinthians 9:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19-22)."

Such is the duty here enjoined. Let us now consider,

***~~II. The argument with which it is enforced—~~***

The nearness of death and judgment is a common argument with the Apostles, in support of their various exhortations: and it is fitly applied on this occasion. For we may well be "moderate," in relation to all earthly things, when we consider how speedily the Lord is coming:

***~~1. To terminate all the things of time and sense—~~***

Whatever we have here below, it is but of short duration: whether we are visited with comforts or afflictions, they are all both light and momentary, and therefore unworthy of any serious regard. Let anyone look back upon his past life, and see how transient have been both his pleasures and his pains: they are all passed away like a dream; and little remains of them but the bare remembrance that they once existed. Shall we then allow our minds to be so affected with earthly vanities, as if they were to endure for ever? No; *we should sit loose to them, not elated by the enjoyment of them, nor depressed by their loss.*This is what we are taught by infallible authority: "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

***~~2. To assign to each that portion which his peculiar case requires—~~***

The end for which God sends to us a diversity of dispensations is, that we may improve them all for the good of our souls. Our improvement of the various talents committed to us will be particularly inquired into, and form the ground of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. To pass that sentence, our Lord is just ready to come: and therefore the only thing which ought materially to affect us would be, not so much the quality of the dispensations, as the *improvement*that we make of them.

Look, for instance, at the Rich Man and Lazarus: how little remains to them of the comforts or sorrows which they experienced on earth!

***~~What is the rich man the better for all his sumptuous fare?~~***

***~~What is the poor man the worse for all his poverty and want?~~***

But the use which they made of their respective dispensations, that is now the only thing worth a thought.

So it will soon be with us: the things which here appeared so important, will have altogether vanished away, and nothing will remain but responsibility for the improvement of them. I say then to all, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth!" And in the prospect of your Lord's second advent to judge the world, be moderate in relation to all present things, whether pleasing or afflictive, 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, and let it be your one concern to "be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless, [1 Peter 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.7) and [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14)."

Let your moderation too be so constant and abiding, that it may "be known unto all men." True it is, that moderation is not of itself calculated to attract notice: it is, in its very nature, unobtrusive and retired. But where it so prevails as to regulate the heart and life, it of necessity diffuses a holy light around us, and serves, by the contrast it exhibits, to gain the admiration of the world. Men gaze and are astonished, when they see we are not under the power of earthly things, as others are: and they are constrained on such occasions to confess the wisdom and excellence of our ways. Thus then let our moderation operate under all circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse: and then shall the efficacy of divine grace be acknowledged, and "God shall be glorified in us."

***~~#2160~~***

***~~A DISSUASIVE FROM ANXIETY~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7)~~***

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

MAN is a prospective creature: he is able to look into futurity; and to give, as it were, a present existence to future things. Indeed, *it is from anticipation that his greatest joys and sorrows flow*. This faculty of foresight is that which eminently distinguishes him above the rest of the creation. Other creatures equal him in actual enjoyment; but he alone can overleap thousands of intervening years, and derive pleasure or pain from the contemplation of distant events. It is to this faculty that the Scriptures are principally addressed. They set before us the final outcome of present things; and declare, that our conduct in this life shall meet with a suitable recompense in the eternal world. Thus, by the *hope of good*and the *fear of evil*, they stimulate us to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life.

But though this power is capable of being turned to such advantage, yet, through the corruption of our hearts, it is too generally abused. Men look only at things visible and temporal, instead of looking also at things invisible and eternal. Moreover, their expectations of future good are generally too hopeful; and their apprehensions of future evil weigh more upon their spirits than the occasion requires. Hence arises in their minds an excessive "anxiety," which it is the design of Christianity to counteract.

In the words which we have just read, we have,

***~~I. A dissuasive from anxiety—~~***

Anxiety; which, as far as it prevails, argues a state of mind that is injurious to ourselves, and displeasing to God.

The great*occasions of anxiety*may be reduced to three;

***~~1. Some good desired—~~***

Men, in different situations of life, have their hearts set upon such things, as may possibly be attained by them, and such as they imagine will conduce greatly to their happiness. Some are eagerly pressing forward to the attainment of *honor*: others are insatiable in their thirst for *gain*. Some are altogether wrapped up in an idolatrous attachment to a *fellow-creature*; others are disquieted, like Rachel, [Genesis 30:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 30.1), and Hannah, [1 Samuel 1:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 1.5-10), because they are disappointed in the hopes of a family.

But all such anxieties are sinful. We may desire the good things of this life: but our desire must be subordinated to the will of God: and, while we use the proper means of attaining our wishes, we must use them with an entire submission to the disposals of his Providence.

***~~2. Some evil dreaded—~~***

Evils foreboded, are often more painful than when actually endured. They frequently press with such a weight upon the mind, as to incapacitate men for the exertions which would serve at least to mitigate their trials, if not altogether to avert them. For instance, men are sometimes so overcome with the apprehensions of a heavy loss, that they are unable to prosecute with attention their proper business, whereby the loss, if sustained, might be in time retrieved. And it is no uncommon thing, to find men sacrificing their honor, their conscience, yes, their very hopes of salvation, in order to avert some impending calamity.

But it would not be thus, if we *considered everything, even "the falling of a sparrow," as regulated by an all-wise God*. We might endeavor with propriety to prevent an evil; but we would never be so intimidated by its approach, as to be driven from our dependence on God, or induced to violate our duty to him.

***~~3. Some trouble felt—~~***

When trouble is heavy or accumulated, whether it be from disease in our persons, or embarrassment in our circumstances, or the loss of some dear relative, how ready are we to give ourselves up to sorrow, as if our wound were incurable, and our misery irremediable! The instances are many, wherein men are so overwhelmed by their afflictions, as to have their intellects impaired, and to be reduced to a state of mental derangement. Yes, even worse effects than these are sometimes produced by trouble: for *the unhappy sufferers take refuge in suicide; and plunge their souls into Hell*,*to rid themselves of their temporal distresses*.

We are not forbidden to give way to grief. The Savior himself wept at the tomb of his friend. But are there to be no bounds to grief? Should not our sorrow be moderated by the consideration, that *the cup is put into our hands by a gracious Father, and that, if drunk in submission to his will, it shall be sanctified to our eternal good?*Such excessive "sorrow" is prohibited in the text; and well it may be; since "nothing" can warrant it, and its operation is so injurious.

While the Apostle thus dissuades us from anxiety, he prescribes,

***~~II. An antidote against it—~~***

***~~Prayer is no less our privilege than it is our duty—~~***

God is ever ready to hear the prayers of his people; and he expects that we would "by prayer and supplication make our requests known to him." Not that he needs to be informed by us; for "he knows our necessities before we ask, [Matthew 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.8);" but we ought to specify our wants, in order the more deeply to impress a consciousness of them on our own minds, and to make us duly sensible of our dependence on him, and of our obligation to him when our prayers are answered. On all occasions we have recourse to prayer: "In everything we should make our requests to God;" *in doubt, for direction*, (for he will direct our paths, [Psalm 25:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.9). [Isaiah 30:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 30.21).); *in difficulties, for support*, (for he will give grace sufficient for us, [James 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.6). [2 Corinthians 9:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.8); [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9).); and *in wants, for supply*, (for he has engaged that we shall want no manner of thing that is good [Psalm 34:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 34.9-10). [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33).). Nothing is so great, but that he is ready to bestow it; nothing is so small, but we need to ask it at his hands.

But, together with our prayers, we would always offer also thanksgivings. Our troubles are always mixed with mercies, for which we would pay unto our God a tribute of praise. A living man can have no cause to complain, [Lamentations 3:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Lam 3.39). *While we are out of Hell, our troubles must be infinitely less than our deserts*! We would therefore approach our God with gratitude for mercies received, and with a dependence on him for those we stand in need of.

***~~This would be an effectual antidote for excessive anxiety—~~***

If we commune only with a fellow-creature, we find some relief: but if we go to our God, he will enable us to leave ourselves to his gracious disposal, and to "cast our burden upon him."

Our *desires*will be weakened by a submission to his will;

our *fears*will be allayed by a view of his providence; and

our *troubles*be mitigated by the consolations of his Spirit.

This part of our subject is more fully opened by,

***~~III. A special commendation of this antidote—~~***

***~~By anxiety "our heart and mind" is overwhelmed—~~***

We have before noticed the depression of spirit which results from excessive anxiety: and there is but too much reason to believe, that many really die of a broken heart. But where the effect produced by troubles is not so great—yet the mind is dissipated by them; and the thoughts are distracted, so that we cannot exercise them upon other objects, or even fix them in prayer before God.

***~~But by means of prayer, our hearts and minds shall be kept in peace—~~***

None but those who have experienced it, can conceive what peace flows into the soul, when we are enabled to commit our ways to God. The heart that was agitated, becomes serene; and the thoughts that were distracted, become composed. Yes, an inexpressible sweetness pervades the whole man, and turns his sorrows into an occasion of joy, [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.7-10). "The peace of God," thus infused into the soul, "keeps," as in a garrison, both "the heart and mind;" so that if trouble seeks to invade us, it can make no impression: not all the *good*that can be desired, nor all the *evil*that can be dreaded, nor all the *trouble*that can be felt—will be able to turn us from our God, or to retard our progress towards Heaven.

This blessing comes to us "through Christ Jesus." It is for his sake that our prayers are accepted: it is through him that peace is communicated to us in answer to them: and it is through his agency upon our souls, that this peace becomes a defense against the incursions of anxiety. In short, from Christ Jesus this antidote derives its efficacy; and through him it shall be effectual for the ends for which it is recommended in the text.

***~~We cannot conclude without observing,~~***

***~~1. How genuine religion contributes to men's present happiness!~~***

Perhaps "anxiety" is a source of more trouble than all other thing's together. Yet this is taken away, in proportion as we devote ourselves to God. It is true, genuine religion brings with it, if we may so speak, its peculiar sorrows: (not that they spring from religion, but from sin: yet in our fallen state, they certainly are attendant on the exercise of religion.) But godly sorrow is beneficial, while "the sorrow of the world works death, [2 Corinthians 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.10)." And, if we live near to God in prayer and praise, we shall be freed from the disquietudes which harass and distress the whole world beside; and shall dwell as in a haven of peace, while others are tossed to and fro, and are "at their wit's end," upon tempestuous billows. "Commit your works unto the Lord," says Solomon, "and your thoughts (not your ways only, but your thoughts, the most fluctuating and ungovernable of all things) shall be established, [Proverbs 16:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 16.3)."

***~~2. What enemies to themselves are those who live in the neglect of prayer!~~***

If men desired no more than present happiness, they ought to be constant at the throne of grace; since it is there alone that they can get rid of their burdens, or obtain peace unto their souls. But the joys and sorrows of men are not confined to this life: they follow us into the eternal world, and abide with us forever: and that which is the appointed means of present blessings, is also the only possible means of everlasting happiness.

The burden of guilt which lies upon us, can never be removed, but by prayer. Peace with God can never be obtained, but by prayer. And those who will not pray, voluntarily bind their own sins upon them, and reject the offered mercies of their God. Think, you prayerless people, how your conduct will appear to you at the day of judgment: "Had I prayed, my sins had been forgiven: had I prayed, I had now been happy beyond all the powers of language to express: but the time is past: prayer will not avail me now: my weeping will be fruitless; my wailing irremediable; my gnashing of teeth eternal."

O that we might all awake from our slumbers! O that we might "arise, and call upon our God!" Then would we understand the efficacy of prayer, and experience its benefits both in time and in eternity.

***~~#2161~~***

***~~THE EXTENT OF A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8)~~***

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is virtuous or praiseworthy--think about such things!"

*THE scope and tendency of Christianity is to ennoble the mind of man, and to restore him to his primitive dignity.*If we could frame to ourselves a just idea of what Adam was, when he came out of his Maker's hands, we would see exactly the spirit and conduct to which we are to be reduced by the Gospel. The *doctrines*of our holy religion, as excellent as they are, are of no value any further than they produce this blessed effect. They point out the way in which this change is to be wrought, and supply the only motives that can operate upon us with sufficient weight. In this view they are invariably proposed by the inspired writers, who, having stated them in their epistles, always call our attention to the practical improvement of them.

In the exhortation before us we may notice,

***~~I. The extent of a Christian's duty—~~***

We are at no loss to arrange the particular duties that are here enjoined, since the Apostle himself distributes them into classes:

***~~1. Things "virtuous"—~~***

Among these "truth" is the first in nature and importance; since, without it, all the bands of society would be dissolved, as there would be no such thing as confidence between man and man. Of such consequence is this esteemed in the world, that no virtues, however eminent, can supply the lack of it, or render a man respectable, that is regardless of it. And so necessary is it in the eyes of God, that he will banish from him with abhorrence all who willfully violate its dictates, [Proverbs 6:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 6.16-17). [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8); [Revelation 22:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.15); and admit those only to his presence whose adherence to truth is strict and uniform [Psalm 15:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 15.2). This therefore is in the first place to be rigidly adhered to, especially by those who are members of Christ's mystical body, [Ephesians 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.25). It is not indeed necessary, nor would it be proper, on every occasion, to declare all that we know: but we must on no account affirm, or insinuate, what is contrary to truth, either with a view to parade or to exculpate ourselves, or for the purpose of incriminating or exalting another. Every species and degree of falsehood should be scrupulously avoided; and every word we utter should bear the stamp of simplicity and godly sincerity.

Next to this, and inseparably connected with it, is "justice". A Christian is to know but one rule of conduct: he is, in all his fellowship with men, to do as he would be done unto; that is, to act towards others, as he, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards him. To be guilty of fraud in a way of business, or in withholding just debts, or in evading taxes, or putting off base coin, or in any other way whatever, is as inconsistent with the Christian character as adultery or murder!

Whatever specious pretexts an ungodly world have invented for the justifying of fraud, no one of us approves of it when it is exercised towards himself; nor will God ever approve of it, however men may extenuate or excuse it. His word to every one of us is, "That which is altogether just shall you follow, that you may live, [Deuteronomy 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 16.20)." And "he knows how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, [2 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.9)."

Besides these virtues which have respect to our words and actions, there is one that extends to our very thoughts, and that is no less necessary to be cultivated by us than either of the foregoing, namely, "purity" None are so ignorant as not to know, that they ought to restrain their passions, and have them in subjection. But it is not sufficient for a Christian to refrain from open acts of impurity; he must learn to mortify his inward desires: he is to "keep his vessel in holiness and honor; not in the lusts of impurity, like those who know not God, [1 Thessalonians 4:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.4-5)." He is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore bound to harbor no thought that may defile that temple, no desire that may grieve his Divine inhabitants, [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.16-17); [1 Corinthians 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19). In all his words, and looks, and thoughts, he would "be as pure as God is pure, and as holy as God is holy, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3) and [1 Peter 1:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.14-16)."

***~~2. Things "praiseworthy"—~~***

The fore-mentioned duties are so essential to the Christian character, that any considerable and habitual violation of them is utterly inconsistent with it. There are other duties equally necessary to be observed, but which, from the weakness of our nature, and the imperfection of our attainments, admit of greater deviations without impeaching our sincerity before God.

Among these, the things which are "honest," that is, grave, venerable, decorous, first demand our attention. A Christian would consider what becomes his age and station as a man, and his character as a disciple of Christ. *It is disgusting when people professing godliness are vying with the ungodly world in dress, and show, and vain parade; in a levity of conduct; in a fondness for vain amusements.*

There is a gravity that befits the "man of God," who has engaged to walk in his Redeemer's steps. Not that he needs to banish mirth, if it is innocent in its nature, and moderate in its degree. Nor need the person of opulence to accommodate himself to the habits of a peasant in his style of living: but there is a *moderation*that he would carefully observe, a limit suited to his character, a bound which he would never transgress. Compare [Ephesians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.4). [1 Timothy 2:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.9-10). [1 Peter 3:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.2-4).

Whatever things are "lovely," are also highly deserving the Christian's regard. There is a courtesy, a meekness, a gentleness, an affability, a modesty; in a word, an urbanity of manners, which is exceeding amiable, and which conciliates the esteem of all who behold it; this, in opposition to rudeness, and an inattention to the feelings of others, should be cultivated by all Christians.

A readiness also to sympathize with others in their distress, and to condescend to the basest offices for their comfort and relief, and a delight in performing all the offices of love—how lovely does this appear, how worthy the pursuit of all that would honor God!

To this also may be added a candor in judging, a patience in enduring, a tenderness in forgiving, a liberality in bestowing; an assemblage of such graces as these is the brightest ornament of a child of God! And, as we all admire them when exemplified in others, we should make it our daily study to illustrate them in our own conduct.

Further still, there are many things that are "of good report," in which also it should be our ambition to excel. A noble unselfishness of mind, that rises superior to all selfish considerations, and consults the public good, is an attainment which the heathen themselves accounted most truly honorable. With this we may rank a nobleness in the ends which we seek to accomplish a wisdom in the means whereby we labor to effect our purpose, a discretion in the manner of employing those means, a due consideration of all circumstances of time and place, a willingness to yield in things indifferent, and a firmness in maintaining what we consider to be right and necessary. A happy combination of these will not fail to exalt a character in the eyes of men, and to procure us respect from those who know how to appreciate such rare endowments. These therefore, with whatever else ensures to men a reputation for magnanimity, or goodness of heart, (provided it be good and proper in itself) we should pursue with ardor, and practice with constancy.

Passing over many other excellencies, such as diligence, contentment, friendship, gratitude, with numberless others to which the Christian's duty extends, let us proceed to notice,

***~~II. The importance of it—~~***

The manner in which the Apostle inculcates these things very strongly marks his sense, at least, of their importance. His distinct enumeration of so many things, his comprehending of them all a second time under the extensive description of things virtuous and laudable; and lastly, the energetic manner in which he recommends them to our attention and regard—all prove, that he was extremely solicitous to impress our minds with a sense of our duty, and to secure to his exhortation the attention it deserves.

***~~Let us then consider how important the observance of our duty in these respects is,~~***

***~~1. To ourselves—~~***

We have no better test of our sincerity before God than this. Our having embraced new tenets, however just those tenets may be, will not prove that our hearts are right with God: nor will an outward reformation of our conduct suffice to establish our pretensions to true conversion. There must be a uniformity and consistency in our endeavors to serve God: there must be no virtues so small, as to seem unworthy of our attention, or so great, as to discourage us in the pursuit of them. We must never think we have attained anything, as long as there remains anything which we have not attained, [Philippians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-15).

There is nothing that can more conduce to our present happiness than this. *Self-government, next to the immediate enjoyment of the Divine presence, is the sublimest source of happiness in this world.*Let anything that comes under the description before mentioned, be considered in all its bearings and effects, and it will be found highly conducive to the comfort of our own minds, and to the happiness of all around us. Abstracted from the consideration of any future recompense, "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)."

Moreover it tends to increase in our souls a fitness for Heaven. By virtuous actions we attain virtuous habits; and by virtuous habits a conformity to God's image: and our conformity to God in holiness is that which alone constitutes our fitness for glory. Should we not therefore be endeavoring daily to get every lineament of the Divine image engraved on our souls? Should not the hope of growing up into Christ's likeness be an incentive to continual and increased exertions in the way of duty? Need we, or can we have, any greater stimulus than this?

***~~2. To the Church—~~***

By this alone can we silence the objections of her adversaries. In every age the adversaries have vented their calumnies against the Church, as though all her members were hypocrites, and their seeming piety were a cloak, for some hidden abominations. They have also represented her doctrines as visionary and enthusiastic, yes, as calculated to subvert the foundations of morality, and to open the floodgates of licentiousness. But when they see a holy and consistent conduct, the joint effect of piety and wisdom, they are constrained to shut their mouths, and to confess that God is truly with us! [1 Peter 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.12); [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15); [1 Peter 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.16).

By this also do all her members contribute greatly to their mutual edification and endearment. It is with Christ's mystical body as it is with our natural bodies: when every member performs its proper office, and supplies its proper nutriment, all the parts are kept in activity and vigor, and the whole is confirmed and strengthened, [Ephesians 4:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.11-13); [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16); [Ephesians 4:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.29). Let any of the graces before mentioned be neglected, and disunion will proportionably ensue. Moreover, those members that are most defective in their duty, will most discover a consequent languor and decay. Whereas, the members that are indefatigable in the exercise of these graces, will "make their profiting to appear," and be enabled to withstand the assaults of all their enemies, [2 Peter 1:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.5-11). The former will be a source of trouble and disquietude to the Church; the latter will be a source of harmony and peace.

***~~3. To the world around us—~~***

There is nothing else so likely to fix conviction on the minds of sinners. *The ungodly world will not learn religion from the Bible*; nor will listen to it as enforced in the discourses of God's faithful ministers. But *they cannot shut their eyes against the light of a holy life.*Paul's epistles are known and read of few: but godly men are "the epistles of Christ, known and read of all men! [2 Corinthians 3:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.2-3);" and many who would not regard the written word, have been won by their godly conduct, [1 Peter 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1-2).

On the other hand, *there is nothing that hardens sinners so much as the inconsistent conduct in the professors of religion*. If a saint falls through temptation, or a hypocrite discovers his hypocrisy; instantly the world cry out, "There, there, so would we have it! [Psalm 35:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.19); [Psalm 35:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 35.25)." Nor are they satisfied with condemning the individual offenders; they immediately reflect on the whole body of Christians as hypocrites: yes, and blaspheme that adorable Savior whose religion they profess, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2). [Romans 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.24). [1 Timothy 6:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.1). Thus do they confirm their prejudices against the truth, and justify themselves in their rejection of the Gospel. If then the rescuing of our fellow-creatures from perdition, or the contributing to involve them in it, be so connected with our conduct, of what importance must it be so to conduct ourselves, that we may adorn our holy profession, and recommend the Gospel to their favorable acceptance!

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

"Think then upon these things."

Think of their *nature*, that you may be apprised of their extent.

Think of their *obligation*, that you may be aware of their importance.

Think of their *difficulty*, that you may obtain help from your God.

Think of their *excellency*, that you may be stirred up to abound in them.

Think of their *effects*on the world around you, that you may make your light to shine before men, and that others, beholding it, may glorify your Father that is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16).

Instead of this application, the following may be profitably used:

1. For the humbling of your souls.

2. For the endearing of the Gospel to you.

3. And for the regulating of your whole spirit and conduct.

***~~1. For the humbling of your souls—~~***

Whence is it that there is so little humiliation and contrition among us? It is because we do not try ourselves by a just standard. We look only to more flagrant transgressions; and therefore even the worst of us only view ourselves like the sky in a cloudy night, when only a few stars are seen and at great intervals. But if we would take the text for the ground of our estimate, the very best of us would see ourselves like the sky in the clearest night studded with stars innumerable, our whole lives being, as it were, one continuous mass of transgression and sin!

If we would habituate ourselves to such reviews of our conduct from day to day, we would find no difficulty in acknowledging ourselves "less than the least of all saints," yes, and "the very chief of sinners."

***~~2. For the endearing of the Gospel to you—~~***

O how precious would the Savior be to you, if you saw yourselves in your true colors! And with what delight would you plunge into "the fountain opened for sin and for impurity!" But the same false estimate of ourselves which keeps us from humiliation, keeps us also from valuing the Gospel of Christ. If we would love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we would get a deeper sense of our need of him, and of the love he has shown us in giving himself to die for us.

It is in this way also that we must learn to prize the influences of the Holy Spirit. When we see what a holy and refined character that of the true Christian is, we shall necessarily say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And, feeling our need of Divine help, we shall implore of God to "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in the inner man," and to "perfect his own strength in our weakness".

***~~3. For the regulating of your whole spirit and conduct—~~***

While you see what a lovely character the Christian is, and how bright it shone in our blessed Lord—you will strive to follow his steps, and to "walk as he walked." Let there then be in you nothing but what is virtuous and praiseworthy. And, if you profess to have been "called with a holy calling," see that you "walk worthy of your high calling," or rather, walk worthy of him who has called you; so that God may be glorified in you, and you be rendered fit for his heavenly inheritance.

***~~#2162~~***

***~~PAUL AN EXAMPLE FOR US~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.9)~~***

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

NO man was ever move averse to boasting than the Apostle Paul: and, when compelled to declare what God had done in him or by him, he appeared to himself "a fool," for uttering it; though he was conscious that he acted, not from choice, but from absolute and indispensable necessity. In truth, what might be called boasting in an uninspired man, was not deserving of that name in him; because he knew that he had been raised up by God, to be an instructor to mankind, both in his doctrines and example. Hence he not only affirmed, that "his word was the word, not of man, but of God, 1 Thessalonians 2:13;" but exhorted men to "be followers and imitators of him, [1 Corinthians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.16)," "even as he was of Christ, [1 Corinthians 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 11.1)."

In the chapter preceding our text, he speaks strongly to this effect: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk so, as you have us for an example, [Philippians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.17)." Nor did he confine his exhortation to a reception of his doctrines merely: he suggested the same in reference to his conduct also, [2 Thessalonians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.9). He was a great advocate for practical religion; and urged on his Philippian converts a diligent attention to "everything which was true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report:" and then, in reference both to his precepts and example, he added, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

To enforce this exhortation, I will set before you,

***~~I. The lessons he has taught us—~~***

Of course, I can speak of these but in a very general and superficial way. Your time would not suffice for a full consideration of them; nor does my present subject require more than a brief notice of what he inculcated as due,

***~~1. To God—~~***

It was not "a divided heart" that he called on men to offer to their God and Savior: he taught them to surrender up themselves as living sacrifices to him; and to be as entirely devoted to him, as a victim is when offered upon the altar. As for our own ease, pleasure, interest—he would not have us consult them for a moment, in comparison with, and still less in opposition to, the will of God: "No man," says he, "lives to himself, and no man dies to himself: for, whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's: for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living, [Romans 14:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-9)." And this duty he binds upon us by the strongest of all obligations, even that of redeeming love, which it were most criminal to resist: "You are not your own—you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are God's! [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)." He would have the whole spirit, soul, and body, sanctified unto the Lord! [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)."

***~~2. To man—~~***

This duty, also, is co-extensive with the former, only in subordination to God, and with a view to his glory. There is nothing which we are not to do for man, nor anything which we are not willingly to suffer for him, if only we may be instrumental to the promoting of his spiritual and eternal welfare. And the Apostle inculcates this with the same precision and force as the former: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (We are to forget *self*, with a view to his benefit, as much as we are with a view to God's glory.) "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!

[Philippians 2:4-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4-8)." Did our blessed Lord, who was God equal with the Father, empty himself of all his glory, and suffer the most excruciating torments, for the salvation of men? There is nothing, then, which we also would not be ready either to do or suffer for the welfare of their souls.

It may however be asked: What are we to do, if they become our enemies, and seek to destroy us? I answer: Contend with them: if they will fight, so do you fight: and the more they exert themselves, the greater let your efforts be also. Only remember, that your weapon must not be like theirs: They fight with evil; but you must have no weapon but good. Nor must you ever yield to them; but to your last hour, and with your last breath, you must keep up the conflict, even as the first martyr Stephen did. This is Paul's own direction, "Be not overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)."

Such are the duties which Paul inculcates: and this view of them will lead us to notice,

***~~II. The example he has set for us—~~***

As, in his Epistle to Timothy, Paul says, "You have fully known my doctrine, and manner of life, [2 Timothy 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.10);" so he here refers the Philippians, first, to what they had "learned and received from him;" and then, to what they had "heard and seen in him."

***~~1. What, then, were his principles?~~***

They were precisely and practically such as he had inculcated on others. Did he enjoin on others to be dead to the world and to self? Hear what he declares to have been his own experience, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and 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)." Yes, so entirely was he under the constrained sense of redeeming love, that he shuddered at the very thought of glorying in anything but the cross of Christ," and more especially because, "through the influence of that, the whole world was crucified unto him, as he also was unto the world, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

***~~2. With these his whole life was in perfect unison—~~***

Nothing could abate his zeal for God. Not all the trials which human nature is capable of sustaining could move him in the least: he counted not life itself dear to him, if he were called to sacrifice it for righteousness' sake. On the contrary, he was ready to suffer bonds, or death, at any time, and in any way, for the honor of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13).

Nor were there any bounds to his love to man. He panted for the salvation of all men, and especially of those who were "his brethren according to the flesh:" and, when he could not prevail on them to embrace the Gospel which he offered to them, he called God to witness what grief their obduracy occasioned him: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart, for my brethren's sake, [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-2)."

Still more, for the prosperity of his converts he was so anxious, that his whole soul was, as it were, enrapt up in them: "Now I live, if you stand fast in the Lord, [1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.8)." And so far was he from regretting anything that he suffered for their sake, that he accounted such sufferings his privilege, his honor, his happiness: "If," says he, "I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all: for the same cause do you also joy and rejoice with me, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18)."

And, now, who can doubt,

***~~III. The blessedness of taking him for our model—~~***

Doubtless here is a high standard for us to aim at: but no lower standard can possibly be admitted. What if we cannot attain to the eminence of Paul? We would not willingly rest in anything short of it; or, if we had even attained to it, we should, like him, press forward for still higher attainments, that, if possible, we might be "pure as Christ himself was pure," and "perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect." And to this we are encouraged by Paul, who says, "Those things which you have learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." Now, it is certainly true, that if we aspire thus after universal holiness, God will be with us,

***~~1. In a way of special manifestation—~~***

He assumes the endearing name of "the God of peace," as he does elsewhere of "the God of love and peace, [2 Corinthians 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.14);" and under this character will he reveal himself to his obedient people. Yes, "great peace shall they have who love his law," "a perfect peace," "a peace that surpasses all understanding." What terms would suffice to give any adequate idea of "the love of God shed abroad in the heart," and of "the light of his reconciled countenance lifted up upon the soul?"

You would in vain attempt to convey to a person who had all his days been immured in a dark dungeon, a just conception of the splendor and influence of the meridian sun: how then can the feeble language of mortality describe the action of Almighty God upon the soul, which he deigns to visit with his more immediate presence? Suffice it however to say, that such visits are realized in the souls of God's faithful people; and that "both the Father and the Son will come down to them, and dwell in them, and make their abode with them, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)," and turn their very souls into the sanctuary of the Most High.

***~~2. In a way of effectual support—~~***

Persons who resemble the Apostle Paul in their spirit and conduct will be sure to resemble him, in some degree at least, in his trials and afflictions. *It is not possible but that those who love darkness rather than light, would hate such lights as these. In truth the more bright a man's light shines before an ungodly world, the more must he expect to be hated, reviled, and persecuted,* even as our incarnate God himself was, during the time of his sojourning on earth: for "the servant cannot be above his Lord:" and "if they called the Master of the house of Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household, [Matthew 10:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.25)."

But, need the godly indulge any fears on that account? No; for "greater is he who is in them, than he who is in the world, [1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4)." Men may assault you with all their might: but it may be confidently asked, "Who is he who shall harm you, if you are followers of that which is good? [1 Peter 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.13)." Men may keep all human aid from you: but who can intercept the visits of your God? Hear his own express promise, given for your encouragement and support: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." And then, lest a sense of your own weakness, and of the overbearing power of your enemies, would discourage you, he adds, "Fear not, worm Jacob: I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth; and you shall thresh the mountains! [Isaiah 41:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.10); [Isaiah 41:14-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 41.14-16)." Yes truly, "if God is for you, who can be against you? [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)."

***~~3. In a way of complete and everlasting fruition—~~***

"Whom God loves, he loves to the end! [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1);" and if he is with us as a God of peace in this world, he will be with us under the same endearing character to all eternity. What he said to Abraham personally, he says to all the children of Abraham: "Fear not; I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward, [Genesis 15:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 15.1)." The present state of the Church, with all her privileges and blessings, is only a prelude to, and a preparation for, a state of far higher blessedness; as John expressly informs us: "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God! [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)." "Then will all trials, of whatever kind, have passed away," and their bliss be absolutely perfect: "the sun itself shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord himself shall be to them an everlasting light, and their God their glory! [Revelation 21:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.4); [Revelation 22:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.5) with [Isaiah 60:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.19)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The lukewarm professor—~~***

How unlike are you to the Apostle Paul! Should not this very circumstance make you tremble for your state? How could you venture, even in the most qualified manner, to address those who have witnessed your life and conduct in terms resembling those which Paul used in my text? You have not the divine presence even with your own soul. You know not what it is to have God with you as "a God of peace;" manifesting himself to you, and filling you with his consolations. If you were to address any as the Apostle did, your own conscience would remonstrate with you, as a deceiver, and an enemy both to God and man. So far from God approving of your state, he speaks of it in such terms of abhorrence as modern delicacy almost forbids one to repeat, [Revelation 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.16).

I beg you, brethren, rest not in a state so fatal to yourselves, and so injurious to all around you. The very circumstance of your having some little regard for God, is that which is most likely to deceive yourselves and all around you. Awake, I beg you, from your delusion, lest you perish under the accumulated guilt of dishonoring God more than any professedly ungodly men can do; and of betraying, to their eternal ruin, multitudes, who fix on you for their standard and example.

***~~2. Those who desire to approve themselves truly unto God—~~***

*Fix your standard high!* Take the Holy Scriptures for your guide; and the Apostle Paul as second only to Christ himself for your example. Be not afraid of being "righteous overmuch," provided only that you are righteous in a proper manner. You can never love God too much: nor can you ever love man too much, provided you love him in subserviency to God. Methinks you may advance far beyond what you have already attained, before you will equal the Apostle Paul: and if at this moment you even equaled him, you would still be far from having already attained the perfection at which you would aim.

Study then his character; mark it in its sublimest traits; and follow it in the whole of your life and conduct. Let his principles be yours; his spirit yours; his conduct yours. This is the way to honor God, and to be happy in your own souls: and "if you do these things, you shall never fall, but shall have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11)."

***~~#2163~~***

***~~CONTENTMENT~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11-12)~~***

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

PAUL was by no means given to boasting. But there were occasions whereon it was necessary for him to declare the secret workings of his heart, in order that he might prevent a misinterpretation of his words, or a misapprehension of his designs. He commends the Philippians for the care which they had taken of him, and the kind attention they had shown him, during his imprisonment at Rome. But, fearful lest he would be understood as complaining of his necessities when immured in a prison, or as wishing, on his own account, a continuance of their attentions, he tells them, that "he had learned, in whatever state he was, therein to be content:" and, in the fullness of his heart, he expatiates upon this idea, as though he would recommend to all persons, in this respect, to follow his example.

Let me, then,

***~~I. State to you the experience of Paul—~~***

In unfolding it, I would entreat you particularly to notice,

***~~1. The invaluable lesson he had learned—~~***

Greatly diversified had been his states; but "in all, he had learned to be content." The word which we translate "content" comprehends much more than a mere quiescent state of mind. The term "self-sufficient," if it did not convey to an English reader a wrong idea, would more exactly express the import of the original.

The Apostle had within himself that which was abundantly sufficient for him, even though he would be reduced to the utmost possible state of destitution, so far as related to the things of this life. He was possessed of all that man could desire: he had:

God as his Father,

Christ as his Savior,

the Holy Spirit as his Comforter,

and Heaven as his eternal home!

What more could he want? What could he desire, that could add to this? Or what could he lose, that could detract from this? This which he had within him was altogether out of the reach of men or devils. The Holy Spirit was within him "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life! [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14);" so that he enjoyed the utmost composure of mind, assured that nothing could impoverish him, nothing hurt him, nothing disturb the tranquility that he enjoyed.

***~~2. The vast proficiency he had attained in it—~~***

At some seasons, he abounded with all that even a carnal mind could wish: but at other seasons he was exposed to as heavy trials as humanity could well sustain. "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches! [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28)."

Now all this, I think, may be said to have put his principle to a severe trial. And did he still preserve his equanimity? Did he still feel contentment under all? Yes, under all. "Nothing could move him." The internal support he felt, from a consciousness that he was under the Divine care, and executing the Divine will, and advancing the Divine glory—upheld him under all circumstances, and far more than counterbalanced all his sufferings. In all this he was "instructed," or, as the word means, initiated, as into a deep mystery.

It was from an insight into the mystery of the Gospel that he gained this extraordinary and invaluable grace. From this mystery he acquired the knowledge of God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, and as engaged for him to supply his every need both in time and eternity. No other instruction could ever have produced such effects: but the knowledge of this mystery was quite adequate to the occasion, and perfectly sufficient to form his soul to these high attainments. "He was thus crucified to the world by the cross of Christ! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14)."

Having traced the Apostle's experience, let me,

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

What an enviable state was his! Let me recommend it you,

***~~1. As a reasonable state—~~***

This perfect contentment with our every lot is reasonable, irrespective of all the great mysteries of the Gospel. For, what would our condition have long since been, if God had dealt with us according to our deserts? We would "not have had so much as a drop of water to cool our tongues!" Who can reflect one moment upon this, and repine at any lot which he may receive on this side the grave? What! "A living man complain! a man for the punishment of his sins!" especially when he considers what an infinitely worse portion he merits, and from which there could never be, as now there may, a deliverance, with a transition to the realms of bliss!

But, I suppose you to have been admitted into the school of Christ. I suppose you to be a partaker of his salvation. Tell me then—possessing, as you do, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and looking forward, as you do, to the speedy and everlasting enjoyment of all the glory of heaven—does it befit you to regard as of any great importance the things of time and sense?

See the Apostle in prison, his feet fast in the stocks, and his back torn with scourges; and yet his soul so full of joy, that he is singing praises to God at midnight: and will you not be ashamed to complain of your minor sorrows?

Or rather, see the Son of God himself, impoverishing himself to enrich you, and welcoming death itself in order to advance you to everlasting life: see him, I say, enduring to the end—when, if it had pleased him, more than twelve legions of angels would have come to rescue him from His sufferings; and will you complain of anything which you may suffer for him? Methinks you feel, every one of you, that the most perfect contentment is that which befits you under every state, to which, by any possibility, you may be reduced.

***~~2. As a blessed state—~~***

The corporeal pain which men endure in this life is nothing in comparison with the mental. Let the spirit of a man be at ease, and it will enable him to bear any bodily infirmity whatever. On the other hand, no accumulation of wealth or honor or sensual gratifications can sustain a man whose heart and spirit are oppressed, [Proverbs 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 18.14).

Suppose two angels are sent from Heaven to execute for a season two different offices on earth; the one to rule a kingdom, the other to sweep the streets: would they not be equally happy, in doing the work assigned them? Let their places then be changed: would the one be inordinately pleased with his elevation, or the other be unduly grieved at his depression? Assuredly not! In whichever state they were, they would remember "whose they were, and whom they were serving," and what blessedness awaited them the very instant they had performed their destined work. Possessed of this sufficiency within, they would be unmoved by anything without, and would have in perfection the grace described in my text.

Thus, in proportion as we are initiated into the great mystery of the Gospel, will this equanimity prevail in us; and under all circumstances will "our souls be kept in perfect peace."

A mariner, knowing the soundness of his vessel, and the skill of him who is at the helm, does not tremble at the gale which is sent to bear him to his destined home. No, he spreads his sails, and, though tossed upon the waves, anticipates with joy the outcome of his voyage, and the rest which he will attain in the bosom of his friends.

This blessedness, then, will attend you, my brethren, if once you learn the sublime lesson which is here taught you in my text. You shall find, indeed, that "godliness with contentment is great gain! 1 Timothy 6:6."

***~~3. As an honorable state—~~***

Who does not see how greatly the Gospel is honored in producing such an experience as this. Yes, and God himself too is honored by it, in that such is the fruit which invariably proceeds from the Gospel of his dear Son. In this state, man is assimilated to God himself. Behold our incarnate God! Behold him on Mount Tabor in his transfiguration, or in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst the hosannahs of the populace, and you find in him no undue *elation*of mind. Or view him in the garden of Gethsemane, or in the hall of Pilate, or when suspended on the cross, you see in him no undue *depression*. He drank with composure the cup which God had put into his hands; saying, "Not my will, but may your will be done."

True religion does not divest men of the feelings of humanity; but moderates, directs, and perfects them. It leaves us at liberty to deprecate sufferings, provided we do it in submission to the Divine will: but, at the same time, it so elevates us above them, as to render them incapable of diverting us from the service of our God, or of retarding us in our progress heavenward.

Philosophical principles have effected much to compose the minds of sufferers: but it is the Gospel alone which gives effectual power so to rise above the things of time and sense, as to possess, under all circumstances, the contentment spoken of in our text.

***~~But you will naturally ask. How am I to "learn" this lesson? I answer,~~***

***~~1. Apply to God for the influences of his Holy Spirit—~~***

It is, as I have said, the knowledge of Christ crucified, and that alone, that can ever fill the soul and render it superior to all earthly things. But who can give you that knowledge? It is the office of "the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to reveal them unto us." None but he can "open the eyes of our understanding:" none but he can "guide us into all truth:" nor can any but he renew our souls after the Divine image. Pray then to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit: and, if you yourselves would not mock your child with giving him a stone when he asked for bread, much less will God mock you, by refusing to impart to you this gift, in which all good things for time and for eternity are contained.

***~~2. Contemplate the fullness which is treasured up for you in Christ Jesus—~~***

"It has pleased the Father, that in Christ would all fullness dwell:" and for you is it treasured there, that "you may receive out of it" according to your necessities. Hence then, if you have believed in Christ, you are authorized to say, "All things are mine, since I am Christ's." And if all things are yours, whether "things present, or things to come"—then what can you lack? Or what ground can you have for discontent? Only get clear views of Christ as your righteousness and strength, and you will be at no loss for the attainment which your soul desires.

***~~3. Survey the glory that is reserved for you in Heaven—~~***

What does it matter to a traveler, if his accommodations, where he stops but a few minutes, are not exactly such as he could wish? Can they carry me forward to my destined home? will be his main inquiry: and if he find that he can attain his wishes in this respect, he will not lay to heart the little inconveniences which he is to sustain for so short a time. The comforts which he shall enjoy at home occupy his mind; and the very discomforts of the way endear to him the end, and make him look forward to it with augmented zest.

Let it then be thus with you, my brethren—you are only *pilgrims*and *sojourners*here: and, if you dwell with blessed anticipations on your eternal rest, you will become indifferent to the accommodations of the way; and, according to the grace given to you, will be enabled to say, "I have learned in whatever state I am, therein to be content."

***~~#2164~~***

***~~EXTENT AND SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S POWER~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)~~***

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

THERE are in the sacred writings many various, and apparently opposite, representations of the Christian's state: he is mournful—yet happy; sinful—yet holy; weak—yet possessed of a derived omnipotence. These paradoxes are incomprehensible to the world at large: but the solution of them is easy to those who know what man is by nature, and what he is by grace, and what are the effects which flow from the contrary and contending principles of flesh and spirit.

Nothing can be more incredible, at first sight, than the assertion in the former part of our text: but, when qualified and explained by the latter part, it is both credible and certain: yes, it presents to our minds a most encouraging and consoling truth.

In elucidating this passage, we shall show,

***~~I. The extent of a Christian's power—~~***

Using only such a latitude of expression as is common in the Holy Scriptures, we may say concerning every true Christian, that he can:

***~~1. Endure all trials—~~***

In following his Divine Master, he may be called to suffer reproaches, privations, torments, and death itself. But "none of these can move him." When his heart is right with God, he can "rejoice that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake. [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41);" he can "suffer the loss of all things, and yet count them but dung, [Philippians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.8);" under extreme torture, he can refuse to accept deliverance, in the prospect of "a better resurrection, [Hebrews 11:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.35);" he can say, "I am ready to die for the Lord's sake, [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13);" and when presented at the stake as a sacrifice to be slain, he can look upon his sufferings as a matter of exceeding joy, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18). [1 Peter 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.12-13).

***~~2. Mortify all lusts—~~***

Great are his inward corruptions; and many are the temptations to call them forth: but he is enabled to mortify and subdue them, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24). "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very fascinating. But "the grace of God, which has brought salvation to his soul, has taught him to deny them all, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16) with [Titus 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.12)." "By the great and precious promises of the Gospel, he is made a partaker of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)," and is stirred up to "cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

***~~3. Fulfill all duties—~~***

Every different situation brings with it some correspondent duties: prosperity demands humility and vigilance; adversity calls for patience and contentment. Now the Christian is "like a tree that is planted by the rivers of water, and brings forth its fruits in its season, [Psalm 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.3)." It is to this change of circumstances that the Apostle more immediately refers in the text: "I have learned," says he, "in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things, verse 11-13."

The Christian knows that *all his duties are summed up in love to God, and love to man*: he is assured, that no changes in his condition can for one moment relax his obligation to approve himself to God in the execution of these duties: and he endeavors to avail himself of every wind that blows, to get forward in his Christian course.

But in reference to all the foregoing points, we must acknowledge that all Christians are not equally advanced; nor does any Christian so walk as not to show, at some time or other, that "he has not yet attained, nor is altogether perfect, [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12)." We must be understood therefore as having declared, rather what the Christian "*can*do," than what he *actually*does in all instances. "In many things he still offends, [James 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.2);" but he aspires after the full attainment of this proper character: in the performance of his duties, he aims at universality in the matter, uniformity in the manner, and perfection in the measure of them.

The Christian's power being so extraordinary, we may well inquire after,

***~~II. The source from whence he derives it—~~***

***~~The Christian in himself is altogether destitute of strength—~~***

If we consult the Scripture representations of him, we find that he is "without strength, [Romans 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.6)," and even "dead in trespasses and sins, [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1)." Nor, after he is regenerate, has he any more power that he can call his own; for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwells no good thing, [Romans 7:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.15); [Romans 7:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.18-19)."

If our Lord's assertion may be credited, "without him we can do nothing;" we are like branches severed from the vine, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

If the experience of the most eminent Apostle will serve as a criterion, he confessed, that he "had not of himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought; his sufficiency was entirely of God, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5)."

***~~His power even to do the smallest good is derived from Christ—~~***

"It has pleased the Father, that in Christ would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," and that "out of his fullness all his people would receive [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." It is he who "strengthens us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man, [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16);" it is he who "gives us both to will and to do, [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13). [Hebrews 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.21)." If we are "strong in any degree, it is in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)." Whatever we do, we must give him the glory for it, saying, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20);" "I have labored; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me:" "by the grace of God I am what I am, [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)."

Nor is it by strength once communicated, that we are strong; but from continual communications of grace from the same overflowing fountain. It is not through Christ who *has*strengthened, but who *does*strengthen us, that we can do all things. We need fresh life from him, in order to the production of good fruit; exactly as we need fresh light from the sun, in order to a prosecution of the common offices of life. One moment's intermission of either, would instantly produce a suspension of all effective industry.

***~~From that source he receives all that he can stand in need of—~~***

Christ is not so prodigal of his favors, as to confer them in needless profusion: he rather apportions our strength to the occasions that arise to call it forth, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25). He bids us to renew our applications to him; and, in answer to them, imparts "grace sufficient for us, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)." There are no limits to his communications: however "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it, [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)." He is "able to 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;" he is ready to "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)." "If only we believe, all things shall be possible unto us, [Mark 9:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.23);" we shall be "able to quench all the fiery darts of the devil, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16)," and "be more than conquerors over all the enemies of our souls! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

***~~The uses to which we may apply this subject, are,~~***

***~~1. The conviction of the ignorant—~~***

Many, when urged to devote themselves to God, reply, that we require more of them than they can do; and that it is impossible for them to live according to the Scriptures. But what ground can there be for such an objection? Is not Christ ever ready to assist us? Is not Omnipotence pledged for our support? Away with your excuses then, which have their foundation in ignorance, and their strength in sloth. Call upon your Savior; and he will enable you to "stretch forth your withered hand:" at his command, the dead shall arise out of their graves; and the bond-slaves of sin and Satan shall be "brought into the liberty of the children of God."

***~~2. The encouragement of the weak—~~***

*A life of godliness cannot be maintained without constant watchfulness and strenuous exertion.* And there are times when "even the youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall," But "if we wait upon our God we shall certainly renew our strength, and mount up with wings as eagles! [Isaiah 40:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.30-31)." If we look "to Him on whom our help is laid, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19)," the experience of David shall be ours: "In the day when I cried, you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul, [Psalm 138:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.3)." Let not any difficulties then discourage us. "Let the weak say, I am strong! [Joel 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 3.10);" and the stripling go forth with confidence against Goliath. Let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus! [2 Timothy 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.1)," and "his strength shall assuredly be perfected in our weakness, 2 Corinthians 12:9."

***~~#2165~~***

***~~ALL NEEDFUL SUPPLIES THROUGH CHRIST~~***

***~~[Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19)~~***

"My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

AS it is a pleasing reflection to a generous man, that the object whom he relieves will have his condition meliorated; so is it a most delightful thought to a grateful mind, that there is One both able and engaged to recompense our benefactors. Were it not for this consideration, the reluctance which many feel to be burdensome to their friends, would scarce allow them to accept the most needful assistances: but this hope both enhances the value, and gives zest to the enjoyment, of every kindness we receive.

Such was the Apostle's experience, when his necessities had been relieved by the Philippian Church: he would have been well content to have lacked their present, as far as it related to his own comfort; but, as it was profitable to the donors themselves, he "desired fruit that might abound to their account, [Philippians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.17)." Having declared on what grounds he was so well pleased with their gifts, he assured them that God would be mindful of all their needs, and abundantly supply them in the hour of need.

To enter fully into the scope of his words, we would inquire,

***~~I. When are we authorized to call God our God?~~***

It is not every claim that presumptuous sinners take upon them to advance, that will be found authorized in the Holy Scriptures; for our Lord himself assured many that Satan was their father, at the very time that they called themselves the children of God! [John 8:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.41); [John 8:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 8.44). But we may justly consider God as standing in this relation to us:

***~~1. When we are born again of his Spirit—~~***

While we continue in our natural state, we are enemies to God, and God is an enemy to us; but when we are begotten by the word and Spirit of God, we are privileged to consider ourselves as his children, and to cry to him, "*Abba, Father!* [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12). [Galatians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.6)."

***~~2. When we have devoted ourselves to his service—~~***

If we would know "whose we are," we must inquire, "whom we serve;" for "to whoever we yield ourselves servants to obey, his servants we are whom we obey, [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16)." If our consciences testify that we have solemnly dedicated ourselves to God, we may boldly say with David, "O God, you are my God." We may be sure that our "Beloved is ours, when we (by a voluntary surrender of ourselves to him,) are his."

When this point is satisfactorily settled in our minds, we may with more comfort inquire,

***~~II. To what extent we may expect communications from him?~~***

That God who pours out his benefits upon the evil and unthankful, is far more abundant in kindness towards his own children. He will give us:

***~~1. According to our necessities—~~***

If we desire temporal things, "we shall lack no manner of thing that is good." If spiritual blessings are sought after, there is not anything we can need, which shall not be *bestowed upon us in the time and measure that Infinite Wisdom sees to be best for us.*Are we wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? He will both suit his gifts to our necessities, [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18); and make the very depth of our misery the measure of his own mercy.

***~~2. According to the riches of his own grace—~~***

Let us survey all the tokens of his bounty on earth, and contemplate all the expressions of his love in Heaven; let us go farther, and consider the incomprehensible fullness of all the good that is in him as the fountain; and then shall we find the true measure of his liberality to his children. If any partake of his goodness in a lower degree, it is, "not because they are straitened in him, but because they are straitened in their own affections."

That none may lose these blessings through ignorance, we proceed to state,

***~~III. By what channel they shall be conveyed to us—~~***

With man in innocence God communed face to face: but, whatever he bestows upon us in our fallen state, he communicates it,

***~~1. Through Christ as our mediator—~~***

"God in himself is a consuming fire;" nor is it possible for us to approach him but through Jesus our mediator. Neither our piety towards him, nor our liberality towards his saints, can render him our debtor, (yes, rather, the more we do for him, the more we are indebted to him); if we receive anything from God, it must come as the purchase of Christ's blood, and as the consequence of his prevailing intercession.

***~~2. By Christ as our head—~~***

It is "in Christ that all fullness dwells." He has "received gifts for the rebellious," and imparts them to whoever he will: and it is "out of his fullness that we must receive." He is the head of the Church, and his people are his members; and as every member is nourished by its union with the head, so it is by grace derived from him that we are to increase with the increase of God, [Colossians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.19).

***~~This important subject may teach us,~~***

***~~1. Contentment in ourselves—~~***

What cause can he possibly have for discontent, who has God for his God, and an express promise that all his need shall be supplied? God has not only engaged to give his people whatever they need, but on many occasions has interposed in a miraculous manner to fulfill his word. And rather than violate his truth in any instance, he would feed them with bread from Heaven, and water from a rock; he would make the ravens to bring them food, or their barrel and cruse to supply them with an undiminished store.

What if we have not all that flesh and blood might desire? Shall we repine? Surely we would say with the Apostle, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therein to be content, verse 12." We are like minors at present, and limited to the measure which our Father sees best for us: but in due time we shall receive the full inheritance. Shall persons so circumstanced give way to discontent? No! though as poor as Lazarus, they should account themselves truly rich.

***~~2. Liberality to others—~~***

God condescends to acknowledge all that is given by us in charity as "lent to himself;" and he pledges himself to "repay it." He even prescribes the honoring of him with our first-fruits, as the means of securing to ourselves an abundant harvest, and of laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life, [Proverbs 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.9-10) with [1 Timothy 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-18). We must not indeed suppose that our alms-deeds can merit anything at the hand of God. Nevertheless, if they are a free-will offering, they are "a fragrance to him, and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor." Let then the bounty of God to us, whether experienced or expected, be a motive for liberality to our fellow-creatures. And let us gladly of our abundance minister to their necessities, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus.

***~~3. Devotedness to God—~~***

Has God given himself to us as our God, and shall not we give ourselves to him as his people? Does God grudge us no blessing which he can give, and shall we grudge him any service which we can render? Are his powers the only limit to his exertions for us, and shall we know any other limit to our zeal for him? Does he do such wonders for us for Christ's sake, and shall not we labor for Christ's sake to honor him? Yes, "the love of Christ shall constrain us" to live for him, and the mercies of God to us be the measure of the services which we shall yield to him, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1).

**COLOSSIANS**

***~~#2166~~***

***~~PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:3-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.3-6)~~***

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in Heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

"God's grace in all its truth!" What a beautiful description of the Gospel! It is grace: it is all grace, from first to last: it is the most stupendous grace that ever God given to any creature, whether in Heaven or on earth. It was marvelous grace to confer on *angels*such an exalted nature as they possess, together with all the glory and felicity of Heaven. It was most astonishing grace also to form *man*in Paradise; to form him in the very image of his God; and to give him a promise, that if he would hold fast his integrity, both he and all his posterity would participate with the angels in all the blessedness they enjoy.

But what is all this to the gift of God's only dear Son to bear the iniquities of fallen man, and, by his own obedience unto death, to restore man to his forfeited inheritance? This is emphatically called, "The Gospel of the grace of God:" and truly it does exhibit the grace of God in such a view as no creature could ever have anticipated; and in such a view as must fill the whole creation, whether of men or angels, with the profoundest admiration, and gratitude, and love. This is the Gospel which you "have heard;" which also, through the illuminating influence of the Spirit of God, many of you "know;" and the excellency of which may be seen,

***~~I. By the effects the Gospel produces in our hearts—~~***

There are three effects mentioned, as produced in the converts of Colosse:

***~~1. "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ"—~~***

This is the first effect which the Gospel produces, wherever it is received into the heart. It reveals to us our need of a Savior; and it holds forth the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, sent into the world to bear our sins, and to expiate our guilt by his atoning sacrifice, and thereby to reconcile us to our offended God. It reveals to us the fullness and suitableness of this salvation; and brings us to this Savior, as our only hope. It leads every one to renounce altogether every other hope, and to trust entirely in the merits and mediation of this adorable Redeemer.

***~~2. Love to all the saints—~~***

This is the next effect produced on all. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are brought into a new family, of which Christ is the master: yes, we are incorporated into a new body, of which Christ is the head, and all the saints are members. I add further, we are all penetrated with one spirit; (for "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit;") and have thus a bond of union, which never did, nor could, exist before. The very instant we believe in Christ, we feel ourselves brought into this relation to all his believing people, whether they be separately known to us or not; and we have, from that moment, somewhat of the same sympathy with them, as every member of our body has with all the rest, the eye with the hand, and the hand with the foot.

***~~3. Hope of happiness in Heaven—~~***

"The hope laid up for us in Heaven" is that for which the Apostle principally gives thanks in the passage before us. The faith and love are parenthetically inserted. But this hope, like the two foregoing principles, is wrought in the heart by the Gospel: by which, as Peter says, "we are begotten again to a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for us, [1 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.4)." Yes, faith penetrates the highest heavens, and sees there crowns and kingdoms purchased by the blood of Christ, and promised to all who believe in him. An eternity of glory upon the very throne of God, the believer expects as his assured portion.

But the excellency of the Gospel is further shown,

***~~II. By the effects the Gospel produces in our lives—~~***

***~~"All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing"—~~***

See the fruits of the Spirit as described by the Apostle: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, [Galatians 5:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.22-23)." There is not a grace that was in Christ Jesus himself, which the Gospel does not form in the souls of those who believe in him: "The discovery which it gives us of the glory of Christ transforms us into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

***~~It does this invariably and universally—~~***

There is not a creature who receives the grace of God in truth, but experiences this effect upon his soul. It matters not whether he be the most civilized man on earth, or a poor savage Indian or Hottentot: he will, from the moment that he receives the Gospel, begin to bear the image of his heavenly Father "in righteousness and true holiness." *The man who professes to believe in Christ, and does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness in his life and conduct, is a self-deceiver, and a hypocrite. "*His faith is no better than the faith of devils;" and, if he dies in his present state, his end shall be like theirs also: for God has decreed, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord! [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

***~~Tell me now, brethren,~~***

***~~1. Have we not ground to "give thanks for you?"~~***

Were you all reduced to the most abject state of poverty, and relieved by the Gospel to the utmost extent of your necessities, and enriched with all that the whole world could bestow; or were you all in dying circumstances, and restored to health by the Gospel; it were nothing, in comparison with the blessings you have received (many of you at least) through the word ministered unto you. You have been brought by the gospel:

from death to life,  
from sin to holiness,  
from Hell to Heaven!

O! what inestimable blessings are these!

Say, then, whether those who have preached unto you the word of life have not reason to bless God for you, as the "seals of their ministry," and as destined to be "their joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of that Savior" whom they have preached unto you, [1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20).

***~~2. Have we not encouragement, also, to "pray for you?"~~***

What will not God confer on those for whom he has already done so much? Surely there is not anything which Omnipotence can effect, that shall not be bestowed upon you, in answer to the prayer of faith. See what Paul prayed for in behalf of the Colossians, verse 9-14; That same prayer would I offer for you, and entreat all of you to offer for yourselves. "Open your mouths wide, and God will fill them." "Be not straitened in yourselves; for you are not straitened in him." Only ask according to God's word in faith; and "according to your faith it shall be done unto you."

***~~3. Is there not, however, ground for lamentation, on account of some among you?~~***

Would to God I could say that the change here described had been wrought on all! But there are many of you, I fear, who still remain in your unconverted state; and who, notwithstanding the Gospel has so long been ministered unto you, are yet strangers to the faith, and love, and hope, which it forms in the hearts of those who truly receive it; yes, and whose tempers and dispositions are widely different from the fruits which the Gospel is sent to produce.

Dear brethren, I beg you to study the Gospel more: pray over it more: beg of God to make it "the rod of his strength," and to effect by it in you all that it wrought in the Colossian Church, and all that it is ordained to work in all the world.

***~~#2167~~***

***~~PRAYER FOR GROWTH IN GRACE~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.9-13)~~***

"We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves!"

Benevolence will begin to show itself wherever Christianity gains a just ascendency. This is particularly observable in the prayers which the Apostle offered for others; the fervor and fullness of which clearly proved, that they proceeded from a heart fraught with love, and deeply impressed with the excellency of those blessings which are provided for us in the Gospel. He confined not his attention to the welfare of a few with whom he might happen to sojourn; but extended it to the whole Church, as well to those whom he had never seen, as to those among whom he had ministered. He needed only to be informed that a work of grace was begun in any persons, and he instantly felt a union of heart with them, and took a lively interest in all that concerned them. This remark is strongly exemplified in the prayer before us.

He had heard of the blessed state of the Colossian Church; and, from the instant he had received the glad tidings, he remembered that people in all his stated prayers: and, in the passage before us, he tells them what he prayed for on their behalf. He desired that they might advance:

***~~I. In the knowledge of God's will—~~***

The "knowledge of God's revealed will" is the foundation of all acceptable obedience: and every Christian must of necessity be in some degree endued with it. But he will not be satisfied with a scanty measure of it: he wishes to be "*filled*with it," so that it may engage all the faculties of his mind. Not that he can rest in a *speculative*view of Divine truth, however clear or comprehensive it may be: the knowledge which he covets, is a *practical*and *experimental*knowledge; a knowledge that diffuses "a spiritual savor" over his soul, and enables him to conduct himself, "with all wisdom," as well in his secret conflicts with sin, as in the public exercises of his duty to God and man.

Such then was the Apostle's first request for the converts at Colosse: he desired, that, as they already had some knowledge of God's will, so they might be "filled" with it, enjoying at the same time its sweet savor, and its *practical influence*, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

And would not such be our prayer also for ourselves? Let us not forget, that, while we aspire after divine knowledge, we must chiefly seek that which brings a feast to the *soul*, and endues it with an accurate discernment of good and evil.

***~~II. In obedience to his commands—~~***

The more enlarged views the Christian has of divine truth, the more studious will he be to fulfill the will of God. And in his endeavors after holiness he will propose to himself the highest measure of obedience, and the noblest end. He will not limit himself to the rules prescribed by men; nor will he aim merely at obtaining eternal happiness: but he will consider the relation he bears to God, and the obligations he has received from him, and the expectations which he has of future benefits; and will endeavor to "walk worthy of" such a Father, such a Redeemer, such an unspeakable Benefactor.

He will resemble a dutiful and affectionate servant, who does not merely consider what he must do in order to escape censure, and receive his wages, but what will please his Master. He inquires with himself, What will please my God? That is the great object of his ambition: that is the spring of his activity: and with that view he endeavors to be "fruitful," not in some good works only, but "in every good work," however difficult or self-denying.

Suited to these dispositions was the Apostle's prayer: he desired for the Colossians what he knew they desired for themselves, even "that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." And it is certain, that in proportion as we have attained a just knowledge of God's will, we shall desire, both for ourselves and others, an increase of righteousness and true holiness.

***~~III. In the enjoyment of his presence—~~***

"The knowledge of God" seems to be different from "the knowledge of his will," that has been before mentioned: the former relates to a view of his truth, and the latter to the enjoyment of his presence. In this sense the latter is not a mere repetition, but a blessing intimately connected with a holy life. Whom will God meet, and unto whom will he reveal himself, but "him who rejoices in working righteousness, [Isaiah 64:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 64.5)." Yes; there are manifestations which such persons shall receive, and such manifestations as the world can form no idea of, [John 14:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21); [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23). God will "shed abroad his love in the hearts" of his people; and will testify to them their adoption into his family, and seal them unto the day of redemption. How desirable is this for every saint! and how rich a recompense is it for any self-denial he may exercise in the path of duty! would to God that all professing Christians might experience this; and that not a single day might ever pass, in which they cannot say with the beloved disciple, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, 1 [John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.3)."

***~~IV. In submission to his dispensations—~~***

*The more any person lives in the enjoyment of God, and a diligent performance of his will—the more must he expect to be hated and persecuted by an ungodly world.* But under all his trials he must be "patient:" to whatever length of time they be protracted, he must be "long-suffering." Nor must he merely possess his soul in patience; he must have it blended "with joyfulness," regarding it as his honor and his happiness that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Redeemer's sake, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41). But "who is sufficient for these things?" It is not possible for feeble man to maintain such a conduct, unless he is "strengthened with all might" by the Holy Spirit: yes, there must be such an exertion of omnipotence as will serve for a bright display of "his glorious power;" nor can anything less than this effect so great a work.

Here then again we see the suitableness of the Apostle's prayer: for if we cannot serve the Lord without participating his cross, or sustain by our own power the trials that will come upon us, what alternative remains, but either to abandon our profession, or to implore such help from God as shall make us more than conquerors over all?

***~~V. In thankfulness to him for his mercies—~~***

*There can be no state, however afflictive, in which a Christian ought not to abound in thanksgivings to God.* The Israelites, to whom he divided Canaan by lot, were unspeakably indebted to him: but how are they indebted, to whom he has given an "inheritance among the saints in light;" even in Heaven, where they dwell in the immediate presence of their God! For this they are rendered "fit;" (for it is impossible that they can enjoy it, if they possess not a fitness for it:) their heavenly Father has "delivered them from the power of darkness," even as he did Lot from Sodom, and the Israelites from Egypt, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm: he has moreover "translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son," and brought them into a cheerful and unreserved obedience to his will. Must not they then give glory to their God? *What if they are burning at the stake, ought they not to rejoice that God has rescued them from Hell, and that they are entering on a state of uninterrupted everlasting happiness!*

Surely no Christian would rest short of this attainment: but we would all unite in wrestling with our God, until he pours out his Spirit upon us, and forms us to the model which was here proposed for the Colossian converts.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How glorious are the Christian's privileges!~~***

Did the Apostle incessantly ask of God what God was not willing to bestow? No, "if we opened our mouth wide, he would fill it;" and all these graces would abound in us, to the praise and glory of our God. What then must the Christian be, in whom these things are found! O believer, do not aim at low things; but aspire after the highest measures of wisdom, purity, and joy.

***~~2. How dependent are we upon our God!~~***

It is not at our first commencement only of a religious course that we depend on God, but to the last hour of our lives. We can have no knowledge, holiness, or joy, but as we receive it from him. Let us then make our requests known to him, and depend on him for all seasonable supplies of grace and strength.

***~~3. How great is the benefit of intercession!~~***

We certainly are not sufficiently apprised of this. But when we recollect the intercessions of Abraham for Sodom, of Lot for Zoar, of Moses for Israel, how can we be so remiss in this duty! Let us incessantly plead for each other, knowing that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

***~~#2168~~***

***~~THE GLORY OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15-18)~~***

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the preeminence."

THE preeminence he must have: the preeminence he shall have: his title to it is indisputable: and it is at the peril of our souls to withhold it from him. Do you ask, Of whom we speak thus? I answer, of the Lord Jesus Christ; of whom the Apostles evidently thought that they could never speak enough. Let the Apostle Paul but touch upon his name, and he launches forth in his praise, and scarcely knows when to stop.

Mark the passage before us. The Apostle had informed the Colossians what prayers and thanksgivings he daily poured forth before God, on their behalf. He especially praised God for "delivering them from the power of darkness, and translating them into the kingdom of his dear Son," and having thus, accidentally as it were, mentioned the Lord Jesus, he goes on to expatiate on his transcendent excellencies, not only as the Redeemer of his people, but as "the image of the invisible God, and the first-born (that is, the Heir and Lord) of the whole creation."

And lest it would be thought that he was speaking too highly of the despised and persecuted Jesus, he proceeds yet further to establish his claim to these high titles, by declaring what he had done for the world at large, and for the Church in particular; and that the preeminence thus given him was no more than his due.

In opening up this sublime passage, I shall be led to show,

***~~I. On what grounds pre-eminence is due to Christ—~~***

In all things he must take the lead. This priority is due to him, on account of,

***~~1. His personal dignity—~~***

He, though born into the world as a little infant, after the world had existed four thousand years—was the Creator of all, the Preserver of all, the End of all. "By Him were all things created," both in Heaven and earth, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers. Whether they be "visible," as the heavenly bodies and the earth, with the things upon it; or whether they be "invisible," as the holy angels and the souls of men; he formed them all: whatever rank or order they possess in their respective spheres, (for it seems that in Heaven, as well as on earth and in Hell, there are beings of different ranks and orders,) *from his creating hand they have derived their existence, and from his sovereign will their station*.

Nor is there anything in the whole creation which is not upheld by him. He directs the *stars*in their orbits, and causes the sun and moon to know their appointed seasons. The smallest *insect*too, which is so small as to be invisible to the naked eye, is as much noticed and supplied by him, as if it were the only work of his hands. For himself too, as the supreme God, he made these things: and all of them, whether wittingly or unwittingly, subserve his glory.

If we could suppose that God had delegated to Jesus the work of creating everything, and of upholding it in its order, (though, as he was the Creator of all things, he could not be himself a creature,) still it would be impossible for God to devolve on Jesus the honor of being the end of all things: that is incapable of being communicated to any creature: it is the prerogative of God alone: nor could he divest himself of it, without giving a license to his creatures to alienate from him the most essential rights of Godhead.

Behold, then, the Lord Jesus Christ, in this his personal dignity, as the author and end of all; and then say, whether he is not entitled to a pre-eminence above all? The highest archangel has no such claims. In respect of these things, he is on a level with the basest clod of earth; and must unite with all the rest of the creation in giving glory to our blessed Lord.

***~~2. His official excellency—~~***

In his mediatorial capacity he is no less glorious. He is "the Head of the Church, which is his body:" he is the Head of vital influence, from which every member receives his supply of grace; and he is the Head and Representative of all his members, who at this very moment "are risen, as it were, in him, and sitting in heavenly places in him, [Ephesians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.6)." This I conceive is meant by his being "the beginning, the first-born from the dead."

It is true that he existed before all; and that he was the most distinguished among those who have risen from the dead; having raised himself by his own power, while all others have owed their restoration to life to the miraculous exertion of God's power. But, as he is called "the first-born of the whole creation," not because he was himself created, but because the rights of the first-born all centered in him, and he was, as mediator, the Heir and Lord of all, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2); so his being called "the beginning, the first-born from the dead," imports, that in his risen state the rights of primogeniture still attach to him; and that he is, in Heaven, the Head and Representative of all his members, who, in due time, shall participate in the glory which he there enjoys. This is what the Apostle elsewhere distinctly states; saying, "Now has Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20)."

Consider him, then, in this his mediatorial character; and say, whether he does not in this view also, justly claim the pre-eminence? To him are all in Heaven, and all on earth, indebted for their happiness; even as the moon and stars, no less than this terrestrial globe, are indebted to the sun for all the light which they enjoy. The angels around the throne, no less than ourselves, are all collected under him as their Head, [Ephesians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.10); and, through his all-powerful aid, retain the blessedness, of which we, in due season, are destined to participate. Yes, in Heaven at least, is he glorified as he ought to be; for "in that celestial city the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof, [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23)."

But as, in ascribing pre-eminence to him, we must be active, let us consider,

***~~II. In what way and manner preeminence would be ascribed to him—~~***

It is not sufficient that we "call him, *Lord, Lord*," we must honor him, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth." We must give him the pre-eminence,

***~~1. In our regards—~~***

Go up to Heaven, and see how he is honored there. There is he "as a Lamb that has been slain;" and there, "as a Lamb, he sits upon his throne;" and all the hosts of Heaven, those who never fell, no less than those he has redeemed, are singing day and night, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing! [Revelation 5:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11-13)."

Now, thus it should be on earth. We should be so filled with views of his excellency, and so penetrated with a sense of his love, that the whole creation would be a mere blank in comparison with him. Parents, children, life itself, would be of no account, where his honor is concerned. What the Psalmist said, would be the continual language of our hearts, "Whom have I in Heaven but you? There is none upon earth that I desire besides you! [Psalm 73:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 73.25)."

As for the poor things of time and sense, we would be ashamed that they have ever been allowed to occupy one single thought, except in subservience to him. In a word, the Lord Jesus should be to us now, what he will be in the eternal world—our light, our life, our joy, our All!

***~~2. In our affiance—~~***

As God, who created all things, he is able; and, as our living Head, who is interested in our welfare, he is willing, to do all that our utmost necessities can require. Stretch your imagination to the uttermost; and think whether there is any *guilt*too deep for his blood to expiate, or any *corruption*too inveterate for his Spirit to subdue. To limit him, either in relation to his power or his grace, or to rely on any other besides him—were to deny his Godhead, and to cast him down from his mediatorial throne. Our whole soul should go forth to him; our every need be cast on him: and fear, except that which is truly filial, would be dismissed, and find no more place in our bosoms than it does in Heaven.

O, the holy glorying that befits us! Rise to the occasion, my beloved brethren; and rest assured, that *he who created and preserves the universe can new-create and preserve you*; and he who redeemed the Church with his blood, and united it to himself as his own body, can redeem, and sanctify, and save, yes, "save to the very uttermost, all those who come unto God by him."

***~~3. In our services—~~***

That was an unanswerable appeal which was made to the Jewish rulers, "Whether it is 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)." We should know no rule of conduct but his revealed will: nor, in the execution of his will, is there any limit to be assigned. If we had a thousand lives, they should all be devoted to him: nor, if we could die a thousand deaths, would they be accounted too much to be endured for him. "His love would constrain us," and carry us away as a mighty torrent in his service! It is said of the angels in Heaven, that "they do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word, [Psalm 103:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.20);" and so would it be with us: the very first intimation of his will would call into activity our utmost powers: nor would we ever rest, until we can say of the work committed to us, "It is finished."

***~~Now, brethren, allow a word of exhortation—~~***

***~~1. Contemplate the excellency of your incarnate God—~~***

Survey the heavens, with all the diversified and stupendous bodies contained in them: then inspect the minutest insect, which nothing but the greatest magnifying power can render visible: and see, both in the one and in the other, his creating hand, and his preserving power.

Then say with yourselves, 'The Maker of all these things is my Friend, my Beloved, yes, my very Head, one with me; not merely as a subject is one with his political head, the king, but as any member of my body is with my own head. Not any powers which I myself possess are more used for the good of my own members, than all the powers of this Savior are for me.

For me, he became incarnate:  
for me, he died upon the cross,  
for me, he rose, and ascended up where he was before,  
for me, he orders everything in Heaven and earth,  
for me, "he has prepared a place" in the mansions of his Father,  
and for me, is he shortly coming again, to "take me to himself, that where he is I may be also."

Shall I cease for a moment to think of him?

Shall anything for a moment stand in competition with him?

My dear brethren, let him have the pre-eminence.

Let him be seated on the throne of your hearts.

Let every Dagon fall before him.

Let him "be all your salvation and all your desire."

***~~2. Awake to the performance of your duties towards him—~~***

Are you not ashamed that this adorable Savior has held so low a place in your esteem, that even the most contemptible things that can be imagined have had a pre-eminence above him? There is not a *base lust*which has not more power to sway you, than love to him, or zeal for his glory. There is not a *vanity*which you have not more desired, nor an object whom you have not more feared, nor a device you have not more relied upon, than he. Would you not have thought it impossible, that a Being so glorious in himself, and so gracious unto you, would ever be so despised by you, as he has been? O! humble yourselves before him; and now set yourselves with all diligence to honor and to glorify his name. Let it no longer be a doubt, either in your own minds or in the minds of any that behold you, who has the preeminence in your souls. Give yourselves wholly to him: live altogether for him: let your daily and hourly inquiry be, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

In short, *endeavor to begin the life of Heaven while you are yet upon earth!*When once you are there, "you will follow the Lamb whither-soever he goes, [Revelation 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.4)." Follow him now: follow the footsteps which he trod on earth: follow him, in your affections, to the highest heavens! [Colossians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1-2). Look forward to the time when he, who has ascended as your Forerunner, shall come again to take you to himself, and "seat you with him upon his throne, as he sits on his Father's throne!"

***~~#2169~~***

***~~THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)~~***

"It pleased the Father that in him would all fullness dwell."

IT is scarcely possible to read with attention the Epistles of Paul, and not to be struck with the energetic manner in which he expatiates on the glory and excellency of Christ, not merely when he professedly treats of his work and offices, but oftentimes when he only incidentally, as it were, makes mention of his name. We notice this particularly in the passage before us, where he puts forth all the powers of language to exalt his character to the uttermost.

Confining our attention to the expression in the text, we shall show,

***~~I. What is that fullness which resides in Christ—~~***

There is in him,

***~~1. An essential fullness—~~***

Christ, though apparently a mere man, was the first cause and last end of all things, even "God over all, blessed for ever, verse 16 with [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)." His people are said to be "filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.19);" but "in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9). Men are made to enjoy all the gifts and graces of God's Spirit; and, in this sense, are "partakers of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" but Christ was really "God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16). [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1); [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)."

The Godhead dwelt in him, not symbolically as in the temple [Psalm 80:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 80.1), or spiritually as in us [2 Corinthians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 6.16), but truly, "bodily [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)," substantially. The fullness of the Godhead was essentially his from all eternity; nor was he any more dependent on the Father than the Father was on him: but his assumption of our nature was the result of the Father's counsels, and the fruit of the Father's love, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16). [1 John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10).

***~~2. A communicative fullness—~~***

He has *a fullness of merit to*justify *the most ungodly*. Christ, by his obedience unto death, perfected whatever was necessary for the restoring of us to the Divine favor. His atonement was satisfactory; his righteousness was complete. Under the Mosaic law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice was provided: but the one sacrifice of Christ was all-sufficient; and "all who believe in him, are justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39);" his "righteousness shall be unto them, and upon them all, [Romans 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.22);" and, however great their iniquities have been, they shall be without spot or blemish in the sight of God, [Ephesians 5:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.27).

He has also *a fullness of grace to*sanctify *the most polluted*. With him was "the residue of the Spirit, [Malachi 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 2.15)." The oil that was poured out upon him was to descend to the basest of his members, [Psalm 133:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 133.2). "He was constituted Head over the Church, that he might fill all things, [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23); [Ephesians 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.10);" and he received gifts on purpose that he might bestow them on the rebellious, [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18). His grace is still sufficient to support us in all temptation, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9), and to sanctify us throughout in body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23. *No lusts are so inveterate as eventually to withstand its influence*, [Luke 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.2); *nor is any heart so vile but it shall be "purged by him from all its filthiness, and from all its idols*, [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27)."

It will not be presumptuous, or unprofitable, if we inquire,

***~~II. Why it pleased the Father that all fullness would reside in Christ?~~***

Many reasons might be mentioned; but the principal reasons may be comprehended under the two following:

***~~1. For the honor of his own Son—~~***

As Jesus was to become a sacrifice for us, it was fit that he would have all the honor of our salvation. Accordingly we are told, that God exalted him on purpose that at his name every knee would bow, and that every tongue would confess him to be the sovereign Lord of all! [Philippians 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.9-11).

By this appointment of Christ to be the head of vital influence to the Church, all are necessitated to come to him, and to "receive out of his fullness, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)," and to live by faith upon him from day to day, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20). All are necessitated to depend on him for a constant communication of grace and peace, as much as to depend on the sun for the periodic returns of light and heat. Hence, both on earth and in Heaven, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14). [Revelation 5:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.12-13), all are constrained to give him all the glory of their salvation.

No one can ascribe anything to his own goodness; seeing that all are cleansed in the blood of Christ, and arrayed in the spotless robe of his righteousness, [Isaiah 61:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.10). Nor can any glory in his own strength; since no one has any sufficiency in himself even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5); and much less to renew his own soul. The *merit*that justifies, and the *grace*that sanctifies—are all from him: "he is all, and in all [Colossians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.11);" and he is made all unto us, on purpose that all may be compelled to glory in him alone, [1 Corinthians 1:30-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30-31).

***~~2. For the security of our souls—~~***

There never was but one man (Adam) to whom a stock was entrusted; and he soon (if we may so speak) became a bankrupt. And if we had grace committed to us in such a manner as to he left wholly to ourselves for the improvement of it, we would lose it again, just as Adam did. For our more abundant security therefore the Father treasured up all fullness in his Son; that, however our broken cisterns might fail, there might be an inexhaustible fountain secured to us. In this view we are reminded, that "God has laid help upon One that is mighty, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19);" and that "because he lives we shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19)."

We are further told by the Apostle, that this appointment of Christ to he our head, with the consequent necessity of living by faith in him, and of receiving out of his fullness—was ordained of God on purpose that the promises might be finally secured to all the chosen seed, [Romans 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.16); and he himself declares, that this very constitution of things was the one ground of his assurance respecting the salvation of his soul: "Our life is hidden with Christ in God: and (therefore) when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)."

***~~This passage, duly considered, shows us clearly,~~***

***~~1. The excellency of faith—~~***

How can we receive anything from Christ except by faith? No other method can be conceived whereby we can obtain anything at his hands. But *faith interests us in all that he has done and suffered for us, and in all that he has received to communicate unto us.*It is faith whereby alone we can "draw water out of the wells of salvation:" it is that, in the exercise of which we may be "filled with all the fullness of God." Let all of us then cultivate this precious grace, and, as the best means of receiving every other blessing, let us pray with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith!"

***~~2. The evil of self-righteousness—~~***

Self-righteousness is a practical denial of the assertion in our text. It refuses to Christ the honor put upon him by the Father, and ascribes to *self*that which belongs to him alone. And shall it be thought a small evil to rob Christ of his glory? Shall it appear a light matter to rebel against the eternal counsels of the Father, and to set ourselves in direct opposition to his blessed will? Let none henceforth suppose, that the trusting in our own wisdom, righteousness, or strength, is a trivial offense: for surely God will be jealous for his own honor, and the honor of his dear Son; and will look with scorn on every proud Pharisee, while he will receive with boundless compassion the vilest of repenting harlots.

***~~3. The true nature of evangelical piety—~~***

Vital godliness, especially under the Christian dispensation, consists in a conformity of mind to the revealed will of our heavenly Father. Now in no respect is that will more sacred than in reference to the glory designed for Christ; nor is there anything wherein a conformity to it is more characteristic of true and eminent piety.

In one word then, the true Christian is well pleased that all fullness would dwell in Christ: if he might have some fullness in himself, he would rather have it in Christ, that he might receive all from him. Every part of salvation is the more endeared to him, on account of its coming through that channel: and it is his supreme felicity in this world, as it will be also in the world to come, to owe everything to that adorable Savior, and to glorify him in all, and for all.

Beloved, let this be your daily experience. Let it be your delight to live upon Christ's fullness; and it shall be his delight to communicate to you all spiritual and eternal blessings!

***~~#2170~~***

***~~SANCTIFICATION THE END OF REDEMPTION~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21-23)~~***

"Once you were *alienated*from God and were *enemies*in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under Heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

*OF all the subjects that can occupy the human mind, there is not one so great and glorious as that of redemption through the incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son*. It is that which occupies incessantly the heavenly hosts; and which the Apostle Paul, whatever be his more immediate subject of discourse, reverts to on every occasion: and when he has, however incidentally, touched upon it, he scarcely knows how, or when, to leave it.

This very strongly appears in the passage now before us. Having in the beginning of this chapter thanked God for bringing the Colossians to the knowledge of his Gospel, and informed them what were the peculiar blessings which in his daily prayers he sought for in their behalf, and what thanksgivings he constantly offered up, especially for that which they had experienced in being "translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," he launches forth into the praises of the Lord Jesus Christ for all that he had done in the creation, preservation, and redemption of the world, and particularly for his redeeming love, as manifested to, and exercised upon, the Colossian converts. But, as they were converts from the Gentile world, we may fitly consider his address to them as delivered also to us; and may take occasion from it to show,

***~~I. What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us—~~***

***~~1. Our state was awful in the extreme—~~***

"We were alienated from God." This is no less true of us than of the idolatrous Gentiles: for though by *calling*ourselves Christians we have professed a regard for God and his Christ, we have not really sought our happiness in God: we have not even desired his favor, or used any means to obtain it. We have been contented to live at a distance from him, to put the very remembrance of him far from us, and to seek our happiness in things which had no proper tendency to endear either him to us, or us to him. However observant we may have been of outward forms, we have had no pleasure in communion with him. The exercises of prayer and praise have rather been an irksome task, than occupations in which we found our chief delight. And if at any time we have had opportunities of becoming better acquainted with God and with his holy will, we have not been forward to avail ourselves of them: and if instruction on the subject of his Gospel has been offered to us, we have rather turned away from it, as distasteful to us, than listened to it as pleasing to our souls. The very light which would have revealed him to us, has been offensive to us; and we have turned our eyes from it, as bringing to our view an object whose presence was to us a source of pain.

Nor is this all. We were "enemies to him;" yes, "enemies to him in our mind:" we have had a decided aversion to his law: instead of contemplating it as "holy, just, and good," we have viewed it as imposing a yoke that could not be endured. And this hatred to it has been proved by our actual rebellion against it: our "wicked works" have shown clearly enough that the service of sin was more congenial with our minds than the service of our God. As for all the sublime duties which God's law inculcates, we have lived in a willful neglect of them: and of innumerable evils which it forbids, we have lived in the daily and habitual commission. Such had been the state of the Colossians in their time of unregeneracy; and such is the state of every child of man, until he is renewed by God in the spirit of his mind.

***~~2. But the Lord Jesus Christ has interposed to deliver us from it—~~***

"He has reconciled us to God in the body of his flesh through death." Yes, the Son of God himself has left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our flesh, that in the very nature which had sinned he might bear the penalty that was due to sin, and expiate our guilt by his own blood. The sacrifices under the law were substituted in the place of the offender, and they surrendered up *their*life as an atonement for *his*sins: and through the death of the victim in his stead, the sinner was reconciled unto his God.

Just so, the Lord Jesus Christ has offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world; and effected reconciliation for all who believe in him. No longer does God look with anger upon his enemies, when with penitential sorrow they implore mercy for Christ's sake. Not one of their trespasses will he ever impute to them: their iniquities, however great or numerous they may have been, are "blotted out by him as a morning cloud," and "cast behind his back into the very depths of the sea." This we are authorized to declare: for "God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation," and commanded us to proclaim to the whole universe, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, [2 Corinthians 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-19)."

But, that we may not be deceived by a partial view of this mystery I will pass on from what he has done, to show,

***~~II. What was his ultimate design in doing it—~~***

Whatever compassion the Lord Jesus felt for our fallen race, and however desirous he was to deliver us from destruction, he had other objects in view, that were not a whit less dear to him, and without which indeed his dying for us could never have prevailed to make us happy.

***~~The restoration of our souls to the Divine image was in his more immediate contemplation—~~***

Man by the Fall was despoiled of holiness, as well as happiness; and without a restoration to the former, could never repossess the latter. Indeed God could never re-admit him to his presence: nor could he, if admitted into Heaven, find any satisfaction in the sight of a holy God, or any pleasure in the employments which constitute the felicity of the heavenly hosts. To restore man therefore to the image which he had lost, was one great end of Christ's incarnation and death; as Paul has said, "He gave himself for us to redeem us" not from punishment merely, but "from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works! [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)"

In another passage the Apostle comes more immediately to the point, and says, "Christ has loved his Church, and given 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 would be holy and without blemish, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27)." this passage shows, that the expressions in my text relate not to our justification before God, but to the *sanctification*of our souls; to which Christ has had a view in all that he has done and suffered for us.

***~~And this he will effect for all whom he reconciles to God—~~***

He will impart of his Spirit to the soul,  
he will strengthen the soul for all its conflicts,  
he will enable all his people to "mortify their earthly members," and to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts."

Nor will he ever cease to work in them, until he has transformed them into his own linage, and can "present them unblamably and unreprovable in the sight of God."

We are not indeed to suppose that he will so renew them as to render them perfectly sinless; for the flesh will continue to lust against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh, to the last hour of our lives, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17); but he will so make the spiritual principle triumphant in the soul, as to leave in us no allowed sin, and so that he may present us to God as "Israelites indeed in whom there is no deceit."

In this, however, there must be the concurrence and cooperation of the believer himself; as will appear while I show,

***~~III. What is necessary to be done on our part, in order to secure the blessings which he has obtained for us—~~***

Those who are addicted to system would alter the translation here, and read it, not, "if you continue," but "since you continue." But this is only one instance of many, wherein *the advocates for human systems betray their determination to make everything bend to their views*. The translators of our Scriptures would indulge no such unhallowed partiality. They would in no case wrest the Scriptures to make them favor a party in the Church. They maintained a child-like simplicity; and with scrupulous fidelity labored to transmit to us the Scriptures in a perfect agreement with the inspired original.

Of the propriety of the translation in this place I have no doubt: it is the very language of the Scriptures, in a thousand other places as well as this; and it speaks to us a most important truth, namely, that we never can be presented blameless before God at last, unless we continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.

***~~1. It was by faith that we first obtained a saving interest in Christ—~~***

It would have been to no purpose that Christ had died to reconcile us to God, if we had not on our part believed in him as our Mediator and Redeemer. The unbelieving world who die in their sins, are rather plunged the deeper into perdition, than delivered from it, by the intervention of Christ. Their rejection of him has aggravated their guilt exceedingly: and the word preached to them in his name, will be "a savor of death unto all, to whom it is not a savor of life." The receiving of him into our hearts by faith, put us into possession of all the blessings which he had purchased for us.

***~~2. By the continued exercise of the same faith we must ultimately secure the harvest of which we have reaped the first-fruits—~~***

"As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)." We must "continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel."

It is a fact that many do make shipwreck of the faith. The Scriptures abound with instances of it: and we also shall feel many temptations, both from without and from within, to follow their sad example. Like the stony-ground hearers, we may through the influence of persecution "fall away:" or, as in the case of the thorny-ground hearers, the good seed in us may be so choked by the cares and pleasures of this life, as to "bring forth no fruit to perfection." And from whatever source the defection arises, "if we turn back, we turn back unto perdition," and "God's soul shall have no pleasure in us." Would we then be "presented faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy? Jude verse 24." We must hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:" we must be more and more "grounded" in the faith by a constant exercise of it on every occasion: we must be so firmly "settled" in it, that a man may as well attempt to pluck the sun from the firmament, as to shake either our faith or hope. This is the way to "endure unto the end;" and it is in this way only that we can fulfill that beneficial injunction, "Look to yourselves, that you lose not the things which you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John verse 8."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Are there any who are here yet unreconciled to God?~~***

O! think what a mercy it is that God's wrath has not broken forth against you to your utter and everlasting destruction! Think how many of the human race are now suffering the penalty due to their sins in hopeless sorrows, and in torments of which we have no conception. Do not, I entreat you, let the efforts made for your salvation be in vain. Let not "Christ have died in vain;" and "receive not the grace of God in vain:" but "today, 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!"

***~~2. Are there here those whom God has reconciled to himself?~~***

How can you ever adore him as you ought to do? Can you reflect on the means he has used for your redemption. Can you reflect on his laying your iniquities on the person of his only dear Son, and not bless him? The wonder is, how you can find a moment for any other employment; and that you are not, like the lame man whom Peter and John healed, leaping, and dancing, and praising God every day and all the day long!

But, if this were the frame of your mind, I would still point you to a more excellent way of glorifying your heavenly Benefactor. You have seen that the Lord Jesus, in dying for you, sought "to present you to God holy, and unblamably and unreprovable in his sight:" *let his object then in redeeming you be the one object at which you shall aim through the remainder of your lives*. And remember, that it is not sufficient that you are unblamably and unreprovable before men; you must be so "in the sight of God" also, even of that "God who searches the heart, and tries the thoughts."

Let your secret walk with God be such as he will approve. Let your every temper, and disposition, and habit, mark the friendship that exists between God and you. And let every day be so spent, as if at the close of it you expected your soul to be required of you, and to be presented by your Savior to your reconciled God.

***~~#2171~~***

***~~CHRIST IN US, THE HOPE OF GLORY~~***

***~~[Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27)~~***

"Christ in you, the hope of glory!"

THE Gospel is a "mystery," "the riches" of which are unsearchable, and "the glory" incomprehensible. But the sum and substance of it is contained in few words: it is briefly this, "Christ in us, the hope of glory." In the margin of our Bibles it is translated, "Christ among us, the hope of glory;" and each of these translations has its zealous advocates: but we may easily and properly comprehend both, by saying, that Christ is the hope of glory to us,

***~~I. As revealed in the Scriptures—~~***

The way to the tree of life is guarded by a flaming sword and there is no access to it for fallen man, but by Christ, as the appointed Mediator. He, as Paul says, "is our hope, [1 Timothy 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.1);" and through him there is hope for all through him,

***~~1. As a dying Savior—~~***

It is he who has made atonement for our sins, and "reconciled us to God by the blood of his cross." Through his vicarious sacrifice every sinner in the universe may come to God; seeing that "he is an atoning sacrifice, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the world." However great the debt which we owe to Divine justice, we may regard it all as paid by our Divine Surety; and may assure ourselves, that, if we believe in Christ, "there neither is, nor ever shall be, any condemnation to us".

***~~2. As a living Savior—~~***

It is worthy of particular observation, that in the Holy Scriptures a greater stress is laid upon the life of Christ in glory, than upon his death upon the cross. Peter speaks of him as our hope, in this particular view: "God raised him up, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God, [1 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.21)." Paul, too, represents the life of Christ as more efficacious for our salvation than his death: "Who is he that condemns? it is Christ that died, yes, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us, [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.34)." And still more forcibly, he says in another place, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life, [Romans 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.10)." In Heaven we view the Lord Jesus as our advocate with the Father, maintaining continually our peace with him; when we, by our innumerable departures from him, would entirely destroy all our hope of final acceptance with him.

We view Him, also, as:  
the one source of all spiritual blessings,  
the first cause of all the good that is in us,  
the protector of his people from all their enemies, and  
"the finisher" of the work of which he has been "the author."

It is from this view of him that the weakest of his people is enabled to say, "Because he lives, I shall live also!"

But he is our hope yet more especially,

***~~II. As dwelling in the heart—~~***

All that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us would be in vain, if he did not also work effectually in us. But this he does,

***~~1. Purifying our hearts from sin—~~***

Our blessed Lord is said to "dwell in us, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17)," and to be "one with us, even as he and his Father are one, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21); [John 17:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.23)." Now it is a fact, that his people are universally, and without exception, holy. And whence comes this? Is it from any power of their own? No; it is from the mighty working of his power in us: as the Apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and 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)." Were we "separate from him, we could do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5);" but, through the mighty working of his power in us, we "die unto sin and live unto righteousness," and attain a fitness for our heavenly inheritance.

***~~2. Transforming us into his blessed image—~~***

This, after all, is the crowning work of redemption. Until this is effected, we may well stand in doubt both of ourselves and others. Paul, addressing the Galatian converts, says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you, [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20)." To say the truth, until this is effected, nothing is done to any good purpose. It is not Christ on the cross, nor Christ in Heaven, no, nor Christ in the heart, that will save us—unless his image is there formed in righteousness and true holiness. This is strongly declared by the Apostle Paul, in the third chapter of this epistle; where he says, "Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him; where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but Christ (that is, the image of Christ) is all, and in all! [Colossians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.10-11)." But, when this great work is wrought, we need not fear: we may entertain a well-founded hope; yes, we may have "a full assurance of hope," that, "where he is, there we shall be also;" and that, "when He, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are deluding themselves with false hopes—~~***

All people conceive themselves entitled to indulge a hope of happiness hereafter. But, to entertain any such hope without having received the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts by faith, is a fatal delusion. For the Apostle says, that those who are "without Christ" are also without hope, [Ephesians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.12)." You will ask, Do I wish to drive you to despair? Yes, I do; so far, at least, as to drive you out of all false refuges, and to lead you to Him who is the only Savior of the world. I must declare unto you, that, whatever you lay as a foundation of hope, besides that which God himself has laid, you only deceive your own souls: for "other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:11." Christ is the only refuge of fallen man: nor can you have a scriptural hope of glory, until you have "fled to him, and laid hold on him, [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)," and have his image enstamped upon your souls.

***~~2. Those who have a "good hope through grace"—~~***

"Let your union with Christ be more and more confirmed, becoming daily more intimate and more abiding. It is by this that the work of grace must be carried on, and perfected within you. It is by this that the justness of your hopes must be made to appear: for "every one that has a good hope in Christ will purify himself as Christ is pure," and be progressively "changed into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." In proportion as this work advances, your hopes may well increase: and if this work declines within you, your evidences will be the less clear, and your hope be less assured. Press forward, then, for the highest possible conformity to the Savior's image; that you may already breathe, as it were, the atmosphere of Heaven, and live in the constant anticipation of your future inheritance.

***~~#2172~~***

***~~PREACHING CHRIST~~***

**[Colossians 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.28)**

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

THE mystery of the Gospel was first made known to *Adam*in Paradise: but in process of time the real scope of it was forgotten; and nothing of it remained but the rites whereby it was shadowed forth. To *Abraham*a plainer revelation of it was given; and to *Moses*, a complete system of types, which were to illustrate the Gospel in all its parts. Still, however, the views which men had of it were obscure: the design of the ceremonial law itself was very imperfectly understood; and the idea of men being saved through the crucifixion of the incarnate Deity, was almost as new to the Jews, in the apostolic age, as to the heathen themselves. Hence Paul speaks of it as "hidden from all preceding ages and generations," and as then for the first time "manifested to the saints."

That the memory of it might continue to the end of time, and its benefits be universally diffused, our blessed Lord appointed an order of men, whose sole business would be to spread the knowledge of it throughout the world. Among these Paul was a very distinguished instrument. He both labored more abundantly, and suffered more severely, than any other of the Apostles.

In our text we see,

***~~I. The ministrations of this great Apostle—~~***

***~~He specifies distinctly, first of all, the subject of his ministrations—~~***

This, as he tells us in the words preceding our text, was*Christ in us the hope of glory*. We are sure that the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, was that which he chiefly insisted on. He expressly tells us so in another place, [1 Corinthians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23-24), and declares that he had fully "determined to know and preach nothing else, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2)."

This he affirmed to be the only hope of sinful man: that it was that which made satisfaction to divine justice, and procured our reconciliation with his offended Father, verse 21, 22; that nothing could be added to it to render it more effectual, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4); and that if ever we attained to eternal happiness and glory, it must be entirely through the merit of his sin-atoning sacrifice, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11).

But though the sufficiency of the death of Christ for our salvation was the principal subject of the Apostle's preaching—yet the indwelling of Christ in the soul by his blessed Spirit was necessarily connected with it; and the two points together formed the sum and substance of all his ministrations. He often speaks of Christ "dwelling in us, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17)," and "living in us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)," and "being our life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4);" and in the text he says, that "Christ in us is the hope of glory."

The necessity of this he urged with as much care and earnestness as the atonement itself: because without Christ we could do nothing, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5), yes, we must continue reprobates, [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5), and for ever destitute of any saving interest in his salvation, [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9).

***~~He next mentions the manner in which he conducted them—~~***

He left nothing undone which could promote the reception of the Gospel: he "warned every man:" he was faithful to the trust reposed in him; and, without either courting the favor of men or fearing their displeasure, he boldly commended himself to the consciences of all. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, he persuaded men, [2 Corinthians 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.11). He told them plainly of their lost estate, and their utter incapacity to help themselves. He set before them the provision which God had made for them in Christ Jesus; and in the most pointed terms assured them, that "if they neglected that great salvation, they could never escape" the wrath of God, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3) and [1 Corinthians 16:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 16.22). If any, yes if even an angel from Heaven would attempt to substitute another Gospel, or alter in any respect that which he had preached to them, he did not hesitate to pronounce them accursed, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9).

Nor had he any respect of persons. When preaching before kings, he spoke so plainly as to make them tremble on their throne, [Acts 24:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 24.25); and when addressing those who professed godliness, he warned them frequently with tears, that carnal and worldly-minded professors, whatever they might profess, were "enemies of the cross of Christ; and that their end would be destruction! [Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)."

He also "taught every man in all wisdom." Being himself instructed beyond all others, he labored to impart what he had so freely received, and to make known to his hearers "the whole counsel of God. "Yet in this he exercised discretion. He administered milk to babes, and strong food to those only who were able to digest it, [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.1-2). [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14).

As, on the one hand, he accommodated himself to the infirmities of the weak, so, on the other hand, he "withheld nothing that could be profitable" to the strong, [Acts 20:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.20). As far as he could with a good conscience, "he became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some, [1 Corinthians 9:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.19-22)."

Hence it appears with how much justice he called himself "a wise master-builder, [1 Corinthians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.10);" indeed the whole of his ministrations prove him to have been "a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, [2 Timothy 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.15)."

***~~He further declares the scope or end at which he continually aimed—~~***

The Apostle considered himself to be nearly in the situation of Abraham's servant, who was sent out to procure a wife for Isaac, [Genesis 24:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 24.4); and, like him he labored to accomplish his mission in the best and most successful manner, [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2). He wished to present all, whether Jews or Gentiles, perfect in Christ Jesus."

He wished to present them perfect in his righteousness. All who believe in Christ are freely justified from all their sins, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39). They are clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and are "presented faultless before the presence of the Father's glory, Jude verse 24." Whatever iniquities may have been committed by them in their former life, they are all "blotted out as a morning cloud, and cast into the depths of the sea." From the moment that they believe in Jesus, they are perfectly reconciled to God; they are "accepted in the Beloved, [Ephesians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.6)," and are "complete in him, [Colossians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10) and [Revelation 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.18)."

He sought to present them also perfect through his grace. This was the end at which our blessed Lord aimed in dying for sinners, verse 22; and the very same was the Apostle's end in preaching to them. He would not have his converts to continue in a low state of holiness, but to attain the fullest conformity to the Divine image: he would have them to "be holy, even as He who had called them was holy, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16)." This is the more usual acceptance of the term "perfect" in the sacred volume—it means that growth which Christians in general may be expected to attain: it imports maturity, in opposition to infantile weakness. And so anxious was the Apostle to bring his converts to this state, that he continued "travailing, as it were, in birth with them," until it was fully accomplished: and this was the true reason of his so often "changing his voice" towards them, [Galatians 4:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19-20). in a way of consolation or reproof.

From hence we see unquestionably,

***~~II. The line which mutually befits us in the relation in which we stand—~~***

***~~1. Me, as your minister—~~***

Paul is doubtless the best model for a Christian minister; and, consequently, he is most likely to labor with effect, who follows him in the subject, the manner, and the scope of his ministrations. What then befits me but to be a follower of him in these respects? God helping me, this is what I have endeavored to be, and hope to continue to the end.

I must know nothing but Christ, and him crucified; I must warn or comfort men with all faithfulness; I must not relax my labors as long as I can have access to one who is not yet presented perfect in Christ Jesus; and I must regard the turning of many unto righteousness as the best and richest reward of all my labors.

***~~2. You, my stated hearers—~~***

The preaching of Christ is generally called wild enthusiasm: the warning of men respecting their guilt is deemed harshness: the laboring to instruct men is ascribed to an officious impertinence, or ostentatious vanity, or perhaps designing hypocrisy. A solicitude to bring men to a state of spiritual maturity is reckoned, I had almost said, among the most unpardonable of crimes; insomuch, that the drunkard, the whoremonger, and adulterer, shall meet with more favor from the world at large, than a faithful, diligent, conscientious minister.

But if we revere the person and ministry of Paul, we ought also to honor those who resemble him; and to concur with them to the uttermost, by a submission to their rebukes, a following of their instructions, and an entire devoting of ourselves to the service and enjoyment of God.

We should have the same end in hearing, which they have in preaching to us; we should not be satisfied with any low attainment, but desire and labor to be "perfect in Christ Jesus." This is what, through the tender mercy of my God, I have long experienced at your hands; and this is what I pray God I may ever see in you, as long as our mutual relation shall exist, and until we be summoned to give an account of ourselves at the judgment-seat of Christ.

Let me however both "teach and warn" you. The time is shortly coming when I must present you all before God, either as having answered the end of my ministrations, and as having attained perfection in Christ—or as having disregarded and defeated all my efforts for your salvation. The Lord grant that I may not in that day prove "a swift witness against you," but may have you as "my joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity!

***~~#2173~~***

***~~MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL TO BE SEARCHED OUT~~***

***~~[Colossians 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.1-3)~~***

"I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

NOTHING is more odious than a boasting spirit. Yet are there occasions on which it may be proper for a minister to declare to his people the greatness of his affection for them, and of his solicitude in their behalf. Paul, than whom no man was ever further from indulging this hateful spirit, judged it right, in almost all his epistles, to assure his converts of his remembrance of them night and day in prayer; and of his willingness to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but even his own soul, because they were dear to him, [1 Thessalonians 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.2); [1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8); 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10.

This tended to beget in them a reciprocal affection, and to open their ears to his instructions; and, at the same time to commend to them the Gospel, which had generated in his heart these feelings towards them. True it is, indeed, that he abounded in love far beyond any ministers of the present day: but still every faithful minister may, without pride or arrogance, adopt towards his people the language of our text, and say, "I want you to know how much I am struggling for you."

That we may enter fully into the Apostle's words, I will show you,

***~~I. What he desired in behalf of the Colossian Church—~~***

His object was, "that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, [Colossians 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.28)." With this view, he sought,

***~~1. To bring them to a clear knowledge of the Gospel of Christ—~~***

The Gospel is here called a mystery, even "the mystery of God:" and throughout all his writings he designates it as a great stupendous mystery. It is the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ. It must be viewed as from all eternity concerted between the Father and the Son in the covenant of redemption; wherein the Father agreed to accept the mediation of his Son, in behalf of man; and the Son agreed to assume our nature, and to bear our sins, and to work out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death; and so to watch over those whom the Father gave him, that they might all, without exception, attain to everlasting life, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2); [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6); [John 17:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-12) with 22-24.

Now all this he would have them "understand;" and not in a mere superficial way, but with such "a full assurance" as would leave not a doubt upon their mind either of its truth or excellency.

In the Gospel are "riches" that are utterly unsearchable:  
riches of *wisdom*, which no finite mind can comprehend,  
riches of *love*, which can never be explored,  
riches of *mercy*, which eternity will never suffice to celebrate.

He would have them see how harmoniously all the divine perfections unite in this mystery, and how wonderfully they are glorified. In a word, he would have them see in the Gospel a salvation so worthy of God, and so suited to man, as to carry with it, independently of all other considerations, a satisfactory evidence of its divine origin, and a pledge of the happiness of all who embrace it.

Now this is precisely what every pious minister wishes, and labors to accomplish. Those who are themselves ignorant of this mystery will be satisfied with some loose general statement about Christ, if they do not leave him out altogether. But not so the man who is taught of God: he will endeavor to exhibit to his people all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, [2 Corinthians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.6); and he never will rest, until God has shined into their hearts, to give them a clear, a rich, an assured knowledge of it.

***~~2. To bring them to an open "acknowledgment" of it—~~***

"With the heart man believes unto righteousness: but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, [Romans 10:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.10)." Whatever we may know of this mystery, it will be ineffectual for eternal happiness, if we do not confess Christ openly before men. He will never acknowledge those who are afraid to acknowledge him; but will surely "deny them in the presence of his Father and of his holy angels." Hence Paul labored to effect this also; even to impress their minds so deeply with this mystery, that they might rejoice and glory in it, and be willing to bear all the sufferings that could ever be inflicted on them for their adherence to it.

And for this we also would labor. Against a timid concealment of men's convictions, we would bear the most decided testimony. We know, indeed, that a confession of Christ before men will bring persecution with it. But if any man is unwilling to bear his cross after Christ, or even to lay down his life for his sake, we declare that he is not, nor can ever be, accepted of him. "If he loves father or mother more than Christ, he cannot be Christ's disciple:" "if he loves his own life," so as to save it here, "he shall assuredly lose it" to all eternity. Among those for whom a place is prepared in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, "the fearful and unbelieving" are no less numbered, than those who have been guilty of idolatry or murder! [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8). "If we would approve ourselves to be the servants of Christ, we must not only bear our cross after him, but rejoice that we are accounted worthy to suffer shame, or even death, for his sake." "We must be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain the crown of life."

***~~3. To bring them to a union of heart with each other, by means of it—~~***

"Knowledge," were it as great as that of angels, would be of no value, without love. Nor would zeal itself, even though it led us to endure the flames of martyrdom for Christ's sake, be accepted of our God, if it were destitute of love. A union of heart among the disciples of our Lord is that by which, in a pre-eminent degree, they are to be distinguished. By love they are to be "knit together;" even as beams of timber, when joined and compacted by the builder of an edifice. In the whole universe, there exists no other bond like this. The ties of nature are feeble, when compared with it. It resembles, as far as anything can resemble, the union that exists between the Persons of the Godhead: and by it, more than by anything else, is the power of religion displayed. "I pray for them," says our Lord, "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 know that you have sent me, [John 17:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.20-21)." This, then, the Apostle sought: and this should we seek: nor should we ever be satisfied, until we see it attained and exercised among you.

Having seen what the Apostle desired for them, we will proceed to show,

***~~II. Why with such intensity he desired it—~~***

In the close of the preceding chapter he speaks of "laboring and striving" according to the working of the Holy Spirit, who wrought in him mightily. The word, before translated "striving," he here repeats; conveying to us, thereby, the idea that he exerted himself for the attainment of these things, with such a kind of "conflict" as wrestlers, racers, or fighters, maintained in the Grecian games. His whole heart and soul were engaged in behalf of all his Christian brethren, whether personally known to himself or not, that these great things might be accomplished in them. And for this end he labored,

***~~1. Because these things were essential to their comfort—~~***

In truth, there is no happiness in religion, unless it has its perfect work within us. *A superficial and general view of the Gospel calls forth no admiring and adoring thoughts*: nor does it gender in the soul those ardent affections which bind together the members of Christ's mystical body, and make every one of them ready to "lay down his life for the brethren, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)." But when all the riches of the Gospel are opened to our view, and the incomprehensible mystery of redemption, in all its inscrutable provisions, in its execution at the appointed period, in the mode of its application to the soul, and in all its stupendous consequences, is unfolded to us, so that we can behold our own saving interest in it, and are enabled to bear witness to it before an ignorant and ungodly world—what is all this, but Heaven already begun in the soul!

The glorified saints around the throne have no higher sources of joy than these, no higher theme of praise: and they are only happier than we, because their discovery of these things is more complete, and they are freed from all those infirmities which, in our present state, interrupt our enjoyment of them. To this I may add: when the soul, by virtue of this mystery, is filled with love, even with such love as Christ himself bears to his saints, such love as is the very image of God within us—this is happiness. The man that lives in the exercise of this divine principle breathes a purer atmosphere than others; and can say, "This is the house of God, this is the gate of Heaven!"

Now the Apostle was anxious that "the hearts" of all his brethren "might be thus comforted." And what more can I wish for you? or rather I would say, what less than this should satisfy my desires in your behalf? Brethren, this is the state in which I would have you live: this is the comfort which I would have you all enjoy. And for this end it is, that from time to time endeavor to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel, and to encourage among you that communion of saints which is a foretaste of Heaven upon earth!

***~~2. Because, by nothing short of this could the full ends of his ministry be attained—~~***

A parent would not be satisfied if his children continued year after year in a state of infantile weakness: he would desire to see their stature increased, and their faculties enlarged. Thus the Apostle felt in behalf of all his spiritual children. He longed that they might "grow up into Christ in all things, as their living Head;" daily increasing in the knowledge of God, daily brought into closer communion with him, daily assimilated more and more to his blessed image!

And this is what we would desire in your behalf. We are thankful when "your understandings are opened in any measure to understand the Scriptures;" and, from being blind, you are able to see, though it be only "men, as trees walking." But we cannot be satisfied with this: no; we would "put our hands on your eyes again," until you would "be restored, so as to see every man clearly, [Mark 8:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.24-25)." In truth, whether in respect of faith or love, we never would rest satisfied, until you have attained "the full measure of the stature of Christ." We would never cease to labor, until we have "perfected that which is lacking in your faith, [1 Thessalonians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.10)." and until we see you "standing perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

***~~Behold what course we ministers are bound to pursue,~~***

***~~1. What you should desire for yourselves—~~***

"Who will show us any good?" says the Psalmist: and then adds, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us, [Psalm 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 4.6)." Truly, there is nothing in the universe worthy of a thought in comparison with this. What can worldly knowledge do for you, in comparison with the knowledge of Christ? Or what can the fondest endearments of mere human affection do, in comparison with the love that is divine? If Paul's judgment may be taken, he "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." And this is the mind which I would wish to be in you. This, beloved, is your duty: this is your privilege.

O! beg of God, that you may rise to this. Be not satisfied with low attainments, when such prospects are before you. You see what exertions men make for the attainment of *knowledge*, and the acquisition of *honor*—and will you be less earnest in the pursuit of heavenly things? In a contest for earthly honors, you might feel discouraged by a consciousness of your inferiority in point of talent and capacity: but no such discouragement need be felt by any one in the conflict to which I call you. The very babe and suckling stands on a level with the wise and prudent; or rather, is raised above him, in proportion to his willingness to learn, and his willing submission to the truth of God. *It is the heart, and not the head, that is the seat of divine knowledge, and the region of love.* I beg you, brethren, let these things become the objects of your ambition, and never account any labor too great for the attainment of them.

***~~2. With what ardor you should seek after them—~~***

You have seen "what great conflict" your minister, if faithful, will have for you, in relation to these things: and will you feel less for yourselves? Go, look at those who are engaged in the race, the wrestling, the combat; do you not see how they put forth their energies? Have they any disposition to look about them, or any time to relax their efforts? Yet is the object of their contest light in comparison with yours, and the consequence of a failure unworthy of a thought. Come, brethren, and be in earnest. Study the sacred volume: study it with much and fervent prayer: entreat of God to reveal his dear Son to your hearts: implore the Holy Spirit to "guide you into all truth:" and see to it, that you "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Thus will you have in yourselves an evidence of the Gospel, which no human learning can give you; and conviction of its excellency, which nothing but experience can impart.

***~~#2174~~***

***~~THE TREASURES THAT ARE IN CHRIST~~***

***~~[Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3)~~***

"Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!"

"WISDOM," we are told, "is the principal thing; and therefore we should get wisdom." In all civilized countries, wisdom has been held in the highest repute: and institutions have been set on foot for the cultivation of it. How highly it was esteemed among our ancestors, we may judge from the provision which they made for the education of youth in all succeeding ages. We can have seen but little of the world, if we have not noticed the superiority which a cultivated mind possesses over one that is crude and uninstructed. And though it must be granted, that human learning will not change and sanctify the heart—yet we assert, that it will give a very great advantage for the understanding and explaining of the Holy Scriptures.

We do not say that God could not, or did not, make use of weak and unlettered men for the diffusion of his Gospel: but, as he selected Moses, a man "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," for the instruction and government of the Jewish Church, so he selected Paul, who had "been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel," to be his messenger of grace to the Gentile world: and, if he was pleased so to adapt the instrument to the work in that age of miracles, much more is such a qualification desirable for his chosen servants, now that miracles have ceased. We must not however forget, that the Scriptures are the fountain of true wisdom. We should ever bear in mind, that the heathen sages, though wiser than their contemporaries, were deplorably ignorant in comparison with those who live under the Christian dispensation: and even the light which some of the most learned among them possessed, was most probably obtained, either immediately or remotely, from the inspired volume. There, and there alone, is true wisdom to be found; and therein are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

To open and unfold these to you, is an employment worthy of the occasion on which we are assembled Preached as a Commemoration Sermon in King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

Paul in my text is expressing his ardent desire in behalf of the Christians at Colosse, whom he had never seen, that they might be fully instructed in the great mystery of the Gospel of Christ, "in whom, he observes, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

In illustration of these words we shall,

***~~1. Open to you these treasures of wisdom and knowledge—~~***

But "who is sufficient for such" an undertaking? Who can enter on such a task, without a fear, not only that he shall betray his own ignorance, and disappoint your expectations, but that he may even expose the Gospel itself to contempt? Indeed, if I were capable of doing justice to my subject, such is the impatience of modern auditories, that I could not have time to do more than merely open to you the casket, and give you a superficial view of its contents: but feeling how incompetent I am to unfold all the hidden mysteries of the Gospel, I must entreat you to make up for my deficiencies by your candor; and to be contented with treasuring up for your benefit what you do hear, when you cannot be gratified with all that you would wish to hear.

There are three points to which I will call your attention; and which may give you some little idea, that the subject, however unworthily handled by me, is at least deserving of the deepest investigation. The points I refer to are at all events such as the most enlightened heathen had no idea of; namely,

The real state of man.  
The eternal counsels of God concerning him.  
The stupendous effects produced by those counsels.  
Let these things be for a while considered by us.

**The *real state of man***was altogether unknown to the heathen world. That he was a weak, guilty, and polluted creature—they knew; but how weak, how guilty, how polluted—they had no conception; much less did they know how he was brought into such a state. It is from the inspired volume alone that we learn the perfection of his original nature, and the loss of that perfection through the fall of his first parents. From thence alone do we learn that obvious truth, that we "cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing."

Behold then, at the very onset, what a stupendous mystery is here! that we died in Adam! That "those who have never sinned after the similitude of his transgression," are yet partakers both of his guilt and corruption! That we are "born in iniquity, and conceived in sin," and are "by nature children of wrath!"

To this I beg your particular attention, because it is the very foundation of all spiritual knowledge; it is the very threshold, by stumbling at which, multitudes are kept from ever entering into the deep recesses of the Gospel.

You cannot but know, that men in general, and even learned divines, endeavor to soften down the Scripture declarations of man's guilt and misery: some deny that we are fallen at all; and assert that we come into the world as pure as Adam did from his Creator's hands.

Others allow that we are fallen, but deny that we are involved in the guilt of our first parents, or that the corruption which we inherit from them is anything more than what we have an innate power to subdue. They think that the descriptions given of us in the inspired volume are not to be taken in a literal sense; and that to say that we are "dead in trespasses and sins," is only a metaphor, importing that we are not quite so much alive to God and holiness as we ought to be.

And now mark how entirely such opinions obstruct the way to true wisdom and knowledge: man being in so good a state, there was no occasion for the counsels of the Most High to suggest a method of deliverance from it: a way of deliverance was obvious enough: there was no necessity for God himself to become incarnate, and to expiate the sins of men by his own blood; (man might be saved without any such sacrifice,) there was no need that the third person in the ever-blessed Trinity would undertake to dwell in the hearts of men, to enlighten their minds, to draw them unto Christ, to renew their nature, and to make them fit for Heaven; (man of himself, by the aid of his own reason and resolution, was sufficient for these things,) the obligations conferred upon us by this work of redemption are not such as to call for all the powers of our souls to be consecrated to God in the way of holy obedience; (such a life is needless, enthusiastic, and absurd,) in a word, there is no great cause for alarm to any of us; for we are all in the way to Heaven; and when we get there, shall have no great wonders to celebrate, but only to thank God for that which he could not justly or consistently have withheld.

Yes, brethren, this it is which obstructs the entrance of light into the souls of men: this it is which makes every one suppose that he understands the Gospel well enough: this it is that leads men to deride all idea of mystery, and to *reduce the Gospel to a system of heathen ethics*.

This view of our state by nature supersedes all occasion for the Gospel; every part of which supposes man to be a guilty, polluted, helpless creature.

So guilty, that he deserves the everlasting wrath of God.

So polluted, that he must be made an entire new creature before he can have any enjoyment of God, either now or in the eternal world, [John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.3).

So weak, that he cannot of himself either do a good act, or think a good thought, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13).

I do not hesitate to affirm, that the very first step towards true wisdom and knowledge is, to renounce all idea of our being "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing;" and to confess, from our inmost souls, that we are "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

**Next, let us contemplate the *counsels*of the Most High respecting man.** From all eternity, God foresaw the state to which the human race would be reduced, and concerted with his only dear Son how to effect their recovery. The Father proposed to his Son:  
to become our Surety and Substitute,  
to assume our nature,  
to bear our sins,  
to expiate our guilt  
to fulfill the law which we had broken,  
to satisfy the justice which we had offended,  
and thus to restore us to happiness, without dishonoring God as the Moral Governor of the universe.

The Son accepts the proposal, and undertakes to accomplish the redemption of a ruined world, [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6); [Isaiah 53:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-5); [Isaiah 53:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10-11).

The Holy Spirit also undertakes to impart to the souls of the redeemed all that the Lord Jesus would purchase for them.

See the account given us of this in [Psalm 40:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.6-8), "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

To these counsels the Apostle also constantly refers, as the true source of our redemption: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world began, unto our glory, [1 Corinthians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.7);" and he declares that the manifestation of them to the world under the Christian dispensation was eminently committed to him, and was to be a source of knowledge, not to men only, but to the angels themselves: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I would preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see, what is the fellowship of this mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord! [Ephesians 3:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8-11). See also [Colossians 1:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.26-27)."

Behold then here what treasures of wisdom and knowledge are unfolded to us! We see the veil torn away from before our eyes, and the Sacred Three sitting, as it were, in council, to provide for man's recovery, myriads of ages before his fall! We behold:  
the Father proposing to lay our iniquities on his only-begotten Son;  
his Son accepting the office of our Substitute;  
and the Holy Spirit engaging to render those mysterious plans effectual for the salvation of man!

Can we see nothing wonderful in all this? Does not this "love surpass all knowledge," and all conception? Is there not in it "a length, and breadth, and depth, and height" that can never be explored? Yes; and hence Paul speaks of "riches of glory" as contained in this mystery, [Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27); and, in reference even to a subordinate part of it only, exclaims, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

**Let us now pass on to the *effects*of these counsels**, and see whether they also do not unfold the most stupendous mysteries.

*From these counsels results all the work of Christ*. He in due time left the bosom of his Father, took our nature, was born of a virgin, fulfilled the law, offered himself a sacrifice for sin, rose from the dead, and ascended up to Heaven to carry on and perfect the work which he began on earth. Think of all this as necessary for our salvation. Think of it as concerted from eternity, and executed in time, and at this very moment accomplishing by means of his continual intercession at the right hand of God. Is there nothing wonderful in all this?

*From these counsels also results the salvation of man*. Not a human being to whom the Gospel comes is ever saved, but by virtue of this work which Christ wrought out for him: and by means of this, the vilest of the human race are saved. Those who seek a saving interest in this Savior are accepted of him, even though they may have committed sins of a scarlet or crimson die: but they "who, going about to establish their own righteousness, will not submit to the righteousness of God," are rejected; and the very Savior who would have been a sanctuary to them, becomes a rock of offense, over which they fall to their eternal ruin.

Here is a plain way of salvation for all. In vain do men dispute about the efficacy of their own good works to save them. Here is a door; and those who will enter in by it are saved; and those who obstinately stand without, perish. The very builders of the ark themselves perished, because they did not enter into it: and so will all who do not flee for refuge to this hope that is set before them. Is this wisdom, or this knowledge of small value?

*Further, from these counsels, results the glory of God himself.*It is in this way alone that God is, or can be glorified, by any man. If man were saved in any other way, every one of the Divine perfections would be dishonored. What evidence would there be that God is holy, if he allowed his laws to be violated with impunity? What would become of all the rights of justice, if no sacrifice were offered for sin? How could the truth of God be preserved, if his threatenings were not executed, either against the sinner himself, or against one who would be substituted in his place?

Men speak of God's *mercy*as if that was the only attribute to be displayed, and as if it was of no consequence whether his other attributes were honored or not. But God will not allow one of his attributes to be exalted at the expense of all the rest. Therefore has he opened for us a way of salvation whereby all might be displayed and all be glorified. Not only is *mercy*now exalted, but *justice*too; and that, not only in the condemnation, but in the salvation also of sinful man: nor is it a whit less glorified in the salvation of a penitent believer, than it is in the condemnation of the impenitent, and unbelieving.

Is here then no mystery? are here no treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Truly the angels themselves are made wiser by the revelation of them to the Church; and they are justly represented as "desiring daily to look into them," in order that their admiration of God may be augmented, and their felicity increased.

We have been constrained to speak only summarily on these points; but enough has been said to show, that in this subject there are treasures which will amply repay the most laborious investigation.

We proceed, therefore,

***~~II. To commend these treasures to your most diligent pursuit—~~***

As much as we revere human knowledge, we must declare, that, in comparison with that which we have been considering, the wisdom of philosophers is of no account: for this divine knowledge is at once the most sublime, the most certain, the most attainable, the most useful!

What is there so sublime as this divine knowledge? We grant that many human sciences, and astronomy in particular, are very sublime; and appear to be out of the reach of mortal man: but it is well known that philosophy, in many of its branches, was carried to as high, if not a much higher pitch among the unenlightened heathen, than among ourselves. But who among the heathen could ever find out God? Who could ever dive into his counsels? Who could account for the actual state of things as they existed in the world? Who could tell how a sinful man might be accepted by his God? Truly, "the world by wisdom knew not God:" this knowledge was "too wonderful and excellent" for unassisted reason to explore: nor can we, even with the Bible in our hands, attain it, unless God by his Spirit open the eyes of our understanding, and shine into our hearts to give it to us.

We are expressly 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 us;" and the things there spoken of are those which are revealed to us in the Gospel. It is not of Heaven that the Apostle speaks, but of the Gospel, and the mysteries contained in it. These are the things which are called in Scripture "the wonderful works of God, [Acts 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.11)." And they are "the things of the Spirit, which the natural man cannot receive, nor even know, because they are spiritually discerned." Well therefore may we covet that knowledge which was "hid in God from the foundation of the world," which the wisest philosophers could never attain, which even the learned among ourselves cannot possess, unless God himself becomes their teacher, and "opens their understandings to understand it."

In point of certainty, there is nothing that can be compared with divine knowledge. There are indeed in it many things which we cannot comprehend: but there is much known, and known on the authority of God himself. Most other knowledge is involved in doubt and obscurity; insomuch that hypotheses which have been established for ages, have yet been overthrown by the penetration of a Copernicus or a Newton. But the truth of God is unchangeable; and whether viewed in the promise to Adam, or in subsequent prophecies, or in the types and shadows of the law, or in the fuller revelation of the Gospel, is ever the same. Nor can all the subtlety of men or devils invalidate so much as one single point. Indeed, though received on the credit of the inspired writers, it so commends itself to the believer, as to approve to him its divine origin, as soon as ever it is received into his heart: he there finds a counterpart of every truth he has received, and "has the witness in himself" that it is indeed from God.

Now one great discouragement in the pursuit of human knowledge is, that after having labored for many years, we know not but that we may, after all, be found wrong, in things which we deemed of considerable consequence. But here, we never need to fear a disappointment: God's Word, like himself, abides for ever; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail!

Nor is there any other so attainable as divine knowledge. Thousands have not ability to investigate the depths of human science: if they would bestow ever so much labor, for ever so long a time, it would be in vain.

But not so the knowledge of the Gospel: for though it is so deep, that no man by the efforts of unassisted reason can enter into it—yet it is so easy of acquisition, that "he who runs may read and understand it." If God "opens our eyes, we shall see wondrous things out of his law!" If he shines into our hearts, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shall be seen by us. The qualification for this knowledge consists, not so much in the head, as in the heart: "God opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things that were spoken by Paul." Here then every one is encouraged to pursue it: for "none teaches like God," he can "ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings."

I grant indeed that it is a "hidden knowledge;" it is "a treasure hidden in a field." But it is revealed to us in the Word, and shall be revealed in us by the Spirit, if we desire to be taught of him. The promise is, "All your children shall be taught of God," and, if only we obtain his teaching, we shall "be guided into all truth," nor shall "a way-faring man, though a fool, be left to err therein."

Lastly, What can be compared with divine knowledge in point of usefulness? We deny not but that knowledge of various kinds is replete with benefit to man: but that benefit is bounded by this world, and the present state of things. Not so the knowledge of which we are speaking—that extends to the eternal world. In the knowledge of God and of Christ, are all our hopes centered. By this we are *justified*: as it is said, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." By it also we are *sanctified*: as it is said, "Sanctify them through your truth—your word is truth." By it also we shall be exalted to *glory*; for it is said, "This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

What knowledge is there that can be compared with this? Will earthly knowledge save you? If you could travel the whole round of science, and grasp in your mind all that ever was comprehended by human intellect:  
would it pacify a guilty conscience?  
would it take away the sting of death?  
would it enable you to look forward with comfort to the eternal world?  
would it prepare you to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and to give your account with joy?

No! nothing can do this but the knowledge of God as reconciled to us in the Son of his love. This is the sole property of the Gospel, even of that Gospel which is so neglected and despised. If then you would view these things aright, you must study the Gospel, and "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord."

Must we then lay aside our earthly knowledge? you will ask. No; but you must get it sanctified by the Spirit of God. The spoils of the Midianites were consecrated to the Lord; but before they were allowed to be brought into his tabernacle, "everything that would abide the fire, must pass through the fire; and whatever would not abide the fire, must be made to go through the water," for then only could they be an acceptable offering to him, when they were cleansed and purified from their corruption, [Numbers 31:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.23); [Numbers 31:54](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 31.54).

Thus also must your learning be sanctified; it must not be set in competition with the Word of God, but be made subservient to it. Beware then lest it blind your eyes, and fill you with a conceit that you do not need to be taught of God. What the Apostle says is alike applicable to the philosopher and the peasant, "If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." We must have the teachableness of "little children, if we would enter into the kingdom of Heaven;" and if we will not humble ourselves in that manner, God has told us that "he will take the wise in their own craftiness." In subserviency to the Gospel, your learning will be an invaluable blessing. But in opposition to it, it will prove a curse; for God will "confound the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent!"

Are we then desirous of attaining these heavenly treasures? Let us seek after them in the Holy Scriptures: and while we seek for knowledge as silver, and "search for it as for hidden treasures, let us cry to God for it, and lift up our voice to him; since it is the Lord alone that gives wisdom, and out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding! [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6)."

Let us beg of God to "give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, [Ephesians 1:16-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.16-20)." In this way we may hope to "acquaint ourselves with God," and to attain the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Then we may hope also to "shine as lights in a dark world," and "be as cities set upon a hill." Or, if our sphere is circumscribed within narrower limits, we shall at least have this benefit, that we are "made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus!"

***~~#2175~~***

***~~THE PRIVILEGES AND DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS~~***

**[Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)**

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

THE greatest joy of a faithful minister is to see his people spiritually flourish. The Apostles were eminent examples to us in this respect Paul was no less comforted with the piety of some, 2 Corinthians 7:4, than he was grieved with the lack of it in others, [Romans 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.2). [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19). See also 3 John verse 4. Paul was as solicitous for the welfare of those whom he had only heard of by report, as for those who had been converted by his ministry, verses 1, 5. Hence he took occasion from what they had attained to urge them on to increasing watchfulness and assiduity. Mark here,

***~~I. The Christian's Privileges—~~***

***~~Christ is the gift of God to man [John 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.10). That gift the Christian has received—~~***

He has felt his need of it; he has implored of God to bestow it on him, and has received it for all the ends and purposes for which it has been conferred on sinful man. He has received Christ in all his offices, as "Christ Jesus, the Lord."

***~~Believers are the only people in the universe who have received it—~~***

Others regard it not; yes, they rather refuse it, and pour contempt upon it. They would rather earn salvation by some efforts of their own, than stand indebted for it to the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. But the Christian values nothing in comparison with it; and, in obtaining it, considers himself richer than if the whole world were conferred upon him. Let him only be able to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His!" and he desires no more. In possessing Christ, he possesses all things! [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23)."

In connection however with this gift we must notice,

***~~II. The Christian's Duties—~~***

*Privilege and duty are inseparable.* Though we receive all from God as a free gift, we yet have duties to perform. If we have received Christ, we must "walk in him:"

***~~1. We must walk in dependence on him—~~***

"In Christ is everything treasured up for us," and "we must receive everything out of his fullness." There must be no dependence whatever upon ourselves, but an entire reliance "on him for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Our whole life must be one continued act of "faith in the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~2. We must walk in conformity to him—~~***

As he is to us a source of all spiritual blessings, so is he unto us an example to which we must be conformed. His zeal for God must be transfused into our souls, and his love to man be copied in the whole of our fellowship with mankind, [John 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.34). [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16). If we profess to "abide in him, we must walk in all things as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)."

**III. the Christian's *Privileges* and *Duties***. The diversity of metaphors in this passage greatly enriches the subject, without at all distracting our minds. Our duty and our privilege are to walk in Christ,

***~~1. Firmly—~~***

The use of a root is not only to convey nourishment to the branches, but to keep the tree steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests by which it may be assailed. And we, so far from being cast down by all the storms that may assault us, must take occasion from them to shoot our roots more deeply into this divine soil, and to take more firm hold of him by whom alone we can be upheld.

***~~2. Progressively—~~***

The idea of walking necessarily imports *progress*, as does that of building also. Now, no man is content with laying a foundation: he will go on to build upon it a superstructure, until at last he has completed the edifice. Thus must we also do when we receive Christ into our souls: we must build upon him all our hopes, and never cease to increase in love to him, until we have attained that complete form and size, which the all-gracious Architect has ordained! [Ephesians 2:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.20-22).

***~~3. Triumphantly—~~***

Grounds for sorrow we shall have, no doubt, while this great work is progressing forward; but we shall have abundant cause also for praise and thanksgiving. Be it so; our trials are great both from within and from without. But can we reflect on the gift bestowed upon us, and not be thankful? Or can we contemplate the blessings attached to that gift, and not be thankful? I say then, that "thanksgiving and the voice of melody" should be heard from us, every step we take, from the beginning of our course even to the end! [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.3).

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~To you, even to every one among you, is offered this inestimable gift—~~***

They who have received this gift were once as destitute and unworthy as any of you: and there is not any one among you, however destitute and unworthy, but may be enriched with it, if only you cry unto your God, and seek the Savior with your whole heart, [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3).

***~~If you possess it, see that you labor to walk worthy of it—~~***

Never imagine that privilege either is, or can be, unconnected with duty. Nor ever imagine your course of duty closed, until you shall have attained the full measure of that piety which your union with Christ was ordained to convey.

***~~#2176~~***

***~~PROPER DEITY OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9)~~***

"In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

THE Church of Christ in the first ages was composed of Jews and Gentiles. Now, the Jews were at all times fond of their own traditions, as the Gentiles were of the dogmas of philosophy: and the two, meeting together upon one common ground, were ready to incorporate their respective peculiarities with the Gospel of Christ. To what extent this has been done in Roman Catholic Church is well known. In truth,*the whole system of the Catholics is little better than a mixture of heathen rites with Jewish superstitions*. And those corruptions, which have prevailed to such an awful extent in the Church of Rome, began at a very early period to make their way into the house of God.

Symptoms of an alarming nature had already appeared in the different Churches of Asia: and against them the Apostle put the Colossian converts on their guard; reminding them, that, whatever they might hope to *add*to Christ and his Gospel, their efforts would be in vain; since "in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" and, consequently, without any addition from the conceits of philosophy, or the traditions of Judaism, he was amply sufficient for the work assigned him, and was "able to save to the uttermost all that would come unto God by him."

From this assertion of the Apostle, I shall take occasion to set before you,

***~~I. The doctrine of the Divinity of Christ—~~***

It will be proper to consider it,

***~~1. As expressed in the text itself—~~***

There are some texts, which, to a superficial observer, bear somewhat of a similar aspect with that before us. For instance, it is said in this very epistle, "It has pleased the Father, that in Christ would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)." And, "Out of his fullness we are said to receive even grace upon grace, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)." There is yet a stronger expression in the Epistle to the Ephesians, wherein we are exhorted to contemplate the love of Christ, until we are "filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19);" nay, more: we are said ourselves to be "the fullness of Him who fills all in all, [Ephesians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.23)."

From such Scriptures as these it is argued by many, that the fullness spoken of in my text is only a fullness of gifts committed to Christ for the use of his Church; and that we may as well assume to ourselves the character of the Godhead, as give it to him; since we, no less than he, are said to be "filled with all the fullness of God."

But, on a closer inspection, there will be found a wide difference between all the foregoing passages and our text. The fullness spoken of in the text is the fullness of "the Godhead;" residing in Christ, not symbolically, and for a season, as the Shechinah did in the tabernacle, but corporeally, substantially, permanently. There is no doubt a reference here to the Shechinah, which was a shadowy representation of the Deity. But the reference is rather in a way of contrast than of comparison: for, in my text, it is not God who is spoken of, and who is frequently said to dwell in his people, but the Godhead. Nor is Christ said to "be filled" with it, but to have it essentially dwelling in him; and this, not in a type or shadow, but really, vitally, necessarily, immutably: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Suppose, now, the Lord Jesus Christ to be truly and unquestionably God: suppose, too, it is God's purpose to make this known to us: then, I would ask, can we conceive of any words that would more clearly convey that truth than the language of my text? I must say, that if the words of my text do not clearly and decidedly declare the Godhead of Christ, no words whatever can express it. Nay, more; if Christ be not truly and properly God, the Apostle has done more, by his unguarded expressions, to lead us to idolatry, than all the most impious sophists in the universe could have done by their most ingenious arguments.

***~~2. As confirmed by other passages of Holy Writ—~~***

To enter fully into this subject, would embrace too large a field for one discourse. I shall therefore confine myself to a few passages only, which establish the Divinity of Christ in connection with his humanity. And here let me call to your remembrance that prophecy of Isaiah, where it is said, "To us a child is born; to us a son is given: and his name shall be called, The Mighty God! [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)." This is quite decisive upon the point.

Again, in another part of the same prophecy, it is said, "A Virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son; and they shall call his name Emmanuel, [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14);" which Matthew informs us, is "God with us [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23)." In the New Testament, John, who seems to have been peculiarly attentive to this point, and, more than all the other inspired writers, anxious to impress it on our minds, says expressly, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was*God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [John 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.14)." Paul also, to the same effect, says, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh! [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16). What more shall I say? It is clear, that it was "God, who purchased the Church with his own blood [Acts 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.28);" and that He who wrought out for us a righteousness wherein we are to be accepted before God, is Jehovah himself, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6). Know then, assuredly, that the glorious Person spoken of in my text was no other than our incarnate God, even "God over all, blessed for evermore! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

The peculiar caution given by the Apostle, in relation to this doctrine, leads me to show you,

***~~II. The importance of it to the welfare of our souls—~~***

"Beware," says the Apostle, "lest any man spoil or rob you, through philosophy and vain deceit." So will I say to you: "Beware, lest any deceiver rob you of your hope founded on the divinity of your Lord and Savior:" for,

***~~1. On that depends the efficacy of his atonement—~~***

Supposing the Lord Jesus Christ to have been a creature, how could he make atonement for sin, or work out a righteousness that would be imputable to us? He could do no more than what, by the law of his creation, he was bound to do; and, after having done it, he would have been only "an unprofitable servant." Supposing him to be capable of meriting anything, he could have merited only for himself. If it is said, that the Divine appointment was sufficient to make his sufferings available for us also, I answer that, according to that argument, the same value might as easily have been stamped on the sacrifices of the Mosaic law, if God had seen fit to do so. But the Apostle has said, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins." And why not possible? If a Divine appointment were to stamp on one sacrifice a value which it possessed not, it might as well do so on another. But, if the impossibility arises from the inefficacy of a creature's blood, then it must attach to one creature as well as to another. For however remote two creatures may be asunder, their distance is but finite: whereas, to take away sin, the value of a sacrifice must be infinite: it must satisfy the demands of infinite justice, and entail upon the sinner all the blessings of infinite love and unbounded mercy. The divinity, of our blessed Lord renders all tins practical to him.

It is this consideration which emboldens us to deliver our message to sinful men. We believe "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" and therefore, "as ambassadors from God, we beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God, [2 Corinthians 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.19-20)."

***~~2. From that arises his ability to supply our every need—~~***

To Him is committed the entire government of his Church, [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22). But if He is not God, we shall be in a state little better than the worshipers of Baal. It may be, that he is occupied about the concerns of some other person at the opposite side of the globe; and I must wait until he can hear me, and come to me, and help me: but, while he is delaying, I may perish. *If he is a mere creature, he cannot be omnipresent, nor omniscient, nor omnipotent.*These are the perfections, the incommunicable perfections, of Deity. If he is not God, he does not possess them: and, if he possess them not, he cannot be sufficient for my needs. But he does possess them. He knows every need and every desire of my soul, "Unto Him all things, both in Heaven and earth, are naked and opened:" and there can be no possible situation wherein "his grace shall not be sufficient for me, [1 John 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.20)." "He is the true God; and therefore he is, and shall be, to me eternal life."

***~~3. It is that which will give the chief zest to all our blessedness for evermore—~~***

If my sins were pardoned, though by a mere act of sovereign mercy, I would be happy any where. But when in Heaven I contemplate everything as the fruit of redeeming love, as procured for me through the blood and righteousness of my incarnate God; with what wonder must I be filled! I see now, why all the glorified saints fall upon their faces before God. They have reason to do so: they would be unworthy of a place in Heaven, if they did not. How can they sing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" and remember, that He who so loved them was "King of kings and Lord of lords;" how can they sing thus, I say, and not be lost in wonder and amazement?

And what are those hosannas which I hear offered to "God and to the Lamb?" What! is a creature joined in one common song of praise with the Creator? and that in Heaven, too, in the very presence of the Deity? No; the Lamb is no other than our incarnate God, "the first and the last, who lived, and was dead, and is alive for evermore! [Revelation 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.17-18)."

***~~Conclusion—~~***

***~~1. Let this doctrine, then, be deeply fixed in your minds—~~***

Hold it not slightly and superficially; but acquaint yourselves with it, and with the irrefragable proofs whereby it is established. Those who are adverse to it, will bring forward passages which speak of him as inferior to the Father. But we must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of under different characters in Scripture, as God, as man, and as Mediator between God and man. As God, he is altogether, in the highest sense, "one with the Father [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30)." In the two latter characters he was inferior to the Father; and must, of course, be spoken of in that light. But these passages no more disprove his divinity, than the passages which speak of him as God disprove his humanity.

Man himself is mortal, and immortal; mortal in his body, and immortal in his soul. Who ever thought of putting these in opposition to each other, and of making an affirmation of the one to be a denial of the other? Yet this is what is done by those who deny the divinity of our Lord. But be on your guard against them: and let neither men nor devils rob you of a truth so essential to your happiness both in time and in eternity.

***~~2. Let it make a suitable impression on your hearts—~~***

So astonishing is this truth, that it is a wonder we can ever think of anything else. O, what prostration of soul is it calculated to produce! What admiring and adoring thoughts of God! What a zeal in his service! What a contempt of everything that can come into competition with him! What boasting of him to our fellow-creatures! What commending of him to all! Truly, if we lived under a suitable impression of this truth, we should, as far as human infirmity would admit of it, resemble the very hosts around the throne.

Let us, then, aspire after this experience. Let admiration, and love, and gratitude, and thanksgiving, occupy, as it were, our whole lives! And let us be looking forward to that blissful period, when we shall see him as we are seen; and "know him, even as we are known."

***~~#2177~~***

***~~THE CHRISTIAN'S COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST~~***

***~~[Colossians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10-12)~~***

"You are complete in him, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

MAN is prone to corrupt whatever proceeds from God. He himself came pure out of his Maker's hands: but he soon corrupted his way; as it is said, "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions, [Ecclesiastes 7:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 7.29)." As man has effaced the law originally written upon his heart, so has he, by imaginations of his own, obscured the revelation which God has given to the world.

The Mosaic code was perverted by the Jews. The Christian code has been no less perverted by those who have called themselves Christians. Even in the apostolic age, and while the Apostles were yet in the full exercise of their ministry, persons arose to mutilate and pervert the Christian faith. *The very professors of Christianity, instead of receiving implicitly the truth as it was revealed, introduced into it their own corrupt notions*: the heathen converts retaining their predilection for their former idolatry; and Jewish converts striving to encumber it with their former traditions. It is against such persons that Paul is cautioning the Colossian Church: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ, verse 8." The heathen philosophers having multiplied their deities, and assigned to them a variety of ranks and offices, those who had been converted from among them still felt inclined to look to subordinate deities as their mediators and protectors: while others from among the Jews, who had, or pretended to have, a great veneration for Moses, could not part with the traditions which they had received from their fathers, and which they supposed to he highly conducive to their spiritual benefit.

But Paul tells both the one and the other, that they needed no help from the creature, since "in Christ dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead;" and no created power could do anything for them, any farther than he was expressly commissioned by Christ to do it: in a word, that "they were complete in Christ;" and all attempts to add anything to him, would retard, rather than advance, their conformity to his will, and would ultimately deprive them of all the benefits which they were thus erroneously laboring to secure.

This being the scope of the whole passage, we will draw your attention to the two things mentioned in our text; namely

***~~I. The Christian's completeness in Christ—~~***

***~~In Christ we have all that we can possibly need or desire—~~***

As *God*, he has "all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily;" and consequently is an almighty and all-sufficient Savior. But as *man*also, he has, by virtue of his mediatorial office, a fullness committed to him for the supply of his believing people; according as it is said, "It has pleased the Father that in him would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)."

In our corporeal frame there is, if I may so say, a fullness imparted to the head for the use of all the members, that being the chief depository of all the senses: so there is in Christ, for the use of all his members: all that we need is treasured up in him: and he of God is made unto us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

***~~Nor can the creature add anything to us—~~***

What, I would ask, can "*philosophy*, with all its vain deceits," add to us? Can it suggest one single truth which is not contained in the Holy Scriptures, or give us one atom of spiritual discernment? Can it devise any other way for a sinner's justification before God, besides that which the Scripture reveals, through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can it add any thing to the operations of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of our souls into the Divine image? Can it further, in any one respect, the everlasting redemption of our souls, so that we shall say, this is the work of philosophy, and not of Christ? If the maxims of philosophy cannot effect anything, can its deities? Can they help us, either by their personal efficiency, or by their mediation with any other?

I ask further, can *Jewish*rituals, whether those that have been devised by man, or those which were originally ordained of God, add to us in any of these respects! No; we confidently say, that the Christian is "complete in Christ:" he has in Christ all that he can stand in need of; and to confide in any other is to rob him of his glory, and fatally to deceive our own souls.

But besides the Christian's completeness in Christ, we are called to notice,

***~~II. His conformity to Christ—~~***

That Christ is an *example*to us, is what every Christian well knows. But there is a distinction which is not generally adverted to, which yet it is of importance to remark; namely, that as he is an example to us in his *life*, so is he also, if we may so express it, an exemplar or pattern to us in his *work*. We will explain our meaning.

Christ having undertaken to redeem our souls, submitted to all that was necessary for that end: he was circumcised, as being made under the law for us: he died under the curse of that law; and after having been buried in the grave, he rose again for our justification before God. Now all this which was done in him corporeally, is to be done in us spiritually: the one was intended to be a pattern of the other. This is very minutely set forth by the Apostle Paul, who tells us that the power exercised towards us who believe, exactly accords with that which was exercised towards our Lord Jesus Christ in all the fore-mentioned particulars:  
his quickening from the dead,  
his rising from the grave,  
his ascension to Heaven, and  
his session at the right hand of God far above all the principalities and powers of Heaven or Hell,  
have all a counterpart in us, wrought by the same divine Agent. Compare attentively [Ephesians 1:19-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-22); [Ephesians 2:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.4-6).

***~~Consider distinctly wherein this conformity consists—~~***

Was he circumcised? We have the true circumcision of the heart; that "which is made without hands, and which consists in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh:" and this we have by virtue of our own union with Christ, in whom we have experienced this mystically, and through whom we derive it spiritually.

Was he buried? We also, in our baptism, were, as it were, buried with him; and coming up also from the water, we are risen with him to a new and heavenly life.

That this is the true import of the passage is beyond all doubt; as anyone will see by comparing what the same writer has stated in his Epistle to the Romans, [Romans 6:3-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.3-11); Here, I say, the parallel between what was corporeally wrought in Christ, and spiritually to be wrought in his members, is clear and manifest: we, "by faith in that power which raised him from the dead," experience a similar resurrection to newness of life.

In reference to this then, as well as to the former, we ask,

What can philosophy add to us?

Has philosophy any principles whereby we can be stimulated more entirely to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, than we are led by the Gospel of Christ; or can it impart to us any strength beyond that which we derive from Christ? Did it ever operate thus in any instance from the foundation of the world? No; it never did, nor ever can.

We further ask, Is there any such virtue in Judaizing principles, that we would have recourse to any of them for aid? No; we are expressly told, that by seeking aid from philosophical conceits or Jewish superstitions we shall not only not add to our safety, but shall actually be "beguiled and robbed of our ultimate reward, verse 18."

***~~It is to Christ alone that we must look, and from Christ we must receive all that is necessary for the carrying on and perfecting of our everlasting salvation.~~***

***~~To improve this subject, we say to all,~~***

***~~1. Be thankful to God that your lot is cast where the Gospel is plainly and faithfully dispensed—~~***

The corruptions which began in the apostolic age have since been carried to such an extent as altogether to subvert the Gospel of Christ.

If I am asked before God, what Popery is; I am constrained to answer, that, whatever it be in theory, it is in practice little better than a compound of Pagan idolatry and Jewish superstition. For lack of seeing it before our eyes, we are apt to conceive of it as differing but little from the religion we profess: but it is in all its masses, penances, indulgences, such a system of delusion and impiety as makes one's very blood run cold! It is inconceivable how such a system of tyranny and imposture would have ever gained footing in the world. Little do the Protestants of the present day reflect on the obligations which they owe to their forefathers, and on the responsibility attaching to them for the advantages they enjoy.

But could your eyes see in what *darkness*and *bondage*those who are of the Roman Catholic persuasion are held, you would never cease to bless God, that you have been born in a Protestant land, and been brought up members of a Church that is alike free from the errors of fanaticism, and the bonds of superstition. I know indeed that even in our Protestant Church there is still, in some places, as there was even in the apostolic age, a leaven of these deadly evils: but we speak, to those who have learned to seek a completeness in Christ and a conformity to Christ, as the unalienable privilege, not of themselves only, but of every true believer.

***~~2. Beware of that false humility which would lead you to entrench upon the sufficiency of Christ—~~***

It was a false humility that led those in the apostolic age to seek other mediators or protectors besides Christ, and other means of obtaining his blessings than by faith alone. But while they assumed this "voluntary humility," they in reality were "vainly puffed up with a fleshly mind, verse 18." So it is with those in the present day, who look for something to recommend them to Christ, while they would be receiving all out of his fullness as a free unmerited gift. Their principle is precisely that of which the Apostle complained in the Colossian Church. They think it would be presumption in them to go directly to Christ, and to expect to be admitted by him with such a load of guilt and corruption as they feel: and therefore they hope to make themselves better before they go, so that they may find a readier acceptance with him. But this is to dishonor Christ, and to take from him both the sovereignty, and the riches, of his grace. We must never forget the terms on which alone we are to obtain the blessings of his salvation: we are to buy them, it is true; but we are to "buy them all without money and without price".

***~~3. Live simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

It is "through faith in the Divine power" that all our completeness in Christ, or conformity to Christ, is to be obtained; and to exercise that faith, we are encouraged by the recollection of what that power has effected "in raising Christ from the dead The text." Take a view then of the Lord Jesus after his crucifixion: see him dead, and buried, and guarded by a host of enemies who were determined in a few hours to prove him an impostor. Is he beyond the reach of Divine power? No; at the appointed moment he rises, and ascends to Heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, far above all the principalities and powers of earth and Hell. Are you then in a more desperate state than he? or is not the power of God alike able to effect this change for you? Yes, is it not as much pledged for you as it was for him? Fear not then, "nor stagger at the promises of God through unbelief;" but as Abraham before you was, "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."

***~~#2178~~***

***~~TRIUMPHS OF THE CROSS~~***

***~~[Colossians 2:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.13-15)~~***

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

THERE is one great mystery spoken of throughout the Scriptures, connected indeed with innumerable other truths, but itself the center and substance of them all: this mystery is Christ crucified. Paul in particular insists upon it in all his epistles; he declares that it was the only one thing which he deemed necessary for him to preach, or for his people to be acquainted with. He takes every occasion of magnifying its importance, and of urging his converts to maintain the strictest regard to it. This appears remarkably in the preceding context. See [Colossians 1:27-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27-28); [Colossians 2:1-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.1-4); [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7); wherein not only the mystery itself is stated, but the rich benefits arising from it are largely recited.

Having in general terms said, "We are complete in Christ," he enters more minutely into the subject, and declares that we have communion with him in the whole of his humiliation and exaltation, being "circumcised in him, and buried with him, and risen with him," and, in short, partakers of all his victories and triumphs.

In the text, three benefits are enumerated as conferred by him upon his believing people, and which we propose for our present consideration. If we were to adhere strictly to the order of time in which these benefits were procured for us and imparted to us, we must take the latter clauses of the text first: but, as this is not necessary, we shall rather notice them as they stand; and observe,

***~~I. He has "quickened us when we were dead"—~~***

***~~The state of the Gentile world fitly represents the state of every unregenerate man—~~***

We are dead before God, and doomed to everlasting death on account of our sins, [Galatians 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.10); We are also under the habitual influence of the most corrupt desires, the mortifying of which was signified by the rite of circumcision, and the indulgence of which characterizes those who are uncircumcised in heart, [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3). [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3). We have no spiritual life whatever; nor are we even conscious of our own guilt and corruption; so justly may we be said to be altogether "dead in our sins."

***~~But God has quickened us with, and by, his Son—~~***

There is a *federal*relation subsisting between Christ and his people, so that:  
when he was circumcised, they were circumcised;  
when he died, they died;  
when he rose, they rose.  
In all that he did and suffered, he was their representative, and they had communion with him as members with their head.

But besides this, they have a *vital*union with him, so as actually to receive life and vigor from him, whereby they rise to newness of life, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20); In this restoration to life they are conformed to his likeness; they come forth from the grave of sin and corruption, and soar in their affections to the highest heavens, where from thenceforth their heart is, and where they shall have their everlasting abode.

In addition to this benefit,

***~~II. He has cancelled our obligation to punishment—~~***

This he has done in reference to,

***~~1. Past sins—~~***

*The trespasses which we commit in our unregenerate state are as numerous as the sands upon the seashore: yet, on our believing in Christ, they are all forgiven.* Whether they have been more or less heinous, they are all pardoned. This is not spoken of as a blessing that shall be enjoyed in the eternal world, but as actually possessed at this time. God has "cast our sins behind him into the very depths of the sea! [Micah 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 7.19)."

***~~2. Present sins—~~***

We must not be understood to say that believers have obtained a licence to commit sin with impunity; for nothing can be more contrary to truth: this would make "Christ himself a minister of sin." But our meaning is this: the *moral*law denounces a curse against every one that transgresses it even in the smallest point. The *ceremonial*law illustrates and confirms those penal sanctions. The very sacrifices which were the appointed means of expiating sin, declared that the offerer deserved to die, and that he could not be saved but by the sufferings and death of an innocent victim. From hence it appears, that "the hand-writing of ordinances," which, in its external obligation, related only to the Jews, did, in its spiritual and more enlarged sense, declare the state of all mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles: and in this view it was equally "against us, and contrary to us."

Now this hand-writing Christ has "blotted out," and, by "nailing it to his cross," has "taken it out of the way." There were different ways of cancelling a bond: sometimes it was blotted out; and sometimes it was pierced with a nail, and rendered thereby of no effect. Both these ways, if we may so speak, has Christ adopted, that we might have the fullest security that we shall never be dealt with according to the rigor of the law; and that the debt we owe on account of our sins shall never be required at our hands.

A further obligation he has conferred upon us, in that,

***~~III. He has defeated all our spiritual enemies—~~***

***~~Satan and all his hosts are combined against us—~~***

They have usurped a power over us, and governed us with a most despotic sway, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2) and [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26).

***~~But Christ has completely triumphed over them upon his cross—~~***

As a conqueror, he invaded the empire of Satan, and rescued millions of the human race from his dominion. He "spoiled the principalities and powers" of Hell, and seized as his prey the souls of which they had so long held an undisturbed possession, [Luke 11:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 11.22). [Isaiah 53:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.12). It was upon his cross that he effected this: for there it was that he satisfied divine justice; there it was he fulfilled and cancelled the obligations of the law; there it was that he paid the price of our salvation. "He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us Galatians, 3:13." His triumph was then complete. Like a victorious general leading in chains the distinguished personages whom the victory of war had put into his hands, our blessed Lord exhibited, as it were, to the view of God, of angels, and of his believing people, the vanquished powers of darkness: "he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them upon his cross." He did not indeed, like earthly conquerors, exult in victories gained by the sword of others, and at the expense of their blood: his triumphs were gained by no sword but his, and with the loss of no blood but his: "His own arm brought salvation; and he trod the wine-press of God's wrath alone, [Isaiah 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.3); [Isaiah 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.5)."

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What a wonderful sight is the cross of Christ!~~***

The eye of *sense*can behold nothing in it but an instrument of punishment, and a person suffering upon it as a malefactor.

But the eye of *faith*will discern:  
not a sufferer, but a conqueror;  
not one raised on an accursed tree, but one exalted in triumph;  
not one crowned with thorns, but one wearing a wreath of victory;  
not one nailed and bleeding, but one blotting out with blood, and cancelling the bonds that were against his chosen people;  
not one himself a spectacle, but exhibiting to view his vanquished enemies;  
not the despised Nazarene, but "the Lord of glory."

Strange as it may sound, we affirm, that it was not Jesus, but the prince of this world that was then judged, [John 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.11), cast out, [John 12:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.31), destroyed [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14); for it was then that Jesus "bruised the serpent's head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15);" "by death he destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who until that hour had been all their life-time subject to bondage, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14) and [Psalm 68:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.18)."

Prostrate before him lay the principalities and powers of Hell. Yes, Satan, it was your *power*that was then broken, your *shame*that was then exposed, your *doom*that was then irrevocably sealed. You are now an object of our contempt; and the weakest among us will set his feet upon your neck, and tremble at you no more! [Joshua 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 10.24). "You are fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning;" "you are fallen from Heaven like lightning;" and lower still shall you fall; for we your once infatuated vassals can triumph over you now; and you shall "before long be bruised under our feet! [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

Beloved brethren, "turn aside and see this great sight"—your triumphing Lord, and your despoiled enemies! Nor cease to contemplate it, until you are filled with admiration, and gratitude, and joy!

***~~2. What folly is it to allow ourselves to be diverted from the cross!~~***

This is the particular improvement which the Apostle himself makes of the passage. He had guarded the Colossians against the skeptical pride of philosophers, verse 8; and he proceeds to guard them against the self-justifying pride of Judaizing teachers, verse 16. To the one of these the cross of Christ was a stumbling-block, and to the other foolishness; but to those who viewed it aright, it was "the power of God and the wisdom of God, [1 Corinthians 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23-24)."

Thus at this time we are particularly in danger of being led away from the simplicity of the Gospel, either by the conceits of philosophy, falsely so called, or by the observance of a formal round of duties. But let nothing draw your attention from the cross of Christ.

It is only by the cross that you can be quickened.

It is only by the cross that you can be forgiven.

It is only by the cross that you can obtain deliverance from the penalties of the law

It is only by the cross that you can have victory over the enemies of your salvation.

When you can find another object, or other principles, that can effect these things, then we consent that you shall disregard the cross of Christ. But until then, determine to: *know*nothing, [1 Corinthians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.2), *trust*in nothing, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9), *glory*in nothing, [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14),  
but Christ, and him crucified!

***~~#2179~~***

***~~THE NATURE AND USE OF THE TYPES~~***

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

"These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

MAN is naturally addicted to superstition; partly from a consciousness of his needing mercy from God, and partly from a desire of reconciling himself to God by some meritorious services of his own. The Jewish economy had rather a tendency to foster this disposition, inasmuch as it prescribed many rites and ceremonies as means of acceptance with God. But from these the Gospel has set us free; and, in so doing, has introduced a more free and liberal spirit. Even under the light of the Gospel, we are prone to indulge the same servile desires, and to prefer a yoke of bondage to the freedom of God's children. Such was the case with many even in the apostolic age.

Paul is cautioning the Colossians against two sorts of teachers, who were endeavoring to mislead them; against the advocates for heathen philosophy, verse 8, and against the Judaizing brethren, who insisted on the observance of the Mosaic ritual, verse 16. In opposition to the latter of these, he bids the Christians to assert their liberty from the observances of the ceremonial law, that being, in fact, no more than a *shadow*, of which they now possessed the *substance*.

We shall take occasion from his words to show,

***~~I. The nature of the types—~~***

The Scripture sets before us several kinds of types—

Christians are in general but little acquainted with the types: yet the scripture abounds with them, and mentions various kinds of them. They may be reduced to three classes; natural, historical, and legal.

The natural types are such as may be seen in the works of nature (in this view, the creation of the universe is a type of the new creation, which the regenerate soul experiences through the word and Spirit of God.)

The historical types are such as Moses, Joshua, David, and others.

The legal types are all the ceremonies of the Jewish law.

***~~These are shadowy representations of Christ and his benefits—~~***

All of them relate to Christ in some view or other; either to his person and offices, or to his Church and the benefits he confers upon it. They are the *shadow*, whereof he is the *substance*: and as a shadow represents, though but faintly, the image of the substance, so they portray, though in a very indistinct manner, the character and work of Christ.

***~~In fact, they were instituted of God for this end—~~***

The paschal feast, with all its attendant observances, was not merely commemorative of a deliverance that was past: it was to shadow forth an infinitely greater deliverance that was to come; as Paul says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5). [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 5.7-8)."

In like manner, we are told that all the ordinances relative to the priestly office "served unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: "For, see, says he, that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount [Hebrews 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.5)."

The Law was the shadow; the Gospel is the substance.

The Law was the model; and the Gospel is the edifice erected in perfect accordance with it.

We are not at liberty to consider every common similitude as a type, or to launch into the boundless ocean of conjecture: in some instances indeed observations drawn from analogy may be almost as convincing as the declarations of God himself. But it is safest to adhere to those points which Scripture has determined for us: in them we are in no danger of erring, and therefore can speak with precision and authority. Nor should we ever forget, that, as those things alone are sacraments to us which God has appointed to be so, so those things alone were types to the Jewish church, which God instituted for that express purpose.

The text, in connection with the context, leads us further to declare,

***~~II. Their use—~~***

God would not have appointed them, if they had not been beneficial to his Church. But with respect to the Jewish and the Christian Church, we shall, as they subserved different purposes, notice their use to each:

***~~1. To the Jews—~~***

The types served to show them what sort of a person their Messiah would be: he was to be:  
a *Prophet*, like unto Moses,  
a *Priest*, like Aaron,  
a *King*, like David.

He was to be a *suffering*Messiah, no less than a *reigning*Messiah.

The types further kept up the expectation of him in the world. The first promise had been nearly forgotten; and most probably the repetition of it would have made but a transient impression: but the multitude of observances, daily repeated, and continually directing the eyes of the worshipers to him, could not fail of exciting a general and increasing expectation of his advent. They moreover led the people to exercise faith in him. Every intelligent worshiper must see that the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin; and therefore (as we are sure Abraham, David, and others did) the devout Jews must *look through the ordinances to Christ, and rely on him who was to come, just as we rely on him who is come.*

***~~2. To Christians—~~***

The types are of signal use to us, in that they testify of Christ as the person promised from the foundation of the world, and prefigured in the whole of the Mosaic ritual. When we compare the account of Christ in the New Testament with the various ordinances of the Old Testament, we see how impossible it was that such a coincidence of character would ever happen, but by the express ordination and appointment of God. But they are of further use to us also, in that they wonderfully illustrate the fullness and excellency of Christ.

As there are myriads of stars—yet all of them together are no more than a candle in comparison with the sun; so all the typical exhibitions of Christ are but a shadow in comparison with him: and "though they are exceeding glorious in themselves—yet have they no glory by reason of the glory that excels, [2 Corinthians 3:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.9-11)." To this effect the Apostle says, "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer 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 your conscience from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.13-14)."

This is the *view*which we are to take of the types, this the *improvement*we are to make of them.

We could not have formed any adequate idea of Christ's work and offices, if we had not been assisted by the typical institutions: these serve to embody our notions, and to make them, like a picture, visible to the eyes of men, and therefore intelligible to the lowest capacity: whereas, if we could not thus invest them, as it were, with matter, we could only offer to our bearers some abstract ideas, which, after all, would convey but little meaning, and leave no abiding impression.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How great are the privileges of the Christian Church!~~***

The Jews were oppressed with a yoke of ceremonies, which they were not able to bear—the import of which they could very faintly discern—and the observance of which yielded no permanent satisfaction to their consciences, [Hebrews 10:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.1-2); but we are freed from that yoke, and enjoy a dispensation of light and liberty. Let us be thankful for our privilege, and "stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free."

***~~2. What spirituality of mind we should possess!~~***

Our superior privileges doubtless demand a correspondent pre-eminence in our spirit and conduct. If we are "no longer servants, but sons," we ought to manifest a filial affection towards God, and a delight in his service. But do not many of the pious Jews reproach us? O let us walk worthy of our high calling, and show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light! [1 Peter 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.9).

***~~#2180~~***

***~~HOLDING THE HEAD~~***

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

"Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow."

WHILE the Apostles were yet in the full exercise of their ministry, all manner of heresies sprang up in the Church.

The *Jewish*converts brought with them their partiality for the Mosaic ritual, and insisted on the continued observance of it.

The *heathen*converts introduced the dogmas of their philosophy; on which they insisted, as rendering Christianity more conformable with the opinions to which they had been accustomed.

Hence the Apostle Paul, in the chapter before us, repeatedly cautioned the Colossian saints against both the one and the other of these heretical deceivers. "Beware," says he, "lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ, verse 8." Again, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. verse 16, 17." And then, in reference to both the characters, he says, "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head." It seems that some of the Jewish converts were inclined to rely on angels, as their mediators with God; for God having employed them in the dispensation of his law, they thought it probable that he would make use of them as his instruments also in communicating the blessings of the Gospel. With the heathen converts, the idea of an intermediate kind of deity was quite familiar; and, consequently, coalescing easily with the Jewish teachers in their veneration of angels, they formed, in the Church, a party, which it required all the zeal and authority of the Apostle to suppress. It was to counteract their influence that the Apostle suggested, in the words of my text,

***~~I. A solemn caution not to depart from Christ—~~***

It is here taken for granted, that Christians are all united to Christ by faith, as their living Head. But the Apostle declared, that the persons who were thus endeavoring to subvert the faith of the Colossians did not hold Christ as their Head; and that to embrace their opinions should, in effect, be to renounce Christ.

***~~This was true with respect to them at that time—~~***

To worship angels, and employ them as mediators with God, was indeed proposed under an idea of "humility;" since it was supposed that it would be presumptuous in man to apply directly to God, except through the intervention of some creatures of a higher stamp and order; but if they came to him through them as their mediators, they could not then fail of obtaining the Divine favor. But while this was recommended as an indication of humility, it proceeded, in fact, from nothing but pride: for, by "intruding into things which they had not seen," and presuming to go beyond what God had revealed, they showed that they were "vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind." In recommending the adoption of these opinions, they did eventually "rob men of their reward," instead of securing it to them by any additional bonds.

In truth, they did not themselves "hold fast to the Head," the Lord Jesus Christ; and, so far as they prevailed, they actually severed persons from Christ; and thereby ruined their immortal souls.

***~~And it is equally true with respect to many at this time—~~***

The whole Romish Church sanctions the worshiping both of saints and angels: and, not content with having Christ as their mediator, they make use of the Virgin Mary as their intercessor; and place as much confidence in her, as in the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Need I say, what is the origin of this, or what its effect will be? It is recommended under a pretense of "humility:" but it is the offspring of pride and carnality; it is recommended in order to secure the reward of Heaven; but it beguiles of that reward all who embrace so fatal a system.

And what are they better, who require some internal qualifications in us, as a warrant for us to apply to Christ? The Papists commend new mediators to us, in order to our obtaining of acceptance with Christ; and these other deceivers require new qualifications in us for the same end. And these, no less than the former, go beyond the Scriptures, requiring of us what God himself has never required.

All the qualification which God requires for our approach to Christ is that we thirst after him, and be willing to accept his offered benefits: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." The substitution of any other terms, whatever men may pretend, is the fruit of pride: for it is an avowal, that we look for mercy at his hand as the reward of some kind or degree of goodness in ourselves; and, in effect, it transfers a portion at least of his glory to ourselves. It denies the entire freeness of divine grace, and makes salvation in part to be of works. The consequence of this will be that all who are thus led to renounce their hold of Christ, must perish. They are beguiled of their reward, and betrayed to their everlasting ruin.

To this solemn caution is annexed,

***~~II. A most urgent reason for adhering to him—~~***

***~~It is by union with the Lord Jesus Christ that the whole Church exists—~~***

There is the same union between Christ and his Church as there is between the head and members of the natural body. From the head the vital spirits may be said to flow throughout the whole body: nourishing every part, diffusing strength throughout the whole system, and combining all the members, so as to call forth and concentrate their respective offices for the good of the whole.

Thus it is that all the members of Christ's mystical body receive life and strength from him: all are fitted for the discharge of their several duties: all are made to possess one common interest, and to act for one common end. There is not one life in the head, and another in the members: it is one life that pervades them all: and this, too, in the mystical body of Christ, no less than in our own natural body. It is "not we that live, but Christ that lives in us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20);" yes, "Christ himself is our life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4);" and by his continued agency within us, we "increase with the increase of God."

What then must be the result, if we are cut off from him? We perish of necessity, as the members when severed from the head. Is this, then, no reason why we would guard against the introduction of error, especially of such errors as will have the effect of separating us from him?

But we may further observe, that,

***~~It is by union with Christ that the whole work of grace is carried on in the soul of every believer—~~***

As there is "a body of sin, called the old man," in us by nature, so is there "a new man" in us by grace: and all the different graces, of which this new man consists, are nourished by the same divine principle; and either decline or grow together, according as this is communicated to us, or withheld. A man may have in his natural body a greater measure of force and vigor in some one organ or member than in others: the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, may possess some appropriate and distinguished excellence. But whatever affects the system generally, must affect the body in every part, and produce a corresponding diminution or increase of its powers. Now, if our connection with the Lord Jesus Christ is kept close, and our communications from him abound, we shall have all our graces lively, and vigorous, and active: but if there is anything to intercept the communications of his grace, every grace will languish and decay.

Say, then, whether in this view also we are not concerned with all care and diligence to "hold fast the Head?" Whether we consider the interests of the Church collectively, or the welfare of every individual believer, there does appear a necessity to watch against any interruption of our union with Christ, and to seek from him incessant supplies of grace and strength: for "through him we can do all things, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13);" but "without him we can do nothing, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)."

***~~Behold from hence,~~***

***~~1. How wonderfully simple is the Gospel of Christ!~~***

If we enter into the deep mysteries of religion in an abstract way, the wisest and most acute are soon out of their depth: but if we take them as represented by Scripture images, the weakest and most ignorant Christian has as clear a conception of them as the most learned in the universe. The connection between the head and the body, and the dependence of the members on the head, may be more scientifically described by a learned man; but they are not a whit more justly apprehended by him, than by the poorest of mankind. Yet does this image contain the whole of vital Christianity; which consists in this one thing, "a life of faith in the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us."

Beloved brethren, take with you this image: conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ as your head, from whom all vital influence proceeds. Look to him for a communication of that influence to your soul. Bear in mind, that, except as aided by power from him, you can do no more than your members could if separated from your head. Remember, that as every member of your body is alike under the influence of your head, so must every disposition of your soul be under the control and influence of Christ! And, as there is no schism in the body, no member affecting independence, or living regardless of the head, so let there be no lack of attention to any individual grace; but go to Him for a supply of all, that all may be strengthened, and that you may grow up in all things into Christ, your living head. Let your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, your complete redemption, be all viewed as in him, and all be derived continually from him, according to the measure of the gift which he sees fit to impart.

***~~2. The danger of departing from it in the least degree—~~***

The persons who proposed the worshiping of angels did not mean to renounce Christ; and had they been told that their conceit was in reality a separation of themselves from him, they would have denied that any such consequences could follow. And so it is when persons are looking for some goodness of their own whereon to found their hope, or to warrant their application to Christ; they have as little idea of the evil which they commit, or of the consequences that must ensue.

But remember, that *self*must he altogether renounced; must be renounced by us, as much as it must by the fallen angels, if salvation were at this moment offered to them. *All that we ever can have, is in Christ: it is treasured up in him for our use, and must be received from him.*There is nothing which must not be "received out of his fullness:" and, if you will not come to him for it, you must inevitably and eternally perish. He is a jealous God: he will not admit of rivals: he will not endure that his glory would in any respect or degree be given to another. Whatever, therefore, any man may pretend, or whatever specious appearance any sentiment may assume, whether of superior wisdom, or deeper humility, or more ardent zeal—admit nothing, for one moment, that may interfere with the honor of the Lord Jesus: but be contented to receive all from him, to depend altogether upon him, and to give him the glory of all that you either receive or do.

In a word, be to him what your members are to your head. This idea is extremely simple. Allow nothing to set it aside, or to interfere with it. Carry it into effect in your daily life and conduct: and fear not, but that if you glorify him in this world, you shall be glorified with him in the world above.

***~~#2181~~***

***~~Our Resurrection with Christ a Motive to Heavenly-mindedness~~***

***~~[Colossians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.1)~~***

"If you then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God."

ONE of the most distinguished peculiarities of our holy religion is that it suggests entirely new motives to action. The inducements which reason could offer, were (as all antiquity proves) altogether weak and inefficient. Those alone which Christianity proposes are capable of restraining the passions of men, and of regulating their conduct. Beg of God then that you may feel the power of his word, while I set before you,

***~~I. The duty here inculcated—~~***

I by no means am intimating that we are at liberty to neglect our earthly concerns. Circumstanced as we are, we must of necessity devote much time and labor to the pursuit of worldly things: and, if we neglected them, we would offend against the order of Divine Providence, who has said in reference to them, "Six days shall you labor." But,

***~~"The things which are above" are most worthy of our pursuit—~~***

Among these we must number the favor of our offended God, the manifestations of his love to our souls, the attainment of his image, and the possession of his glory.

Which of these things can be dispensed with? Or which can be attained by a mere inactive wish, or by a formal and faint endeavor? These things, in point of value and importance, as far excel all earthly things, as the splendor of the meridian sun eclipses the faint radiance of the glow-worm.

***~~These therefore we are to seek with our whole hearts—~~***

They are to have the first place in our esteem, and to be sought with a diligence proportioned to their value, [Matthew 6:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.33). Seeking only will not suffice: we must *strive*to enter in at the strait gate; for we are told that "many shall seek, and not be able, [Luke 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 13.24)." "The kingdom of Heaven must be taken by violence, [Matthew 11:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.12)," even by the holy violence of faith and prayer.

The things above must be sought with the same constancy and zeal as are employed by the world in the pursuit of things below. Worldly men are never weary in the pursuit of their objects. From the earliest dawn to the very hour when they retire to rest, their appetite for earthly things continues; nor, whatever they may attain, are they ever satisfied. Their energies may be enfeebled by labor; but their taste is still the same: they savor the things which pertain to time and sense, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5). They seek them constantly, them supremely, them only.

Now this is the way in which we should "seek the things that are above:" and, in comparison with these, all earthly things would be to us as dung and dross. Even life itself would be of no value, if by sacrificing it our eternal interests may be improved, [Luke 14:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26-27); [Luke 14:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.33).

If this appears "a hard saying," attend while I lay before you,

***~~II. The considerations with which it is enforced—~~***

The Apostle urges upon us our duty on the ground of consistency. Mark,

***~~1. Your professions—~~***

The word "If" does not express any doubt in the Apostle's mind, but imports an acknowledged fact, namely, that the Christian is risen with Christ. It is the same as if he had said, "Since you are risen with Christ." Now every Christian is risen with Christ both federally, and spiritually. Christ is his federal Head and Representative: and all that He experienced, we experienced in him. Was he circumcised when a child? Was he at the close of life crucified, dead, and buried? Did he rise, and ascend to Heaven? And is he now sitting at the right hand of God? In the whole of this we had, not an interest only, but a direct participation, [Colossians 2:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.10-12).

Exactly as we died in Adam, partaking, as it were, with him in the sin which, as our head and representative, he committed, so all which Christ did and suffered is imputed to us, as though we had ourselves done and suffered it in him, [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22). [2 Corinthians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.21).

Spiritually also are we risen in Christ. All that he did and suffered is, if I may so speak, accomplished personally in every one of us, his corporeal acts and sufferings being the model of what we experience in our souls. This is by Paul stated with great accuracy. In his prayer for the Ephesian Church, he desires that they may "know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power in all his believing people, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

And then he marks distinctly and separately the work which God accomplishes in his people, quickening them from the dead, raising them up to newness of life, and setting them together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20) with 2:4-6."

Now then I ask, Is not this what as Christians you profess? Do you not profess to be thus risen with Christ, savingly interested in all that he did and suffered for you, and bound to be conformed to him in the whole of this his mediatorial work and office. You do profess it, whether you intend it or not. And *this profession binds you to an entire devotedness of heart and life to God*. You must of necessity "thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that those who live would not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)."

But you shall see this on authority that cannot be disputed, and actually urged in the very way suggested by my text. "What shall we say then; Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who are dead to sin (as we all profess to be) live any longer therein? Don't you know, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also would walk in newness of life [Romans 6:1-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.1-11)."

The point then is proved. Consistency requires that you would seek primarily and with your whole hearts the things above.

If yet you entertain a doubt of this, I ask you, what judgment you yourselves pass on a carnal, sensual, worldly-minded professor of religion? Do you not condemn him as inconsistent? Then in so doing you pass judgment on yourselves.

***~~2. Your expectations—~~***

The words, "Where Christ sits at the right hand of God," are not added casually and without design: they give exceeding great weight and emphasis to all that precedes. These words express the expectations of the Christian, as the former do his professions. "Christ is at the right hand of God," the seat of honor and of power. But he is not there as a mere individual for his own happiness only. He is there prosecuting still the work which he began on earth, and in which we are as much savingly interested as we are in what he did and suffered here below.

We look to him to afford us all needful aid by the constant supplies of his Spirit and grace, [John 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7-11). [2 Corinthians 12:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.8-9)."

We look to him to obtain for us the acceptance of our poor imperfect services, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5).

We look to Him to come again and take us in due season to a full participation of all the glory which he himself possesses, [John 16:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.23); [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24), and [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

But in which of these shall we succeed, it we do not live unto him? If we were to tell you, that a worldly and carnal life was the way to obtain these blessings, would you not cry out against us as "blind leaders of the blind?" Then behold what your expectations are, and how powerfully they proclaim and enforce your duties. If "your faith and hope depend altogether upon the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God, 1 Peter 1:21," your duty must of necessity be to look to him continually, that you may receive out of his fullness all that your necessities require.

***~~And now see,~~***

***~~1. How few real Christians there are upon earth—~~***

If they were Christians who sought only the things below, there would be no lack of them in every place.

But if those only are Christians who in heart and life are risen with Christ, and who seek only the things above, then are they few indeed.

Brethren, try yourselves by these marks, and you shall soon find your real character before God: But know this of a truth, that, whatever you may think to the contrary, they only who live unto Christ in this world, shall ever live with him in the world to come.

***~~2. How blessed are those who are Christians indeed—~~***

Being risen with Christ, their lives are hidden with Christ in God, beyond the reach of men or devils, verse 3. While they are engaged in heavenly pursuits, they may enjoy the security which God has ordained for them. Oppositions, indeed, and difficulties they must expect; but Christ will not lose one member of his mystical body. He derides the vain attempts of his enemies and ours. We too may defy the confederate powers of earth and Hell, [Romans 8:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-34); for, however they may obtain a temporary triumph, their efforts shall terminate in their own confusion. With Christ we shall rise victorious; and "when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory! verse 4."

***~~#2182~~***

***~~HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS~~***

***~~[Colossians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.2)~~***

"Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

IT seems harsh and paradoxical to say that Christianity is very imperfectly understood among us. Respecting its mysterious *doctrines*, perhaps, the allegation would be admitted without difficulty: but respecting its *precepts*, scarcely anyone would suspect that the observation could have any foundation in truth. But it is to the preceptive part especially that I intend the remark to be applied: and I think that before I have closed my present subject, the greater part of you will agree with me, that the sentiment is just.

The *morality*of Christians in general goes only to the conduct of men so far as it is visible to those around us. But *the Christian precepts extend to the inmost feelings of the soul, and requires a conformity to the Savior himself*, not only in the dispositions of his mind while he sojourned upon earth, but in the change wrought upon him in his exaltation to Heaven: it requires us to be dead to sin as truly as ever he died for sin; and to live as truly and entirely to God as he did, and yet does, in his risen state in glory. The precept which you have just heard will fitly illustrate this truth. I will endeavor to mark,

***~~I. Its import—~~***

Directions in Scripture are often put in a way of contrast, when they are to be understood only in a way of comparison. Such, for instance, is the declaration, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." We are not to understand that passage as prohibiting sacrifices, which had been expressly enjoined, and were yet of necessity to be offered; but only as expressing an approbation of acts of mercy, even though they would supersede the observance of some positive injunction.

When our Lord says, "Labor not for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures unto everlasting life," he must not be understood as discouraging an attention to worldly business: for God has authoritatively commanded, "Six days shall you labor." It is in a comparative sense only that his words must be understood: and in the same manner must we interpret also the words before us. Mark,

***~~1. The things here contrasted—~~***

"The things which are on earth" are those which relate to this present life. Even intellectual pursuits must be included, no less than the pleasures, or riches, or honors, of the world.

On the other hand, by "the things which are above," we must understand everything relating to the soul, its first acceptance with God, its progressive restoration to the Divine image, and its final possession of the heavenly glory. The latter of these we are to pursue, if not exclusively—yet supremely, so as to show that they have no rival whatever in our souls.

The term here translated "Set your *affections*on things above," is more literally rendered, in the margin, "*Mind*the things that are above." The term imports, not an exercise of the intellectual powers only, but also of the will and the affections; and such an exercise of them as demonstrates the supreme attachment of the soul. Perhaps it was on this account that our translators preferred the translation; which, though less proper in itself, more exactly conveyed the sense to those who were unacquainted with the original. But, not to separate the words, let us take them in their collective import; and consider,

***~~2. The precept relating to them—~~***

I have said that all concern about earthly things is not forbidden: on the contrary, there are many things which require an ardor and intensity in the pursuit, and cannot be attained without. But they must not engage the affections of the soul; they must not be permitted to stand in competition with Heaven and heavenly things.

In comparison with the knowledge of Christ, all that the world contains must be in our eyes no better than "dung and dross." The favor of an offended God:  
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in all its sanctifying operations;  
the witness of the Holy Spirit testifying of our adoption into his family, and of our interest in Christ;  
and, finally, the eternal possession of his glory.

What deserves to be sought after, like these?

What will bear any comparison with these?

These, then, are to occupy our supreme regard; and everything else must give way to them. Earthly satisfactions of any kind, if they stand in competition with them, must all be sacrificed without hesitation and without regret. So permanent must be the ascendency of these things in our minds, that no labor for them shall appear too great, and no suffering too intense. In comparison with them, even life itself must be of no value in our eyes, and the whole world be only as the small dust upon the scale.

This precept does indeed appear to impose a duty that is quite impracticable: but, to show that it deserves our most attentive regards, I will display,

***~~II. Its reasonableness—~~***

Let us take a more distinct survey of the two different objects which are here contrasted; and the preference required in behalf of heavenly things will be found precisely such as it befits us to manifest. For,

***~~1. They are more excellent in themselves—~~***

What is there truly valuable in the things of this world? They have no intrinsic worth: they are only good as being high in the estimation of men. *An angel would disregard them all, as much as we would the dirt under our feet. Crowns, kingdoms, empires—what are they all, but the baubles of children, which a man in his senses would despise!* Beyond food and clothing there is nothing worth a thought: and they derive their value, not from anything in themselves, but from the necessities of our nature, which render them important in our eyes.

But there is real excellency in:  
the favor of God,  
the grace of Christ,  
the witness of the Spirit,  
and the glory of Heaven!

Yes, truly: these elevate our nature, and ennoble it, and raise it to its primitive perfection and blessedness. These things the highest angel in Heaven cannot but approve; yes, he must account them as objects on which it is impossible to bestow too great, or too undivided, an attention.

***~~2. They are more satisfactory to our minds—~~***

*Those who possess the most of this world are the very persons who most feel the emptiness and vanity of it all!* Go to those who have attained all that their hearts could desire, and ask them whether they have not grasped a shadow? A name, a title, a ribbon of distinction; what contemptible things in comparison with those which belong to the soul! Who that possesses them does not feel an aching void in his bosom, unless with them he possesses also the favor of God? But the blessings of which we have before spoken, are solid; and the person who enjoys them, possesses rest in his soul. "Having drunk of the living waters, he thirsts no more" for anything besides.

***~~3. They are more conducive to our happiness—~~***

Are the rich and great happier than other people? Not a wit! A Lazarus, with God's love shed abroad in his heart, is happier than the Rich Man among all his banquets. Search the Scriptures, and see whether those who have reveled most in their wealth, and drunk most deeply of the cup of pleasure—have not pronounced it all, not merely vanity, but vexation of spirit also?

But look at the possessors of spiritual good: take them in their lowest state; view them poor, and weeping, and mourning, and hungering and thirsting after degrees of holiness unattained: what says the Scripture respecting them? What? Our Savior himself declares them "blessed," "blessed," "blessed," "blessed!" If, like Paul and Silas, they are reduced to the most pitiable condition that can be conceived, they have ample ground for the most exalted joy: and even in martyrdom itself they have no cause for anything but thanksgiving and praise.

***~~4. They are more easily to be attained—~~***

Multitudes, however much they were to labor, could never gain earthly distinction: and multitudes who do labor for it with a reasonable hope of success, are left a prey to the most painful disappointments. But who that has the heart of a man is incapable of acquiring heavenly blessings? Or who ever failed in attaining them, provided he only sought them in humility and faith? Methinks this is one of the chief excellencies of spiritual things, that they are open alike to all, and never are sought in vain. Of them, in all their fullness, we may say, "Everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened."

***~~5. They are more lasting—~~***

*Let a man possess the whole world—how long shall he retain it? Every moment his happiness is drawing nearer to a close!*No sooner is the breath departed from his body, than he surrenders it all to some new possessor, who shall, like him also, retain it but a little time. For "we can carry nothing away with us when we die," we came naked into the world, and naked must we depart from it.

But is it thus with the man who has sought his happiness in God? No, truly; "he has treasures in Heaven;" and at death he goes to the full possession of them. *His happiness, instead of being terminated at death, is then consummated!*He then, as it were, comes of age, and enters on the full possession of "his inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled, and fades not away, reserved in Heaven for him."

And now let me ask, Is it unreasonable that these things would occupy your minds, in preference to the vanities of time and sense? These things, which are:  
so excellent in themselves,  
so satisfactory to us,  
so conducive to our happiness,  
so certain to be attained, and  
so lasting in the enjoyment?

Surely the poor empty vanities of time and sense cannot for a moment, stand in competition with these; nor do they deserve so much as a thought, in comparison with them.

***~~Let me now commend this precept to you,~~***

***~~1. As a test to try your character—~~***

In this view it is particularly set before us by Paul: "Those who are of the flesh, mind the things after the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)." Now, here the very same term is used as in our text: and it forms a line of distinction between the carnal and the spiritual man, between "him who is in a state of death, and him who is in the enjoyment of life and peace, [Romans 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.5)." It may be thought, indeed, that the adoption of evangelical opinions, and the making an open profession of piety, will supersede this test: but nothing can ever set it aside.

The Philippian converts judged that they were in a state of acceptance with God, because they professed faith in Christ. But respecting many of them, Paul said, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction!" And then, assigning the reasons for his judgment, he combines with other things this charge, "*They mind earthly things!*[Philippians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18-19)."

I call every one of you, then, to try yourselves by this infallible mark. It is a point easily ascertained. *You need only examine your lives from day to day, and see what it is that interests you most, and forms the leading objects of your pursuit.* You may be deeply engaged about earthly things, and yet be right in the sight of God, provided heavenly things are regarded by you with supreme and paramount affection. Bring then, I beg you, this matter to a trial; and never cease to implore of God that spiritual discernment which he alone can give, and that uprightness of heart which is indispensable to the forming of a right judgment.

***~~2. As a rule, to regulate your conduct—~~***

Truly, this must distinguish every child of God: though *in*the world, we must not be *of*it: "our hearts and minds must be in Heaven." This is our duty, our honor, our happiness, our security. There is no standing still in religion. If we advance not, we recede. Be not contented to rest in a low state, but "press forward for the highest attainments in holiness; forgetting all that is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before, until you have fully attained the prize of your high calling!"

***~~#2183~~***

***~~THE EXALTED STATE OF A CHRISTIAN~~***

***~~[Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)~~***

"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory!"

INNUMERABLE are the advantages which Scripture gives us over the heathen philosophers: for, while it reveals to us a much sublimer rule of conduct than they were able to devise, it affords motives sufficient to incline us to duty, and teaches us where to obtain strength for the performance of it. *The duty it enjoins is nothing less than a supreme delight in heavenly things*; but at the same time it animates us by the consideration of the privileges we enjoy and the prospects we have in view. What the Christian possesses in these respects may be seen in the words before us, in which we notice,

***~~I. His exalted state—~~***

The Christian is a paradox, being both dead and living at the same time.

***~~He is "dead"—~~***

Once he was alive wholly and entirely to legal hopes and carnal enjoyments: but now is dead to both. He now sees that he has no righteousness of his own for his justification before God, and no strength of his own for the fulfillment of God's holy will. He therefore renounces all dependence on himself, and seeks righteousness and strength in Christ alone, [Isaiah 45:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24).

*As for the enjoyment of the things of time and sense, he has the same capacity for it as ever; but he has lost his inclination for it, and no longer seeks his happiness in it.* He feels the emptiness and vanity of all sublunary good: and, while he is thankful for the portion of it that is committed to him, he regards the whole world as an object that is crucified, and is himself crucified unto it! [Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

***~~Yet is he "alive" in a far higher sense than ever he was before—~~***

He has in Christ a "life," whereby he is enabled to live unto his God, and to walk in the paths of holiness and peace. This life is "hidden with Christ in God;" so that, while the world sees it not, Satan is not able to destroy it. When Adam had life, so to speak, in his own possession, his great adversary prevailed over him and slew him: the believer therefore is placed beyond the reach of Satan's efforts, and has his life treasured up in Heaven, where Satan has no access, and in God, over whom he can have no power.

Indeed Christ himself lives in the believer [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20), and is "his very life." What the soul is to the body, that is Christ to the believer's soul, acting in all its faculties, and operating in all its energies. And hence the believer, however dead he is in himself, is enabled to live in a way that no other creature in the universe can live.

But the believer must be yet further viewed by us in,

***~~II. His glorious expectations—~~***

***~~The Savior, though once as unknown by the world as they, and still more despised, shall one day appear again in glory!~~***

The time is fast approaching, when he shall descend from Heaven in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father and his holy angels. While he was upon earth, his glory was, for the most part, veiled. A little of it sinned forth on Mount Tabor; and his own more immediate followers "beheld somewhat of his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father." But "the world knew him not," "the darkness could not apprehend his light." But in the day of judgment his appearance will be such as becomes his august character, so that he will be equally acknowledged by all, whether friends or enemies, as "King of kings and Lord of lords!"

***~~Then will the whole assembly of believers appear with him in glory!~~***

They will be gathered from every quarter of the globe "to meet their Lord in the air," every one of them with "bodies like unto his glorious body," and souls like unto his glorified soul; for they will be altogether "like him, when they shall see him as he is! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2)." They will then appear:  
as monuments of his grace,  
as trophies of his victory,  
as heirs of his glory!

Truly he will be admired and glorified in them, when it shall be seen what sovereignty he has exercised in the choice of them, and what power he has put forth for their salvation! [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10). It will then be seen, not that they triumphed, but that he triumphed *for*them, (upon his cross, [Colossians 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.15),) and *over*them, (by his converting grace, [Psalm 45:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.5). [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5),) and *in*them, by the sanctifying efficacy of his Word and Spirit, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28); Then will they be seated with him upon his throne, and as "joint-heirs with him" be partakers of his kingdom for evermore!

***~~Of this, the present state of their souls justifies an assured expectation.~~***

The connection between the two parts of my text must on no account be overlooked. Both "the death" of the saints, and "their life" warrant an assurance, that they shall reign with Christ in glory. Who can hurt the soul of one that is dead? So neither can anyone destroy a soul that is "dead to sin:" in both cases, the soul is hidden with Christ in God.

Again, when our life was committed to the keeping of the first Adam, he, though perfect, and in Paradise, allowed it to be wrested from him by the subtlety of Satan. To prevent a recurrence of such a calamity, our renewed life is not committed to our own care, but is treasured up in the second Adam, and is hidden with Christ in God, out of the reach of any enemy!

Who then shall prevail against us? Not all the powers of earth or Hell shall effect our ruin: "our life being hidden with Christ in God," we are placed beyond the reach of evil; and therefore may be sure, that when he shall appear again to judge the world, we also shall appear with him in glory. This seems to be the true import of the passage; and nothing less than this will adequately convey to our minds the security and blessedness of a believing soul.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Let believers be sensible of the distinguished mercy given unto them—~~***

"Who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord?" Behold the unregenerate world: they are "dead," it is true; but to what are they dead? Not to self, but to God and to everything that concerns the soul; while you are dead to the law, and to sin, and to the world, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ. *Light and darkness are not more different from each other, than is the spiritual from the natural man*; *and the regenerate man from him who remains dead in trespasses and sins*. And who has put the difference between you and the unbelieving world? Who has made you children of God and heirs of glory—while so many millions of your fellow-creatures have the wicked one for their father, and everlasting misery as their portion! Truly, if you do not bless and adore your God, and rend the air with your hosannahs, the very stones will cry out against you.

***~~2. Let them endeavor to walk worthy of their high calling—~~***

This is the entire scope both of the preceding and the following context. "Set your affections on things above," "for you are dead," etc. Then after the text it is added, "Mortify therefore your members upon earth." This should be the effect of all God's mercies to us: and I call on every one who professes to have received life from Christ, to give evidence of that life, by "walking in all things just as Christ walked".

***~~#2184~~***

***~~CHRIST IS ALL~~***

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

"Christ is all, and in all."

MEN are ever ready to value themselves upon their natural endowments, their civil distinctions, or their religious privileges; and to imagine that a preeminence in these things gives them some kind of claim to honor and respect, even from God himself. But nothing which a natural man can possess, will give him any such advantage over others as shall entitle him to boast, as though his salvation were in any measure of, or from, himself. The most learned "Greek" must be indebted to divine teaching as much as the unlettered "Scythian;" and the Jew that has been admitted into covenant with God by "circumcision," be as much saved by the blood and righteousness of Christ as an "uncircumcised" or idolatrous "barbarian;" the "free-man" has no superiority above the "slave." All stand upon the same footing with respect to salvation; all without exception are dependent upon Christ for all their mercies: in all cases, relating to all persons, and to all the circumstances of each, the creature is nothing, and Christ is all, "he is all in all." We shall,

***~~I. Illustrate this truth—~~***

If we consult the Scriptures, or our own experience, Christ will be found all in procuring, imparting, maintaining, and completing our salvation.

***~~1. Christ is all in procuring our salvation—~~***

Who among the sons of men first suggested to our Lord the plan of saving our ruined race through the sacrifice of himself? Who assisted him in performing the mighty work which he had undertaken? "Did he not tread the winepress of God's wrath alone? [Isaiah 63:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.3)." When he "finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness," "there was none with him;" "he looked and there was no man; therefore his own arm brought salvation! [Isaiah 59:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 59.16)."

Who can add to the work which he has accomplished? Who can bring forth any works of supererogation or perfection that shall eke out his righteousness, or give weight and efficacy to his sacrifice? Surely Christ alone must be acknowledged as "the author of eternal salvation! [Hebrews 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.9)."

***~~2. Christ is all in imparting our salvation—~~***

The state of mankind may be fitly compared to the *dry bones*in Ezekiel's vision, [Ezekiel 37:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.1-3); they are altogether incapable of exerting themselves in the way of godliness, or of performing the functions of the spiritual life. He who commanded Lazarus to come forth from the grave, and who calls himself "the resurrection and the life," must quicken them, or they will remain to all eternity "dead in trespasses and sins." If "we choose him, and love him, it is because he has first chosen us, and loved us! [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3). [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." There is not a saint on earth that 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)." "It is not of blood, or of the will of the flush, or of the will of man, that we are born, but of God, [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13)." Through the pride of our hearts indeed, we are too apt to boast: but "who among us has anything which he has not received, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7)." Who must not trace up to God both his "disposition to will, and his ability to do" what is right and good? [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13). Nothing but the most consummate pride can hinder us from confessing that "salvation is, not of him who wills, or of him who runs, but of God that shows mercy! [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16);" and that, "if we have been saved and called with a holy calling, it has not been according to our works, but according to God's eternal purpose and grace! [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)."

***~~3. Christ is all in maintaining our salvation—~~***

Nothing is more evident than our inability to maintain our natural life: however careful we be in the use of means, we cannot secure our *bodies*against the effects of disease or accident. The preservation of our *spiritual*life is yet further beyond the reach of our foresight or our skill. If left by God for one moment, we shall fall. If Adam, even in Paradise, yielded to temptation, notwithstanding he was a perfect man, then how much more shall we, who are full of evil? Paul acknowledges that, notwithstanding all the grace he had received, he "had not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought! [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5)."

As water ceases to flow when its communication with the fountain is cut off, or as light is instantly extinguished as soon as the rays of the sun are intercepted, so all spiritual life would cease in us for ever, if "Christ, who is our life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)," would for one instant withhold his quickening influence, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5).

From hence it is that we are necessitated to "live entirely by faith in the Son of God," and to "receive continually out of his fullness, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

***~~4. Christ is all in completing our salvation—~~***

While we continue in the body, we shall be as dependent upon Christ for everything, as we have been at any period of our existence. He who has been "the *author*, must also be the *finisher*of our faith, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2);" the same "Zerubbabel who laid the foundation of this spiritual work, must finish it with his own hands, in order that, when the head-stone shall be brought forth with shoutings, we may cry, Grace, grace unto it forever! [Zechariah 4:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 4.7-9)." Indeed, it is not only to the end of life that Christ will carry on his work, but long after we have moldered in the grave, "he will raise us up again at the last day! [John 6:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.39-40)," appoint us our proper portion, exalt us to his throne of glory, and be the continued source of our happiness through all eternity! [Revelation 7:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.17); [Revelation 21:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.23).

This being a truth of infinite importance, we shall endeavor to,

***~~II. Improve it—~~***

It is not a mere assent to this doctrine that will profit our souls, but the application of it to our hearts and consciences. Let us then apply it:

***~~1. For reproof—~~***

In how strong a light does the guilt of *worldly men*appear when viewed through the medium of this truth!

God assures us that no distinctions of whatever kind will effectually make us happy; and that the happiness of all must be altogether in, and through Christ.

The worldling, on the contrary, declares, by his practice at least, that the world, and not Christ, is the true source of rational enjoyment. What is this but to "make God a liar?" and shall this be deemed a light offense in the day of judgment?

But this subject more particularly condemns the self-righteous. These, instead of looking to Christ for the free, unmerited, and continued exercise of his grace, are ready to boast that they are not as other men, and to go forth in a dependence on their own strength and goodness: instead of regarding him as their entire "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," they transfer much of his glory to themselves; instead of making him their all, they make him almost nothing. Do such persons honor Christ? or can they expect to be honored by him before the assembled universe?

Even true *believers*will see much cause to be ashamed when they reflect how low their thoughts of Christ have been, and how cold their devoutest affections towards him are.

Above all, the *ministers*of the Gospel, even the most faithful among them, have reason to be ashamed. They know that they, who neglect Christ, neglect their all; and that the consequences of that neglect will be inexpressibly dreadful. Should not then their "eyes run down with tears day and night for the pride" and ignorance of their people? Should they not "beseech them," yes, and entreat God for them, with floods of tears, if that by any means they might prevail on some to embrace the Savior? Have they not reason to tremble lest the blood of multitudes who perish would be required at their hands? Surely they, who are ready to condemn their zeal, would rather pity them, and pray for them, and encourage their activity to the utmost.

***~~2. For direction—~~***

They who are inquiring, what shall we do to be saved? have here the shortest and plainest direction that can be given them: if they remember that "Christ is all," and heartily endeavor to make him their all, they can never perish. Their danger arises not less from their aversion to exalt the Savior, than it does from the love of worldly and carnal lusts. Yes, it is far easier to mortify any wicked habit whatever, than to bring the soul to a sincere acquiescence in Christ as our all. We are always wanting to retain some ground of self-preference, and self-delight: but, if ever we be saved by him, we must lie in his hands as new-born infants, and be contented to be "washed, justified, and sanctified by him" alone! 1 Corinthians 6:11.

The drooping and doubting Christian may also find in these words the very direction which he most of all stands in need of. Doubts and fears arise, either from a defective view of Christ's all-sufficiency, or from an apprehension of our own lack of fitness to participate in his benefits. We wish to see ourselves purified in some measure, in order that we may be warranted to lay hold on the promises: whereas the Scripture teaches us, first to lay hold on the promises as sinners, that "by them we may" become saints, and "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." We mean not to encourage sin of any kind; God forbid: but *we must go to Christ as having nothing in ourselves, that in him we may have all*.

***~~3. For comfort—~~***

Doubtless, to those who determine to abide in sin, no consolation whatever can be administered, for "the wrath of God does, and ever will, abide upon them!" But to those who would forsake sin, though they be now the very chief of sinners, our text affords unspeakable comfort. They are not to heal themselves in part, and then to apply to the Physician; but to go to Christ just as they are, and to cast themselves entirely upon him. O that some might be encouraged to flee to him for refuge! For as he must be all in the very best of men, so he is willing to be all to the vilest of the human race: "him who goes unto him, he will never cast out!"

As for the true believer, the subject before us is the one ground of all his comfort: if Christ were not to be his all, he would absolutely despair; because he knows that "without Christ he can do nothing." But knowing also the all-sufficiency and faithfulness of Christ, he commits himself cheerfully into his hands, "confident that he who has begun the good work in him, will perform it to the end, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)," and "preserve him blameless to his heavenly kingdom."

***~~#2185~~***

***~~THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION~~***

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

"Christ is all, and is in all!"

The Author, in the preceding Discourse, has treated this text as commentators in general have done, in reference to our *justification*before God. But he apprehends on further consideration, that it refers rather to our *sanctification*. In either sense, the position is true, that "Christ is all;" but the latter interpretation seems more exactly to convey the mind of the Spirit in this passage. The reader, by comparing the two Discourses, will be enabled to judge for himself.

In order to ascertain the true sense of any passage of Scripture, two things are to be attended to:

we should mark the scope of the context, and

compare the terms or phrases with similar passages of Holy Writ.

By separating these canons of interpretation, we shall often overlook the true meaning of God's word, and put upon it a forced construction; whereas, if we unite them, we shall almost always find its just import.

It is undeniable that the, verses which precede and follow our text refer to sanctification, see, verse 1-14; nor is there anything which properly relates to our justification: and therefore we have a strong presumptive ground for interpreting the words of our text in reference to the new nature, which is spoken of in the verse immediately before it: nor could anything but the peculiarity of the expression lead one for a moment to look for any other sense.

But it seems that to interpret the word "Christ," as meaning the image of Christ, or the New Man, is to take a great, and almost an unwarrantable liberty with Scripture. Nevertheless, if we compare some other passages with the text, see [2 Corinthians 13:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.5), where "Christ in us" must be understood of his image, because it is that whereby we are to ascertain whether we are in the faith. See also [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19), where "Christ formed in us" cannot be understood of Christ personally, but of Christ spiritually, that is of his image. Above all, see [Romans 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 13.14), where the very metaphor which occurs in our context, is used. "Put on the new man," says our context, "for Christ," that is, the putting on of Christ, or of the new man, "is all." And, in the passage referred to, is the very expression, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ", we shall find that we are fully authorized to put this construction upon it, and that there is no necessity to understand it in any other way than that which the context so evidently requires.

The meaning then of the words before us is simply this: we should be daily putting off our old and corrupt nature, and be putting on a new and holy nature; because nothing else will be at all regarded by God. Whatever advantages we possess, we have nothing, if we are not holy. On the other hand, whatever disadvantages we labor under, we shall suffer no loss, if we are holy: for the image of "Christ" on the soul "is all, in all" persons, and under all circumstances. Where that is, God will be pleased; and where that is not, he will be eternally displeased.

In order to confirm this momentous truth, we shall show, that, in the eyes of God, our restoration to the Divine image "is all in all." It is,

***~~I. The one scope of all God's plans—~~***

***~~God's design in the redemption of the world at large—~~***

When first he determined to rescue man from perdition, he decreed that he would "create us anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, in which he ordained that we should walk, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10).

The means which he used for the accomplishment of our salvation had especial respect to this end, not to save us *in*our sins, but *from*them, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21). [Acts 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.26).

He sent his only dear Son to take our nature, and in that nature to live, to die, to rise again. But in all this he aimed, not at our *happiness*merely, but our restoration to the *holy image*which we had lost, [Galatians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.4). [1 Peter 1:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.18-19); [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24). [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." This is specified in terms peculiarly strong and energetic, in order that we may not overlook this truth as if it were only of secondary importance, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27).

He gave his Holy Spirit also for the same end, he gave him:  
to humble us, [John 16:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.8-11),  
to renew us, [Titus 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5-6),  
to mortify all our vile lusts and passions, [Romans 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.13),  
to fashion us after the Divine image, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24) with [2 Corinthians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.22).

A "seal" is an impress of the Divine image; and a "pledge" is the commencement of heavenly purity and joy, and to perfect that image in our souls, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

***~~God's design in imparting that redemption to individuals—~~***

Why did he choose any of us from before the foundation of the world? It was "that we might be holy, and without blame before him in love, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)."

Why has he revealed his grace in our hearts? It was to "teach us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)."

If he applies his promises to our souls, or hides his face from us, it is alike "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1) with [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10)."

Whatever be his dispensations towards us, "this is his will, even our sanctification, [1 Thessalonians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.3);" and this is his ultimate design in all, even:  
to "carry on the good work he has begun, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6),"  
to "sanctify us wholly [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23)," and  
to "perfect that which concerns us [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8)."

But holiness is also,

***~~II. The one object of God's regard—~~***

***~~Nothing but holiness is regarded by him in this world—~~***

The external ordinances of religion are not only worthless, but even, hateful, in his sight, if destitute of solid piety, [Isaiah 1:11-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.11-16). On the other hand, the smallest particle of genuine holiness is not overlooked by him, [1 Kings 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 14.13). Even the semblance of it has sometimes been rewarded by him, in order that he might show to mankind how great a value he has for it, where it really exists, [1 Kings 21:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 21.29). One single disposition is declared by him to be of great price in his sight, 1 Peter 3:4. The purposes which have never been realized in act, are highly commended by him, [1 Kings 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 8.18). And wherever he sees a person laboring to do his will, he invariably reveals to him his love in a more abundant measure, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23), and communicates to him his richest blessings, [Isaiah 58:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.10-11).

***~~Nothing but holiness will be regarded by him in the world to come—~~***

When we shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, the inquiry will be, not, what we have *professed*, but what we have *done*, [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23); [Matthew 25:31-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31-46); and a Gentile who has served God according to the light that he enjoyed, will be preferred before the Christian professor, who has not made a suitable improvement of his superior advantages, [Romans 2:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.25-27). Apparently trivial occurrences will be noticed in that day; and rewards will be dispensed, not according to the greatness and splendor of our actions, but according to their intrinsic qualities, and to the principle evinced by them, [Matthew 10:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.42).

We must not indeed imagine that there is any merit in our poor services, for there is imperfection in them all; and, "if we had done all that is commanded us, still we would be only unprofitable servants:" but God delights in holiness; and wherever he beholds it, he will, of his own grace and mercy, bestow upon it a proportionate reward, exalting those to the highest thrones in glory, who have made the greatest improvement of the talents committed to them, [Matthew 25:19-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.19-23).

There will be no distinction made, except what is grounded on the different degrees of conformity to the Divine image which the different individuals have attained. God will not respect the circumcised more than the uncircumcised, or the rich and learned more than the poor and illiterate. *In all persons equally, the image of Christ will be sought for; and the possession, or lack of it, will determine their eternal state*. "Christ will then be, as he now is, all, and in all!"

***~~We conclude with inquiring: Who among you is like-minded with God?~~***

***~~1. You worldly people—~~***

How far are you from according with God. With him, Christ is all; with you, the world. If you may but enjoy the pleasures, the honors, the riches of the world, you care not about the image of Christ: to be rich in faith and good works is not the object of your ambition—that you leave to the old, the sick, the enthusiasts.

But ah! if Christ is all, as indeed he is, think what a vanity you are pursuing: think how poor you will be in the day of judgment; and how you will then execrate your present ways. Be persuaded to be wise in time: and beg without delay that "Christ may be made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

***~~2. You self-deceiving religious professors—~~***

*How many are there in the Church, who will talk about Christ, and speak of him as the ground of all their hopes, while yet they are shamefully destitute of his image!*Yes, grievous it is to say, that there are "many vain-talkers and deceivers" now, as well as in the apostolic age:  
many who are proud and passionate;  
many who are earthly-minded and covetous;  
many who are unchaste and lewd;  
many that are deceitful in their words, and dishonest in their dealings;  
many, in short, whose tempers, and dispositions, and conduct, are a disgrace to their profession.

If such there are here present, know that *you are as unlike to God as Satan himself is!*Know that all your knowledge, all your experiences, and all your professions, will only aggravate your condemnation, if you die in your present state! [Job 36:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 36.13).

You do well to rely on Christ, and to make him your all in point of dependence; but know for a certainty, that, however you may pretend to trust in him, you never can he saved by him, unless you become new creatures! [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17); for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14)."

***~~3. You true believers—~~***

You can appeal to God that you are like-minded with him in this grand point; and that *you desire as much to be saved from sin, as to be delivered from Hell itself*. This is a blessed evidence that you are born of God, [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10). While you are thus panting after holiness, you have nothing to fear—your faith is sound, [James 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.22). your hope is scriptural, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3), and saving, [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5); [Romans 8:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.24). Go on then from grace to grace, from strength to strength, [2 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.18). Be daily putting off the old man with its lusts, verse 8, 9, and putting on the new man with all its characteristic graces, verse 12, 13. Be "growing up thus into Christ in all things as your living Head, [Ephesians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15)." until you have arrived at the full measure of the stature of Christ! [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); and when you have attained a perfect fitness for the enjoyment of your God, you shall be *like*him, and *with*him for ever! [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.2).

***~~#2186~~***

***~~CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DISPLAYED~~***

***~~[Colossians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-15)~~***

"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. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

THE end of Christianity is to restore man to the Divine image, in order to his ultimate restoration to the blessedness which he has forfeited and lost. Nor does God ever accomplish the latter but through the medium of the former.

Doubtless the Lord Jesus Christ, by his own obedience unto death, effects our reconciliation with God: that is his work, and his alone.

But our "fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light" is the work of his Holy Spirit, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12); and it is wrought in every one of "God's elect:" for no one is "chosen to salvation but through the sanctification of the Spirit, united with, and added to, the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)."

Hence, in the chapter before us, the Apostle marks distinctly wherein that renovation consists: it is "a putting off of the old man, and a putting on of the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness, verse 9, 10 with [Ephesians 4:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.24)."

The particular *evils of the old man*, which are to be put off, are enumerated in, verse 8, 9. The *particular graces of the new man*, which are to be put on, are stated in the words of my text: and, inasmuch as this transformation of the soul into the Divine image, or "the forming of Christ within us," is that which, beyond all other marks of distinction, will operate to our final acceptance with God. This is the meaning of "Christ is all," that is the image of Christ. Compare [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19).

The Apostle urges us to meet God, as it were, upon his own terms: "Put on, therefore," the new man: and he urges us, by the consideration of the distinguishing grace which we ourselves have received: "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved," this new man. Now, the attainment of this change is what we all profess to hope for; and, therefore, it should be sought by us with all diligence, and be manifested by us ill the whole of our life and conduct.

To impress this upon your minds, I will show,

***~~I. Wherein true Christian character consists—~~***

If we would have a full view of this subject, we must enter into the Christian's experience before God. But that would lead us beyond the proper scope of our text, which confines our attention to the Christian in his daily walk before man. Adhering then to our text, let us see what the Christian should be:

***~~1. What the Christian should be, in the daily habit of his mind—~~***

You cannot but know, brethren, what proud, selfish creatures we are by nature; caring for nothing but our own ease, pleasure, honor, and advancement. Except in very particular cases, where relative or social ties have created a more than ordinary interest in our minds, how little do we feel for those around us; either for those with whom we have more immediate fellowship, or those who are bowed down with sorrows of any kind!

But, in opposition to these hateful dispositions, we should put on:  
in the place of indifference, compassion;  
in the place of roughness, courtesy;  
and in the place of pride, humility.

We may conceive how a mother's affections would yearn over her first-born child, when writhing in agony, and perishing through want. Such "affections of mercies should we put on" towards all who are in want or trouble of any kind; participating, at least by sympathy, in the sorrows which we cannot alleviate in any other way. And towards every person with whom we come in contact, whether he be a superior, an equal, or an inferior; yes, and whether he be a friend or foe—we should "put on kindness," and exercise nothing but benevolence. As least of all, we would be ever ready to take the lowest place, "putting on humbleness of mind," and, with unaffected simplicity, rendering ourselves the servants of all around us. This, I say, should be the daily habit of our minds; not called forth by great exertion, but operating readily, naturally, habitually, as the feelings of a mother towards her infant offspring.

***~~2. What the Christian should be, in his deportment towards others—~~***

Here, alas! we cannot but be sensible:  
what *irritability*we have shown on the slightest occasions;  
what *displeasure*, when an offense has been of any continuance;  
what *alienation*we have felt from those who differ from us in their opinions and conduct;  
what *vindictiveness*, when any serious injury has been sustained by us.

But all of this is sadly unfitting to us as the followers of Christ, whom, by every possible consideration, we are bound to imitate and resemble. For anger, we should "put on meekness;" and "long-suffering," in the place of retaliation or complaint. Instead of harboring intolerance, we should "put on forbearance;" and, instead of retaining a vindictive spirit against any, we should call to mind how many and great offenses Christ has forgiven us; and would gladly "mete to our fellow-creatures the measure which we ourselves have received from him." This is the spirit which we are to manifest on all occasions; and this is to be the constant tenor of our way in all our fellowship with mankind.

***~~3. What the Christian should be, in the governing principle of his life—~~***

Here is man's great defect. By nature we are altogether enrapt up in self. *Self*is the principle that actuates us in everything, and the end for which alone we live. Self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-interest, occupy, for the most part, our every thought, and regulate our every motion. But there is a new principle that is imparted to the Christian, and under its influence his whole life must be directed: and this is the principle of love. This is the root and essence of every other grace: it comprehends all, combines all, consolidates all. Whatever there be that enters into the composition of Christian "perfection, this is the bond" which unites it altogether, and forms it into one harmonious mass.

It is the spirit which pervades and actuates every faculty of the soul, even as the soul directs and regulates every member of the body. The soul, in operation, causes every member to perform its proper office; and love, presiding, will keep every Christian grace in full activity. This, therefore, we must "put on, over all, and above all" the other graces that have been mentioned; so that nothing may be lacking to the proper discharge of all our duties.

That I may the better commend to you this state of mind, I will endeavor to point out,

***~~II. The vast importance of Christian love—~~***

Notice particularly what the Apostle urges in my text: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved," these several graces.

God calls for it;  
man expects it;  
consistency requires it.

***~~1. God calls for it—~~***

You are his elect. But to what has he called you? Not to salvation only, but "unto holiness, [1 Thessalonians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.7)." Hear particularly how Paul states this matter: "God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4)." And again: "He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29)."

Now if, instead of cultivating these graces, we retain "the old man" in all its power and efficiency, we defeat the very object which God, supposing him to have elected us, has had in view. And will God endure that? Our blessed Lord said, "Have not I chosen you twelve; and one of you is a devil? [John 6:70](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.70)." Know, then, if we continue devils, as Judas did, we shall, with him, "go to our own place! [Acts 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.25)," and not to the habitation of the just. We can never be "beloved" of our God, if we are not "holy."

***~~2. Man expects it—~~***

If we profess to be "the elect of God," man will very reasonably demand a proof of it. We may tell him of our faith: but he will reply, "Show me your works. As for your faith, God alone can judge of that: but I must judge of the tree by its fruits: and, it you profess to be distinguished above your fellows by the special favor of your God, I have a right to ask: What do you more than others [Matthew 5:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.47)." Have you "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness? [Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22-24)." Let me see what your tempers are in your family, and towards all around you, and especially under circumstances of heavy trial. Tell me not of your inward experiences before God. I must judge by your spirit and conduct towards man: and, if I find you not endued with the graces of the Spirit, I can account you no better than others; yes, rather, I must account you worse; since, with all your high professions, you are no better than hypocrites and deceivers!"

***~~3. Consistency requires it—~~***

This is the peculiar force of my text. When we call ourselves "the elect of God," we profess to have been "renewed in the spirit of our mind;" for, if we do not profess this, the most abandoned reprobate in the universe has as much right to call himself "elect," as we.

"Are you, then, destitute of compassion? How dwells the love of God in you? [1 John 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.17)."

Are you proud, passionate, intolerant, unforgiving? "Lie not against the truth [James 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.14);" you are "children of darkness, and not of light;" "not children of God, but children of the devil, [1 John 3:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.7-10)." *To "call Christ, Lord, Lord," without walking in his steps, is only to deceive and ruin your own souls!*

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

***~~1. The excellence of Christian principles—~~***

Christianity requires us to refer all good to God; and to say, after all that we have attained, "By the grace of God, I am what I am! [1 Corinthians 15:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.10)." But will this tend to encourage us in sin? No, "the grace of God, which brings salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world! [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12);" and "the hope that we have in Christ will, of necessity, lead us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure! [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

***~~2. The beauty of the Christian character—~~***

Look at a man clothed, as my text describes, in all those lovely graces; and "so clothed with them," as never to be seen without them: and then tell me, whether he is not a lovely character.

Is there a man in the universe that does not admire "affections of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, and forgiveness," and all under the direction and government of "love?" I grant, that, from envy and jealousy, the world may be filled with rage against a person possessing all these graces: for so were they incensed against our blessed Lord himself, in whom these virtues existed in their utmost possible perfection; but this was on other grounds than on account of his virtues. He professed himself the Messiah; and therefore they put him to death: his tempers, and dispositions, and habits, they could not but admire. And so, at this day, the men that hate us, under the idea of "God's elect," cannot but acknowledge that the consistent Christian is, of all characters, the loveliest upon the face of the earth! 1 Peter 3:4. I call upon all of you therefore, brethren, to "show forth these virtues;" and thus to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, by well-doing! [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15)."

***~~#2187~~***

***~~LOVE TO THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED~~***

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

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly!"

IT was declared to be one of the principal advantages which the Jews enjoyed above the heathen, that they had "the Oracles of God committed to them, [Romans 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.1-2);" and we are still more highly privileged, in that we have in our hands the New Testament Scriptures, whereby we are enabled to understand the writings of Moses and the prophets more fully than the writers themselves understood them.

What part of the Christian records the Colossians could possess, we do not exactly know: we are sure that the sacred canon was not yet complete; nor were the different epistles which have come down to us, collected into one volume. It is probable enough that one or two of the Gospels might have been seen by them: and the possession of such a treasure would be a very sufficient ground for the exhortation before us.

To us who enjoy a complete collection of all that God has ever seen fit to reveal—at least, as much of it as is at all necessary for our edification and comfort—the exhortation may be addressed with proportionably greater weight. To impress it the more powerfully upon your minds, we shall take occasion from it to show you in what light the sacred volume should be regarded, and in what manner it should be improved.

***~~I. In what light the Scripture should be regarded—~~***

The word which has been transmitted to us was written by different men, in different and distant ages of the world. But though it was written by men, it is indeed the Word of God; because those holy men wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, [2 Peter 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.21). Indeed, the word is, properly and strictly speaking, "the word of Christ"—

Our blessed and adorable Lord ministered to the Church not only before his incarnation, but from the very beginning of the world. It was He who preached by Noah to the antediluvian world, [1 Peter 3:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18-20). It was He who inspired all the prophets in all succeeding ages of the Church; and enabled them to testify beforehand respecting his future sufferings and glory, [1 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.10-11). Thus was he the real Author of the Old Testament.

With respect to the New Testament, whatever is revealed there must also be traced to the same source. It was Christ who taught his Apostles, and who "by his Spirit brought all things to their remembrance," and, in a personal appearance to Saul, revealed to him the whole scheme and plan of redemption, [Galatians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.11-12). What the Apostles spoke in his name, they affirmed to be, not the word of man, but of God, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13); and what they wrote in their epistles, they declared to be "the commandment of their Lord, [1 Corinthians 14:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.37)." Hence every part of the sacred volume is justly called by the Apostle "the word of Christ."

***~~In this view it ought to be regarded by us—~~***

Let us suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ were now to come among us, and to teach in our Churches, as once he did in the streets and synagogues of Judea: would we not, if we knew him to be that very Jesus, listen to him with the deepest attention? Would we not revolve in our thoughts the various subjects of his discourse, and labor to ascertain their true import? If we could suppose him now addressing us from the cross, and appealing to his sufferings as an unquestionable demonstration of his love, and an irresistible argument for our adherence to him; would we not be melted to tears? Would we not be ready to exclaim, "What have we to do any more with idols?" "Other lords have had dominion over us; but by you only will we make mention of your name."

Or, lastly, let us suppose that we saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, [Acts 7:56](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.56); let us suppose he spoke to us now, as once he did from Mount Sinai, with thunderings, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and the sound of the trumpet waxing louder and louder, [Hebrews 12:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.18-19); would we not tremble? Would we not be ready to engage, as the Israelites did, "All that the Lord has spoken will we do, and be obedient?"

Were we to hear him speaking to us in any of these ways, the word would not more certainly be his, than this word is which we now possess: and therefore whatever opinions of fear or love or gratitude we would feel on account of such revelations of his will, we ought to feel in reference to that sacred volume which we have in our hands. Whenever we look upon it, we should say, This is the word:  
of Him who came down from Heaven to instruct me;  
of Him who died upon the cross to save me;  
of Him who now sits enthroned in glory, and will hereafter fix my eternal doom according to it! [John 12:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.48).

Let us next inquire,

***~~II. In what manner the Scripture should be improved—~~***

We should not merely regard it with pious veneration, but, should make use of it,

***~~1. For the furnishing of our minds—~~***

*It is to little purpose to have the Scriptures in our homes, unless we read them diligently, and acquire an experimental and practical knowledge of them.*As the tables of the law were deposited within the ark, so should the whole "Word of God be hidden within our hearts." It should "dwell in us;" it should dwell in us "richly;" its *precepts*should be treasured up in our minds, that we may know what the will of the Lord is: its *promises*should be precious to us, that we may be able to plead them at the throne of grace, and obtain the accomplishment of them to our own souls: nor would its *threatenings*be overlooked, but rather be considered as kind and beneficial admonitions which are given us for our good.

It will be said by many, that their memory is defective, and that they cannot retain the things which they read or hear: but if we made a practice of selecting daily some short portion of Scripture for our meditation throughout the day, the most ignorant among us would soon attain a knowledge which at present appears far beyond his reach.

***~~2. For the regulating of our conduct—~~***

Speculative knowledge, for the most part, tends only to pride and contention. That which alone is valuable to the Christian, is practical. The Scriptures are designed to lead him to such wisdom and discretion as will be in vain sought for from any other source. Indeed "all wisdom" is to be "drawn from these wells of salvation."

The person whose mind is cast into the mold of the Scripture, will view everything as God views it: he will have the same practical judgment as God himself has. "Good and evil, light and darkness" will not be confounded in his mind, as they are in the minds of ungodly men: he will distinguish them with ease, except in cases that are very obscure and complicated. By means of the spiritual discernment which he has obtained, he will be able to judge of the conduct of others, while they are not able to appreciate him, [1 Corinthians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14-15); and as far as his actions are regulated by his principles, he will be a light to all around him; and they shall be constrained to "acknowledge that God is with them in truth,"

Indeed it is for this end that God sets up a light in his people's souls, "not that it may be put under a bushel, but that it may be set on a candlestick, and give light to all that are in the house;" and that the person possessing it may be able to say to all around him, "Whatever you have *seen*and *heard*in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

***~~That we may enforce the exhortation in our text, we would remind you, that a love to the Scriptures is,~~***

***~~1. An inseparable attendant on true piety—~~***

Look at the most distinguished saints, and see how they regarded the inspired records. *Job*esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food, [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12). *Jeremiah*found them the "joy and rejoicing of his heart, [Jeremiah 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 15.16)." And to David they were "sweeter than honey and the honey-comb, [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10)." Let not us then think that we have any title to be classed with those holy men, if we do not resemble them in this particular.

***~~2. A necessary means of advancement in every part of the divine life—~~***

Have we been only just quickened from the dead? We cannot but love that which has been the means of giving us life, [Psalm 119:93](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.93).

Are we as new-born babes? we must of necessity "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby, [1 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.2)."

Have we arrived at the strength and stature of youth? "that word must abide within us, in order that we may be able to overcome" the great adversary of our souls, [1 John 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.14).

In a word, whatever state we be in, it is "by the Scriptures that we are to be furnished for every good word and work, 2 Timothy 3:16-17."

***~~#2188~~***

***~~DOING ALL IN THE NAME OF CHRIST~~***

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

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

SUPPOSING the existence of one Supreme Being to be acknowledged, our obvious duty towards him must be to exercise such a dependence on him, as shall evince a consciousness, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being, [Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.28)." This being what, for distinction's sake, I will call *natural religion*, we may see what must, of necessity, be required of us under the Christian dispensation.

By the Gospel we are informed, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator and Governor of the universe; and, consequently, must be entitled to all that regard which, as Theists, we pay to the Supreme Being. But He is further revealed to us as the Redeemer of the world; and, consequently, as standing in a still nearer relation to us, as our vital Head; from whom we derive all supplies of grace and peace, and to whom we must ascribe all the blessings which we enjoy, whether in time or in eternity.

What, then, is evangelical religion? It is not*a mere assent to certain principles*, however accurate those principles may be. Nor is it *a practice of certain duties*, however commendable those duties may be. It is a habit of mind, by means of which Christ's universal agency is acknowledged, and the whole soul goes forth to him; receiving everything from his fullness, and improving everything for his glory.

To unfold this more clearly, I will endeavor to show, what, under the Gospel dispensation, should be the habit of our minds,

***~~I. In all that we do for God—~~***

In my text, we are told to do everything "in the name of Jesus Christ." Now, by this expression, I understand that we should do everything,

***~~1. From respect to his authority—~~***

Paul says, "We command you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, [2 Thessalonians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.6)." It was by the authority of Christ that he issued that command; and from a respect to that authority was that command to be obeyed.

In like manner must we have respect to Christ in everything that we do: for he has said, "Then are you my friends, if you do whatever I command you." It must be a matter of indifference to us what man may enjoin, unless it have the sanction of our blessed Lord's authority also.

We must always ask ourselves,*What does the Lord Jesus Christ require of me?*That I will do, at all events, and under all circumstances. If it is approved of man, I will do it, not so much to please man, as to please the Lord: and If it is disapproved by man, I shall still do it, because it will please my Lord. Nor will I be diverted from the path of duty, though the whole world would combine to oppose my progress. My Lord's will being clearly ascertained, I shall need nothing to encourage my exertions, nor will I suffer anything to obstruct them.

***~~2. From love to his name—~~***

We read of "receiving a child in Christ's name," and of "giving a cup of water in his name, [Mark 9:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.37); [Mark 9:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.41);" that must import that we do it from love to Christ. And this should be the one spring of all our actions: "The love of Christ would constrain us! [2 Corinthians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14)." It is not necessary that there would be in our minds, on all occasions, a long train of argumentation to call forth this principle: a mother needs not such a process to call forth her love to her infant offspring: if an occasion calls for the exercise of that principle, it is ready for action at all times, and at a moment's notice. And so should it be with us, towards our Lord Jesus Christ. There should be in us such a deep and abiding sense of our obligations to him, that, in everything we say, and in everything we do, we would desire to please him.

***~~3. In dependence on his grace—~~***

The Prophet Micah says, "All people will walk in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever;" that is, in an entire dependence upon him. Now, to whom must we look for direction in all our ways, but to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has engaged, as our Shepherd, to go before us, [John 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.4), and who has told us in all things to follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21)."

And on whom shall we rely for assistance in our difficulties, but on him who has directed us to be "strong in the Lord, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)," and assured us that "through his strength we shall do all things, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9). [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

And through whom can we hope for acceptance, but through Him, our Mediator and all-prevailing Intercessor, [Ephesians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18). [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2).

***~~4. For the advancement of his glory—~~***

When Peter and John had healed a man that had been lame from his mother's womb, the spectators were ready to ascribe the miracle either to "the power or holiness of those" who had wrought it. But the Apostles instantly gave the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name, and by whose power alone, it had been wrought: "Through faith in his name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which is by him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all, [Acts 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.6); [Acts 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.16)."

Thus, whatever it is that we either say or do, we must consult his glory, and labor to advance it. Nothing is too insignificant for us to attend to in this view: "Whether we *eat*or *drink*, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)." If it is thought that it would be presumption to suppose that anything we can do can by any means advance his glory, we quite mistake: for, in his last intercessory prayer, he 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)."

The same habit of mind must be cultivated, also,

***~~II. In all that God does for us—~~***

There may be many occurrences which, to flesh and blood, are painful: yet, in them must we see nothing but an occasion of praise and thanksgiving. Job blessed God as well for taking away his property as for bestowing it, [Job 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 1.21). And thus must we also "in everything give thanks," knowing that "this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us, 1 Thessalonians 5:8."

***~~We, in all circumstances, have occasion to praise our God—~~***

Those things which have the most painful aspect are yet in reality the fruits of divine love: for "whom God loves, he chastens; and scourges every son whom he receives, [Hebrews 12:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.6)." Indeed, the beneficial tendency of our afflictions is often as clear and visible as if it were pointed out to us by a voice from Heaven. For who does not see how *trials wean us from the world, and purify us from our dross?*We are told, and we find it true, that "tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, even a hope that makes not ashamed, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5)." But, independent of this, so great are the blessings of redemption, that they ought to swallow up, as it were, every other consideration; and to fill our souls with unutterable joy and gratitude, even in the midst of all the troubles that either men or devils can inflict upon us.

In the first chapter of this epistle, the Apostle puts this in a most striking point of view. He supposes the Colossians to be oppressed with heavy and long-continued afflictions: and "he prays for them," that they may be "strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. [Colossians 1:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.11-14)."

Must they under their trials be content with exercising "patience?" No! Or "long-suffering?" No! They must be filled with "joyfulness;" and be so borne up by a sense of God's mercy, and by the wonders of redeeming love, as to have not a word to utter but in a way of praise and thanksgiving. This then, beloved, is to be the frame of your minds at all times; as it was of Paul and Silas, when in the prison and in the stocks "they sang praises to God at midnight, [Acts 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.25)."

***~~In doing it, however, we must still have respect to the Lord Jesus Christ for the acceptance of our very best services—~~***

Continually is this inculcated in the Scriptures of truth. "We must give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, [Ephesians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.20)." Praise is "a sacrifice which must be offered" on him as our altar; and "be presented by him" as our great High Priest, even as the animals were under the Jewish law, [Hebrews 13:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.15). It is therefore called "the calves of our lips, [Hosea 14:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.2)." Nor can any sacrifice, however holy, be "acceptable to God, but as offered to him through Jesus Christ, [1 Peter 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.5)." This is particularly to be borne in mind at all times. We must do on earth as they are doing in Heaven. Not a voice is heard in Heaven which does not give glory to God and to the Lamb: nor on earth should a soul be found that does not say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto your name be the praise."

***~~Let me now observe,~~***

***~~1. If this is true religion, how little is there of true religion upon earth!~~***

Where do you find men of the character above described? How few are there, how very few, in whom this is found to be the prevailing habit of their minds! An attention to doctrines is frequent; nor is regard for moral duties uncommon: but such views of Christ, such respect to his authority, such love to his name, such dependence on his grace, such zeal for his glory, and such an overwhelming sense of his love as swallows up every other feeling—where are these found?

In how very small a measure are they possessed by the very best among us! and how far are the generality from possessing them at all! Yet it is by this standard that all Christian experience must be tried.

My dear brethren, get your minds rightly instructed in this matter; and then will you be able to form a right judgment, both of your own state and of everything around you.

***~~2. If this is true religion, how happy a man is the true Christian!~~***

Doubtless the Christian must be conscious of innumerable defects, and must find cause in himself for the deepest humiliation. But, in proportion as he has attained this experience, tell me whether he is not happy? Tell me whether he is not a far happier man than the possession of the whole world could make him? I know that an ignorant ungodly world will deride this as enthusiasm: but the passage which I before cited, in reference to natural religion, is amply sufficient to show that this experience is most rational, and indispensable to the Christian character.

What are the feelings of one who, in the daily habit of his mind, "lives, and moves, and has his being in God?" Precisely such are the Christian's feelings towards the Lord Jesus Christ, only elevated by a sense of redeeming love.

"Believe then in Christ;" and "abide in him" by the exercise of faith and love: and let him be "your life." Yes, "live altogether by faith in Him who has loved you, and given himself for you." Then will you "rejoice in him even now, with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory," and soon be partakers of "all the fullness of joy at God's right hand for evermore!"

***~~#2189~~***

***~~THE RELATIVE DUTIES EXPLAINED~~***

***~~[Colossians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.18) to [Colossians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.1).~~***

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.  
Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.  
Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.  
Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.  
Servants, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.  
Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that you also have a Master in Heaven."

IT is often a matter of complaint with some, that many who have been ordained to preach the Gospel leave the great and mysterious doctrines of the Gospel in the background, and bring forward little else than dry *morality*. But, whatever ground there may be for that complaint, it may be well to inquire, Whether there be not too much reason to complain of another class, who pay such exclusive attention to the *doctrines*, as almost entirely to overlook the duties, of the Gospel? Among some it would be almost thought superfluous, and even wrong, to devote an entire discourse to the subject of moral duties; since, according to their views, the discharge of them may well be left to the simple operation of faith, without any distinct statement of them from the teachers of Christianity.

But the Apostle Paul did not think so. On the contrary, in those two epistles (to the Ephesians, and Colossians) in which he enters most deeply into the mysteries of Christianity, he enlarges most fully on the relative duties. We are persuaded that a similar plan ought to be adopted by every minister of Christ. We should have no exclusive preference for doctrines or duties, but would put each in their place, and bring them both forward in their proper season. Convinced of this, we enter with great pleasure on the consideration of our relative duties; that is, of the duties,

***~~I. Of husbands and wives—~~***

It is worthy of observation, that, not in this place only, but in all other places where the Apostles speak of the relative duties, they mention those of the inferior first. The reason of this seems to be, that the duties of the inferior arise solely from the command of God, and are totally independent of the conduct of the superior; so that no neglect of duty on the one part can justify any neglect of it on the other. Agreeably therefore to the Apostolic plan, we shall notice the duty,

***~~1. Of wives—~~***

To you are assigned obedience and subjection. Partly, because you were created after man, and for the sake of man; and partly because you were first in the transgression, and were the means of bringing ruin upon man and upon all his posterity, [1 Timothy 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.11-14) with [Genesis 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.16). The extent to which obedience to your husband is required of you is indeed exceedingly great: it reaches to everything that is not contrary to the will of God: it is, if I may so speak, co-extensive with the obedience which the Church owes to the Lord Jesus Christ; and your obedience is due to your husband, as to the Lord himself.

I am aware that this expression is very strong; but I conceive it is not at all stronger than the declarations of Paul. True, in the text it is only said, "Submit yourselves, as it is fitting in the Lord:" but in the Epistle to the Ephesians he draws the very parallel that I have drawn, and shows that your duty to your husband corresponds exactly with the Church's duty to the Lord Jesus Christ: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church: and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything, [Ephesians 5:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.22-24)."

In the whole of this obedience, she must feel that it is due to him by God's special appointment: that he is her head, and her lord, whom she is bound, not only to obey, but to obey with "respect, [Ephesians 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.33)," "even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, [1 Peter 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1); [1 Peter 3:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.5-6)."

This may be thought to sound harsh by those who are not accustomed to consider what the Scripture speaks on this subject: but it will not be thought so, if we contemplate what God has required,

***~~2. Of husbands—~~***

Your duty, is to "love your wives," and never on any occasion to entertain an unkind feeling towards them. A proud, haughty, imperious behavior towards them is most offensive to God, who will regard every harsh, bitter, or contemptuous expression towards them as an abuse of your authority and a violation of his commands. Though he has constituted you *lords*, he has not authorized you to be *tyrants*; but requires you to be precisely such lords over your wives, as Christ is over his Church. You are to govern, it is true; but you are to govern only for the good of the wife; you are to seek only, and at all times, her best interests, and to promote to the utmost of your power her real happiness. You must not require anything unreasonable at her hands, nor ever fail to recompense with testimonies of your love, the efforts which she makes to please you. Nor must you merely endeavor to render her happy, but you must be ready to make great sacrifices for this end.

What the Lord Jesus Christ has done for his Church, is set forth as the proper model and pattern of your duty towards your wife: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." O! what an example is here! Methinks, no wife would complain of the obedience that is required of her, if the authority of her husband were exercised in such a way as this! On the contrary, obedience on her part would be her chief delight.

Know then, you husbands, that this is the duty assigned to you: if your wives are to be obedient, as the Church is to Christ—then you also on your part are to be loving, even as Christ is to the Church. Your wives should be to you as your own flesh. "Now no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the Church, [Ephesians 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.28-29); [Ephesians 5:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.33);" and precisely in the same way should you exercise all imaginable tenderness towards your wives, and be as careful of paining them as you would be of suffering anything to wound the apple of your eye.

Next to the duties of husbands and wives will naturally follow those,

***~~II. Of parents and children—~~***

Here again we are called, in the first place, to notice those of the inferior:

***~~1. Of children—~~***

Obedience is your duty also: nor is there any limit to the exercise of this duty, except where you are required to violate a command of God. Reason indeed is sufficient to teach you this: for your own ignorance and inexperience must of necessity direct you to look up to your parents for instruction and guidance. But Scripture teaches you to regard the authority of your parents as God's authority, and to consider obedience to them as obedience to him. In fulfilling the commands of parents, there should be no reluctance: on the contrary, to please, and serve, and honor his parents would be the desire and delight of every child. He should have no wish to shake off their yoke; no desire to act independently of them.

Nor let this be thought hard: for God has annexed a special promise to the fulfillment of this duty: the command relating to it is said to be "the first commandment with promise, [Ephesians 6:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.1-3);" and it is generally to be observed, that the blessing of God does rest in a more especial manner, throughout the whole of their lives, on those who have honored and obeyed their earthly parents.

This may be accounted for on natural principles; for the dispositions which are exercised in filial obedience argue a degree of self-government, which will go far to render a man both amiable and prosperous in every situation and condition of life. But besides this, the blessing of God will assuredly rest on such characters; and He, as the universal Parent, will recompense into their bosom their compliance with this command.

***~~2. Of parents—~~***

Both in the text, and in the parallel passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is a restraint laid on parents with regard to the exercise of their authority: it is not to be attended with harshness or severity, "lest they provoke their children to anger, and discourage them" from attempting to fulfill their duty, under the idea, that, whatever efforts they may use to please their parents, it will he a hopeless task.

Parents have much to answer for, when they produce such an effect as this on their children's minds. If on the one hand it be said, that "there is much folly in the heart of a child, and that the rod of correction must drive it out;" it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the mind of a child may soon be cast down, and that we may by harsh restrictions and undue severity augment that very rebellion which we endeavor to subdue.

There can be no doubt but that many parents harden their children's hearts against their authority in the first instance, and ultimately against the authority of God himself, purely by the *tyranny*which they exercise, and by the continual irritations which they occasion. That is a humiliating view which the Apostle gives of parents, but, alas! how true in too many instances, [Hebrews 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.10); and in the last day they will be found, in too many instances, the prime movers, and the real causes of their children's eternal ruin!

Fathers, be upon your guard respecting this; and instead of thus driving your children to despondency, endeavor to bring them up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord, [Ephesians 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.4)." See in what way God deals with His children, how he bears with their infirmities, and consults their best interests, [Psalm 103:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 103.8-13); so would you do, [1 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.11); and, like Abraham of old, be solicitous only for their eternal welfare, [Genesis 18:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.19).

There is yet one other relation specified in the text, namely, that,

***~~III. Of masters and servants—~~***

It has pleased God that there should be different ranks and orders of society, and that to each would be assigned appropriate duties. We notice those,

***~~1. Of servants—~~***

Your rank in society is ordered by the Lord: nor, when you hear in what light you are viewed by him, will you see any reason to repine at it. By virtue of your office you are required to "obey those who are your masters according to the flesh:" and to obey them cheerfully too, and without reserve. Nor in the discharge of this duty are you to act in the absence of your master any other way than you would in his immediate presence; you are to render obedience "in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [Ephesians 6:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.5-6)."

What an elevated view does this give of your situation and employments! You appear to be servants of men: and so indeed you are. But you are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ: and it is your privilege to consider yourselves as living in his service, as much as if he were to come down to sojourn again on earth, and to admit you into the number of his servants. Whatever your particular office is, you are privileged, so to speak, as altogether to forget your servitude to man, and to consider yourselves as performing the office of angels in the service of your God and Savior.

It is your privilege also to expect your wages from Him. What you receive from man, is for your body only: but you shall have wages for your soul also, even "the reward of an eternal inheritance!" This is represented as the state even of slaves, and of those who were called to serve Jewish or Heathen masters. How much more then is it the happy state of you who live in Christian families, and especially where God in Christ Jesus is loved and feared! Yes, "whether you be bond or free, your Master, your work, your wages are the same, [Ephesians 6:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.8)." Act then agreeably to this exalted view of your station. Even though you would have "froward and unkind masters," still act the same: and, if your *work*is thereby rendered the more difficult, your *reward*shall be proportionably advanced, 1 Peter 2:18-20.

***~~2. Of masters—~~***

As your servants are to put you in the place of Christ, so are you to be as in the place of Christ to them. Exactly such a muster as he, if in your place, would be, such are you to be to those who are under your command.

Would he never be unreasonable in his expectations or commands? So neither are you to be.

Would he be kind and indulgent? So must you be.

Would he delight to make his servants happy; and would he consult in all things their eternal welfare? So are you to act, "doing in your station the same thing in them," as they in theirs are required to do to you, [Ephesians 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.9).

Especially must you "forbear all threatening" words or looks, "remembering that you also have a Master in Heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons," and who, as their avenger, will call you to an account for all acts of unkindness or oppression towards the basest of mankind. In a word, see how your God directs and governs you; and let him be your model for your government of those whom he has graciously committed to your care.

***~~We may see here,~~***

***~~1. The extent and excellence of true religion—~~***

*Religion enters into every situation and relation of life*. It finds the whole world disordered like a body, every joint of which from head to foot is dislocated: but by its operation on the hearts of men, it sets every joint in its place, and diffuses through the whole a divine unction, whereby every joint is set at liberty, and performs with ease its proper functions.

Those in a higher and more honorable station despise not those which are lower and less honorable; neither are they envied by them: but each occupies with contentment and satisfaction the place assigned it by its Maker, and finds its own happiness in contributing, according to its ability, to the good of the whole.

If it is said that these effects are not visible in the world, even among those who profess religion; I answer, that this only shows how little there is of true religion in the world!

The first ages of the Church display in all its beauty the native tendency of Christianity: and, if the same effects are not alike visible now, it is not owing to any lack of efficiency in religion itself, but to the low state of religion in the world. *In proportion as vital godliness prevails, it does, and ever must, manifest its practical influence upon the heart and life.*

***~~2. The importance of studying the character of Christ—~~***

Christ ought to be well known to us in his work and offices as the only Savior of the world. But we must not confine our attention to his mediatorial work: we must also contemplate him as an *example*which we are to follow in every part of our conduct both towards God and man.

Behold him as a son and a servant; what an entire devotion was there in him to his Father's will! It was his food and drink to do it.

View him also as the Husband and Lord of his Church; what inconceivable love and kindness does he exercise towards her at all times, notwithstanding her innumerable defects! Let us then study his character; and whether we move in the higher or inferior relation, let it be the one aim of our lives to walk in his steps, and to follow his example.

***~~3. The way in which to judge of our spiritual attainments—~~***

*Religion is a practical thing, and is intended, as we have shown, to make us fill to advantage every relation in life.* Now I grant that there are many who discharge in a most commendable manner their relative duties, while yet they have no regard for God in their hearts. Consequently, I cannot exactly say that the fulfillment of relative duties will stamp you as pious characters: but this I must say, that the *not*discharging of these aright will prove to demonstration, either that "your religion is altogether vain," or that it is at a very low ebb indeed.

But supposing that there be no manifest neglect of these duties, I would ask: How much is there of God in them? Is the authority which you either obey or exercise, regarded as God's? Is *his will*considered as the rule of all that you do, and *his glory*as the end? Here is the point to be inquired into: it is this which makes your actions pleasing and acceptable to him: and I may add, that it is this which will make obedience easy and delightful to yourselves.

Habituate yourselves then to realize the thought that it is Christ whom you serve, or in whose place you stand while others are serving you. So shall your whole deportment become exquisitely pure, and holy, and refined; and you will "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things!"

***~~#2190~~***

***~~THE CHARACTER AND AIM OF A CHRISTIAN MINISTER~~***

***~~[Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)~~***

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

LOVE is the essence of the Christian religion. The heathen themselves noticed the fervor of the love which existed among the first Christians. Ministers in particular feel a distinguished regard for those to whom they have been signally useful, [1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8). Epaphras is set forth as a most eminent pattern of affection and zeal.

***~~I. The office he sustained—~~***

Epaphras was perhaps the same with Epaphroditus. He was of Colosse, and perhaps the founder of the Church established there; he sustained the most honorable of all offices, being "a *servant*of Christ." This office every Christian may be said to bear, but ministers bear it in a higher and more exalted sense. They are,

***~~1. His stewards—~~***

A steward has the care and management of the family committed to him: so Christ's ministers have the mysteries of the Gospel committed to them, [2 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.7). They are to dispense these mysteries to men, [Luke 12:42](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.42); hence we are taught to consider them expressly in this view, [1 Corinthians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.1).

***~~2. His messengers—~~***

They are ambassadors from the court of Heaven, 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; they deliver to men his messages of grace and mercy: they negotiate, as it were, a peace between God and man.

***~~3. His representatives—~~***

They stand in his stead, [2 Corinthians 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.20); the word they speak is not theirs, but his, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13). The reception or rejection of them will be deemed a reception or rejection of Christ himself, [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

***~~4. His glory—~~***

They are the instruments whereby he is known and glorified: hence they are expressly called "the glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 8:23."

In this office he acted worthy of the trust reposed in him.

***~~II. The love he manifested—~~***

*Love will invariably manifest itself in acts of kindness towards those who are the objects of it.*A minister's love will show itself most towards the souls of men; but none can do good to souls unless God himself grants his blessing, [1 Corinthians 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.7); hence Epaphras made application to God in prayer.

***~~He did this fervently—~~***

It is said of Jacob that he "wrestled" with God all night in prayer. Compare [Genesis 32:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24); [Genesis 32:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.28) with [Hosea 12:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 12.4). Thus did Epaphras on behalf of the Christians at Colosse. How desirable is it that every minister would be so occupied!

***~~He did it constantly—~~***

He was not satisfied with preaching to them, or praying with them: he remembered them "always" in his secret prayers before God, 1 Thessalonians 3:10 with [Isaiah 62:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.7); nor did his absence from them diminish his concern for their welfare. This was the most unequivocal testimony of his affection that he could possibly give them. *It is easier to preach to men ten hours, than to pray for them one!*

Nor could he rest satisfied, while his people had sins to forsake, or spiritual needs to be supplied.

***~~III. The end he aimed at—~~***

He desired that his Christian friends might be *Israelites indeed*; no doubt he had exerted himself much and often to make them so. He sought the same blessed end in all his prayers for them:

***~~1. That they might have no secret reserves in their obedience—~~***

He well knew that *one sin indulged would destroy the soul*, [Jeremiah 48:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 48.10). He was aware that nothing but the most unreserved dedication of ourselves to God's service would be of any avail [Psalm 119:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.6). He therefore prayed that they might do "all" the will of God.

***~~2. That they might attain the highest degrees of holiness—~~***

There is no absolute perfection or completeness in the creature; but there are high degrees of holiness to which the upright may attain. He wished them not to continue babes, but to arrive at a state of manhood; and not to be satisfied with a scanty measure of grace and knowledge, but to be "filled with all the fullness of God." He longed that they might be as eminent in piety as possible, [1 Thessalonians 5:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23).

***~~3. That they might be steadfast to the end—~~***

Many "endure only for a season, and in a time of temptation fall away;" but the apostatizing of persons who have been hopeful, is death, as it were, to a faithful minister of Christ, 1 Thessalonians 3:8. He knew that there were many seeking to turn them from the faith, [Colossians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.8); he therefore sought to have them so established that they might "stand."

***~~We may observe from hence,~~***

***~~1. What should be the standard of a minister's preaching—~~***

Faithful ministers are often thought too strict and severe; but if they would desire such spiritual maturity for their people, they would labor also to promote it by their preaching. If they would lower the standard of men's duty, they would betray and murder the souls committed to them! Let not any then condemn the strictness or severity of what they hear, unless it exceeds the Scripture standard.

***~~2. What should be the measure of the people's practice—~~***

There is no attainment with which we would be satisfied, while there remains anything to be attained. What ministers would desire for us, we ought to desire and aim at for ourselves. Whatever then we may have attained, let us forget what is behind, and press forward toward that which is ahead!

***~~1 THESSALONIANS~~***

***~~#2191~~***

***~~TRUE PIETY DESCRIBED~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 1:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.2-4)~~***

"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father  
 your work produced by faith,  
 your labor prompted by love,  
 and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.  
For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you"

THIS epistle, though not placed first in the sacred canon, is generally supposed to have been the first in point of time. And in point of tenderness and affection, it is certainly inferior to none. The Church at Thessalonica was subjected to heavy trials. In their first reception of the word, they sustained grievous opposition, verse 6; and, in their subsequent profession of it, they endured a great fight of afflictions, being no less cruelly persecuted by their own countrymen than the Apostles were by the Jews, [1 Thessalonians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.14). From them Paul had been driven by the fury of his bloodthirsty enemies, [Acts 17:5-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.5-10), who had followed him even to Berea with the most relentless animosity, [Acts 17:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.13-14).

It is no wonder therefore that he felt extremely anxious for his new converts, under a situation of such peril. Gladly would he have returned to them again and again: but his watchful and malicious adversaries would not allow it, [1 Thessalonians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.18). Hence his concern for them became extreme; so that he could no longer endure the suspense he was in concerning them.

The presence of Timothy with him at Athens was of great importance: yet on the whole he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, that, by sending Timothy to them, he might gain certain information of their state, and promote their establishment in the faith, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2; [1 Thessalonians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.5).

After Timothy's return to him, he wrote this epistle to them. It is an epistle admirably calculated to impress the minds of all who read it, whether ministers or people, and to show them what ardent affection would exist between all who stand in that relation towards each other.

In the commencement of it we see how ready he was to acknowledge and commend what was good in them: and herein he particularly instructs us how to minister with effect. Though doubtless it is the duty of every minister to reprove and correct what he sees amiss in his people, his chief delight would be:  
to comfort the feeble-minded,  
to support the weak, and  
to build up all in their most holy faith.

The object he would continually aim at would be, to be "a helper of their joy."

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider,

***~~I. The graces which he had seen in them—~~***

The great leading graces of Christianity are, "faith, hope, and charity." On these all other graces essentially depend; so that where these graces are, there will all others most assuredly be found. But of all these graces there are counterfeits:  
there is "a faith that is dead:"  
there is "a love, which is" little else than "dissimulation:"  
and there is "a hope of the hypocrite that perishes."

Such however were not the graces which had been exercised among them: in them he had seen,

***~~1. An active faith—~~***

True faith is *active*—it brings to the Christian's view the Lord Jesus Christ, as having in him a fullness of all imaginable blessings treasured up for the use of the redeemed; just as the vine has in its root and trunk that sap, of which all the branches partake, and by which they are nourished, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19). [Ephesians 1:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22-23). [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5). *Faith, moreover, brings him to Christ for daily supplies of those blessings which his various necessities require*,[John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16). And having received communications of grace according to his necessities, he is stirred up by it to improve them to the glory of his Redeemer's name.

In a word, whatever the Christian has to do for God, he does it through the operation of this principle of faith; by which, and by which alone, he overcomes the world, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4), and purifies his heart, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9). This faith he had seen in his Thessalonian converts: yes, so eminently had it shone forth in them, that they were celebrated for it in almost every Church throughout all the Roman empire, and were held forth as patterns and examples of it to all the Christian world, verse 7, 8.

***~~2. A laborious love—~~***

Love is that fruit by which, above all, the truth and reality of faith will be discerned, [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6). It is by this, above all, that we can assure ourselves, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14), or be known to others, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35), as faithful followers of Christ. If we do not have love, then all else that we can have is of no value, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3). But *love is a laborious grace*: it is always seeking for something which it may do, either for God or man. It cannot endure to be idle. Whether it can do little or much, it delights to be doing what it can, [Mark 14:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 14.8). Nor is love diverted from its pursuit by slight obstacles. No, like the water obstructed by the dam, it will overcome them; and will evince its strength and ardor, in proportion to the difficulties that impede its exercise.

Love is a self-denying grace: and where it exists in due measure, it will prompt a man not only to sacrifice ease and self-interest, but even to lay down his life itself for the brethren [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16). This grace was so conspicuous in the Thessalonian converts, that Paul judged it quite unnecessary to write to them on the subject: they were so taught by God himself respecting all its duties and offices, that he could add nothing to them, but only exhort them to abound more and more in the conduct which they had already pursued, [1 Thessalonians 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.9-10).

***~~3. A patient hope—~~***

Hope is the offspring of faith and love, or at least of that faith which works by love. It is here called "hope in our Lord Jesus Christ;" because "in him all the promises of God are yes and amen." Hope is a *patient*grace, leading us to expect all that God has promised, however long we may have to wait for it, [Romans 8:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.25); and to fulfill all that God has required, to the utmost possible extent, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3); and to suffer all that God has ordained us to suffer, in hope of a final recompense, [Hebrews 10:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.34); and, finally, to continue in a constant course of well-doing, even to the end, [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7). Such was the hope which the Thessalonians had maintained; and in which they had greatly rejoiced, even in the midst of all their afflictions, verse 6.

From considering the graces of these eminent Christians, we proceed to notice,

***~~II. The effects produced by these graces in his own mind—~~***

They excited in the Apostle's bosom:

***~~1. A lively interest in their welfare—~~***

A person less connected with them than he, could not but have admired such excellencies. But he was their father: he had begotten them in the Gospel, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13); and therefore he might well boast of them, as "his glory and joy, [1 Thessalonians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.20)."

Accordingly we find that, "whenever he came into the presence of his God and Father, he both gave thanks for them, and prayed for their still greater advancement in everything that was good. Most exalted was the joy which he felt on their account, [1 Thessalonians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.9). When he saw the transcendent eminence of their attainments, he quite forgot all his own afflictions, [1 Thessalonians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.6-7); the sight inspired new life and vigor into him, [1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.8); and he felt in himself a recompense, which richly repaid all that he had done and suffered for their sake.

This shows what are the views and feelings of every faithful minister, when he sees his people adorning the Gospel of Christ by their conduct. Truly, as John says, "they have no greater joy than to see their children walk in truth, [3 John 4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/3 John 4)." This comforts them in all their approaches to the throne of grace: this fills them with praises and thanksgivings to God. That so great an honor would be conferred on themselves—that such advantages would be imparted to their perishing fellow-creatures—and that such glory would be brought to God by their means—is to them a subject of almost stupefying amazement, and of overwhelming gratitude. And while they render thanks to God for these things, they pour out their hearts before him in prayers and supplications in their behalf. In a word, these things form a bond of union between a minister and his people, such as exists not in the whole world besides.

***~~2. An assured confidence in their state—~~***

When he beheld these fruits produced by his converts, he "had no doubt of their election of God:" the graces they exercised were manifestly wrought in them by the power of God, who had wrought thus upon them in consequence of his own purpose which from all eternity he had purposed in himself, [Ephesians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.11). [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9).

The same blessed assurance we also may entertain, wherever the same ground for it exists. Assurance, so founded, can never be productive of any bad effect. It is only when persons pretend to be assured of their election on other grounds, that any evil can arise from it. If, for instance, a person founded such a conceit on a dream, or vision, or strong impression on his own mind, then we would be among the first to bear testimony against him, as a wild enthusiast, and a self-deluding impostor. Against such a delusion we readily acknowledge that no terms of reprobation are too severe. But when such fruits as those which the Thessalonian converts produced are visible in any, then may we indulge the pleasing thought respecting them, as they also may respecting themselves, that "God loved them with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn them, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3)." Only we may observe, that this assurance is no farther justifiable than it is warranted by the graces which exist in the soul: with the increase of those graces it may justly rise; and with the diminution of them it must proportionably fall. Any other assurance than this is unscriptural and vain: but this not only may be entertained, but is the privilege and comfort of all who believe in Christ.

***~~Happy would we be to improve this subject in such a way only as corresponds with the general tenor of the Apostle's address,~~***

***~~1. Must we not rather take up a lamentation over most of you?~~***

Of how small a part of our audience can we speak in the terms here used towards the Thessalonian converts! For, where are the works of faith, the labors of love, the patience of hope, of the generality among you? Where are those fruits which would warrant your minister to say, that he "knew from them your election of God?"

What is the *faith*of the generality, but a dead faith?

What is their *love*, but an empty name?

What is their *hope*, but presumption?

We would not willingly speak thus, God knows! We would be glad to be found false accusers in this matter. Greatly would we rejoice to be convinced of our error, and to revoke every intimation we have here given. But, while the fruit produced by you is no other than what the world at large produce, we can address you in no other terms than those of grief and sorrow.

If the fruit is bad, the tree must be bad also. O brethren! examine well the daily operation and effect of your faith and love and hope; and then ask, whether Paul would have exulted over you, as he did over the Thessalonian converts? And if your own consciences testify that he would have found no such cause for joy in you, then learn to relax your confidence of your state before God, and seek to be made "Israelites indeed, in whom is no deceit."

***~~2. Allow a further word of exhortation to the saved—~~***

To those who really possess and manifest the graces before described, we would say, Be thankful to God for his electing love; and give him all the glory of whatever good there is in you. "Press onward too, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what is before:" and never think that you have already attained, while and thing remains to be attained.

But to those in whom there is little or no evidence of such a work of grace we would say: For Christ's sake deceive not your own souls. This which you have seen in the Thessalonians is Christianity: and this is the state to which the Gospel is designed to bring you also: this too is the object of all our ministrations. If these graces be not wrought in your hearts, we consider ourselves as "laboring in vain, and running in vain!" While we see not this effect of our ministrations, how can we "give thanks for you?" or how, with any comfort, can we "make mention of you in our prayers?" Instead of rejoicing over you, we can only mourn and weep on your account! [Jeremiah 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 9.1); [Jeremiah 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 13.17); and, instead of having the delightful thought of presenting you to God "as the children which God has given us, verse 19 with [Isaiah 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.18)," we have the terrible apprehension that we shall prove swift witnesses against you to your eternal condemnation! [Malachi 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.5). We pray you, brethren, lay to heart these affecting considerations; and begin without delay to seek that entire change both of heart and life, which invariably characterizes the elect of God, and which alone can warrant any hope of happiness in the eternal world.

***~~#2291~~***

***~~THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOSPEL BECOMES EFFECTUAL~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5)~~***

"Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."

IT is not uncommon for persons to be troubled in their minds respecting their saving interest in the Divine favor: they want to know whether they belong to the elect. But this is a point which can never be ascertained, except in one way. No man can go up to Heaven, and search the book of God's decrees. No man can turn over the pages of the book of life, to see whether his name is written there. The discovery must be made by an examination of our own heart and life. If we find the *fruits of the Spirit*within us, we know infallibly who the agent is that has produced them; and from such an undeniable evidence of God's love we may safely conclude, that we are elected of him.

It was thus that Paul discerned the interest which the Thessalonians had in God's electing love. Their "fruits of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus," flowing as they did from a powerful operation of the Gospel upon their souls, left no doubt upon his mind respecting their state, but enabled him confidently to assert, that "he knew their election of God." He saw the *fruit*; nor was he at any loss to determine from what *root*it sprang.

It is for this fruit that we now purpose to inquire: and, in order that we may attain a just knowledge of our state, we shall show,

***~~I. When the Word may be said to come in word only—~~***

By "our Gospel" the Apostle means, that which he and his fellow-laborers, Timothy and Silvanus, had preached to them, and which had "come to them" as sent and authorized by God himself. But notwithstanding its divine origin, it comes to many "in word only." Now it comes thus—

***~~1. When it makes no impression on the minds of those who hear it—~~***

Many hear the Gospel for years, and yet never come to the saving knowledge of it. Not that they lack a capacity to understand it; but they lack an inclination to attend to it with that seriousness that it requires. They listen to the voice that utters it; but they do not reflect upon the subject itself; so that it passes through their minds, like a vessel in the ocean, leaving no trace behind.

Our Lord compares them to the way-side, on which good seed is sown, but is instantly taken away again by the birds, so that none of it springs up, [Matthew 13:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.4); [Matthew 13:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.19). It is truly said of them, that "hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."

***~~2. When it makes no other impression than what mere moral persuasion would produce—~~***

Oratory on some occasions will produce very powerful effects. Even the recital of some calamitous event will greatly affect the passions, and either rouse us to indignation, or melt us to tears. But these emotions are only transient: the memory of the things that caused them vanishes away; and no abiding effect is produced.

Thus it is with many who hear the Gospel. They are affected by it for a time: sometimes they are depressed with fear and terror, and sometimes elated with hope and joy: but *they experience no radical change of heart and life*. Such were many of Ezekiel's hearers: they were delighted with his eloquence, as people are with a performance of vocal or instrumental music; but their hearts were as much addicted to covetousness, and as averse to real piety as ever, [Ezekiel 33:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31-32).

Such persons are represented by our Lord as the stony-ground hearers, who receive the word instantly and with joy; but, having no root in themselves, they quickly wither, and come to naught, [Matthew 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.5-6); [Matthew 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.20-21). James also compares them to men who see their face in a looking-glass, but go away and forget what manner of persons they are, [James 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-24). Whatever impressions therefore the Gospel may make upon them at the time, it certainly comes to them in word only.

Such an application of the Gospel being of no value, we proceed to show,

***~~II. In what way the Gospel must come, in order to be effectual—~~***

To whoever it be declared, whether to men of greater or less capacity,

***~~1. The Gospel must come with a divine energy to the soul—~~***

The Gospel is "the rod of God's strength," even that wonder-working rod whereby the most astonishing miracles are wrought, [Psalm 110:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.2). By it "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life again, [Matthew 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.5) with [Isaiah 35:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.5-6)." Weak as it is in itself, even as the rod of Moses was, the Gospel is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of sin and Satan; bringing, not the actions only, but even the thoughts, of men into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5). See also [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29)."

This is "the sword which Christ girds upon his thigh, [Psalm 45:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 45.3-5)," and with which he subdues his enemies. It is "the sword of the Spirit" also [Ephesians 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.17). The Gospel is, in short, that instrument whereby the Sacred Three accomplish all their mysterious purposes in converting and saving a ruined world. But then it must be wielded by an almighty arm—it must "come in demonstration of the Spirit and of power! 1 Corinthians 2:4." or else it will fail of producing any permanent effect. None but He who moved upon the chaos, and formed it into order and beauty, can new create the soul.

Such a change may be wrought as we road of in Ezekiel's vision, where the dry bones came together, and the sinews and flesh came up upon them; but they were only a corpse still, until the Spirit breathed upon them: and then they rose up, even a great army! [Ezekiel 37:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.7-10). Thus persons who are dead in sin, may be brought to a profession of religion by other means: but nothing short of a divine power can ever "turn men truly from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God! [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)." Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone who can give the increase! [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7).

***~~2. With an assured sense of the truth and excellence of the Gospel—~~***

One reason why the Gospel has so little effect, is, that "men do not mix faith with what they hear, [Hebrews 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.2)." They regard it "rather as the word of men, than as the Word of God, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)." In going to hear it, they consider themselves as going to hear a man; when they would rather go in the spirit of the Centurion and his friends, saying, "Behold, now we are all here present before you, to hear all things that are commanded you by God, [Acts 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33)."

Moreover, the Gospel would be viewed as a remedy—a remedy of God's providing, and exactly suited to our spiritual needs. We should go to hear it, as a hungry person goes to a feast: he will not be satisfied with barely looking upon the things that are set before him; he feels an appetite for them; he believes them to be good for him; and he partakes of them for his own personal benefit and satisfaction.

When the Gospel comes in this manner, even as it did on the day of Pentecost:  
it lays open the whole heart, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37). [1 Corinthians 14:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 14.25);  
it pierces deeper than a two-edged sword, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12);  
and it heals the wounds that it inflicts, [Acts 16:29-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.29-34).

Then it is truly precious to the soul; sweeter than honey or the honeycomb; and more desirable than one's necessary food, [Psalm 19:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.10). [Job 23:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 23.12).

Coming in this manner, the Gospel is of inestimable value; as will appear, while we consider,

***~~III. What effects it will then produce—~~***

It will work in us precisely as it did in those at Thessalonica. It will make us:

***~~1. Imitators of Christ—~~***

The Thessalonian Christians instantly became "followers of Christ and of his Apostles, verse 6." They made an open profession of Christianity, and consorted with those who were like-minded with themselves. In the same manner, all who "receive the truth in the love thereof" will join themselves to other believers, without any fear of that reproach which their new profession will bring upon them. They have counted the cost, and are willing to pay it. They take up their cross cheerfully, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy all the pleasures and honors of the world! [Hebrews 11:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.25-26)."

While they call themselves *followers*of Christ and his Apostles, they also become *imitators*of them. They will no longer follow the course of this world, but will regulate their conduct by a higher standard: they will look to the example which Christ has set them, and endeavor to "walk as he walked." His meekness and gentleness, his humility and kindness, his patience and self-denial, his devotedness to God, and love to man—will be progressively transcribed into their hearts and lives; nor will they be satisfied "until they arrive at the measure of the full stature of Christ! [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); [Ephesians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15)."

***~~2. Patterns to their brethren—~~***

This also is mentioned to the honor of the Thessalonians, as resulting from the manner in which the Gospel came to them, verse 7. And in this all true Christians will resemble them. One in whom the word has wrought effectually will not be contented with setting a good example to the world around him; (this would be a matter of no great difficulty,) he will make his light so to shine before men, that all, whether believers or unbelievers, may be edified by it. He would gladly say with the Apostle to all who behold him, "Whatever you have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you, [Philippians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.9)."

This distinguished piety is not to be sought by ministers only, (though doubtless they, with their peculiar advantages, ought not to be behind others in anything that is good, [1 Timothy 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.11),) but by Christians of every age, and of every class. All would endeavor to grow in grace, that from children they may become young men, and from thence advance until they are fathers in Christ, [1 John 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.12-14). And it is certain, that all who are perfect, or have attained to maturity in the Christian life, will be thus minded, [Philippians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-15).

***~~We may learn from hence,~~***

***~~1. What reason for thankfulness they have, in whom the Gospel has wrought effectually—~~***

If we have experienced any spiritual change, we must trace it up to God, as the sole author of it.

The power that effected it was not in the word; for then the same change would have been wrought in all who heard it.

Nor was the distinction occasioned by our own superior wisdom or goodness; for then the wisest and most moral of men would uniformly be the most forward to receive the Gospel; whereas they are rather the most averse to it, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28).

No, it was God alone who made us to differ! [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7); and to Him alone must all the glory be ascribed! [John 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.13).

***~~2. How we are to obtain benefit from the word delivered to us—~~***

If the mighty working of God's power is requisite, even of the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, [Ephesians 1:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.19-20), we should implore his presence before we go up to his house; we would be lifting up our hearts in prayer while we are hearing his word; and, after the seed has been sown, we should water it with our prayers and tears.

This is the way which God himself has prescribed, [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.5). [Proverbs 2:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.2-6); and it would insure a blessing, because Christ himself is in the midst of his people, on purpose to bless those who call upon him in spirit and in truth, [Matthew 18:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.20). It is owing to the lack of this, both in ministers and people, that the ordinances are so unprofitable, [James 4:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.2).

Let us then abound more in the great duty of prayer, [Ephesians 1:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.16-18); and God will pour out his Spirit upon us, [John 16:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.13-14); He will give us that unction of the Holy One that shall teach us all things, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); [1 John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.27); and make his word to be "the power of God to the salvation of our souls! [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16).

***~~#2193~~***

***~~SCOPE AND END OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 1:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.9-10)~~***

"They themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

PAUL delighted in bestowing commendation wherever it was due. When writing to the Church at Rome, he told them that "their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world, [Romans 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.8); and here he tells his Thessalonian converts, that their faith was so celebrated, that he heard of it wherever he went; insomuch that in every place he was anticipated in his commendations of them, the extraordinary effects of his ministry among them being in all the Churches a general topic of conversation. The particular effects which had been produced he here specifies: and, in considering them, we shall be led to show,

***~~I. What is the great end and object of our ministrations—~~***

Ministers are ambassadors from God to man: they are sent with tidings of mercy to a rebellious world: but they are sent also to effect a spiritual change in the hearts and lives of all who receive their message. Ministers are sent to bring men,

***~~1. To serve and obey their God—~~***

All people, until converted by the Spirit of God, are universally addicted to idolatry. They may not indeed, like the heathen world, bow down to stocks and stones; but they "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," possess the supreme place in their affections, and are sought after in preference to God. To turn men from these vanities, and to bring them to their God, is the end for which every minister is sent, and at which he would continually aim. And this, we trust, is the object which, in all our addresses, we have in view.

Yes, we would bring you to serve the living God, who alone is worthy of your regard; for he alone has life in himself; and he alone can confer life on his devoted servants. But it is not a mere formal service to which we would bring you, but*a radical surrender of all your faculties and powers to him*. This is your "reasonable service." There is none but God that has any claim upon you. What has the world done for you? Or what can it ever do? To whom, or to what, are you debtors, that you would consult their wishes, or obey their will? But God has created you, yes, and has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son. You are therefore in no sense, and in no degree, your own—your bodies, and your spirits, are altogether his; and with them you must glorify your God alone! [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.19-20).

***~~2. To wait for the second coming of their Lord from Heaven—~~***

He who once came down from Heaven to suffer for us, and by his own obedience unto death has "delivered us from the wrath to come," has been raised up from the dead, and is now exalted to the right hand of God, that he may carry on and perfect the work he has begun. He will once more come down from Heaven to gather together his elect, and to raise them to the fruition of that glory which he has purchased for them!

To wait in joyful expectation of that period is the privilege of all his people: and to bring you to such a state of mind is to be the incessant labor of his ministers. We are not to be satisfied with seeing you born to God; but, as loving parents, we are to nourish you in our bosom; that under our fostering care you may "grow to the full measure of the stature of Christ."

This waiting posture, this constant readiness for the coming of your Lord, is one of the highest gifts to which any man can attain! [1 Corinthians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.7). We speak not now of persons waiting, like criminals, for the arrival of their Judge; (that is a state from which it is the Christian's privilege to be delivered;) but of their waiting as servants for the coming of their Lord.

The diligence of servants is prompted, not by fear, but love; and they feel assured of the approbation of their master, when he shall find everything done, though not with absolute perfection—yet in all material points agreeably to his will. Thus we would have you with your loins continually girt, and your lamps burning with undiminished splendor, [Luke 12:35-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.35-38).

But perhaps we may give a yet juster view of the state to which we would wish to bring you, if we compare you to "a bride preparing herself" for the arrival of her bridegroom. Such would be the holy and longing desire which you would feel after the coming of your Lord, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12) with [Titus 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.13); and to assist you in this preparation, that eventually we may present you to him in a state of complete readiness, is the blessed service which we have to perform, [Revelation 19:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 19.7). [2 Corinthians 11:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.2).

Such is the office of those to whom the cure of souls is assigned: and corresponding with it is,

***~~II. The duty of those to whom we minister—~~***

As we must not seek to please men, but to edify them, so they must not be satisfied with reaping mere instruction, but must determine,

***~~1. To yield themselves up to the full influence of our labors—~~***

In coming to the house of God, all persons would resemble Cornelius and his friends, when Peter came to minister unto 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)." There would be no disposition to cavil at what they hear, or to sit in judgment on the preacher, but *a real desire to learn the will of God, and a full determination through grace to do it.*

If the minister endeavors to probe the conscience, they would welcome the beneficial wound, and cry unto the Lord, "Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart!"

If he is endeavoring rather to bind up the broken spirit, they would thankfully embrace the gracious promises of the Gospel, as those who most need the blessings which it offers.

If, on the other hand, he be denouncing the terrors of the Lord, they would humble themselves before God in dust and ashes, if perhaps they may be lifted up in due time.

And lastly, if he be expatiating on any duty, they would set themselves, like racers in a race, to run with ardor and with patience the race that is set before them.

Whoever it be that speaks, and whatever it be that is spoken, provided only it be agreeable to the standard of truth, they would receive it, as the Thessalonians did, "not as the word of man, but as the Word of God, [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)." The whole assembly of you should come to the ordinances as to a banquet prepared by the Lord; or as the sick and diseased came to our Lord in the days of his flesh—each feeling his own malady, and determined, if possible, to obtain a cure. However difficult it may be to gain access to him, you would press through the crowd, as it were, to touch but the hem of his garment; or seek to be let through the roof of the house, so that you may by any means find admittance into his presence, and obtain the blessings which you stand in need of.

In a word, *Christians should be satisfied with nothing short of a perfect conformity to the Divine will*; and would come to the house of God with hearts so melted, as easily to be poured into the mold of the Gospel, and permanently to retain the very image of their God.

***~~2. To display the efficacy of them in the sight of all men—~~***

The Thessalonians were "examples," not to the world only, but to believers also, and that throughout all the regions of Macedonia and Achaia. This is what we also should endeavor to be: we should "shine as lights in the world," and in every situation and relation of life we would so make our light to shine before men, that all who see us may glorify our Father who is in Heaven.

We should bear in mind that the honor of God is greatly affected by our conduct; and that our fellow-creatures also may either be "won by our good conduct," or be eternally ruined by our misconduct. We should, from these considerations, take especial care never to lay a stumbling-block in the way of others; but so to walk, that we may be able to say unto all around us, "Whatever you have seen and heard in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." Thus we would "show to all what manner of entrance the Gospel has had among us," and what are its genuine effects: and thus putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, we would constrain them to acknowledge, that the doctrines we profess are holy, and "that God is with us of a truth."

***~~We conclude with one or two inquiries:~~***

***~~1. What entrance has the Gospel had among us?~~***

Has it so wrought, as to attract the attention, yes, and excite the admiration also, of all around us? Alas! in how many has it produced no change at all! and in how many a change in profession only, or in external conduct—while the *heart*is as worldly, and the temper as unsubdued, as ever! Look to it, brethren, that you do not thus receive the grace of God in vain: for if the Gospel is not unto you a savor of life unto life, it will be a savor of death, to your more aggravated condemnation.

***~~2. How may it be rendered more effectual for our good?~~***

Search what it is that has hitherto obstructed the operation of the word upon your souls. Some are careless and inattentive, so that the word never enters into their hearts; in others, the word takes not any deep root; while in others its growth is hindered by the lusts and cares which grow up together with it. All these therefore must be rooted out, that the good seed may prosper and increase.

But there is yet another evil, which renders the most faithful ministry unavailing for the good of many: I refer to *that pride and conceit which so inflate the hearts of many, and render the Gospel itself odious in the world*. This must be mortified; and a childlike spirit be cultivated in the midst of us. "The meek will God guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."

***~~#2194~~***

***~~THE MINISTERIAL CHARACTER PORTRAYED~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8)~~***

"We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

BOASTING, when it proceeds from vanity, is hateful in the extreme. But there are occasions whereon it may be necessary to declare what the Lord has done for us, or what we have been enabled to do for him. When, for instance, we are suffering under false accusations, it may be necessary to state many things which none but God has seen. And we have reason to rejoice that Paul's enemies constrained him to have recourse to this method of clearing and vindicating his own character; because by this means we have all his exalted principles clearly developed, and the brightest pattern of human excellence exhibited to our view.

But, independent of any such occasions, it is allowable to express the feelings of our hearts, and to bring to the remembrance of those whom we love the opportunities we have had of testifying our regard. It is by such communications that we revive both in ourselves and others those sublime affections which constitute the basis of Christian friendship.

The Apostle, when writing to the Corinthians, was constrained to sound forth, as it were, his own praises, in order to answer the calumnies that had been circulated respecting him: but in this epistle he speaks only out of the fullness of his heart to those whom he regarded with the most endeared affection: and the whole of what might be called boasting was nothing but the effusion of a heart and mind glowing with love, and animated with the noblest opinions.

From what he says of himself in the words before us, we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What are the dispositions and habits of a faithful minister—~~***

Ministers are represented in the Scriptures under a great variety of characters. Sometimes they are called shepherds, whose office is to search out the straying sheep, and bring them to the fold of Christ: and, when once brought thither, to watch over them with all imaginable care, "strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, binding up the broken, bringing back again any that have been driven away." As to the lambs, they are to "carry them in their bosom, and gently to lead those that are with young, [Ezekiel 34:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.2); [Ezekiel 34:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.4) and [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.11)."

But they are designated by a far more exalted character, even that of a father; which comprehends in it everything that is tender and endearing, [1 Corinthians 4:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.14-15). How much of care and responsibility is involved in this relation, may be judged from the complaint which Moses poured out before God, when he was called upon to stand, as it were, in this relation to all the people of Israel, [Numbers 11:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 11.11-14).

There is however a still more tender image by which God is pleased to represent his own stupendous love to his people, and by which also the duty of ministers is portrayed; I mean that of a mother nursing her infant offspring, [Isaiah 66:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.10-13). Paul, declaring his concern for the welfare of his converts, compares his feelings with the pangs of a woman in child-birth, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19); and his delight in them, with that of a mother cherishing in her bosom her new-born infant.

The language in our text is exquisitely beautiful and touching. The nursing-mother, not in her arms only, but in her bosom, nourishes the child. In all her treatment of it, she is not harsh, as one that is soon wearied in performing offices of love; but gentle. If absent from her infant for a few hours only, she is most affectionately desirous of it, and delights to draw forth to it the bosom, even though it be with great pain and inconvenience to herself; and she would impart to it, as it were, her vital strength, yes, her very soul. All this she does to it because of the tender affection which she bears towards it. The whole creation does not afford a sublimer image than this; yet this fitly represents the conduct of Paul towards the church of Christ, and consequently, the conduct of every faithful minister, in proportion as he resembles Paul.

Mark then, under this image, the habits of the faithful minister;

***~~1. His tender affection—~~***

Paul's concern for his converts was never surpassed by that of any mother for her children. If there was the least reason to fear that any temptation had operated to the injury of their souls, he had no rest in his spirit, until he had ascertained their real state; and, if he received a favorable account of them, then every trial was easy, and every affliction light, [1 Thessalonians 3:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.5-8).

Thus it is also with every servant of the Lord Jesus. "If any man cares not for his sheep, he is a hireling," and unworthy of the name of a minister of Christ. The true shepherd will, I had almost said, "lay down his life for the sheep." He well knows that *nothing but the Gospel, faithfully administered, can benefit their souls*—and this he is willing to impart to them to the utmost of his power, as the remedy for all their diseases, and as a supply for all their wants: and, according to its efficacy upon their souls, will be his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows. "He has no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth! 3 John, verse 4."

***~~2. His self-denying exertions—~~***

Paul worked with his hands by night, to supply his own temporal necessities, while he labored, with incredible exertion, throughout the day, to communicate spiritual benefits to the souls of men. Though he might justly have claimed a maintenance for his body—yet he forbore to do it, that he might have the satisfaction of dispensing freely the blessings which he himself had so freely received, verse 9, and [2 Thessalonians 3:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.8-9) with [1 Corinthians 9:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.12-18) and [2 Corinthians 11:7-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.7-12).

Every minister indeed is not called to forego in like manner his claims of temporal support; but every minister would be able to declare to his people, as in the presence of God, "I seek not yours, but you." The only object of a faithful servant of Christ is, to advance the welfare of his people: for this end he will "not count even life itself dear to him," but will "endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24) and [2 Timothy 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.10)."

If he be really called to sacrifice his life in the sacred cause, he will account it rather a ground of blessing, than any cause of sorrow or condolence, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

But, as in every relation of life there are duties belonging to the one side as well as the other, it will be proper for us to consider also,

***~~II. The reciprocal obligations of a faithful people—~~***

A husband and wife, a parent and child, a magistrate and subject, have each their appropriate duties; and so have also a minister and his people: and as the minister's duties are fitly represented by those of a mother, so those of the people may justly be considered as analogous to those of an affectionate and obedient child. They owe then,

***~~1. Love to their pastors—~~***

In this very epistle, wherein Paul testifies such unbounded love to his converts, he tells them what they also ought to feel towards those who ministered unto them: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13."

We do not speak of that *partiality*, which renders men unwilling to receive the Gospel from any one besides their own favorite minister; that is a reprehensible attachment, leading to an idolatrous regard to some, and a contemptuous disregard of others: but a grateful sense of the obligations conferred by those who labor in the word and doctrine, ought to be cultivated and expressed by all, [1 Timothy 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.17). Indeed it can scarcely be carried to too great an extent: it should not stop short of any sacrifice, not even of the surrender of life itself, if by such means their labors may be preserved for the Church of Christ, [Romans 16:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.3-4).

***~~2. Attention to their instructions—~~***

No one can doubt whether this be the duty of a child towards his parent, See [Deuteronomy 27:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 27.16); and it is equally the duty of a people towards their spiritual parent. A minister is sent especially from God himself to impart unto them the knowledge of the Gospel. Though he is only an earthen vessel, he has the treasures of salvation committed to him for the benefit of others; and, as a faithful steward, he is to dispense them to all according to their several necessities. He is to them in the place of God himself. He is to them in God's stead, when he is proclaiming to them, in his name, the word of reconciliation. His word, as far as it agrees with the inspired volume, is the word, not of man, but of God: and those who despise it, despise not man, but God, verse 13 and [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8).

***~~3. Submission to their authority—~~***

This in the Church of Rome is carried to an absurd and impious extent: but in the reformed Churches, and especially in our own, it is almost entirely set aside; and a minister who claims the measure of authority which God has given him for the edification of his Church, is considered as an usurper. But what would be the consequence, if the parent had no authority in his own family? What but confusion must ensue, if all his children thought themselves at liberty to follow their own inclinations, without any direction or restraint from him? True, a minister is "not a lord over God's heritage:" his authority relates only to things pertaining to the welfare of his Church; but in these his judgment would be a rule of conduct to those committed to him. This is the command of God himself respecting it: "Obey those who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you, [Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.17)."

***~~4. Cooperation with him in every good work—~~***

A minister cannot do everything. Moses had seventy elders given to him, as assistants in his great work: and such would our people be in the Church of God. They can aid in instructing the rising generation. They may do incalculable good, in searching out the wants and necessities of the poor, and in administering, not to the temporal benefit only of their neighbors, but also to the benefit of their souls. Women, as well as men, have much in their power. Without the aid of their people, it is little, comparatively, that any ministers can effect. The Apostles themselves were greatly indebted in this respect to their people; and to this even Paul ascribed, in some degree at least, the efficiency of his labors, [Romans 16:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.1-2); [Romans 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.6); [Romans 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.9); [Romans 16:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.12).

What if, in a large family, the children cannot supply the place of their father? Can they do nothing to assist his endeavors, and to promote the welfare of the whole? Thus then would even the weakest among our people labor, according to their ability, to promote to the uttermost the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the glory of his great name. The *richer*part would contribute of their abundance to help forward every pious and benevolent plan; and the *poorer*afford their aid also in any way that may best comport with their sphere, and be best suited to their several capacities.

***~~Improvement—~~***

***~~1. How is such a blessed state of things to be produced?~~***

Let all consider the relation into which they are brought: and above all, let them consider how the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the success of his Gospel, are involved in their conduct. *Ministers can never hope to be extensively useful, unless they put away all worldly and selfish interests, and labor to attain all those holy virtues which their station imperiously demands*. Nor can any people really adorn their holy profession, unless they also on their part seek to become as little children, and cultivate a humble, loving, and heavenly deportment. Let us then, each in his station, aim at this; and pray earnestly to God for his grace, which alone can qualify us for the discharge of our respective duties.

***~~2. How is such a blessed state of things to be revived?~~***

It must be expected that where the Gospel has been long preached, Satan will sow tares with the wheat, and that evils of some kind or other will arise. It was so in the apostolic age, and it will be so in every age. It were unreasonable to expect that it would be otherwise, considering how corrupt the hearts of men are, and how easy it is for anyone of a perverse spirit to create dissension. But if what we may call the family union and harmony have been interrupted, every one should exert himself to the uttermost to restore the bonds which have been dissolved.

Let all in the first place set themselves to find out what has been the occasion of dissension; and endeavor, if possible, to remove the cause, and especially to subdue and mortify those evil dispositions which have unhappily been exercised. If there are any of a perverse spirit, withdraw from them, that they may be put to shame, [Romans 16:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.17-18) and especially [2 Thessalonians 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.6); [2 Thessalonians 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.14-15).

If any are conscious that they have done amiss, let them repent and humble themselves before God and man, [2 Corinthians 7:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.8-9). Thus will evil be done away; thus will Satan also, our great adversary, be disappointed; and thus shall we all "grow together as a holy temple in the Lord."

***~~#2195~~***

***~~THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO ARE CALLED~~***

**[1 Thessalonians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.11-12)**

"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

NEXT to the example of our blessed Lord, there is none so worthy of imitation as that of Paul. *He appears to have been so entirely cast into the mold of the Gospel, that he was a living image of all that it requires.*In the ministerial office especially he was almost a perfect pattern. His dauntlessness, his singleness of heart, his self-denial, his fervent zeal for God, and tender love to man—never were surpassed, nor ever equaled by any human being. Respecting the purity of his intentions, and the integrity of his conduct, he could appeal to all among whom he had labored, yes to God also: no less than eight times in eleven verses does he repeat this appeal; so conscious was he that he had exerted himself to the utmost of his power to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures, and the glory of his God.

In the appeal before us we may notice,

***~~I. The duty of Christians—~~***

The first great duty of those to whom the Gospel comes, is to believe in Christ, [1 John 3:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.23) and [John 6:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.28-29). But yet even this is subservient to a higher end, even to the attainment of holiness, and the glorifying of God by a heavenly conduct. The Christian is not to be satisfied with low attainments, but to walk worthy of his God:

***~~1. To walk worthy of God as his Governor—~~***

God has given us his word which is a perfect transcript of his mind and will. This word is to be the rule of our conduct. In obeying it therefore we must not select the easier parts, and overlook the precepts which are more difficult. We must not attempt to reduce the standard to our practice; but rather endeavor to raise our practice to the standard. We should not inquire, How little can I do, and yet escape punishment? But rather, What can I do to please and honor my Divine Master? How shall I commend to others his government? How shall I convince them that his service is perfect freedom? How shall I illustrate his perfections by my own conduct? How shall I make my light so to shine before them, that all who behold it shall be constrained to glorify my God, and to take upon them his light and easy yoke?

**2.** **To walk worthy of God as his Benefactor—**

God has "called" his people, not by the word only, but also by "the effectual working of his power." He has called them to be subjects of "his kingdom" on earth, and heirs of "his glory" in Heaven! [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19). [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). This distinguishing grace calls for every possible expression of love and gratitude. Our one inquiry therefore should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?" How shall I walk worthy of such a Benefactor? Shall not my soul overflow with love to him? Shall I not "delight myself in him;" and "present myself a living sacrifice to him;" and strive incessantly to "glorify his name?" Shall I think anything too much to do or suffer for his sake? Shall I not seek to be as "pure as he is pure," and "perfect as he is perfect?" Surely, "as He who has called me is holy, so would I be holy in all manner of conduct! [1 Peter 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15)."

This is the Christian's duty—thus to argue, and thus to live.

In order to enforce this subject yet further, we will consider,

***~~II. The duty of ministers—~~***

It is through the exertions of ministers that God carries on his work in the hearts of his people. Ministers are set apart on purpose to teach men their duty, and to urge them to the performance of it. They stand related to their people as a parent to his children: and in the exercise of their high office, they are to address them with parental tenderness, and parental authority.

"Allow then the word of exhortation," while we endeavor to impress upon your minds a due regard for holiness. Permit me, however unworthy of the sacred office, to address you,

***~~In a way of affectionate entreaty—~~***

"God has called you unto holiness," and "this also we wish, even your perfection." Consider then, I beseech you, how much is to be attained by your advancement in holiness.

1. Consider how holiness will contribute to your present happiness. Experience must long since have shown you, that there is no comfort in religion, when we are living at a distance from God, or in the indulgence of any besetting sin. We hope also, you have found how "pleasant and peaceful are the ways" of godliness, when you are steadfastly walking in them. Go on, and you will have continually increasing evidence, that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward."

2. Consider also how your holiness will promote the good of others. We speak not of the benefit that will arise to society from the good offices you do them, but of the effects which your good example will produce. If your life is not "such as befits the Gospel of Christ," the world will despise religion as a worthless unproductive thing: and those who profess godliness will be apt to catch the infection, and to sink into lukewarmness.

But if you "walk worthy of your high calling," you will "by your well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" you will constrain them to confess, that the principles which operate so powerfully on your souls, must needs be good; and you will perhaps win many, who would never have been won by the word alone, [1 Peter 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1).

3. Consider further how holiness will advance your eternal happiness. What though there be no merit in your works, shall they not be rewarded? Shall not every one reap according to what he sows, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8); and that too, not according to the quality only, but the quantity also, of his seed? Yes, "every man shall be rewarded according to his own labor, [1 Corinthians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.8);" he shall "reap sparingly or bountifully, according as he has sown, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6);" and every talent that is improved shall have a correspondent recompense in the day of judgment, [Matthew 25:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.28-29).

What further inducement to holiness can you wish for? Only reflect on these things, and surely I shall not have "exhorted" you in vain.

***~~2. In a way of authoritative injunction—~~***

Paul, when least disposed to grieve his people, said to them, "As my beloved sons, I warn you, [1 Corinthians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.14)." And in the text he tells us, that he "charged" them in a most solemn manner, and testified unto them. Behold then, we testify unto you that the holiness which we inculcate is of prime importance, and indispensable necessity.

1. Consider that nothing less than holiness will prove you to be real Christians. If you are "Israelites indeed, you must be without deceit." If the fire of holiness descends from Heaven into the bosom to consume your lusts, it will burn until all the fuel is consumed! The contending principles of flesh and spirit will never cease from their warfare, until the flesh is brought into subjection, [Galatians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.17). 1 Corinthians 9:27. "If you are Christ's, you have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)." Deceive not yourselves; for, "whoever you obey—his servants you are! [Romans 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.16)." If you are born of God, you will not harbor any sin, [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9), or be satisfied with any attainment, [Philippians 3:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12-14); but will seek to be "righteous, even as God is righteous, [1 John 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.7)."

2. Consider that nothing less than a holy life will suffice to comfort you in a dying hour. When you come to that solemn season, things will appear to you in a different light from what they now do. The truths which have *now*gained your assent indeed, but float in your mind as though they were devoid of interest or importance, will *then*present themselves to your mind as the most solemn realities. What will you then think of cold and lifeless services? What bitter regret will seize you, and terrible forebodings too, perhaps, when you look back upon a partial obedience, and a hypocritical profession?

*O that you may not fill your dying pillow with thorns!* O that you may serve the Lord in such a manner now, that in that day you may "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," and "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of your Lord and Savior, [2 Peter 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.10-11) with [Psalm 37:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 37.37)."

3. Consider, lastly, that nothing less will avail for you at the bar of judgment. We repeat it, that you will not be saved for your works: but we repeat also, that you will be dealt with according to your works. It will be to little purpose to have cried "Lord, Lord," if you are not found to have done the things which he commanded! [Matthew 7:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.21-23) with [Luke 6:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 6.46). God has said, "Cursed be he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully, [Jeremiah 48:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 48.10);" nor will either our self-commendations, or the applause of others, avail us—if the heart-searching God does not bear witness to our integrity, [2 Corinthians 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.18).

Behold then, as in the sight of God, we testify these things; and charge you all, that if you would ever behold the face of God in peace, you make it the great object of your life to walk as befits saints, and to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

The Apostle contented not himself with general exhortations; but addressed himself to individuals; even, as far as he could, to every one of his people. Let me then apply my subject more particularly to you, dispensing to each his portion in due season.

**1. Are there among you those who make no profession of religion?**Do not think that you are excused from that holiness which is required of the saints. As the creatures of God, you are bound to obey him; and as "bought with the inestimable price of his Son's blood, you are bound to glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his, 1 Corinthians 6:20." Nor would it be any consolation to you that you make no profession of religion; for, if you have not been called to be subjects of God's kingdom and heirs of his glory—then you are vassals of Satan, and partakers of his condemnation.

**2. Are there any who, by reason of their unsteady walk, are ready to doubt whether they have ever been effectually called?** Let me both "exhort and charge" them not to leave this matter in suspense; but to obtain of God that "grace that shall be sufficient for them." Let me at the same time suggest some considerations proper to "comfort" and support their minds.

They would ask perhaps, How shall I gain the object of my wishes? How shall I walk worthy of my God? I answer, "Walk in Christ, [Colossians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6)." That is, walk in a continual dependence on the merit of his blood, and the assistance of his Spirit. By his blood you shall be cleansed from guilt: "by his Spirit you shall be strengthened in your inner man," and enabled to do whatever He commands, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13).

Finally, let all, whatever they may have attained, press forward for the prize of their high calling, and endeavor to abound more and more!

***~~#2196~~***

***~~A DUE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)~~***

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually works also in you that believe."

A parent of a numerous family must expect *trials*of various kinds: yet will He have many *consolations*to counterbalance them. And so it is also with the faithful minister. Both from without his Church and from within, he will experience much that is painful and afflictive. If his *afflictions*abound, so will his *consolations*also. If his doubts respecting the state of some of his people renew in him pangs, like those of a woman in travail, the progress and advancement of others will afford him much heartfelt satisfaction.

Thus Paul found it. The anguish that was occasioned in his bosom by some of his converts was so keen, that he could scarcely speak of them without weeping: but over others he rejoiced with a very lively and exalted joy. The Church at Thessalonica in particular was contemplated by him with pre-eminent delight; insomuch that, whenever the thought of them occurred to his mind, he could not but pour out his soul before God in praises and thanksgivings in their behalf.

It is our intention at present to show,

***~~I. What there was in his ministry among them which occasioned such incessant thankfulness to God—~~***

His success among them was great, not only as to the number of his converts, but especially in the spirit which they manifested. In ministering to them the Gospel, there were two things in particular which filled him with joy and gratitude, namely:

***~~1. The manner of its reception—~~***

They did not consider his word as a system, like that of different philosophers, invented by man, and standing only on human authority; but they regarded it as the Word of God himself, even while it was delivered to them by a weak instrument, "a man of like passions with themselves." They looked, through the messenger, to Him whose ambassador he was; and every word that was uttered by him was received as if it had been spoken from Heaven by the Deity himself! They received it:  
as proceeding from his love,  
as sanctioned by his authority, and  
as assured to them by his truth and faithfulness.

The great wonders of redemption through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus were not looked upon "as a cunningly devised fable," but as a most stupendous effort of divine wisdom: *planned*from all eternity in the councils of the Father, *executed*in due season by his only-begotten Son, and *applied*to their hearts by the agency of the ever-blessed Spirit.

They felt not themselves at liberty to reject these overtures of mercy, or to cavil at them as exceeding the comprehension of our feeble reason; they considered that they had no alternative, but to believe and live—or to disbelieve and perish.

But their acceptance of these overtures was not a matter of constraint: they saw that the veracity of God was pledged to fulfill every promise which the Apostle made to them in Jehovah's name; and that it was as impossible for a penitent believer to perish, as it was for God to lie: How could he be otherwise than thankful, when his word among them was thus received?

***~~2. The manner of its operation—~~***

Truly his word among them was "living and powerful;" and most effectually did it work upon them:  
in their first conversion,  
in their subsequent support, and  
in their progressive sanctification.

He speaks before of "the entrance he had among them," in that "they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God:" and, immediately after our text, he mentions the heavy trials they had to endure; which yet they had sustained with unshaken fortitude: and the tidings he had heard from Timothy, of their advancement in faith and love and every grace, completed his joy, so that he forgot all his own afflictions through his joy on their account! [1 Thessalonians 3:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.6-7). What could he desire more than this?

John, who had been admitted to nearer fellowship with his Savior than any other of the Apostles, knew no greater joy than this, 3 John verse 4. Well therefore might Paul pour forth his soul to God in praises and thanksgiving for such a mercy as this.

In Paul's acknowledgments we may see,

***~~II. What grounds of thankfulness all ministers have, whose labors are so blessed—~~***

Wherever the Gospel is so received, and so operates, there is abundant cause for praise and thanksgiving unto God;

***~~1. For the people's sake—~~***

Happy, thrice "happy are the people that are in such a case, yes happy are the people who have the Lord for their God." "Who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord! [Deuteronomy 33:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.29)." Can we reflect on the change that has taken place on you, and not rejoice? "Look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are dug!" Do you consider *Lot*to be blessed on account his escape from Sodom? What was Sodom's fire, in comparison with those eternal burnings from which you are escaped? He was saved to die at last—you are saved to live forever! You are not merely delivered from the power of darkness, but are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son! Yes, and are made heirs together with him of an everlasting inheritance. Little can we know of the value of an immortal soul, if we are not filled with joy and gratitude at the thought of such blessings being imparted to it.

***~~2. For the Church's sake—~~***

No language could adequately express the transports of the saints of old, when they contemplated the effects that are here described: "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, [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23). See also [Psalm 96:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 96.11-13); [Psalm 98:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 98.1-9)." Where such children are multiplied, Zion, the mother of them all, may well rejoice: her honor will be great; her happiness exalted. With what joy will she draw forth her bosom of consolation to her numerous offspring! with what delight will she dandle them on her knees, and bear them in her arms, [Isaiah 66:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.10-13). In the sight of all the world shall she be glorified; and she shall be a blessing to all around her! [Isaiah 60:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 60.13-14).

***~~3. For the world's sake—~~***

The dishonorable conduct of professors is a stumbling-block to the world; as our Lord has said, "Woe unto the world because of offenses." But wherever the sanctifying operations of the Spirit appear, there "the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence;" and they are constrained to acknowledge the excellency of the principles which they hate. Independently of any spiritual benefit, the world is greatly advantaged by the progress and advancement of true religion: for if they will only inquire who are the great promoters of every charitable institution; they will find that the most active agents are uniformly found among those who love and profess the Gospel. But besides this, their spiritual welfare is greatly advanced by the blameless and heavenly deportment of professing people: their prejudices are weakened, and they are often led to inquire candidly into those principles, which they see to be productive of such blessed effects.

***~~4. For the Lord's sake—~~***

It is from the Church alone that God has any glory upon earth. But when his people do indeed adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, their light constrains many to glorify their heavenly Father. Then too does the Savior himself rejoice: he "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied."

Yes, God the Father too is comforted, if we may so speak, in the successful outcome of his eternal counsels: "He beholds his obedient people with infinite satisfaction;" "he rejoices over them with joy; he rests in his love; he rejoices over them with singing! [Zephaniah 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zeph 3.17)."

Can we then behold events in which God the Father and God the Son take so deep an interest, and not be thankful for them? If we ourselves love God in any measure as we ought, we shall rejoice in his joy, and glory in his glory.

***~~See from hence,~~***

***~~1. Whence it is that the word preached is so generally ineffectual to any saving purpose—~~***

As in the wilderness, so now, "the word preached does not profit men, because it is not mixed with faith in those who hear it" Men do not hear it as the Word of God, and therefore they hear without interest and forget without remorse. But be it known to all, that their disregard of God's messages, by whoever delivered, involves them in the deepest guilt, 2 Chronicles 26:12. [1 Thessalonians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.8), and will subject them to the heaviest punishment! [Hebrews 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.1-3); [Hebrews 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.28-29).

***~~2. How it may be made effectual to the good of our souls—~~***

Whenever you come up to the house of God, come with prepared hearts, as Israel did to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law. Look through the minister, to God himself. Sit at his feet, as Mary at the feet of Jesus. Seek not to be pleased, but edified. Do not indulge a critical and captious spirit; but "receive with meekness the engrafted word;" and then you shall find it both able and effectual to save your souls, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21). If it is a precept or an exhortation, a promise or a threatening, receive it as if it were addressed to you by an audible voice from Heaven: so shall it descend on your souls as dew or rain, that fail not to accomplish the ends for which they are sent, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11).

***~~#2197~~***

***~~CHRISTIANS, THE JOY OF THEIR MINISTERS~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 2:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19-20)~~***

"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy!"

THE relation between a minister and his people is a subject rarely touched upon, except in addresses exclusively intended for those who sustain the pastoral office. But it is a subject of general importance; and ought to be felt by the people, as well as by the minister; between whom there would be at all times a feeling of reciprocal affection.

A pious pastor does not undertake his office for his own aggrandizement, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock! [Ezekiel 34:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 34.2-3)."

No, he has higher objects in view: he seeks their best interests, and makes their welfare his chief concern. The epistles of Paul, not those addressed to Timothy and Titus merely, but those addressed to whole Churches, are full of this subject. This letter to the Thessalonians is almost one continued breathing of parental tenderness, on the Apostle's part, and a call on his converts for correspondent responses on their part.

The extreme ardor of his affection for them is indeed the immediate subject of all the preceding context. He had been driven from them suddenly by a violent persecution; and it was owing to the unabated malice of his enemies that he had not visited them again. Greatly had he longed to do so; and repeated efforts had he made; for they were exceeding dear to him, as he tells them: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Yes, you are our glory and joy."

From these words we will take occasion to show,

***~~I. In what light a faithful minister views his people—~~***

If a man is a faithful servant of Christ, the spiritual prosperity of his people will be the aim of all his labors, and the one source of all his joys: both at the present hour, and in the prospect of the eternal world, their welfare will be "his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing." Is it asked: Why they are so dear to him? We answer: He glories in them;

***~~1. As witnesses for God—~~***

God is excluded as it were from this lower world. The great mass of mankind acknowledge him not, or acknowledge him in word only, and not in deed and in truth. But true believers confess him openly before men; they are his witnesses:  
that he is *great*, and worthy to be feared;  
that he is *good*, and worthy to be loved;  
that he is *faithful*, and worthy of entire trust and confidence.

But yet more particularly they are witnesses of all his perfections, as united and glorified in the cross of Christ; and they proclaim to all around them, that, in Christ Jesus, God is "a just God and a Savior," yes "just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus." These are the truths which ministers have it in commission to make known to the sons of men: and by the free publication of these truths *they hope to turn men from the guilt and dominion of sin—to peace with God, and universal holiness*.

Obstinate unbelievers will deride this attempt as visionary: but the minister of God can point to his converts as living witnesses for God, and as monuments of the saving efficacy of his Gospel; and in this view they give him a ground of joy and exultation far beyond all that the whole world besides could afford. Hence "he glories in them in the Churches," as God himself also does, seeing that "they are to him for a name and for a praise and for a glory" throughout the whole earth.

***~~2. As trophies of the Redeemer's grace—~~***

There is not one of them who was not once a slave of Satan, "the god of this world, who rules in all the children of disobedience." But secure as they once seemed to be in the hands of "the strong man armed, the stronger Potentate, even Jesus, has rescued them" from his dominion, and "brought them into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Jesus, when he yet hung upon the cross, triumphed over the principalities and powers of Hell, and "by death overcame him who had the power of death;" but in his resurrection and ascension he triumphed yet more, "leading captivity itself captive."

But it is in the preaching of his word that all this is made to appear. By that men are "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Not that he drags them like captives at his chariot-wheels, but rather takes them up with him into "his chariot, wherein he goes forth conquering and to conquer."

How Jesus exults in them in this view may be judged from that expression of the prophet, "You are a crown of glory and a royal diadem in the hands of your God! [Isaiah 62:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.3)." No wonder therefore that the soldiers of Christ, through whose instrumentality the victory has been won, exult also.

***~~3. As the fruits of his own labor—~~***

It is rarely, if ever, now, that faithful servants of Christ are allowed to labor, like Isaiah, fifty years, and, like Hosea, seventy, with scarcely any visible fruits of their ministry. Though God does not make equal use of all, yet, if they are faithful, he will not leave them without witness, [Jeremiah 23:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.22); he will accompany their word with fruit. Were they left to "labor in vain and run in vain," their hands would soon hang down, and their hearts faint: but when they see "the dry bones quickened, and the dead come forth out of their graves," through the influence of their word, they greatly rejoice, [Ezekiel 37:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 37.9-10). They point to such persons as "seals of their ministry, [1 Corinthians 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.2)," and as attestations from God, that the word delivered by them is His word.

It is said of women, that, when once they behold the fruit of their travail, they "forget, as it were, all their pangs, for joy that a child is born into the world." And thus it certainly is with those who minister in holy things. Much they have to endure in the prosecution of their great object: but when they see sons and daughters born to God, they account their labors richly recompensed; and, for the attainment of such a blessing "they count not even their lives dear unto them."

***~~4. As pledges of his own eternal felicity—~~***

There is, it is true, no merit in converting sinners unto God, seeing that the whole work is God's alone. "Whoever plants or waters, it is God alone who gives the increase." But it is nevertheless true, that "those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever! [Daniel 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.3)." It is not indeed in proportion to every man's *success*, that a recompense will be bestowed: but according to every man's *labor*it will, [1 Corinthians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.8). And O! what a blessed period will that be, when the faithful minister shall present his converts before the throne of God, saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me!"

Not even in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ himself will he forget those with whom, as Paul expresses it, he once travailed in birth: "there will they be his joy and crown of rejoicing:" there will they be, as it were, jewels in his crown. Every fresh accession to the Church thus enhances the minister's joy: and in the prospect of this, "he joys according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil, [Isaiah 9:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.3)."

But since it is not over all that a minister can rejoice, we proceed to show,

***~~II. Who they are whom he can truly recognize under this character—~~***

In the first ages, when every Christian was exposed to so much peril on account of his Christian profession, there was reason to hope that all were sincere: and therefore the Apostle could say to the whole Philippian Church, "It is fit for me to think thus of you all." But Christianity is professed now under far other circumstances: and the great mass of those who are called by the name of Christ are far from being "a joy and crown of rejoicing" to their minister. Even of religious professors, there are great multitudes "of whom we must stand in doubt," and of whom we cannot speak, but with grief, [Philippians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.18). Those who alone will ultimately prove the joy and crown of their ministers, are,

***~~1. Those who have genuine faith—~~***

There must be a real conversion of the soul to God. It is not necessary that this conversion be sudden, or that it would be attended with such circumstances as shall enable a person to declare the precise time and manner in which it was accomplished. But it is necessary that every man would have an evidence within himself that he is "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son."

He must receive Christ into his heart, and build on him as the only foundation of his hope. "Christ must become truly precious to his soul." Christ must be his life, his peace, his strength, his joy, his all. Until this is done, a minister can have no comfort in any man, because he has no ground to believe him truly and savingly converted to God. But when this change is manifest (for no natural man in the universe ever thus gloried in Christ alone,) then does the person in whom it is wrought become the joy and crown of his minister. He then, in the judgment of charity, is brought to the fold of Christ: and his minister, like a faithful shepherd, rejoices over him, as a sheep that was lost, and is found.

***~~2. Those who walk in love—~~***

If there be a mere adoption of Christian *principles*, without the attainment of Christian *practice*—this change will produce no satisfaction, in the heart either of God or man. But if there is a corresponding change in the heart and life of a professor, and a suitable exercise of Christian graces and tempers—then the minister will feel a proportionable confidence respecting a work of grace within him: seeing the *fruit*to be good, he will conclude that the *tree*is good also.

The grace of love in particular must be predominant. "This is the grace whereby all men are to know whether we are Christ's disciples." If pride, envy, malice, or any other temper contrary to love, reigns in the heart, we only deceive ourselves in imagining ourselves Christians: we are yet in darkness, and children of the wicked one, [1 John 2:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.9-11); [1 John 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.10); [1 John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14-15); [1 John 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7-8). A minister can only weep over such persons: they are a grief to him here, [2 Corinthians 12:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.20-21); they will be yet more so in that day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come to judge the world, [Hebrews 13:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.17). They themselves too, if they be not undeceived in time, will have to bewail their delusions to all eternity.

Love is absolutely and indispensably necessary to prove the sincerity of our faith. *If love reigns not in the heart—then our faith is but the faith of devils.*But if love is the governing principle of our lives, then have we "that which accompanies salvation;" and a minister may confidently rejoice over us as the elect of God, 1 Thessalonians 1:4. [Hebrews 6:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.9).

***~~3. Those who advance in holiness—~~***

*It is essential to grace, that it grows and advances in the soul.* The children of God's family are all expected to grow from "babes" to "young men," and from young men to "fathers." Now, as a mother, however she might rejoice at the birth of her infant, would soon cease to rejoice, if it did not grow in stature and in strength; so is a minister's joy turned into grief, if he sees his people making no proficiency in the divine life, but continuing under the habitual influence of those defects which characterized them in their unconverted state, or in the earlier stages of their professed conversion.

O you who profess godliness, consider this; and inquire whether you do indeed make your profiting to appear? It is only when we have clear evidence that you are growing up into Christ as your living Head, and progressively transformed into his image, that we can glory in you, or look forward with comfort to that awful meeting which we shall have with you in the great day of the Lord Jesus, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28).

***~~We will improve this subject,~~***

***~~1. In a way of appeal—~~***

The text is an appeal to the whole Church at Thessalonica, that he had sought nothing, and rejoiced in nothing, in comparison with their spiritual welfare. And the same appeal, we hope through grace, we can make also Of course, no minister will proceed to make such an appeal, if he has not a testimony in the consciences of his people, that what he says is true.

Yes, blessed be God, we can, and do, appeal both to you and to God himself, that that we have lived but for the benefit of those committed to our charge, and "have known no greater joy than to see our people walk in truth."

Permit us then to ask, whether *you*can make the same appeal to the heart-searching God? Have you sought, as the one great object of your life, so to improve our ministrations, that "you might be our joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Has there also been a reciprocity of affection, so that "we have been your rejoicing, even as you also have been ours, in the prospect of the great day of the Lord Jesus, [2 Corinthians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.14)." Let this be well fixed in all your minds, that unless the regard between a minister and his people be mutual, and their endeavors to reap benefits from his ministry keep pace with his efforts to impart them—then little ultimate good can result from the connection: on the contrary, the word which he labors to make unto you "a savor of life unto life, will prove in the outcome a savor of death unto death."

***~~2. In a way of exhortation—~~***

A meeting must soon take place between us before the judgment-seat of Christ: and in reference to that awful period Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Church, saying, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 Thessalonians 2:1." In reference to that solemn meeting we also would exhort you.

In a little time we shall be called to give an account of our ministrations, as you also will of your improvement of them. Let not him who wishes you to be his joy and crown be disappointed of his hope. If he cannot "present you in a perfect state to Christ in that day," all his warnings and instructions will have been lost upon you, [Colossians 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.28), yes, worse than lost, seeing that he will be "a swift witness against you!"

O you, who have never yet been converted by the labors of your minister, let him now prevail on you to turn unto the Lord with your whole hearts.

And let those of you who look up to him as your spiritual Father, hold fast the truth you have received, and endeavor to shine more and more as lights in the world, that his joy in you may be complete in the last day, [Philippians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.15-16). Yes, we would address you in the words of Paul to his Philippian converts, "My brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved, [Philippians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.1)."

***~~#2198~~***

***~~THE PEOPLE'S STABILITY IS THE MINISTER'S COMFORT~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.8)~~***

"Now we live, since you are standing firm in the Lord."

THERE is nothing that more strongly characterizes a faithful ministry, than the mutual affection that is found to exist between the minister and his hearers. The people, while they retain any just regard for their Lord and Savior, will love those who have been his instruments for good to their souls, [Galatians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.15); and those who are instrumental in bringing others to the knowledge of salvation, will consider their converts as their children, "whom they have begotten to God," and "with whom they have travailed in birth, [1 Corinthians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.15). [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19)."

We see this exemplified in all Paul's epistles, especially in that before us. After a short stay at Thessalonica, he was driven from thence by "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort," who sought to kill him; and who, on hearing that he had fled to Berea, followed him thither with the same intent, and drove him thence also. He was now at a great distance from them, and very apprehensive on their account; lest the sufferings which he had endured for them, and the trials which they themselves also experienced, would have deterred them from maintaining their steadfastness in the faith. "When therefore he could no longer forbear, verses 1 and 5," he thought it better to be left at Athens alone, than to remain any longer in uncertainty about them; and accordingly he sent his only friend and companion, Timothy, to see them, and to report to him their state.

Having heard a good account of them, he declares, that all sense of his own personal afflictions vanished, as soon as he heard of their spiritual advancement; and that his spirits, which had been exhausted by a long and painful suspense, were revived, so that he began, as it were, to "live" anew, since he was informed that they "stood fast in the Lord."

From the words before us we shall take occasion to show,

***~~I. What is that stability which all Christians must attain—~~***

When any persons first receive the Gospel, so as to yield themselves up to its influence, they are said to "be in Christ."

When they make advances in grace, they are said to "walk in Christ."

And when they are established in a firm adherence to the truth, they are said, as in the text, "to stand fast in the Lord."

This is that stability which is required of us; namely, a stability in the faith, the profession, and the practice of the Gospel:

***~~1. In the faith of the Gospel—~~***

There are many things which may occasion us to make shipwreck of the faith:  
a conceit of our own wisdom, [Romans 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.22). [Isaiah 47:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 47.10);  
a fondness for philosophy and human reason, [Colossians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.8);  
a listening to the teachings of heretics, [2 Timothy 2:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.16-18);  
an undue regard to ceremonies and rites, [Colossians 2:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.16-19);  
an erroneous idea of the merit of good works, [Romans 10:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.3);  
and many more, which may rob us of the vital experience of it in our souls: Love of the world; sloth, etc. etc.

But all these must be withstood: we must "hold fast the form of sound words that has been delivered to us;" and, not contented with a barren orthodoxy, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, enjoying his presence, and "receiving out of his fullness grace upon grace".

***~~2. In the profession of the Gospel—~~***

When persecution arises because of the word, a separation is made between the professors of religion, as the grain and chaff are separated when tossed to and fro in the sieve. But woe be to us, if we are like the chaff, that is driven away with the wind. We must "not put our light under a bushel," but be bold, and "behave like men:" we must "endure hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ:" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering:" we must be "willing to be bound, or even to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus:" we must not count our lives dear to us, so that we may but finish our course with joy.

It is true, we are not to court persecution by an indiscreet declaration of truths, which people are not yet prepared to receive: but we must not conceal our religion, as if we were ashamed of it: we must in no respect deny Christ. "If we draw back, it will be unto perdition:" "if we only look back," after having put our hands to the plough, we are not fit for the kingdom of God:" "he who loves his life, shall lose it; and he alone that is willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, shall save it unto life eternal."

***~~3. In the practice of the Gospel—~~***

In times like ours, *it is easy to retain orthodox opinions, and to keep up a profession of religion*. But many are found enlisted under the banners of Christ, who are not really "fighting the good fight of faith." Even in matters of plain truth and honesty, it is not every professor who can bear a scrutiny into his conduct: yes, there really is often found a higher sense of honor and integrity among the men of this world, than among some of whom better things might have been hoped.

In respect of *temperaments*, too, there are many who will talk of Christ, and show a love to his Gospel—who are yet proud, haughty, imperious, passionate, contentious. There are many who are so fretful and impatient on every trifling occasion, as to make all around them uncomfortable. There are many too, who, when they ought rather to be judging themselves, are constantly judging others with uncharitable severity.

But let not those who possess so little of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, imagine that they are standing fast in the Lord: for, whatever experience they may have had in times past, they are certainly in a state of awful departure from him. *We must possess the image of Christ, and we must advance in the attainment of it—or else our faith and our profession will be vain*,[James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26).

But if there be no particular deviation from the path of duty in these things—yet may we have greatly declined from true religion. We must preserve:  
a spirituality of mind,  
a zeal for God,  
a love to his ways,  
a delight in secret communion with God,  
and a tender regard for the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures.

This is the stability which chiefly characterizes the growing Christian, and which is the surest evidence of a saving interest in Christ.

That all may be stirred up to seek this stability, we shall show,

***~~II. Why the attainment of stability lies so near to the heart of every faithful minister—~~***

A minister stands related to his people as a pastor to his flock, over which he is to watch, and of which he must give a strict account: and his solicitude about them, instead of terminating when they are brought into the fold, may be said then more properly to commence. He will be anxious about their attainment of stability in the divine life,

***~~1. Because the honor of God is deeply interested in it—~~***

Let any professor of religion either renounce his profession, or dishonor it by any misconduct, and the world will immediately cry out against religion, and represent all the professors of it as hypocrites. Thus it was that "the name of God was blasphemed" on account of David's fall: and thus "the way of truth is evil spoken of" at this time; as though religion were only a cloak for wickedness.

On the other hand, the name of God is glorified when his people adorn their holy profession: the light which they reflect around them, compels many to acknowledge the beneficial influence of his Gospel, and the powerful efficacy of his grace, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16).

And can ministers be indifferent about the honor of their Divine Master? If they are so dear to him, that "whoever touches them, touches the apple of his eye," ought not He, and His interests, to be dear in their sight? Ought not rivers of tears to run down their eyes, when men keep not his law, and especially when His sacred name is blasphemed through those who bear His name and profess His religion? Yes; much as they must feel when an injury is done to themselves, their grief is incomparably more poignant, when they see their blessed "Lord crucified afresh, and despite done to the Spirit of his grace."

***~~2. Because their salvation altogether depends upon it—~~***

It is not sufficient that men "run well for a season;" they must "endure to the end, if ever they would be saved." To what purpose are we in Christ, if we do not stand fast in him? Our departure from him only makes "our last end worse than our beginning." And is not this a fearful consideration to all of us? When Paul saw reason to stand in doubt respecting his Galatian converts, "he travailed in birth with them, as it were, a second time, until he would have clear evidence that Christ was truly formed in them."

Whoever reflects upon the value of a soul (in comparison with which the whole world is lighter than the mere dust upon a balance), must have continual sorrow and heaviness in his spirit, when he sees any moved away from the hope of the Gospel, and "forsaking the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that can hold no water."

***~~3. Because the great ends of the ministry are answered by it—~~***

When any persons turn, either in faith or practice, from the holy commandment delivered to them, "all the labor we have bestowed upon them is in vain:" it is even worse than in vain, because it will bring upon them a more aggravated condemnation! What a reflection is this for those who have spent their strength, and perhaps jeopardized their very lives for the salvation of their fellow-creatures! Can we wonder that the declension of those who have professed our holy religion, would be as a dagger in the hearts of those who have watched and labored for their souls; and that the lives of faithful ministers would be bound up, as it were, in the stability of their people? The beloved disciple could say, "he had no greater joy than that his children walked in truth!" No doubt, his greatest grief was, as that of every faithful minister must be, to see any of them departing from it.

***~~We shall conclude our subject with a few words:~~***

***~~1. Of grateful acknowledgment—~~***

It would not always be proper to commend people to their face, yet on some occasions the Apostle judged it expedient to do so, 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4). We rejoice therefore in bearing testimony to the steadfastness which you have maintained during our afflictive separation from you; and we can truly say with the Apostle, that "in all our affliction we have been greatly comforted by your faith. "We thank God for all the joy with which we rejoice before him on your account;" and we pray, that "what he has thus begun in you, he may carry on and perfect until the day of Christ."

***~~2. Of affectionate warning—~~***

Never let it be forgotten, that we must first be in Christ, before we can stand fast in him. If apostates are in an awful condition, so also are those who have never embraced the Gospel of Christ. We must flee to Christ, as our only refuge from the wrath of God; and must seek to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in him.

Let the saints too remember (what the text strongly intimates), that they are in continual danger of falling. They have a subtle enemy, whose devices have ruined thousands, even of those who once appeared eminently holy. "Let him therefore that thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls!"

***~~3. Of joyful encouragement—~~***

It is not in yourselves, but in the Lord, that you are to stand fast: and while you are placing all your dependence on him, he is engaged to "keep you by his own almighty power unto everlasting salvation." "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "His grace is sufficient for you," and shall "make you more than conquerors" over all your enemies. As weak as you are in yourselves, "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness! [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)."

***~~#2199~~***

***~~A MINISTER'S JOY IN HIS PEOPLE~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 3:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.9-10)~~***

"How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."

THE connection between a minister and his people is little considered, and little felt. A general concern on his part, and a respectful esteem on theirs, are deemed adequate expressions of their mutual regard. But the relation of a father is not nearer than that which a minister sustains towards those whom he has begotten by the Gospel: nor would their mutual feelings be a whit less tender than those of a parent and a child. "They should be his joy; and he theirs, [2 Corinthians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.14)."

It was in this light that Paul regarded his Thessalonian converts. They were the fruit of his ministry. It was the word delivered by him who had been made effectual to their conversion to God, [1 Thessalonians 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5-6); and they had greatly adorned their holy profession, [1 Thessalonians 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.7-8). He had planned a longer stay among them; but had been driven away from them suddenly, by the violence of persecution, [Acts 17:1-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.1-10). He had also made repeated attempts to return to them; but had been prevented by the determined hostility of his enemies, [1 Thessalonians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.18). Not knowing how far they might be able to maintain their steadfastness, he felt extreme concern in their behalf: and "when he could no longer forbear, he thought it good to be left at Athens alone," rather than continue any longer in such painful suspense respecting them. He dismissed Timothy therefore, though he could but ill spare the labors of so dear a friend, to inquire into their state, and to bring him a faithful account of their progress, verse 1, 2, 5. The tidings he received were highly favorable; and they filled him with unutterable joy; his very life being bound up, as it were, in their welfare, verse 6-8. Indeed, he had never ceased to pray, and with extreme earnestness, to God, to open a way for his return to them, and to make him still more useful to their souls. Of this he assures them, in the words which we have just read; which will lead me to show you,

***~~I. The delight which a pious minister has in the fruits of his ministry—~~***

A pious minister has troubles which are unknown to others; so also has he joys, which are peculiar to himself. God makes use of him, to gather out of the ungodly world a Church and people; and over them he rejoices with a very sublime joy. He rejoices in:

***~~1. Their past deliverance—~~***

How different was their state from what it is now become! "They were afar off from God; (alas! how far!) but now they are made near by the blood of Christ:" they were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; but now are made fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Now, how can a minister contemplate his people as "recovered out of the snare of the devil, by whom they had been led captive at his will," yes, and as "brands plucked out of the burning," even out of the fire, as it were, of Hell itself, and not rejoice?

Was it a matter of exceeding joy to the lame man to be restored, so that "he went into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God?" and was it a matter of grateful admiration to an assembled populace, when they saw all manner of bodily diseases healed? and must it not fill a minister's heart with joy to see the souls of men dispossessed and healed? to see them "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God!" Truly, he must be very unworthy indeed to have such an honor conferred upon him, who does not exult and leap for joy at the benefits imparted through the instrumentality of his word.

***~~2. Their present holy walk—~~***

They are brought to a state of peace, with God, and in their own souls. This is a blessing, of which no others can have any just idea: for there is "a peace that passes all understanding;" and "there is no such peace to the wicked." Moreover, they are enabled to "walk in newness of life," and to approve themselves faithful servants to their God. In truth, they are the only people from whom God has any tribute of praise and honor. From the world at large he has nothing but an unmeaning observance of forms and ceremonies; but from these, the service of the heart. They are "lights in a dark world:" they are "witnesses for God:" they are "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." Perhaps, too, they may be chosen vessels to convey the same rich treasure to others, and to dispense to a benighted world the benefits which they themselves have received.

How can a minister look on these, and not sing for joy? Does a parent rejoice in the progressive advancement of his children, in their opening prospects of further attainments, and in the hope that they shall one day prove blessings to the world? Much more must a pious minister rejoice in the growth of his people in faith and charity, in the honor which by their holy walk they bring to God, and in the benefits which they confer on men. We wonder not, that, in hearing such tidings of his Thessalonian converts, the Apostle could say, "We were comforted over you, in all our affliction and distress, by your faith, verse 6-8."

***~~3. Their future destinies—~~***

For them is prepared a throne of glory, on which they shall reign for ever and ever in the presence of their God: and the very angels in Heaven are waiting, as it were, with eager expectation, to install them there: nor do they ever execute a commission with sublimer joy than when sent down from Heaven to receive a departing spirit, and to bear him on their wings into the realms of bliss.

Let a minister view his people in this light, and contemplate what they shall shortly be—the very angels not so exalted, or so near their God, as they, [Revelation 5:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.11). The very stones would cry out against him, if his heart did not leap for joy at such a thought as this. To expatiate upon the glory of that state is needless: suffice it to say, that every glorified saint will be filled with bliss according to the utmost extent of his capacity, and that without alloy, or intermission, or end. And for this it is, that the minister is preparing them with tender assiduity and incessant care: and well may he water these plants with joy, when he recollects whose planting they are, and where they shall grow to all eternity!

His joy, however, is mixed with affectionate solicitude; as will be seen, while we consider,

***~~II. The great object which he aims at in all his interaction with them—~~***

In his absence from them will he pray to God in their behalf; yes, "very exceedingly," [Philippians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.12), will he pray for them: (for prayer is the best test and evidence of love,) and, when he shall have again the happiness of ministering unto them, he will labor to advance their every grace, but chiefly "their faith." This (their faith), I say, he will particularly endeavor to increase, [Philippians 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.25) and [2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11-12), and to extend to the uttermost,

***~~1. Its realizing views—~~***

Men imagine, that a*mere assent*to the truth of the Gospel is saving faith: but such a faith as that may be no better than the faith of devils; of whom it is said, that they "believe and tremble." But true "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:" it gives a reality to things invisible and future, as if they were actually before our eyes. Faith does not merely acknowledge our fall, and our recovery by Christ; but it brings them home with power to the mind, so as to produce a suitable feeling of those truths in our souls.

Let us suppose a sepulcher opened before us, and all its nauseous and offensive contents exhibited to our view: we may easily conceive what disgust we would feel. Yet is it no other feeling than what a believing apprehension of our own inward corruptions will create in our souls; insomuch, that we shall "loath ourselves," yes, and "abhor ourselves, even as holy Job did, in dust and ashes."

We may form some idea, too, what our feelings would be, if we were shipwrecked, and saw the boat, to which we were about to commit ourselves, stored with such necessary articles as the impending danger would admit of, and by the help of which we hoped to reach a place of safety.

Such is the light in which faith will present the Lord Jesus Christ to our view. Our lost state by nature and practice we shall feel, together with the absolute impossibility of preserving ourselves by anything that we can do. We shall see the Savior offering himself to us as the means afforded us by God for our deliverance; and we shall with eager solicitude commit ourselves to him, if perhaps we may escape the perils of the sea, and reach in safety our destined port. The whole work of salvation will become a reality, in which all the emotions of hope and fear will be roused, and the utmost efforts of our souls be called into activity. Nay, it is not merely the alternative of life or death that will press upon us, but the infinitely more fearful alternative of Heaven or Hell. Of Heaven, with all it glory; or Hell, with all its terrors!

I need not say how the sight of such things operates in relation to the body: and surely a realizing view of them by faith will not operate less powerfully in relation to the soul. To this state, then, a minister will labor to bring his people, that they may have the most vivid apprehensions of divine truths, and live under an impression of them as strong as if they were actually made visible before their eyes.

***~~2. Its influential energies—~~***

*Nothing but saving faith will produce an abiding influence upon the soul.* How that will operate, we see at large in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: and to have it operate in that way upon his people's minds, will be the continued aim of every pious minister. He will not be content to see them "run, as uncertainly; or fight, as one who beats the air." He would have them like people engaged in the race, who have no time to look about them; and as people in actual combat, who must either slay their adversary, or be slain. We need not ask why those persons so exert themselves: the reason is plain: with them, the duty to which they are called is a reality.

Others may trifle; but *they*cannot: they have too much at stake.

Others may think it an easy thing to get to Heaven: but *they*find it calls for the utmost exertion of all their powers.

Others may imagine that they have within themselves a sufficiency of all needful strength: but *they*know that a new-born infant is not weaker than they; and that, if not aided by continual supplies of grace and strength from above, they must inevitably and eternally perish.

Hence they "live altogether by faith in the Son of God;" applying to him for everything, and "receiving everything out of his fullness." This is living Christianity: this is practical religion: and to this every pious minister labors to bring his people; so that, at whatever moment they be summoned to the presence of their God, they may be found ready, and fit for the inheritance provided for them.

***~~This subject will clearly show us,~~***

***~~1. What is the source of all our other deficiencies—~~***

Faith is at the root of all that is good; and unbelief, of all that is evil. According to our faith will every grace be found within us. Look at a person in a state of departure from his God: to what is his condition owing? There is "in him an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Look at persons anxious to attain the highest grace, so as to be able to forgive their brother, not seven times, but seventy times seven: for what do they pray? an increase of love? No; but of faith: "Lord, increase our faith [Luke 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.5)."

Turn to the world around you and you shall see that unbelief is the one great source of all their rebellion against God: they believe not that he will call them to so strict an account as he has declared he will; and, consequently, they see no need of such humiliation, and such earnestness in the divine life as he calls for. Let them once be brought to believe these things, and they from thenceforth regard the care of their souls as "the one thing needful".

***~~2. What we should chiefly seek for in the ministry of the word—~~***

What the enlightened minister chiefly labors to impart—we would chiefly labor to obtain. Doubtless we would not be unmindful of any grace: but we would remember, that faith is the parent of all the rest. It is faith that "overcomes the world," and "works by love," and "purifies the heart."

Let me then recommend to you to seek increasing views of Christ, so as to realize his presence with you. Put him before your eyes, as dying for you on the cross; as interceding for you at the right hand of God; as possessing all fullness for your use. Realize his great and precious promises, as made to you, and as in due season to be fulfilled to you: and from day to day take Pisgah views of the Promised Land, until you obtain a blessed foretaste of your inheritance. This is the way to "walk by faith;" and in this way you shall proceed with joy, until your faith be turned into sight, and Your hope into fruition.

***~~#2200~~***

***~~THE EFFECT OF LOVE ON UNIVERSAL HOLINESS~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.12-13)~~***

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

THE grace which is most generally spoken of in the Holy Scriptures as establishing the souls of men, is faith: "If you believe not," says the prophet, "you shall not be established, [Isaiah 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.9);" and again, "Believe in the Lord your God, and so shall you be established, 2 Chronicles 20:20." It is by faith that we lay hold on the Word of God; and by faith that we commit our every concern to God; and by faith that we expect the accomplishment of all that God has promised: and therefore the composing and establishing of our minds in relation to all future events is properly represented as the fruit of faith.

But there is a sense in which love also establishes the heart, as the Apostle intimates in the passage before us; where he prays, that God would make the Thessalonian Christians to abound in love, in order to the establishment of their hearts in universal holiness. In this view love is sometimes united with faith, as concurring with it to strengthen and fortify the soul; as when Christians are said to "have on the breast-plate of faith and love."

But this effect of love not being generally understood, we will enter the more carefully into the subject, and point out,

***~~I. The influence of love on universal holiness—~~***

Love is an extremely powerful principle in the heart of every one that is truly born of God: it is the great wheel which sets the whole machine in motion, and gives a vital energy to every part. In love chiefly does the new man consist; and from it does every Christian grace derive its strength.

***~~1. Love rectifies all the powers of the soul—~~***

*SELF*has usurped an entire dominion over the whole race of mankind. It has pervaded and debased all their faculties:

The understanding is so blinded by it, as to be incapable of seeing anything in its true light.

The judgment is so perverted, that men universally "call evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)."

The willis altogether indisposed for exertion, except in that line where self may be gratified, and our own ease, or pleasure, or self-interest, or honor may be advanced.

Even conscience itself is an unfaithful guide, having no sensibility at all, except in concurrence with the corrupt dictates of a perverted judgment and a carnal will.

But let love come into the heart, and assume that ascendency over it which God has ordained, and all these faculties will receive a new direction—I had almost said, a new power. Now as soon as truth is proposed to the mind, its beauty and excellence shall be discerned, and its superiority to every adverse principle shall be acknowledged. Now also, notwithstanding the yet remaining bias of the corrupt nature towards what is evil, the prevailing and dominant inclination will be towards what is good; the Divine nature within us counteracting the motions of the old man, and not allowing it any longer to retain the mastery over us; and the conscience continually impelling us to greater measures of conformity to God's revealed will.

This process will be best seen by some examples placed before our eyes. The Apostle Paul, previous to his conversion, had all the advantages which a man could have for the improvement and direction of all his faculties: but yet every faculty of his soul was entirely engaged on the side of sin. Not having love in his heart, notwithstanding his imagined rectitude, he was no better than a savage beast in his conduct towards the Christian Church: "he breathed out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against them," and thought all the while he was acting in the path of duty, and rendering to God an acceptable service [Acts 26:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9-10). But when once he was converted to God, and brought under the influence of a principle of love, he condemned all which he had before approved [1 Timothy 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.13); and was willing to die for those, whom he had just before labored to destroy.

We may behold the same effect in those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. Compare the state of their minds when they came together that morning, and when they separated, and our subject will have all the elucidation that can possibly be desired. Compare [Acts 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.13) with [Acts 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.44).

***~~2. Love enters into every action of the life—~~***

It is as the soul, which pervades, and operates in every part of the body. We are apt to view it only in some particular act; but it enters into, and forms, the very habit of the soul. Paul's description of it will serve us as a rule whereby to judge of its office, and as a clue whereby to discover its most hidden operations. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-7)."

Here we see that not only our actions towards others, but the dispositions of our own minds in secret, are most materially affected by it; and consequently, that its influence extends to every branch of universal holiness! [1 John 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.10).

***~~3. Love prepares the soul for heavenly communications—~~***

Dispositions that are contrary to love, bar the soul against God: they shut out good, from whatever quarter it might come. If a man under their influence reads the Bible, what is it but "a sealed book?" If he attempts to pray, the heavens to him are as brass: his prayers have no power to ascend: they have no warmth in them: they freeze upon his very lips, [1 Peter 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.7). If he enters into conversation, there is no savor in anything he says, nor any capacity to receive good from anything he hears. In the public ordinances, and in his private chamber, he is alike dull and formal. Go where he will, or do what he will, he neither communicates good, nor receives good.

But when love comes into his soul, his heart is expanded and enlarged towards both God and man. To *God*he goes with holy confidence, and finds access even to his very bosom, [1 John 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-19); and "God, who is love" itself, delights in his own image as reflected from the suppliant's face, and rejoices to communicate to him all the blessings of grace and peace. A soul filled with love is just such a habitation as God delights in; and he will not fail to descend and dwell in it, [John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.16). Nor is it in relation to this life only that a person under the influence of love enjoys this confidence; he looks forward, even to the day of judgment, with a sweet assurance, that that God, whose image he so earnestly desires to bear, will not cast him into outer darkness, [1 John 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.17). The sense of these words, in the Author's apprehension, is, "Herein is our love perfected: so that we have boldness in reference to the day of judgment; because as be is, so are we in this world, we bearing his image, who is love itself." This makes a clear and important sense of the passage.

Let the same person now go into company, or attend the public ordinances, or take up the blessed Word of God, he has new eyes, new ears, new feelings altogether. There is an unction of the Spirit upon his soul, that enables him to derive edification from everything, [1 John 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.20); 1 [John 2:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.27), and to diffuse, wherever he goes, "a sweet savor of the knowledge of Christ." His love is like "the ointment of the right-hand which betrays itself," refreshing both himself and all around him with its sweet fragrances. In a word, there is no limit to the communications which such a one may expect from "God, who does already dwell in him, and whose love is, and shall be, perfected within him! [1 John 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.12)."

Seeing then that love is of such fundamental importance, let us notice,

***~~II. The attention due to it under this particular consideration—~~***

Love, for its own sake, should be cultivated to the uttermost: but when we consider its vast influence both on our present and eternal welfare, we would seek it with all our might. This appears from the solicitude which the Apostle expressed for the growth of the Thessalonians in this heavenly virtue. In reference then to his expressions, we say,

***~~1. Let us seek to abound in Christian love—~~***

Whatever advancement any persons may have made in this virtue, they would still press forward for higher attainments in it, desiring to "increase and abound in it more and more." The Thessalonians were eminently distinguished in this respect, so as not to need from the Apostle any instructions on the subject: yet even them did he exhort to "increase more and more! [1 Thessalonians 4:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.9-10)," imitating and emulating his love to them.

Consider for a moment the Apostle's love to them, the ardor, the tenderness, the efficiency of it: he compares his feelings with those of a father, yes, and of a nursing mother towards her infant offspring. And such was his concern about them, that he could scarcely endure his existence, until he was assured of their spiritual welfare; and he was us willing to lay down his life for them, as a mother was to draw forth the bosom to her nursing child, [1 Thessalonians 2:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.7-8); [1 Thessalonians 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.11); [1 Thessalonians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.1); [1 Thessalonians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.5-7). Now such is the love that we would all aspire after: for nothing short of this is required of us by Almighty God, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16).

***~~2. Let us entreat God to work Christian love in us—~~***

"Love is of God [1 John 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.7);" nor can any but God create it in the heart. We may attempt to stir up in others this heavenly flame, but we shall never succeed, until God himself shall send down fire from above, and create the vital spark in the soul.

Solomon justly observes, that "if a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would be utterly despised, Song of Solomon 8:7." We may labor and toil to the uttermost; but our efforts will only be like those of the disciples, when they strove in vain to row their ship to shore, until Jesus entered into their vessel; and then they were immediately at the land where they wished to go, [John 6:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.18-21). In many cases, the "more abundantly we endeavor to testify our love, the less we shall be loved, [2 Corinthians 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.15);" yes, we shall only be "casting our pearls before swine, which will turn again and rend us, [Matthew 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.6)." But God can in one moment kindle the sacred flame, even in the soul that has indulged the most inveterate malignity. Behold the jailor: one hour he executed his commission against Paul and Silas with savage and needless cruelty; the next, he washed their stripes with all imaginable tenderness and love, [Acts 16:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.24); [Acts 16:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.33).

Let us cry then to him for the gracious influences of his Spirit, to create us anew, and to form and fashion us after his blessed image.

***~~3. Let us be stirred up to this especially from the consideration before us—~~***

Shortly is the Lord Jesus Christ coming with all his glorified saints to judge the world: and then will an inquiry be instituted, not after this or that particular grace, but after *universal holiness*. This consideration surely ought to weigh with us, and to make us thoroughly in earnest in the pursuit of love.

Many grounds of confidence we may appear to have; but they will all fail us in that awful day: "Our knowledge may be so extensive, as to embrace all the mysteries of religion; our faith so strong, as to remove mountains; our liberality so great, as to give all our goods to feed the poor; and our zeal so ardent, as to give our bodies to be burned; and yet, for lack of a radical principle of love in our souls, it may profit us nothing; and we may be, in God's estimation, no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals! [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3)."

O, how carefully should we examine ourselves as to the existence of this principle within us, and how ardently would we seek its increase! "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he:" if he be altogether under the influence of love, "he fulfills the law," and is approved of his God: but, if this be not the reigning principle in his soul, whatever he may be, or whatever he may do, "he is in darkness even until now, [1 John 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.9); 1 [John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 2.11)," and will be consigned to everlasting darkness at the last day! 1 [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15).

***~~With those who feel the importance of this subject, two questions will naturally arise:~~***

***~~1. How shall I know whether my love increases?~~***

This question deserves an attentive consideration: for, if we form our judgment on inadequate and erroneous grounds, we shall only deceive ourselves to our everlasting destruction. Let not any then imagine that their love increases, because they feel an increased attachment to any particular individual or party, or have a general desire to do good. If we would form a correct estimate of our love, we must examine what *difficulties*it surmounts, what *sacrifices*it makes, and what *victories*it gains over every selfish inclination or corrupt affection?

"If we love those only who love us, what do we more than others? Do not even the Pharisees do the same?" We must "love them that hate us, and bless them that curse us, and do good to them that despitefully use us and persecute us." It is only in this way only that we can approve ourselves "children of our heavenly Father."

Enter then deeply into the workings of your own hearts: see how far pride, and anger, and malice, and envy are mortified within you; and how far humility, and meekness, and forbearance, and forgiveness, and a disposition to prefer others in honor above yourselves, are risen up in their stead, and are brought, though under the most trying circumstances, into easy and habitual exercise.

Real love has, if I may so say, an intuitive and instinctive operation. See it in the mother of the child which Solomon ordered to be divided between the claimants: she did not need to reason upon the matter; but love, instantly operating in her soul, inclined her to sacrifice her own interests for the good of her child. So it is that love will evidence itself, wherever it exists: it will rise to the occasion, whatever the occasion is; it will "heap coals of fire on the head" of those whom it cannot otherwise soften; and, "instead of being overcome by evil, it will overcome evil with good." Try yourselves by this standard, and you will soon see what the state of your souls is before God.

***~~2. What shall I do to get an increase of love?~~***

Many directions here might be given: but we will content ourselves with only one. Nothing but love will beget love: nor will any thing but a sense of God's love to us prevail to create in us any real love towards our fellow-creatures: we must know what he has done in laying down his life for us, before we can feel any disposition to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if by grace we are enabled to "comprehend in some good measure the height and depth and length and breadth of Christ's love," then shall we be transformed by it into his image, yes, and "be filled with all the fullness of God! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)."

Contemplate then this stupendous mystery: dwell upon it, as it were, incessantly in your minds: muse upon it, until the fire of divine love kindles in your souls: and from thus "beholding his glory, you shall be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)."

***~~#2201~~***

***~~ADVANCEMENT IN HOLINESS ENFORCED~~***

**[1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1)**

"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."

OUR blessed Lord, when about to leave the world, commanded his Apostles to go and "proselyte all nations" to his religion, "teaching them at the same time to observe and do all things that he had commanded them." Thus, in their ministrations, *principle*and *practice*were to go hand in hand. But many are disposed to separate what he has thus united: some making the Gospel little else than a system of moral duties; while others omit duty altogether, and occupy themselves entirely in establishing their own peculiar views of its doctrines. Both of these parties we conceive to be wrong.

A superstructure is nothing without a foundation; neither is a foundation anything without a superstructure. Each indeed has its appropriate place; but both are alike important: for if, on the one hand, the superstructure will fall without a foundation; so on the other hand, it is for the sake of the superstructure alone that the foundation is laid. Paul, "as a wise master-builder," was careful at all times to lay his foundation deep and strong: but, having done this, he was careful also to raise upon it a beauteous edifice, such as God himself would delight to inhabit, [1 Corinthians 3:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.10-11). [Ephesians 2:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.22). This appears in all his epistles, not excepting those which are most devoted to the establishment of sound doctrine.

In the epistle before us he seems to have had little else in view, than to assure the Thessalonians of his tender regard for them, and *to excite them to the highest possible attainments in universal holiness*. He was ready enough to acknowledge, that his instructions had produced the most beneficial effects upon them; but he was anxious that they would still press forward for higher attainments, as long as anything would remain to be attained.

The words which we have just read consist of an appeal, and an exhortation. Let us consider:

***~~I. The appeal—~~***

Paul had not sought to *amuse*them by curious speculations; nor had he given them maxims whereby they might please and gratify their fellow-creatures. *His object had been to bring them to such a holy and consistent "walk," as would be pleasing and acceptable to their God.*What kind of a walk that is, it will be profitable for us to inquire.

If we would so walk as to please God, we must:

***~~1. Walk in Christ, by a living faith—~~***

This is particularly required by Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians: "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, [Colossians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6)." By this is meant, that we would *walk in a continual dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ for all those blessings which we stand in need of.*He is the fountain of them all: they are treasured up in him, on purpose that we may have them secured for us against every enemy, [Colossians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3).

Do we need a justifying righteousness? To him we must look for it, and from him we must receive it: "We must call him, The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

Do we need grace to sanctify and renew our souls? From him we must receive it, according to our necessities, [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16).

Our wisdom, our strength, our peace, our all, is in him, and must be derived from him in the exercise of faith and prayer, 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Thus it was that Paul himself walked: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." And thus it is that we also must live, depending on him for everything, and glorying in him alone, [Isaiah 45:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.24-25).

***~~2. Walk after Christ, by a holy conduct—~~***

This also is particularly specified by another Apostle as essential to an acceptable walk with God: "He who abides in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked, [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)." Our blessed Lord "has left us an example, that we should follow his steps."

Like him, we must live altogether for God, making it "our food and our drink to do his will."

Like him, we must rise superior to all worldly cares, or pleasures, or honors, "not being of the world, even as he was not of the world."

Like him, we must exercise meekness and patience, and forbearance, and love even to our bitterest enemies, never swerving in the least from the path of duty for fear of them, nor yielding to anything of a vindictive spirit on account of them, but rendering to them, under all circumstances, good for evil, and committing ourselves entirely to the disposal of an all-wise God, [1 Peter 2:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21-23).

In a word, "the same mind must be in us as was in him," under every possible situation and circumstance of life, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5); and then, as "he pleased the Father always," so shall we infallibly be approved by him in the whole of our conduct, [Romans 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.2).

The Apostle, appealing to them that he had so taught them, exhorts them to press forward in the course he had pointed out. Let us proceed then to consider,

***~~II. The exhortation—~~***

In this he acknowledges that they had already done well, but he wishes them to redouble their exertions in their heavenly way. Let us notice here,

***~~1. The fact conceded—~~***

When he says, "You have received from us," he does not mean merely that they had heard his instructions, but that they had so heard them as to be *influenced*by them. It was at all times a delight to the Apostle to acknowledge the good that was in his converts, and to bestow commendation on them as far as it was due. And it is with sincere joy, that we can make the same acknowledgment respecting those to whom we have ministered, We bless God that many have been brought to live by faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and "so to walk as they have him for an example. Of course, a congregation would be well known before such concessions are made. They come best from a stated pastor, who is well acquainted with their spiritual condition;" and it is our earnest desire and prayer to God, that our ministrations may produce the same blessed effect on all. But whatever advances you may have made in the divine life, we must call your attention to,

***~~2. The duty urged—~~***

Paul would not have that any one of his converts would faint or be weary in well-doing. "The path of the just is like that of the sun," which advances without intermission to its meridian height and splendor, [Proverbs 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 4.18). Having begun to run well, we must continue; yes, like racers in a course, we must forget that which is behind, and press forward with ever-increasing ardor to that which is before, exerting ourselves the more, the nearer we approach the goal, [Philippians 3:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13-14).

Behold then our duty. Have we begun to "walk in Christ Jesus?"

Let us live more entirely upon him every day we live.

Let us resemble the branch of a vine, which incessantly derives its sap and nourishment from the stock, and derives it only in order to its more abundant production of the choicest fruit. [John 15:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.4-5).

Have we begun to "walk after Christ?"

Let us seek a more entire conformity to his image, yes, a perfect transformation into it "from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord, [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18)." We must know no bounds, no limits to our exertions: we must seek to "grow up into him in all things," to attain "the full measure of his stature, [Ephesians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.13); [Ephesians 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15)," be "holy as he is holy," and "perfect as he is perfect."

The affectionate and earnest manner in which the Apostle urges this duty upon them, will furnish us with:

***~~An important and appropriate conclusion—~~***

He might well have enjoined these things in an authoritative manner; but "for love's sake he rather besought them, Philemon verse 8, 9." But what an argument did he use! "I exhort you by the Lord Jesus!" By this sacred name I would also beseech you, beloved brethren.

***~~1. I would entreat you by the consideration of all that he has done and suffered for you—~~***

Can you reflect on the humiliation, the labors, the sufferings to which he submitted for you, and not long to requite him to the utmost of your power? He never assigned any bounds to his love—and will you fix any bounds to yours? He never ceased from his work, until he could say, "It is finished"—and will you stop short in yours? O brethren, "this is our wish, even your perfection, [2 Corinthians 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.9)." Let the same be your wish, your labor, your continual pursuit.

***~~2. I would entreat you by the consideration of all the interest that he yet takes in your welfare—~~***

Night and day is he occupied in promoting the salvation of your souls. Though seated on his Father's throne, and partaking of all his Father's glory, he is not forgetful of you. On the contrary, *he is making continual intercession for you, and administering the affairs of the whole creation for your good*.

Does he see you deviating in any respect from the path which he trod? "Father," he cries, "forgive them, and lay not this sin to their charge."

Does he see the powers of darkness striving to ensnare you? He sends a host of angels to your aid, that they may "minister unto you," and "hold you up in their hands, that you dash not your foot against a stone."

Does he see you ready to faint in your spiritual course? "Go," says he, "go, my Spirit, strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart, of that drooping saint." "Take of the things that are mine, and show them unto him," and "fulfill in him all my good pleasure."

Now then, when the Savior thus cares for you, will you leave off your care for him? When he is thus managing your concerns, will you not with increasing confidence commit them to his care? When he is doing everything that can possibly be done for you, will you leave anything undone that can be done for him?

***~~3. I would entreat you by the consideration of the honor he will derive from you—~~***

He himself tells us, that "his Father is glorified in our fruitfulness, [John 15:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.8)." And Paul speaks of Christ also as magnified in his body, whether by life or death, [Philippians 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.20). What a thought is this! Can you, my brethren, glorify the Father, and magnify the Lord Jesus, and will you not strive to do it? Know assuredly, that "your professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ" does cause him to be exceedingly magnified: and the more "the exceeding grace of God" appears in you, the more of praises and adoration and thanksgiving will abound to him, 2 Corinthians 9:13-14. Let this blessed prospect animate your souls: and wherein you have hitherto glorified him, seek to "abound more and more."

***~~4. I would entreat you by the consideration of the glory that will accrue to him in the day of judgment—~~***

In that great day the Lord Jesus "Christ will be glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe, 2 Thessalonians 1:10." The brighter his image shone upon them here, the more radiance will appear around them there; and all will be as jewels to compose his crown, [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17).

When the demoniac had confessed his inability to withstand the Lord Jesus, and yet had prevailed over seven men who attempted to cast out the evil spirit, we are told that "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, [Acts 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.17)." How then will it be magnified, when the extent of his power in you shall be seen, and your once dark polluted souls shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever!

Now then is the time for you to exalt his name, and to augment his glory to all eternity. It is but a little time that you will be able to do anything for him: when death comes, all your opportunities to advance his glory will cease for ever. Up then, and be doing.

We have shown you how to walk and to please God, and you have begun the blessed work; but O, we entreat you to abound more and more! And may "the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21)."

***~~#2202~~***

***~~THE RESURRECTION~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.13-18)~~***

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

IT is justly said by the Apostle, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." Certainly, true religion doubles our joys, at the same time that it greatly diminishes our sorrows. Whatever temporal happiness a man of God enjoys, he has, by anticipation, the joys of eternity also added to it; while his griefs, whatever they may be, are also proportionably mitigated by the consideration of:  
their transitory nature,  
their sanctifying efficacy,  
and their glorious outcome.

This Paul intimates in the passage before us. There were some of the Thessalonian Church who had given way to sorrow in an unfitting manner; so that, in that respect, they could scarcely be discerned as differing from the unconverted heathen around them. To correct this, he tells them of the glorious prospects which they have in the eternal world, and begs them to look forward to their future destinies, as the means of tranquillizing their minds under all the painful circumstances which might at any time occur.

In the words which we have just read, he declares:

***~~I. The certainty of the resurrection—~~***

The heathen quite derided the idea of the resurrection, [Acts 17:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.18); [Acts 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.32), deeming it altogether incredible, [Acts 26:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.8); and some who professed Christianity explained away the doctrine relating to it, and represented the resurrection as a merely spiritual change, which had passed already, [2 Timothy 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.18). Even some of the Thessalonian Church did not appear to be well grounded in it: and therefore Paul assured them, that it was a doctrine on which they might fully depend.

***~~They did believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—~~***

On these two facts all Christianity was founded, namely, that "Jesus had died for our sins, and had risen again for our justification, [Romans 4:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.25)." If Jesus had not risen, all their faith in him, and all their hope from him, was altogether vain, [1 Corinthians 15:13-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.13-18).

***~~These facts admitted, the resurrection of man would follow of course—~~***

The resurrection of our blessed Lord was both an evidence that God can raise the dead, and a pledge that he will. The same power that raised him, will raise us: nothing less than Omnipotence was necessary for the one; and to Omnipotence the other also must yield. Had Jesus risen merely as an individual, we might have supposed it possible that the power exerted in his behalf would not be exercised for us. But he rose as the federal Head of his people: and what has been done for him, the Head, shall also be done for all his members. He is "the first-fruits of those who sleep." Now the first-fruits assured the whole harvest. We may be sure therefore, that, as "our Forerunner" is gone before, we shall all follow him in due season, [1 Corinthians 15:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.20); [1 Corinthians 15:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.23) with [John 14:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.2-3) and [Hebrews 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.20). The one gives us a full assurance of the other, [Acts 17:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.31).

For their fuller instruction, he proceeds to state to them,

***~~II. The order in which it shall be effected—~~***

This perhaps is a matter of curiosity, rather than of any great practical importance: but Paul would not have the Thessalonian Christians ignorant of it; and therefore it is not undeserving of our attention. The resurrection then will take place in this order:

***~~First, the dead will be raised from their graves—~~***

All that have ever departed out of the world, will be restored to life, each clothed in his own proper body. The sea and the grave will yield up those who have long since been entombed within them, and they shall all live again upon the earth, [Revelation 20:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.13). The text indeed speaks of the righteous only, who had fallen asleep in Christ: but in other passages we are informed that the ungodly also will hear the voice of the Son of God, and, in obedience to it, come forth from their graves, [John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28-29). [Daniel 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 12.2).

Irresistible will be the summons, when "the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God," shall sound. When Jesus came in his state of humiliation, thousands withstood his voice: but none will, "when he shall come in his own glory, and the glory of his Father, with his holy angels." The great and mighty, as well as the base and insignificant, shall come forth alike, each re-united to his kindred body, and each appearing in his own proper character.

***~~Second, those who remain alive upon the earth will be changed—~~***

Certainly those who are on the earth will not be changed first; and it appears, that they will remain unchanged, while all who have ever died are restored to life. What a surprising sight will it be, to behold such countless multitudes of the children of Adam bursting forth from their graves, and standing up, an innumerable host, in their incorruptible and glorified bodies!

But, this once effected, the people who are then living upon earth will be changed in an instant, their mortal and corruptible bodies becoming at once, and without any dissolution preparatory to it, incorruptible and immortal.

This is the order which Paul has specified also in another epistle: first the trumpet, then the rising of the dead, and then the change of the living, [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.51-53). Well may the Apostle call it a "mystery, [1 Corinthians 15:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.51)." But as all will then be in that form which they will bear to all eternity, what an amazing difference will then appear in those who once perfectly resembled each other! The godly how beautiful! the ungodly, how deformed! both having either Heaven or Hell depicted in their very countenances! Amazing sight! how infinitely surpassing all human conception!

***~~Third, then will they all together be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air"—~~***

Yes, into the presence of their Judge must they go: and as the earth would not be a theater sufficient for the occasion, they must meet the Lord in the air.

Blessed, blessed summons to the *godly!* With what joy will they go forth to meet Him, whom unseen they loved, and out of whose fullness they received all the grace that ever they possessed, "their spirits being now made perfect," and "their vile body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body!"

On the other hand, with what reluctance are the *ungodly*dragged into his presence! How gladly would they hide themselves from him, if it were possible. Thousands, who were once the great and noble of the earth, and who thought there was none above them to whom they owed allegiance, will now curse the day that they were born, and "cry to the rocks and mountains to cover them" from the face of their offended Lord! [Revelation 6:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 6.14-17).

Having stated this, he declares,

***~~III. The blessed outcome of it to the saints—~~***

***~~They "shall be forever with the Lord"—~~***

From him they will receive a sentence of acquittal, or rather of unqualified approbation, "Well done, good and faithful servants!" To his right hand will they be called, as a prelude to the honor he is about to confer upon them. The judgment finished, he ascends with all his bright attendants to the Heaven of heavens, the immediate residence of the Deity; and these his redeemed people now ascend together with him, to behold his glory in all its unclouded splendor, [John 17:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21), and to participate in his throne, even as he participates his Father's throne, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

O what fullness of joy do they now possess, [Psalm 16:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 16.11). How bright their vision of his glory! How unbounded their fruition of his love! Nothing now could add to their felicity; nor can anything now detract from if, [Revelation 7:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.14-17); [Revelation 22:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.3-5). That too which constitutes its chief ingredient is, that it will be "forever!" Were this happiness to be only for a fixed period, however long, it would not be complete: the idea of its ultimate termination would rob it of half its value. But it will be pure and endless as the Deity himself!

***~~IV. The dreadful outcome of it to the ungodly—~~***

They will be bidden to "depart from him; to depart accursed; to depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Alas! alas! What weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth will they experience; and that also forever and ever! Unhappy creatures! "It would have been better for them, if they had never been born."

He further suggests,

***~~V. The improvement that would be made of this subject—~~***

The word translated "comfort," is in the margin rendered "exhort." Either sense of the word is just; and therefore we will include both. This subject then would be improved by us,

***~~1. In a way of mutual consolation—~~***

Have any of us been bereaved of dear and pious friends? "Let us not sorrow, as those who have no hope." What though they shall not come again to us? It is but a little time, and we shall go to them: and most blessed shall be our meeting at the right hand of God.

Are we terrified at the thoughts of our own approaching dissolution? It is but "a sleep," if we belong to Jesus; it is a *falling asleep in the Savior's arms*. What is there dreadful in this? O put away your unbelieving fears; and learn to *number death among your richest treasures*, [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23).

***~~2. In a way of mutual exhortation—~~***

Certainly the thoughts of a resurrection and a future judgment ought to fill us with holy awe: for the consequences of that judgment are such as no words can adequately express, nor any finite intelligence fully comprehend. We then would exhort every one of you, and you should also exhort one another, in the words of the prophet, "Prepare to meet your God!" Remember the blessedness "that is here spoken of, is to those only who die in the Lord:" and, if you would *die*in the Lord, you must *live*in the Lord—you must be in him, as the branch in the vine, by a living faith; and you must abide in him to your dying hour. Seek then "to be found in him, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in him." Then may you look forward to death as to a transient sleep, from which you shall awake in the morning of the resurrection, to everlasting blessedness and glory!

***~~#2203~~***

***~~WATCHFULNESS ENJOINED~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 5:1-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.1-9)~~***

"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

ON an occasion like the present, when God is so loudly speaking to us by his providence, I am anxious that his voice, and his alone, would be heard among us: for as, on the one hand, it would be peculiarly difficult so to speak, as to cut off all occasion for misconception, so, on the other hand, filled as your minds are with holy fear and reverence, it will be far more grateful to you to sit, as it were, at the feet of Jesus, and to hear what the Lord God himself shall say concerning you.

Methinks, in the spirit of your minds you are all, even this whole congregation, like Cornelius and his company, saying, "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you of God." Yes, I would hope that each individual is now in the posture of Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." To meet these devout wishes in a suitable manner, I have chosen a portion of Scripture, which contains all that the occasion calls for, and bears the impress of Divine authority in every part. It comes home to our business and bosoms: it turns our minds from the distinguished individual whose loss we lament, and fixes them on our own personal concerns; proclaiming to every one of us, "Prepare to meet your God!"

The point to which it more immediately calls our attention, is, the coming of our Lord to judgment. The precise period when that solemn event shall take place has never been revealed either to men or angels: it is "a secret which the Father has reserved in his own bosom." This only we know concerning it, that it will come suddenly and unexpected to all those who dwell on the earth: and therefore it is our wisdom to be always standing prepared for it. We believe indeed that it is yet far distant from us, because there are many prophecies which yet remain to be accomplished previous to its arrival: but *to us the day of death is as the day of judgment*; because as death finds us, so shall we appear at the bar of judgment; and "as the tree falls, so will it lie" to all eternity! We shall therefore speak of death and judgment as, in effect, the same to us; and we shall notice in succession,

**I.** The uncertainty of the period when death shall arrive—

**II.** The character of those who are prepared for it—

**III.** The duty of all in reference to it—

**I. As to the *uncertainty*of the period when death and judgment shall arrive**, the idea is so familiar to our minds, and the truth of it is so self-evident, that, as the Apostle intimates, you have no need to have it brought before you. Yet though universally acknowledged as a truth, how rarely is it felt as a ground of action in reference to the eternal world! We look into the Holy Scriptures, and there we see this truth written as with a sun-beam.

We behold the whole human race surprised at the deluge in the midst of all their worldly cares and pleasures; and all, except one little family, swept away by one common destruction.

A similar judgment we behold executed on the cities of the plain: and these particular judgments are held forth to us as warnings of what we ourselves have reason to expect. Our blessed Lord says to us, "You also be ready; for in an hour that you think not the Son of Man comes!" Yet we cannot realize the thought, that death would ever so overtake *us.*Nay, we even try to put the conviction far from us, and, in every instance of sudden death that we hear of, we endeavor to find some reason for the mortality of our neighbor, which does not attach to ourselves.

When, as in the instance now before us, a person is snatched away suddenly, and in full health, as it were, we are constrained for a moment to reflect, that we also are liable to be called away: but it is surprising how soon the thought vanishes from our minds, and how little permanent effect remains. We are told that our danger is in reality increased by our security; and that we are then most of all exposed to the stroke of death, when we are most dreaming of "peace and safety;" yet we cannot awake from our torpor, or set ourselves to prepare for death and judgment. We are not altogether unconscious, that destruction, even inevitable and irremediable destruction, must be the portion of those who die unprepared; and yet we defer our preparation for eternity, in the hope of finding some more convenient season.

We see *our neighbor*surprised as by "a thief in the night;" and yet we hope that notice will be given to us. We even bear about in our persons some disorders or infirmities which might warn us of our approaching end; and yet we look for another and another day, until like a woman in travail, we are unexpectedly seized, and with great anguish of mind are constrained to obey the summons of the King of Terrors.

Now why is it, that notwithstanding "we know perfectly" the uncertainty of life—we are so little affected with the consideration of it? If there were no future state of existence, we might account for it; because men would naturally put away from them any thoughts, which might diminish their enjoyment of present good. But when this life is only a space afforded us to prepare for eternity, and when an eternity of happiness or misery depends on our improvement of the present hour, it is truly amazing that we would be able to indulge so fatal a security. One would think that every one would be employing all the time that he could redeem from the necessary duties of life, in order to provide for his eternal state. One would think that he would scarcely give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eye-lids, until he had obtained a clear evidence of his acceptance with God, and had "made his calling and election sure." But this is not the case: and therefore, evident as the truth is, we need to have it brought before us, and enforced on our minds and consciences by every argument that can be adduced.

Permit me then to remind those who are living in open sins, that they know not how soon they may be called into the presence of their God, with all their sins upon them! And how will they endure the sight of their offended God? Will they, when standing at his tribunal, make as light of sin as they now do? Will they prevail on him to view it as mere youthful indiscretion, and unworthy of any serious notice? No, in truth: if any could come to us from the dead, they would not designate their sins by such specious terms as they once used respecting them; but would tell us plainly, that "those who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Think then, you who make a mock of sin, how soon your voice may be changed, and all your present sport be turned to "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

Nor is it to open sinners only that we must suggest these thoughts. We must remind the moral also, and the sober, that death may quickly terminate their day of grace. Yes, we must "put them in remembrance of these things, though they know them, and are established" in the belief of them.

We mean not to undervalue sobriety and outward morality: no; we rejoice to see even an external conformity to Christian duties. But more than outward morality is lacking for our final acceptance with God.

We must have a penitent and contrite spirit.

We must seek refuge in Christ from all the curses of the broken law.

We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

We must be brought to live no longer to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again.

These things are absolutely and indispensably necessary to our salvation. The *form*of godliness, however far it may carry us, will profit us nothing at the bar of judgment, if we possess not the *power*of it. How awful then is the thought, that, in a few days or weeks, those persons who are most respected and revered among us for their wisdom and learning, for their uprightness and honor, may be called to give up their account to God, before they have attained that vital godliness which must constitute their fitness for Heaven!

But indeed the uncertainty of life speaks loudly to the best of men; it bids them to "stand upon their watch-tower," and be ready at every moment to meet their last enemy. For, *as mere morality will profit little without real piety, so the lamp of outward profession will be of no service, if it is destitute of that oil which God alone can bestow*.

It is a matter of consolation to us, however, that some are prepared for death, however suddenly it may come.

***~~II. Who they are, and what their character is, we now come to show—~~***

The Scriptures everywhere draw a broad line of distinction between the true servants of Christ, and those who are such only in name and profession. Thus, in the words before us, they are called "Children of the light and of the day," in opposition to those who are "of the night and of darkness." Doubtless this distinction primarily referred to their having been brought out of the darkness of heathen superstitions, into the marvelous light of the Gospel of Christ. But we must not suppose that it is to be limited to this.

The ways of sin and ignorance are justly denominated darkness, no less than idolatry itself. The paths of faith and holiness may be called "light," whether we have been brought into them suddenly from a state of heathenism, or gradually, under a profession of Christianity itself.

Now of the Thessalonians Paul could say, in the judgment of charity, that "they all were children of the light and of the day." The state of profession was very different *then*from what it is at this time: people did not embrace Christianity unless they had been strongly convinced of its truth; and the moment they did embrace it, they strove to "walk worthy of their high calling," and to stimulate each other to "adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things." The *persecutions*they suffered obliged them to have constant recourse to God in prayer for his support; and to watch carefully over their own conduct, that they might not give any just "occasion to their adversaries to speak reproachfully."

Hence *their religion was vital and practical*, and very different from that which reigns among the professors of Christianity at this day. Now men are *reputed*Christians, though they have their affections altogether set upon the world, and their habits differing but little from those of heathen. A man may be *reputed* a Christian, though he drink, and swear, and commit evils, which ought scarcely to be so much as named among us. A man may be *reputed* a Christian, though he have no real love to Christ, no sweet communion with him, no holy glorying in his cross and passion. But "you have not so learned Christ, if so be you have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus."

The distinction between light and darkness is the same as ever: and those only who walk according to the example of the primitive Christians, can be called "the children of the light and of the day." But those, whoever they are, are prepared for death: to them, though it may come suddenly, it cannot come unlooked for: it "cannot overtake them as a thief."

And such was that exalted man, whom it has pleased our God so suddenly to take from the midst of us. In whatever light we view him, he was a bright and consistent character, an ornament to his profession, an honor to his God. It is the peculiar excellence of religion, that it operates in every department of human life, and stimulates to an exemplary discharge of every duty.

His superiority to all worldly considerations was strongly marked throughout the whole course of his life.His excellencies were the fruits of true religion in his soul. He had been brought out of the darkness of a natural state, and had been greatly enriched with divine knowledge. He was indeed "mighty in the Scriptures;" his views of divine truth were deep, and just, and accurate; and, above all, they were influential on the whole of his life and conduct. He not only beheld Christ as the Savior of the world, but relied on him as his only hope, and cleaved to him with full purpose of heart, and gloried in him as his Lord, his God, and his whole salvation! Nor was he satisfied with serving God in his closet: no; he confessed his Savior openly; he was a friend and patron of true religion, he encouraged it in all around him; he was not ashamed of Christ, nor of any of his faithful followers. He accounted it no degradation to show in every way his attachment to the Gospel, and his full conviction that there is salvation in no other name under Heaven than the name of Jesus Christ. He was, in the highest sense of the word, "a child of light:" and truly he caused "his light so to shine before men," that all who beheld it were constrained to glorify God in his behalf.

To him death came not as a thief in the night. Though it came suddenly, so suddenly that he had not the smallest apprehension of its approach, it found him not unprepared. His loins were girt, his lamp was trimmed, and he entered, a welcome guest, to the marriage-supper of his Lord!

O that we all might be found equally prepared, when the summons from on high shall be sent to us! O that we may have in our souls an evidence, that we also are "children of the light and of the day!" Happy indeed would it be, if the state of religion among us were such, that we might adopt with truth the charitable expression in our text, "You all are children of the light and of the day."

But if we cannot do this, we have at least reason to be thankful, that real piety is certainly more prevalent among us than it was some years ago; that prejudices against it have most astonishingly subsided; and that, where it does not yet reign, its excellence is secretly acknowledged; so that on this occasion we may doubt whether there are so much as one among us, who does not say in his heart, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Let me then proceed,

***~~III. To point out the duty of all, in reference to that day—~~***

We should "not sleep as do others." Those who put the evil day far from them, can live unmindful of their God, regardless of the sentence that he shall pass upon them. They can go on *dreaming*of Heaven and happiness in the eternal world, though they never walk in the way thither, or seek to obtain favor with their offended God.

But let it not be thus with any who desire happiness beyond the grave. If ever we would behold the face of God in peace, we must improve our present hours in turning to him, and in laboring to perform his will. If the prize held out to those who wrestled, or ran, or fought, could not be obtained without the most strenuous exertions, then much less can the glory of Heaven be obtained, unless the acquisition of it be the great object of our lives. It is true indeed that "the Son of Man must give unto us the food that endures to everlasting life;" but still we must "labor for it" with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. To expect the end without using the means, is to reverse the decrees of Heaven, and to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. We must "watch and be sober."

*It is an inordinate attachment to earthly things that keeps us from the pursuit of heavenly things.*The cares, the pleasures, the honors of this life—engross all our attention, and leave us neither time nor inclination for higher objects. This groveling disposition we must resist and mortify. We must set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; and must not only keep Heaven constantly in view, but must so run as to obtain the prize.

The men of this world love darkness rather than light, as being more suited to the habits in which they delight to live. "Those who sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken, (if not lost to all sense of shame,) are drunken in the night:" but we, if indeed we are of the day, shall delight to "come forth to the light, that our deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

We should study the Holy Scriptures, not merely to acquire a critical knowledge of them, (though that is good and necessary in its place;) but to find what is the will of God, and what is that way in which he has commanded us to walk. Instead of being satisfied with doing what shall satisfy the demands of an accusing conscience, we must aspire after a perfect conformity to the Divine image, and endeavor to "walk in all things even as Christ himself walked."

But our duty is described in our text under some peculiar images, to which we shall do well to advert. We are supposed to be as sentinels, watching against the incursions of our spiritual foe. For our protection, armor of heavenly temper has been provided: "for a breast-plate, we are to put on faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." We might, if it were needful, mark the suitableness of these various graces to the protection of the part which they are intended to defend. But as this would lead us rather from our main subject, we content ourselves with a general view of these graces, as necessary for the final attainment of everlasting salvation.

We must put on **faith**, without which indeed we are exposed to the assault of every enemy, and destitute of any means of defense whatever. It is in Christ alone that we have the smallest hope of acceptance with God; and in him alone have we those treasures of grace and strength which are necessary for a successful prosecution of our spiritual warfare.

"He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." But how must we obtain these things from him? It is by faith, and by faith only that we can "receive them out of his fullness." This then is the first grace which we must cultivate; for according to our faith all other things will be unto us. To him we must look continually; renouncing every other confidence, and trusting altogether in him alone. *In the fountain of his precious blood we must wash our guilty souls*, or, as the Scripture expresses it, "Our garments must be made white in the blood of the Lamb." To him, under every conflict, we must cry for strength; for it is his grace alone that can be sufficient for us; and "through his strength communicated to us, we shall be able to do all things."

Yet, notwithstanding all our exertions, we shall find that in many things we daily offend; and therefore, under every fresh contracted guilt, we must look to Him who is "our Advocate with the Father, and the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Hence it is that all our peace must flow; and hence we shall find a satisfactory answer to the accusations of every enemy: "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died; yes rather, who is risen again, who also makes intercession for us."

But together with this we must cultivate **love**, which indeed is the inseparable fruit of faith; for "faith works by love." Whether we understand "love" as having God or man for its object, or as comprehending both, it is a good defense against our spiritual enemies.

For, if we truly love our *God*, who shall prevail upon us to offend him? If we "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," "who shall separate us from him? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No! In all these things we shall be more than conquerors through him who loved us."

And if we love our *fellow-creatures*as ourselves, we shall strive to benefit them to the utmost of our power; and account no sacrifice great, which may contribute to their welfare: we shall be ready to "suffer all things for the elect's sake," and even to "lay down our lives for the brethren."

Behold then, what a defense is here against the darts of our enemies! Who shall be able to pierce our bosom, when so protected? We may defy all the confederate armies of earth and Hell! "for I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

For the protection of our head there is a helmet provided, even "the **hope**of salvation." Let a man have been "begotten to a living hope in Christ Jesus, to a hope of that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for us," and will he barter it away for the things of time and sense? Will he allow his views of Heaven to be clouded by the indulgence of any unhallowed lusts? No!

He will contend with every enemy of his soul.

He will "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts."

He will "lay aside every weight and the sins that most easily beset him, and will run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith." Instead of forgetting the great day of the Lord, he will be "looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of Christ."

Though willing to live for the good of others, he will "desire rather for himself to depart, that he may be with Christ, which is far better" than any enjoyment that can be found on earth. "Not that he will desire so much to be unclothed," because of any present troubles, as to "be clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up of life."

This armor then must be procured; this armor must be worn; and, clothed in it, we must watch against all our enemies.

And though others sleep—yet we must not. Yes, if all around us would be drowned in sleep—yet must not we give way to slumber. If to be sober and vigilant must of necessity make us singular, we must dare to be singular, even as Elijah in the midst of Israel, or as Noah in the antediluvian world. If it is true that none but those who are children of the light and of the day are ready for death and judgment, let us come forth to the light without delay, and endeavor to walk in the light, even as God himself is in the light. His word is light: it shows us in all things how to walk and to please him: it sets before us examples also, in following whom we shall by faith and patience inherit the promises, as they now do.

Let this word then be taken as a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths: and let us follow it in all things, as those who would approve themselves to the heart-searching God.

Let us not listen to any vain excuses for delay. We see, in the instance before us, how suddenly we may be called away, and how soon our day of grace may come to a close. And how terrible will it be, if that day would overtake *us*as a thief!

Let us be wise: I beseech you all, by the tender mercies of God, to have compassion on your own souls, and to "work while it is day, knowing that the night comes wherein no man can work."

***~~#2204~~***

***~~THE DUTIES OF MODERATION AND WATCHFULNESS~~***

**[1 Thessalonians 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.8)**

"But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

THE exact season of the day of judgment is wisely hidden from our eyes. If it were revealed to us, there is no reason to think that we would make a right improvement of that knowledge. The uncertainty of its arrival is far better calculated to excite our diligence in religious duties, because, while we are told that it will come as *surely*, as *irresistibly*, and as *unexpectedly* as a thief in the night, or as travail upon a woman with child, we see the necessity of continual watchfulness and preparation for it. The world at large indeed will rest in supineness and security, in spite of every warning that is given them: but those who profess to fear God should manifest a different spirit, and, as persons apprised of their danger, should ever stand upon their guard. To this effect the Apostle exhorts us in the text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

***~~I. The description given of believers—~~***

***~~The careless world are in a state of intellectual and moral darkness—~~***

The light of divine truth has not shined into their hearts, nor have the clouds of nature's darkness been dispelled. "They call evil good, and good evil; and put darkness for light, and light for darkness, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)." Their lives also abound with deeds of darkness, "nor will they come to the light, lest their deeds would be reproved."

***~~As contrasted with them, believers "are of the day"—~~***

They have been "brought out of darkness into the marvelous light" of the Gospel, and are enabled to "discern between good and evil." Their dispositions also are changed, so that they desire to "walk in the light, even as God is in the light;" and they "come to the light, that their deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." They see indeed much in themselves for which they have reason to be ashamed: but they would gladly attain to such purity of heart, that their inmost thoughts and principles, no less than their actions, would bear the minutest inspection of all their fellow-creatures.

But that they are prone to relapse into their former state, is strongly intimated in,

***~~II. The exhortation addressed to them—~~***

The children of darkness are represented in the preceding context as addicted to sloth and intemperance, verse 7; in opposition to which vices, believers are exhorted to "be sober," that is, to exercise,

***~~1. Moderation—~~***

They who know not the vanity of earthly things may reasonably be expected to run to excess in their attachment to them, and their concern about them. But *it ill befits those who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, to set their hearts upon such empty, unsatisfying, transient enjoyments.*God would have them to "be without worry," like "the birds of the air, that neither sow nor gather into barns." He expects them to "set their affections rather on things above," and to put forth the energy of their minds in the pursuit of objects worthy the attention of an immortal spirit. And though they may both rejoice and weep on account of present occurrences—yet they would "rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and weep as though they wept not, because the fashion of this world is passing away, [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 7.29-31)."

***~~2. Vigilance—~~***

Others yield to sloth, because they see no occasion for activity: but believers know what numerous and mighty enemies they have to contend with. They see also, how short and uncertain their time is for accomplishing the work which God has given them to do: and of what infinite importance it is that, whenever called to appear before God, they would be able to give a good account of their stewardship; surely then they can find no time to loiter. They would rather exert themselves with all diligence; and, "whatever their hand finds to do, they would do it with all their might."

This exhortation is at once illustrated and enforced by,

***~~III. The particular direction with which it is accompanied—~~***

***~~Believers, whatever they may have attained, are yet in a state of warfare—~~***

Their enemies, though often vanquished, are still ready to return to the charge: nor will they fail to take advantage of any unwatchfulness on our part: they know the places where we are most open to assault; nor have we any security against them but by guarding every pass, and standing continually on our watch-tower. Without such precautions the strongest would be overcome, and the most victorious be reduced to a miserable captivity.

***~~There is, however, armor, whereby they may become invincible—~~***

Faith, hope, and love, are the principal graces of the Christian; and, while he keeps these in exercise, they are as armor to his soul.

Faith sees the things that are invisible, as though they were present to the bodily eyes.

Love fixes our hearts upon them.

Hope both appropriates them to ourselves, and enables us to anticipate the enjoyment of them.

Having these for our helmet and our breast-plate, our head and heart are secured. In vain does Satan suggest, that there is nothing beyond this present world, or nothing better than what he offers us, or that, if there is, we at least have no part in it. These fiery darts are instantly repelled; and we determine to continue our conflicts with him, until he is bruised under our feet.

***~~This armor therefore every believer must put on—~~***

In vain shall we hope to maintain our moderation and watchfulness, if we are not clothed with this divine panoply. Every day must we put it on afresh. Nor must we use it only in the hour of conflict: we must, like good soldiers, habituate ourselves, to the use of it, even when we are not sensible of immediate danger, in order that, when called to defend ourselves, we may be expert and successful in the contest.

We must be careful too that we never separate these pieces of armor; for, whether our head or heart were unprotected, our vigilant enemy would assuredly seize his opportunity to inflict a deadly wound. It is on the union of our graces that our safety depends. Whether we lay aside our faith, our love, or our hope—we are equally in danger. Let us then put them on daily, and preserve them in continual exercise, that we may fight a good fight, and be "more than conquerors through him who loved us."

This subject being altogether addressed to those who "are of the day," we need only add a few words to those who "are of the night"—

The warning given them in the context is well worthy of their deep attention. It is said, that "the day of the Lord shall overtake them as a thief in the night." They lie down in security, concluding that, because the ruffian has not hitherto disturbed their midnight slumbers, he never will: but at last he comes upon them to their terror, and spoils them to their confusion. Thus will the day of judgment, or, which is the same to them, the day of death, come upon the ungodly; and they will lose their souls, which it, would have been their daily labor to secure.

Even believers need to be exhorted to sobriety, and must be vanquished, if they follow not the directions given them: what then must the unbeliever do, if he continues in his supineness? What hope can there be for him? Let all arise from their slumbers, and arm themselves for the battle. "It is high time for all of us to awake out of sleep: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light:" and let us war a good warfare, until "death itself is swallowed up in victory!"

***~~#2205~~***

***~~THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION~~***

**[1 Thessalonians 5:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.16-18)**

"*Rejoice*evermore. *Pray*without ceasing.

In everything give *thanks*: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

THE just union of personal and relative duties is the brightest ornament of the Christian profession. The discharge of either will be imperfect, if it is not united with an attention to the other. As beauty in the human body consists not in the exquisite formation of any single feature, but in the just symmetry and configuration of the whole frame, so *the perfection of a Christian character consists not in an exclusive attention to any one duty, but in a due regard to all duties, civil and religious, social and personal*.

Paul has been giving directions respecting the duties we owe to each other as a Christian society, verse 14. He now descends from the social to the personal duties; stating at the same time both the grounds on which they stand, and the indispensable necessity of attending to them.

Taking his directions in a comprehensive and united view, we learn that true religion is,

***~~I. A spiritual service—~~***

Many, like the Pharisees of old, suppose that true religion consists in a formal attendance on ordinances, and an external decency of conduct. But true religion is inward and spiritual. It calls forth the strongest energies of the soul. It enables a person to maintain a holy fellowship with God in secret. Paul himself describes it as consisting, not in outward ceremonies of any kind, but in a devotedness of heart and soul to God, [Romans 14:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.17), and declares that no man can be a Christian indeed, who does not possess and manifest this elevated state of mind, [Philippians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.3) and [Romans 2:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.28-29). How earnestly then would we examine whether we be thus continually waiting upon God in the exercise of prayer and praise!

***~~II. A rational service—~~***

Spiritual religion is too often deemed enthusiasm. Indeed, if we interpreted the text literally and in the strictest sense of the words, we would make religion impracticable and absurd; but, when properly explained, it enjoins nothing but what is highly reasonable. It requires us to live in the stated and devout exercise of public, social, and private prayer; and to maintain such a sense of our own unworthiness, as excites a lively gratitude for every mercy we enjoy, and stimulates to an unwearied admiration of the Divine goodness. Can anything be more reasonable than such a state? Would not they, whose iniquities are so great, and whose needs so numerous, be frequently employed in imploring mercy and grace in the time of need? And those who are daily loaded with benefits, be daily blessing and adoring their Benefactor? Such a service is expressly called a "reasonable service, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)." To do otherwise were surely most unreasonable: nor are any people more irrational than those who pour contempt on these holy exercises from an affected regard for rational religion.

***~~III. A delightful service—~~***

Many are prejudiced against spiritual religion, as though it must of necessity deprive them of all the comforts of life. Certain it is that it will rob them of all the pleasures of sin: but it will afford them infinitely richer pleasures in its stead, [Proverbs 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.17). This is not true of formal religion, but only of inward and spiritual religion. What can be more delightful than to maintain "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?" Can there be any melancholy arising from incessant praises and thanksgivings? Were the first converts, or the Samaritans, or the jailor, rendered melancholy by the acquisition of religion, [Acts 2:46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46); [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8); [Acts 16:34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.34). Many are made melancholy by false views of religion; but none are by just and scriptural apprehensions of it. In proportion as we live in the exercise of it, we resemble the glorified saints and angels.

***~~Such being the nature of true religion, we will endeavor to enforce the PRACTICE of it—~~***

The will of God should be the law of all his creatures; and his will respecting us is fully revealed. It is his earnest desire that we would live in the enjoyment of himself. "He wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live." It is moreover his authoritative command that we would love and serve him: it is his command to all, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned. None are so high as to be exempt from this duty, nor any so situated as to be incapable of performing it. The heart may be lifted up in prayer and praise, even when we are occupied in the service of the world. Let all then know God's will respecting them. We must delight ourselves in communion with God.

O let us be like-minded with our heavenly Father! Let us say, this shall be my will also. From henceforth let us "watch unto prayer and thanksgiving with all perseverance:" let us be ashamed that we have so long resisted the Divine will; and let us so live in obedience to it on earth, that we may have our portion with those who are praising him incessantly in Heaven.

***~~#2206~~***

***~~QUENCHING THE SPIRIT~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.19)~~***

"Do not quench the Spirit."

*THERE is a harmony between all Christian graces, and a dependence of one upon another; so that none can be exercised aright, unless all be allowed their due place and influence*. There are doubtless many occasions of grief and sorrow; yet no circumstances are so afflictive, but we may find in them some ground of joy and gratitude. Hence in the directions which the Apostle gives to the Thessalonian Church, he bids them to "rejoice evermore," and "in everything to give thanks." But to moderate our feelings, and to combine them in such a proportion as occasions may require, is difficult, yes, impossible, to flesh and blood. In this arduous work, we must be directed and assisted by the Spirit of God. In this connection, the caution in the text is extremely forcible: for if we are not attentive to improve the offered aids of the Spirit, we shall never be able to execute any other part of our Christian duty.

The words before us may have some reference to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; but being inserted amidst exhortations to various graces, they must be understood in reference to them also.

They contain a very solemn caution; in discoursing upon which we shall,

***~~I. Consider the operations of the Spirit under the emblem of fire—~~***

The Spirit is frequently spoken of under the emblem of fire, [Acts 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.3-4). [Matthew 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 3.11). [Revelation 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 4.5); and fire justly represents his offices and operations—

Kindle a fire in a dark place, and it will give light to all around it. Draw near to it when chilled with cold, and it will warm and comfort you. Cast wood or straw upon it, and it will cause them to burst forth into a flame. Suppose it heated to a furnace, and, if you put stones into it, it will break and dissolve them. Let gold or silver be submitted to its action, and it will purge them from their dross. Let iron be cast into it, and it will transform the metal into its own likeness, so that it shall come out as a mass of fire.

Here we see the operations of the Spirit. It is his office to enlighten the mind, [Ephesians 1:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.17-18); nor had the Apostles themselves any light which they did not derive from him, [1 Corinthians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.12).

Call upon him in a state of great dejection; and he will be your Comforter, [John 14:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.16-17); [John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.26). [2 Corinthians 7:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.6).

Beg of him to reveal to you the Father's love, and the grace of Christ; and he will inflame your soul with love and gratitude, [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14). [Romans 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.5); [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13).

Submit your stony heart to his powerful operations; and he will break it in pieces, as he did in the days of old, [Acts 2:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.37), and will melt it to contrition [Ezekiel 36:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.26-27).

Carry your corruptions to him to be subdued; and he will purify your soul from their power and defilement [Ezekiel 36:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25) and 1 Corinthians 6:11.

Let him exert his full influence upon you; and he will assimilate you to himself, and transform you into the very image of your God! [2 Corinthians 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.18).

Such being the operations of the Spirit, we shall,

***~~II. Show in what way we may "quench" them.~~***

There are passages of Scripture which seem to militate against this doctrine: see [John 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.14) and [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9). But give them all the force you please, they do not prove that sin will not quench the Spirit; or, that those who live and die in sin shall not perish. And to bring them forward on such an occasion, is to weaken (and, in reference to many, to destroy) the force of the Apostle's admonition. The caution is addressed to all Christians without distinction; and therefore ought to be enforced in that extent. The very giving of the caution sufficiently shows the possibility and danger of quenching the Spirit; and therefore we should all attend to it with fear and trembling.

We may quench the Spirit in a variety of ways:

***~~1. By resisting his operations—~~***

There is not anyone on whom the Spirit has not frequently exerted his influence, to bring him to repentance. But how have his motions been regarded? Have they not in many instances been resisted? Have we not plunged ourselves into business or pleasure, perhaps too into reveling and intoxication, in order to drown his voice, and silence the remonstrances of our conscience?

This then is one way in which many quench the Spirit. God has warned us, that "his Spirit shall not always strive with man [Genesis 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.3);" and has told us how he dealt with his people of old; that "because they hearkened not to his voice and would none of him, he gave them up to their own hearts' lusts, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12)." And a similar resistance on our part will bring the same judgment upon us, [Proverbs 1:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 1.24-26).

***~~2. By delaying to comply with them—~~***

Few, if any, are so impious as to determine that they will never turn to God. Men deceive themselves with some faint purposes of turning to God at a future period. Thus, when the Spirit "knocks at the door of their hearts, [Revelation 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.20)," they send him away, as Felix did Paul, with an intention to "send for him at a more convenient season." But, as in the instance alluded to, the more convenient season never came, so it too often happens with respect to us.

The Spirit is a sovereign agent, and is not at our command: he is "a wind that blows where he wills:" and, if we will not spread our sails to the wind, and avail ourselves of the advantage afforded to us, we may bemoan our lost opportunity when it is too late, [Isaiah 55:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.6).

***~~3. By entertaining opinions inimical to them—~~***

It is not uncommon for those whose consciences are awakened to a sense of their condition, to take refuge in *infidel opinions*. If they do not call in question the divine authority of the Scriptures, they doubt the veracity of God in them, and deny the certainty and duration of the punishment which he denounces against impenitent sinners.

Others adopt an *antinomian creed*; and from some experience which they suppose themselves to have had of the divine life, conclude they shall never be suffered finally to perish, notwithstanding that their present experience attests their hypocrisy and self-deceit. But all of these are "speaking peace to themselves when there is no peace;" and, if they are not roused from their delusions, will soon reap the bitter fruits of their folly! [Jeremiah 8:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 8.11). [Deuteronomy 29:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 29.19-20).

***~~4. By indulging habits contrary to his mind and will—~~***

God abhors iniquity of every kind: nor will he dwell in any heart that is allowedly debased by sin. If then we harbor pride, envy, malice, covetousness, impurity, or any other secret lust, we shall provoke him to abandon us to ourselves, [Psalm 66:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 66.18); for he has said, "If any man defiles the temple of God. him shall God destroy, [1 Corinthians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.17)."

Lest any of you would be inattentive to the operations of the Spirit on your hearts, we shall,

***~~III. Enforce the caution, not to quench them—~~***

Consider then:

***~~1. Whom it is that you resist—~~***

It may appear to us to be only a friend or minister, or, at most, our own conscience, that we resist: but, whatever be the means whereby God speaks to us, the voice is his; and an opposition to the dictates of the Spirit is an opposition to God himself, [Acts 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.4). Have we sufficiently considered whom we thus "provoke to become our enemy, [Isaiah 63:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 63.10)."

***~~2. What is his design, in striving with you—~~***

Has God any interest of his own to serve? Will he be less happy or glorious, whether we are saved or perish? He is moved by nothing but love and pity to our souls. And all that he desires is, to enlighten, sanctify, and save us. The first impressions that he makes upon us may be painful; but they are a needful incision, in order to a perfect cure. And would we resist his love and mercy? In what light shall we view this conduct, when his gracious designs shall be fully known, and our ingratitude be contrasted with them?

***~~3. How awful will be our state, if we finally prevail to quench his motions—~~***

While he continues to strive with us, there is hope. If there is but a spark of this heavenly fire within us, the dying embers may be rekindled: but if once this fire be extinguished, there is no hope. If God has once said, "Let him alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)," let him live only to fill up the measure of his iniquities, and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath! [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5)," then our state will be inconceivably dreadful: better would it be for us that we had never been born. And who can tell but that this very day the Spirit may depart from him never to return? Let the dread of this awaken us to a sense of our danger, and stimulate us to improve the calls and assistances we now enjoy.

***~~Advice—~~***

***~~1. Renounce everything that may lead you to quench the Spirit—~~***

Do ungodly companions try to lull you asleep in sin? Forsake them.

Do earthly, sensual, and devilish affections grieve the Spirit? Mortify them.

Whatever it is that tends to damp this sacred fire, put it away. Better were it to lose all that we have in the world, than to have the Spirit finally taken from us.

***~~2. Do all that you can to stir up the sacred fire within you—~~***

Fire will go out, if left to itself. We are commanded to "stir it up, [2 Timothy 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.6)." This must be done:  
by meditation, [Psalm 39:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 39.3),  
by prayer, [Psalm 40:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 40.1-3),  
by reading of the Word of God, [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29), [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12),  
by attending on divine ordinances, [Acts 10:33-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.33-34),  
and by holy and spiritual conduct, [Luke 24:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.32).

Watch then the motions of the Spirit, and delay not to comply with them. Let everything serve as fuel to the flame: and, however much you delight in God, endeavor to abound more and more.

***~~#2207~~***

***~~INVESTIGATION OF TRUTH RECOMMENDED~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.21)~~***

"Test all things; hold fast to that which is good."

THERE are many who, either from an indifference about truth, or from a conceit that they are already sufficiently acquainted with it, neglect the public ministry of the Gospel, and even hold it in contempt. This is extremely culpable; because the ordinances of religion are God's appointed means for carrying on his work in the souls of men. Hence we are bidden "not to despise prophesying;" and "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."

At the same time, we are not necessarily to give our assent to everything we hear; for error may be proposed to us as well as truth: and therefore the Apostle gives us this advice: "Test all things: hold fast to that which is good."

In considering the two parts of this advice, we shall take each in its order:

***~~I. Test all things—~~***

Remarkable is that address of Elihu to his friends: "Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning. For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good, [Job 34:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.2-4)." There is much error abroad in the world; and that not only harbored, but propagated also. It will be well, therefore, for us to test, by some authorized standard,

***~~1. Our own opinions—~~***

Every man has some opinions about religion, though in many cases they are very crude and indistinct. On any other subject, those who have never investigated the science will hold their opinions with some measure of diffidence and distrust: but, *in reference to religion, the most ignorant are often the most confident*. The fall of man, the corruption of human nature, the necessity of an atonement, the influences of the Spirit—are not only questioned by many, but are rejected by them as utter "foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23);" and man's sufficiency to save himself is maintained, as though it admitted not of any doubt whatever.

But, whatever be our opinions on these topics, and on others connected with them, we should bring them to the unerring standard of God's word. Our inquiry in relation to everything should be, *"What do the Scriptures say?"*By this must every sentiment be tried: and according to its agreement with this test must every opinion stand or fall.

***~~2. The opinions of others—~~***

We are particularly cautioned, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, [1 John 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.1)." The one standard, to which everything must be referred, is the Word of God: as it is said, "To the law and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20)." To this our blessed Lord appealed, in confirmation of his word, "Search the Scriptures: for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me! [John 5:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.39)." And Paul commends the Bereans, because, when they heard him, they searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether his doctrines agreed with that unerring rule.

If, then, our blessed Lord and his Apostles desired to be tried by that standard, I have no hesitation in saying, "Test all things," whether delivered by the many, or the great, or the learned, or the pious, or the authorized and commissioned. If even an angel from Heaven were to come to teach you, I would still give the same advice, and say: As God has given you a perfect standard, it befits you to refer everything to it, and to test everything by it.

The Church of Ephesus adopted this plan, in its fullest extent, "You have tested those who say they are Apostles, and are not; and have found them liars! [Revelation 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.2)." And whether this, or the contrary, be the result of your examination, I say with boldness, "Test even an Apostle by the standard of God's blessed word!"

Having thus distinguished truth from falsehood, we must,

***~~II. "Hold fast to that which is good"—~~***

There are many that would wrest it from us: and we must hold it fast against all assaults,

***~~1. Of proud reason—~~***

Reason will presume to sit in judgment upon the truth of God. But this is not its province. Its proper office is, to judge whether the Scriptures are a revelation from God: but, when that is ascertained, faith is then to apprehend whatever God has spoken: and the highest dictate of reason is, to submit ourselves to God with the simplicity and teachableness of a little child! When, therefore, reason presumes to oppose the declarations of God and to say, "This is a hard saying: who can bear it?" regard not its proud dictates, but "receive with meekness the written word, [James 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.21);" remembering, that "what is foolishness with man, may be indeed the wisdom of God," and "the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes it."

***~~2. Of corrupt passion—~~***

This also fights against the truth of God. And no wonder, for the Word of God condemns every unhallowed desire, and requires us to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." How would it be supposed that our corrupt nature would approve of a book, which enjoins us to "cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye," lest by sparing either the one or the other we plunge both body and soul into the fire of Hell? It cannot be but that our self-indulgent appetites would rise against such severe dictates, and condemn them all as unreasonable and absurd.

But you must not listen to such objectors, who "hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds would be reproved." Our one question must be, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" and his *will*once known, must be the sole director of our *ways*.

***~~3. Of a menacing world—~~***

The world which lies in wickedness ever did, and ever will, set itself against the self-denying doctrines of the Gospel. But we are not to make a sacrifice of divine truth in order to please man: for "if we vet pleased men, we could not be the servants of Christ, [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)." Nor are we to indulge any concern upon this topic: for the very desire to retain "the friendship of the world" is a certain mark of enmity against God, [James 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 4.4). Whatever men may say, or whatever they may do, we must be faithful to our God, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart." Having "*bought*the truth, you must never *sell*it." "Hold fast what you have; and let no man take your crown, [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11)."

***~~But, before I conclude this subject, let me show you, in few words,~~***

***~~1. How to distinguish what is "good"—~~***

You will naturally say, in reply to what has been spoken: 'How shall I know what is good? For those who oppose the Gospel will appeal to the Word of God as confidently as those who receive it. How am I to determine between them?'

I answer, the despisers of the Gospel manifestly wrest the Word of God, and by ingenious criticisms, pervert it, for the purpose of maintaining their own erroneous opinions; while the humble believer receives it with all humility of mind: so that from their very mode of interpreting the Scriptures, you can tell, almost to a certainty, who is right.

As a general rule, take the entire systems of both, and compare them, and see what is the proper tendency of each: and then remember, that the doctrine which:  
humbles the sinner,  
exalts the Savior,  
and promotes a holy life,

is and must be "good;" while everything which has an opposite tendency carries its own evidence along with it, as erroneous and bad.

This rule, in conjunction with the other, will leave you in no danger of erring, if you cry to God for the teaching of his Spirit, and rely with confidence on his heavenly guidance.

***~~2. How to make a just improvement of it—~~***

Never rest in a *mere speculative*view of truth, however good it may appear. The use of divine truth is to enlarge the mind, and renovate the soul. Your views of the Gospel ought to raise your affections to God, and to fill you with adoring thoughts of your Lord and Savior; and at the same time to transform you into his image. Your soul should "be delivered into it, as into a mold;" so that every one of its divine lineaments may be formed upon you. To hold it fast for any other end than this, will be to little purpose. But let it be thus improved, and it will be found good indeed: for it will free you from everything that is corrupt and sinful, and bring you in safety to the realms of bliss!"

***~~#2208~~***

***~~ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL~~***

***~~[1 Thessalonians 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.22)~~***

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."

SIN is a tremendous evil. The consequences of one single sin are beyond all our powers of thought or conception. If only one is hardened by it, who can tell where his influence may extend, or through how many generations it may be transmitted? To the individual who commits it, who shall say how much evil will accrue? The Spirit may be grieved; the conscience seared; and Satan may get an advantage that shall never be regained.

Hence arises *the necessity of standing at the remotest distance from evil*: for if a thing be not evil, yet, if it appears to be so, it has all the effect of a positive evil to those who behold it. We would therefore "abstain even from all appearance of evil."

In discoursing on this subject, we shall consider,

***~~I. The injunction itself—~~***

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." This may relate to:

***~~1. The things we do—~~***

That which is perfectly indifferent in itself, may either appear wrong, or really be so, according to the circumstances under which it is done. The eating of things offered to idols, or the observance of certain days, were indifferent in themselves; and a person might either do or forbear these things, without improving or injuring the state of his soul, 1 Corinthians 8:8 and [Romans 14:2-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.2-6).

But if the doing or forbearing these things had any influence to ensnare the consciences of others, it was the duty of every person to pursue that line of conduct which was most inoffensive, [Romans 14:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.20-21). Paul thought, that though "all things were lawful for him, all things were not expedient, [1 Corinthians 10:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.23);" and therefore exercised self-denial with respect to things indifferent in themselves, lest his influence would induce others, who were less acquainted with Christian liberty, to follow his example, in opposition to the suggestions of their own consciences, [1 Corinthians 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.13).

Ezra might have asked a guard to protect him through the desert, [Ezra 7:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezra 7.16-18) with 8:22; and Nehemiah might have gone into the temple, to save himself from danger, [Nehemiah 6:10-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Neh 6.10-19); but they both chose rather to expose their lives to any peril, rather than do what in their circumstances would have been open to misconstruction, and would have been imputed to them as sin.

Thus there are some amusements and indulgences which, under particular circumstances and in a limited degree, may be innocent, from which we nevertheless ought to abstain; lest an undue advantage be taken of our conduct, and we be considered as patronizing that, which, under other circumstances, would be positively evil.

***~~2. The manner in which we do them—~~***

Much, very much, depends on the *manner*in which we do things which in themselves are inoffensive or even good. None can doubt but that alms-deeds, prayer, and fasting, are good in themselves; yet they may be so performed as to be open to the imputation of ostentation or hypocrisy: on which account our Lord gives us rules for the due discharge of these duties, [Matthew 6:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.1-6); [Matthew 6:16-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.16-18).

To give instruction or reproof to our neighbors is doubtless an important office; but if it is performed in an unfitting spirit, we shall appear to others to be only venting our own spleen, and all our endeavors will be lost upon them. Hence is that direction given us by the Apostle, "Let not your good be evil spoken of, [Romans 14:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.16).

***~~3. The end for which we do them—~~***

Daniel might with great propriety have prayed in his house with his windows shut: yes, it might have been thought, perhaps, more decorous. But, in his circumstances, he determined to die rather than to suspend his devotions, or even to conceal them by shutting his windows. He was in the midst of idolaters, and therefore he judged it necessary openly to confess his God. And, when the edict was issued by the Persian monarch to forbid the offering of any petition to anyone except himself for the space of thirty days, Daniel was more bound than ever to worship openly; because the concealing of his devotions would have been considered as a renunciation or denial of his God. Hence he determined to make no alteration whatever in his conduct, but to suffer the consequences of his fidelity to God, [Daniel 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.10).

Thus would we walk wisely, "cutting off occasion from them that seek occasion;" and determining that our enemies "shall find no cause of complaint against us, except concerning the law of our God, [Daniel 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 6.5)."

To impress this injunction the more deeply on our minds, let us consider,

***~~II. The importance of it—~~***

The avoiding of all appearance of evil is of great consequence:

***~~1. To ourselves—~~***

Our character is stamped by our actions as they appear to the world. God alone can judge the heart; man must of necessity form his judgment in a great measure from the outward appearance; though doubtless he is to put the best possible construction upon everything, so far as truth and reason will admit.

We owe it therefore to ourselves to guard against everything that either deservedly or undeservedly may bring an evil report upon us. Paul was very attentive to this, when he had collected a large sum of money for the poor saints in Judea: he desired that some person of established reputation would go with him, so that he might "provide things honest in the sight of all men, [2 Corinthians 8:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 8.19-21)," and "give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully, [1 Timothy 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.14)."

***~~2. To the world around us—~~***

The world are ever ready to spy out causes of complaint against the people of God, and, when they behold a flaw, to cry out, "There, there! So would we have it!" Instantly they proceed to blame religion itself for what they see amiss in the professors of it; and justify themselves as acting a more befitting and consistent part. On this account we would "walk in wisdom towards them that are without, [Colossians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.5)," and, if possible, "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well doing, [1 Peter 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.15)." Indeed, as they may be hardened in their sins by an injudicious conduct, so they may be "won by the good conduct" of those around them, [1 Peter 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.1-2). It may be, that our light shining before them may constrain them to confess that God is truly with, and lead them to "glorify our Father that is in Heaven, [Matthew 5:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.16)."

Can we need any greater argument for walking wisely? Would not this consideration induce us all to adopt the Psalmist's resolution: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2);" and make us pray with him, "Lead me, O Lord, because of my observers; make your way straight before my face, [Psalm 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 5.8)."

***~~3. To the Church of God—~~***

A discreet and blameless conduct is no less important as it respects the Church. The weak are of necessity much influenced by those whom they consider as more advanced than themselves: and, if they see anything done by a person whom they respect, they will be ready to follow his example, even though they are doubtful in their minds respecting the lawfulness of the act itself. Then, even though the act is lawful, they commit sin, because they go against their consciences, are not thoroughly persuaded of its innocence, [Acts 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 14.23). And we, if we pay no attention to their weaknesses, actually sin against Christ ourselves, and are guilty of destroying a soul for whom Christ died, [1 Corinthians 8:9-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.9-12). Let us not then imagine ourselves at liberty to do all things which are in themselves lawful; for *we are not at liberty to cast a stumbling-block before a weak brother*,[Romans 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.13); [Romans 14:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.15); but are to consult his good, no less than our own, [1 Corinthians 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.24).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How far are they from real Christians, who can live in known and allowed sin!~~***

Christianity requires us to abstain even from the *appearance*of evil: how much more from sin itself! Ah, beloved, you may easily see the folly and hypocrisy of calling yourselves Christians, while your whole conduct proclaims that you have no delight in God, nor any higher aim than to appear good to men.

***~~2. How excellent is the true Christian in comparison with others!~~***

Christians are not improperly called "the excellent of the earth." Behold their care, their tenderness, their circumspection, their "dread of even a garment spotted by the flesh, Jude verse 23." Their conduct is fitly described by the Apostle, "Whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, these they both think upon" and perform, [Philippians 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.8). "See then, Christians, that these things be in you, and abound." "As you have received how you ought to walk and to please God, so abound more and more, [1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1)."

***~~#2209~~***

***~~COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION TO BE SOUGHT AFTER~~***

**[1 Thessalonians 5:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.23-24)**

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."

PARENTS naturally desire the prosperity of their children; but they can by no means secure it. Even though their children would be disposed to concur with them in every prudent plan—yet their combined efforts cannot guarantee success; since, in numberless instances, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."

True indeed it is, that success in spiritual things is infinitely more difficult to be obtained, on account of the *obstacles*which are to be surmounted, and the *enemies*which are to be subdued. But Omnipotence is engaged in behalf of all who sincerely labor for themselves: nor is there any attainment, to which those who go forward in the strength of God may not confidently aspire.

The object which Paul desired in behalf of his Thessalonian converts was doubtless exceeding great: it was, that they might be "sanctified completely, and be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ:" but "his hope concerning them was steadfast," being founded, not on their weak powers, but on the power and fidelity of God, who had undertaken to "perfect that which concerned them, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8)." In illustrating the words before us, we shall notice,

***~~I. The blessing desired—~~***

This was the greatest blessing that mortal man can enjoy on earth: it was,

***~~1. The sanctification of their whole man—~~***

Man is usually spoken of as consisting of two parts, a body and a soul: but he may, perhaps with more propriety, be considered as having three parts:  
a corporeal substance;  
an animal soul (life), like that which exists in the lower orders of creation;  
and a rational immortal spirit, which connects him with the world above.

This distinction between the soul and spirit is to be found also in the Epistle to the Hebrews; where it is said, that "the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)."

In all of these parts, man is corrupt:

"His body, in all its members, is only, and invariably, an instrument of unrighteousness unto sin, [Romans 6:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.12-13)."

His animal soul, with all its affections and lusts, leads him to those gratifications only, of which the brutes partake in common with him, Jude verse 10.

His immortal spirit is filled with all those evil dispositions which characterize the fallen angels, such as, pride, envy, malice, discontent, and rebellion against God.

These different kinds of wickedness are frequently distinguished by the Apostle, according to the sources from whence they spring: he speaks of the unconverted man as "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, [Ephesians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.3);" and tells us, that we must "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, if we would perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." Agreeably to these distinctions, the character of fallen man is, that he is "earthly, sensual, and devilish! [James 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 3.15)."

In all of these parts, then, we need to be renewed and sanctified: we need to have our *bodies*made instruments of "righteousness unto holiness, [Romans 6:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.19);" our *souls*, with "their affections and lusts, crucified, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24);" and our *spirits*"renewed after the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24)." Hence Paul prays for the Thessalonian converts, that they may be sanctified "completely" that is, throughout their whole man, even "in their whole spirit, and soul, and body." This, and this alone, will constitute us "new creatures." "The old things" pertaining to every part of us must "have passed away, and all things must have become new, 2 Corinthians 5:17." Then alone can we be said to be "partakers of the divine nature [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4);" and then alone have we any satisfactory evidence that we are Christians indeed, [2 Corinthians 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.17).

This entire change was the first part of the blessing which Paul solicited in their behalf. But he could not be satisfied with this, he therefore further entreated.

***~~2. The continuance of it unto the day of Christ—~~***

To be made thus "blameless" is doubtless an unspeakable blessing; but it would be of little service to us, if we were to lose it again, and to return to our former state of sin and impurity. This is an idea which many lovers of *human systems*do not like: but it is inculcated in every part of the Holy Scriptures: nor can any man get rid of this idea, without doing violence to many of the plainest passages of Holy Writ, and, I had almost said, "wresting them to his own destruction."

By the Prophet Ezekiel, God tells us, that, "if the righteous man departs from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, his righteousness shall no more be remembered; but for the iniquity that he commits, he shall die, [Ezekiel 18:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.24)." Paul warns us, "that, if after tasting of the heavenly gift, and being made partakers of the Holy Spirit, we fall away, it is impossible, (or so difficult as to be all but impossible,) for us ever to be renewed unto repentance, [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.4-6)." Peter speaks yet more plainly, assuring us, that, "if after having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are again entangled therein, and overcome, our latter end will be worse than the beginning: for it would be better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us, [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)."

Hence Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, that they might "be preserved blameless unto the day of Christ." To run well for a season, would avail them nothing, if they were hindered at last. To little purpose would they have "begun in the Spirit, if they ended in the flesh." We must "endure to the end, if ever we would be saved! [Matthew 10:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.22)." And so important is this truth, and so necessary to be inculcated on the minds of even the most exalted Christians, that our blessed Lord himself, in his Letters to the Seven Churches, closes every letter with this solemn admonition, that "to him who overcomes," and to him alone shall the full blessings of his salvation ever be extended, [Revelation 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.7); [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10); [Revelation 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.17); [Revelation 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.26); [Revelation 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.5); [Revelation 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.12); [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21).

Hence are those frequent cautions against declension in the life and power of godliness, 2 John verse 8. [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11). [2 Peter 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.14); [2 Peter 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.17-18). May the Lord grant we may ever bear them in mind! for God himself expressly says, "If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him! [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38)."

On these accounts the Apostle prayed for them, that "the work begun in them might be carried on and perfected unto the day of Christ, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

Vast as this blessing was, he did not doubt of obtaining it in their behalf. This appears from,

***~~II. The assurance given—~~***

***~~To the attainment of this blessed state God "calls us" in his Gospel—~~***

"God has not called us to impurity, but unto holiness," even to the highest measure of it that can possibly be attained. He says not only, "Be holy, for I am holy, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16);" but, "Be holy, as I am holy," and "perfect, as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect, [Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.48)."

***~~And, as "the God of peace," he promises to raise us to it—~~***

God, having given us his Son to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and to "make reconciliation for us through the blood of the cross," is pleased to reveal himself to us under the endearing character of "the God of peace." Being now "our God and Father in Christ Jesus," he undertakes to do for us all that shall be necessary for our final acceptance with him in the day of judgment. He promises to "sprinkle clean water upon us, and to cleanse us from all our filthiness, and from all our idols! [Ezekiel 36:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.25-27)." He teaches us also to look, not to his mercy only, or his power, to effect this, but to his truth and faithfulness, yes, and to his very justice too: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, [1 John 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.9)."

This I say, he promises to us, being first of all become, through the atoning blood of Christ, a "God of peace." We are not to get sanctification first, and then, in consequence of that sanctification, to find him a "God of peace;" but first to look to him as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, and then to experience the sanctifying operations of his Spirit. This order must be particularly noticed in our text, as also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is particularly marked, [Hebrews 13:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.20-21); if we overlook this, we shall be in danger of misapprehending and perverting the whole Gospel of Christ. But if we bear this in mind, then may we expect from God a full and complete salvation.

In many places does he pledge his faithfulness to do for us all that we can stand in need of, and never to discontinue his mercies towards us, [1 Corinthians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.8-9) and [2 Thessalonians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.3); He may punish us, and hide his face from us; but he will not utterly abandon us, or cast us, off [Psalm 89:30-36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.30-36). [Jeremiah 32:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 32.40).

***~~We must, however, be found in the diligent use of the appointed means—~~***

The dependence of his blessing on the use of the appointed means is not always expressed; but it is always implied. "He will be inquired of by us," before he will do for us the things which he has most freely promised, [Ezekiel 36:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.37). He has appointed the *means*as well as the end, or rather I would say, the end by the means: he has "chosen us to salvation; but it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13). [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2)." He alone has the power whereby our salvation must be affected, as the words of our text very strongly imply. But he expects that we exert ourselves, as much as if all the power resided in our own arm: and the very consideration which many persons urge as a reason for their inactivity, is suggested by him as a reason and encouragement for our most strenuous exertions, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13). If we will not ask, and seek, and strive, we must expect nothing at his hands: but if we will put forth our own feeble energies in the way of duty, he will "strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man," and "make us more than conquerors through him who loved us."

***~~From this subject we may learn,~~***

***~~1. How mistaken they are who think that the Gospel leads to licentiousness—~~***

What symptom of licentiousness is here? Rather, may we not challenge every religious system in the universe to produce morality like unto this? Other systems provide for "the cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter;" but no other so effectually reaches the *heart*. The Gospel provides for the sanctification of all our faculties and powers, and for the transformation of our whole man into the very image of our God. Its language is, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace, [Romans 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.14)." And its effect is, to produce in every mind the desire which is so affectionately expressed in the text, and not for others only, but for ourselves also.

Let all jealousy then on this head be put aside: and let us seek to be justified freely by faith in Christ; that, having peace with God through his precious blood, we may receive the communications of his grace more abundantly, and be "changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God!"

***~~2. How deluded are they who rest in Christian doctrines, without aspiring after Christian graces—~~***

Such there have been in every age of the Church. Not that the Gospel has in itself any tendency to create such characters; but the corruption of men's hearts will take occasion from the Gospel to foster opinions, which are, in reality, subversive of its most fundamental truths. Many regard all exhortations to holiness as legalistic. Yes, there are not lacking some who will maintain, that Christ, having fulfilled the law for us, has absolved us from all obligation to obey it in any of its commands. They affirm that it is cancelled, not only as a covenant of works, but as a rule of life. They profess, that the sanctification of Christ is imputed to us, precisely as his righteousness is; and that we need no personal holiness, because we have a sufficient holiness in him.

Horrible beyond expression are such opinions as these: and how repugnant they are to those contained in our text, it is needless to observe. That some who advance these opinions are externally moral, and often benevolent, must be confessed: (if any are truly pious, it is not by means of these principles, but in spite of them,) but the great body of them, with but few exceptions, bear the stamp of their unchristian principles in their whole spirit and conduct.

The whole family of them may be distinguished by the following marks:

They are full of pride and conceit, imagining that none can understand the Gospel but themselves. Such is their confidence in their own opinions, that they seem to think it impossible that they would err. They are dogmatic in the extreme, laying down the law for everyone, and expecting all to bow to their judgment: and so contemptuous are they, that they speak of all as blind and ignorant who presume to differ from them.

Their irreverent manner of treating the great mysteries of our religion is also most offensive; they speak of them with a most unhallowed familiarity, as though they were common things. So profane are they, that they do not hesitate to sneer at the very Word of God itself, whenever it militates against their favorite opinions. "By these fruits you shall know them;" and by these fruits you may judge of their principles.

True indeed, along with their errors they also bring forth much that is sound and good: but this only renders their errors the more palatable and the more delusive. They altogether vitiate the taste of the religious world, and indispose them for all practical instruction. They so exclusively set forth what may be called "the strong meat" of the Gospel, as to withhold all "milk" from the household of our God, [Hebrews 5:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.13-14). 1 Corinthians 3:2. In a word, they promote nothing but spiritual intoxication, and banish from the Church all spiritual sobriety.

In what we have said, we do not design to mark the characters of any particular men, but the character and effect of their principles: and we do not hesitate to say again, that this is the true character and effect of Antinomianism, wherever it exists.

In opposition to all who would thus make "Christ a minister of sin," we must declare, that he came to save his people, not *in*their sins, but *from*them, [Matthew 1:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.21); and that "the grace of God which brings salvation, teaches, and must ever teach, men to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present world, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)," yes, and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, [Colossians 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.12)."

***~~3. How blessed they are who have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—~~***

You are not called to "make bricks without straw." That God, who is now reconciled to you through the Son of his love, undertakes to supply you with "grace sufficient for you, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9)," and to "fulfill in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power, [2 Thessalonians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11)." And is he not able to do this? Or will he forget his promises, or "suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail?" No! "He is faithful who has promised, who also will do it."

Be of good courage then, whatever difficulties you may have to encounter. Know, that "greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world, [1 John 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.4)." Gird on the armor which is provided for you, and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-11). 2 Timothy 2:1." Our prayer for you is the same as that of Paul for the Thessalonian Christians: yes, beloved, "this is our wish, even your perfection, [2 Corinthians 13:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.9)." And we rejoice in the thought that "God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work, 2 Corinthians 9:8." Only look to him as "a God of love and peace," and you shall find that "what he has promised he is able also to perform, [Romans 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.21)."

***~~2 THESSALONIANS~~***

***~~#2210~~***

***~~THE STATE OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 1:3-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-7)~~***

"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."

ONE advantage which we derive from the epistles of Paul is, that we are enabled to see in them an endless diversity both of characters and attainments. Every occurrence in the different cities where the apostolic churches were planted, has given occasion for suitable remarks, which, though adapted in the first instance to a particular place or circumstance, are applicable in some considerable degree to the Church of God in all ages. In some of the epistles we have the Church presented to us in a declining state; and suitable admonitions are given to her: in others we see her prospering, and hear the counsels of infinite wisdom proclaimed unto her.

The Thessalonian Church was of the latter character, and seems to have been eminently favored of her God. She was high in the esteem also of the Apostle Paul; and deservedly so, because she was conspicuous among all the Churches of that age for her high attainments. The words I have just read will lead me to consider,

***~~I. The happy state of the Thessalonian Church—~~***

In her infant state she was highly commended for "her works of faith, and labors of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Thessalonians 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.3)." But here we view her in her more adult state: we behold,

***~~1. Her increasing faith—~~***

The Apostle testifies respecting the believers there, that their faith "had grown exceedingly," being daily:  
more vivid in its apprehensions,  
more vigorous in its actings,  
more uniform in its effects.

It is of the very nature of faith to fix on things that are invisible, and to make them, as it were, present to the soul. And in this their faith had evinced its growth, in that it had enabled them to see, almost as with their bodily eyes, the Savior whom they loved, enthroned above all powers and principalities, invested with a fullness of all spiritual gifts, ordering all things both in Heaven and earth, and, by his prevailing intercession at the right hand of God, securing to his believing people all the blessings of grace and glory.

They further saw, as from Mount Pisgah, the land of which they were before long to take possession: the thrones, the crowns, the harps of gold, all prepared and made ready for them, against the time appointed for their complete possession of their inheritance. Of these things they had some view at first, just as a man has of the skies on a cloudy night: but now, as when through a pure unclouded atmosphere, a man beholds the vast canopy of Heaven studded in every part with stars more brilliant than the brightest gem; so now their view of Christ, and of all the inconceivable glories of redeeming love, was clear and full. A corresponding energy too, was felt through all the powers of their souls, accompanied with a fixed determination of heart to live for Him who lived and died for them.

***~~2. Her abounding love—~~***

This was no less remarkable. In almost every Church, partly from a diversity of views and interests, and partly from the infirmity of our common nature, there are some comparative alienations of heart, if not some actual disagreements. But here "the love of every one of them all towards each other abounded." One spirit pervaded the whole body: and time, instead of giving occasion to the enemy to foment differences, had only cemented and confirmed their mutual affection. In this they showed how much they were grown in grace, seeing that they were so greatly assimilated to the image of their God, whose name and nature is love. Happy, happy people, where "the unity of the Spirit was so perseveringly kept in the bond of peace!"

***~~3. The invincible firmness of her perseverance—~~***

Great had been their trials from the very beginning, 1 Thessalonians 1:6; and though we know but little of particulars, we are assured in general, that the persecutions which they experienced from their own countrymen were of the most cruel and bitter kind, [1 Thessalonians 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.14-15). But were they intimidated? No, "they held fast the profession of their faith without wavering:" they "were in nothing terrified by their adversaries:" "they had respect unto the recompense of the reward;" and took joyfully the afflictions with which they were visited, knowing that they had in Heaven enough to compensate for all. They even "gloried in the cross of Christ," and "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to bear it for his sake."

What an enviable state was this! But, that we may form a right estimate of this state, let us consider,

***~~II. In what light the Apostle viewed it—~~***

He knew not to give flattering words to any man: yet he could not but declare that he regarded their state as a fit subject,

***~~1. Of thanksgiving to God—~~***

God was the author of the grace they first received: and he was the giver also of all the improvement they had made of it. "Of him, and him alone, was all their fruit found." To him therefore the Apostle gave the glory, "as it was fit" he should, and as he found himself "bound" to do.

The creation of the material world was his: nor was the new creation of their souls at all less the work of his hands. True, he made use of the will of men: but he first of all implanted that will in them, and then made use of it for the accomplishment of his own most gracious purposes. From first to last "he gave them both to will and to do of his good pleasure," being alike "the author and the finisher" of all.

Thus then should we also do for all that is good, whether in ourselves, or others. We would acknowledge him in it, and glorify him for it, and confess, in relation to it all, that "by the grace of God we are what we are!"

***~~2. Of commendation in the Church—~~***

"He gloried of them" in the different Churches where he ministered: for he not only found pleasure in speaking well of them, but he thought it of great utility to the Church of God to hear of the proficiency which others had made; inasmuch as it would stimulate them also to greater exertions, and encourage them to expect greater measures of divine grace, in order to their own more exalted proficiency.

This was the case with respect to the Corinthian Church. Paul boasted of them to the Churches in Macedonia, that Achaia had shown extraordinary readiness in providing for the poor saints in Judea; and, in speaking of this to the Corinthians, he says, "Your zeal has provoked very many, [2 Corinthians 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.2)."

And so should it be with us. When we look at Prophets and Apostles, we are apt to think that it would be presumptuous to hope for such grace as they possessed: but when we see common individuals, or whole churches, far exalted above us in everything that is good, we should be ashamed, and never cease to emulate and rival their attainments.

***~~3. Of consolation to themselves—~~***

These graces, exercised under such peculiar circumstances, were sufficient to demonstrate, that there must be a future state of retribution, where the present inequalities of the Divine procedure would be rectified: they were an evidence too that in that day "they would be counted worthy of that kingdom for which they suffered such things." It could not fail, but that in that day a suitable recompense would be given both to themselves and their oppressors: to those "who caused their tribulation, trouble," proportioned to the trouble they had occasioned: but "to those who had endured the trouble, rest," even everlasting rest in the bosom of their God, "with all the Prophets and Apostles" who had endured the same things before them.

Now to know this, must be an exceeding great consolation to them under their multiplied afflictions: and therefore he could not but declare to them, that, if they had, on the one hand, so much reason to complain, they had, on the other hand, abundantly more reason to rejoice; since they had, even in these very afflictions, an evidence of their fitness for glory, and a pledge that in due season it would be conferred upon them.

To us also will this account of them be profitable, if we duly consider,

***~~III. What lessons we should learn from it—~~***

Two things it may well teach us:

***~~1. That opposition, however formidable it may be, is no excuse for our turning back from God—~~***

What are *our*persecutions, in comparison with those which *they*endured? Yet they were "steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." Should we then be intimidated? Should we hesitate whom to obey, or what course to follow? No; we would take up our cross cheerfully; and having counted the cost, would be content to pay it.

The stony-ground hearer, when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, may well draw back, because he has no root in him: but the true disciple will go with his life in his hand, and be willing not only to make minor sacrifices, but even to lay down his life for Christ's sake.

We must not imagine that such a line of conduct was necessary for the primitive Christians only: it is equally necessary for Christians in every age: and "he who loves his life shall lose it; and he alone who is willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, shall find it unto life eternal."

***~~2. That whatever proficiency we have made in the Divine life, we should still press forward for higher attainments—~~***

Certainly the proficiency of the Thessalonians was very eminent, even in the earlier state of their progress; for even then "they were examples to all believers, both in Macedonia and Achaia." But they had not rested in their attainments: they had pressed forward for the highest possible degrees of grace: and through mercy they had attained a most uncommon eminence in the divine life.

So we, even if we had advanced as far as Paul himself, should, like him, "forget all that was behind, and reach forward to that which was before, and press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!" We should aspire after a perfect resemblance to our Savior's image; and seek, if possible, so to be poured into the mold of the Gospel, as to have every lineament of our character conformed to it. We should think nothing attained, as long as anything remained to be attained. We should seek to "grow up into Christ in all things, as our Head," and to "be changed into his image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

***~~Application~~***

***~~1. How different from the Thessalonian Church are the generality of those who call themselves Christians!~~***

Many have heard the Gospel to little purpose; or rather, "our entering in unto them has been altogether in vain, [1 Thessalonians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.1)." If we look for their works of *faith*, and labors of *love*, and patience of *hope*, as evidences that the word has come to them with power, we find no more than others have who never heard the Gospel at all.

As to a visible growth in these things, there is no sign of it: they have continued from the beginning even to the present hour nearly the same persons, perfectly satisfied with themselves, and not less unconscious of the need of any change, than unconcerned about it.

Let not such persons account themselves Christians indeed; or imagine that they can be thought worthy of that kingdom for which they have never suffered, never labored, never cared. To such persons the conduct of the Thessalonians, if exhibited before their eyes, would be rather an object of derision, than of admiration and love: and consequently they have in themselves "a manifest token," that they have nothing to expect at God's hands, but everlasting destruction.

I entreat you, brethren, consider that in the day of judgment the righteousness of God will be so visibly displayed, as to constrain the whole assembled universe to acknowledge it, as well in those who are saved, as in those who perish. How it can be displayed in the salvation of such as you, you judge. Righteousness would find no plea for rewarding you, no justification in your acquittal: for if God is just, there must be a difference put between those who have served him, and those who have served him not—a difference, which may well make every one of you to tremble.

***~~2. How diligently should the most exalted among you press forward in your heavenly course!~~***

There is room enough for improvement in every believer. Think, beloved, how much more strong and operative your *faith*might be; how much more ardent and influential your *love*; how much more firm and patient your *hope*. You know but little of yourselves, if you are not daily mourning over your short-comings and defects. Let all of you then, without exception, seek to "grow in grace:" if you are "children," seek to become "young men." If you are "young men," seek to become "fathers in Christ." If you are fathers, still seek to become more and more like to Christ, until you "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

If, as is probable, your zeal will provoke the greater opposition against you, welcome it, as rendering you more like to Him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and suffered even unto death. So will your fitness for Heaven daily increase, and be more fully recognized by your God and Savior in the last day: and you need never fear but that the recompense which he will bestow, will amply compensate for all that you can do or suffer in this valley of tears!

***~~#2211~~***

***~~CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 1:6-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.6-10)~~***

"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

WE cannot behold the state of the world around us, but we must feel a need of some future day of retribution. We see the holiest and best of men, men "of whom the world is not worthy," hated, reviled, persecuted; while their proud oppressors exult in their tyranny, and glory in their shame. Can it be imagined that God will never recompense the fidelity of his servants, or notice the impiety of his enemies? Shall true religion always suffer? Shall iniquity always triumph? It cannot be. The very existence of such enormities is "a manifest proof," or demonstration, that there will be a "righteous judgment of God," wherein he will show it to be "a righteous thing with him to recompense trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled." The mention of this period is introduced by the Apostle in this very view: and, to impress the thought more powerfully on our minds, he describes, in most energetic terms, the manner in which our Lord will come to judgment, and the ends for which he will come. Let us consider,

***~~I. The manner in which our Lord will come to judgment—~~***

This, though solemn and instructive, must not occupy much of our attention at this time, because of the superior importance of the latter part of our subject. "The Lord Jesus" is the person that is "ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and dead, [Acts 17:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.31)." He is at present in Heaven, where he ascended from Mount Olivet, and "where he will continue until the time of the restitution of all things, [Acts 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 3.21);" but at the appointed time he "will be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire!"

When he first came into the world, his advent was obscure; but at his second coming it will be exceeding glorious. He will be attended with an innumerable host of angels, who, on account of their inconceivable strength and power, are called "mighty;" and who are represented as "his" angels, because they were created by him, and are continually employed in his service. At the day of judgment in particular they will be actively engaged, in separating the righteous from the wicked [Matthew 13:49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.49)," in "binding up, as it were, the wicked in bundles to cast them into the fire" of Hell, [Matthew 13:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.30); [Matthew 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.39), and in "gathering together the elect, [Matthew 24:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.31)," in order to their more complete enjoyment of the glory prepared for them.

The majesty of his appearance will be greatly increased by his being surrounded with "flaming fire." When formerly he descended on Mount Sinai, "the whole mountain burned with fire," in so awful a manner, that the whole nation of Israel, and even "Moses himself, exceedingly trembled and quaked, [Exodus 19:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.16); [Exodus 19:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.18) with [Hebrews 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.21)." But on his future descent from Heaven, "his throne will be like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire; and a fiery stream will issue and come forth from before him, [Daniel 7:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.9-10)." At the same time the earth itself also shall be on fire, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the whole globe whereon we live shall burst forth in one vast and universal conflagration! [2 Peter 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.10).

How terrible this scene will be, no words can express, no imagination can conceive: but that day is justly characterized as "the great and terrible day of the Lord! [Joel 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.11); [Joel 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Joel 2.31)."

This description is doubly awful as connected with,

***~~II. The ends of his coming—~~***

These are:

***~~1. The punishment of the wicked—~~***

It is commonly thought, that If we are moral in our conduct, we need not trouble ourselves about religious principles. But whom will the Lord punish in that day? The immoral and profane? Yes, doubtless: but shall these be the only monuments of his indignation? No! "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

In these words are comprehended not only the idolatrous Gentiles, and the unbelieving Jews, but all among ourselves also who do not experimentally *know*God, and unreservedly *obey*the Gospel. Theoretical knowledge, or hypocritical profession, will be of no avail: we must feel our obligation to God as our Benefactor, our duty towards him as our Governor, and our dependence on him as our Father and our Friend. We must, moreover, embrace the salvation which he has offered us in the Gospel, trusting solely in the merit of our Redeemer's blood, living wholly on the fullness that is treasured up for us in him, and devoting ourselves entirely to him, as his redeemed people.

Would to God this point were sufficiently considered! Brethren, mark attentively the declaration in the text, and then see what becomes of those presumptuous opinions which are so confidently asserted, and so generally received:

See whether morality is all that is needed to enter Heaven.

See whether you are at liberty to disregard the Gospel.

See whether the principles of Christianity are of so little consequence, that you may be saved without them.

See whether that obedience to the Gospel, which is derided as fanaticism, be a matter of indifference, or deserving of the odium cast upon it.

Ah! be assured that, whatever the ungodly world may say or think, all those who do not truly know God, and cordially obey the Gospel, shall perish for ever! [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17).

Nor let it be thought that the punishment of such persons shall be light, or of short duration. The Apostle enlarges on the idea, in order to fix it more deeply in our minds. Such persons shall be banished "from the presence of the Lord," and from all the bright displays of "his power and glory." Nor shall they merely suffer this loss (though that were inexpressibly dreadful,) they shall also be exposed to pain and anguish, such as God alone can inflict, and such as would destroy their very existence, if the same power that inflicted it, did not uphold them under it. To this punishment there shall be no mitigation, no intermission, no end: it will be "everlasting." They will have "no rest day or night; and the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever! [Revelation 14:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.11)." The Judge himself will pronounce this sentence on them, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! [Matthew 25:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.41). [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48)."

***~~2. The salvation of the righteous—~~***

As the honor of God is pledged for the condemnation of the wicked, so is it also involved in the happiness of the righteous. But who are the righteous? Mark the description given of them in the text: they are "the saints," and "those who believe."

Here then again let infidels and scoffers read their doom. The only people that shall be saved, are those who believe in Christ, and are sanctified by his Spirit. Let the term "Saints" or "Believers" be used as expressions of contempt: the time is coming, when those who are worthy of those names shall be held in a different estimation, and receive a juster recompense.

The Savior, at his coming, shall be "glorified and admired by them." Now he appears exceeding glorious in their eyes, even "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely! [Song of Solomon 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Song 5.10); Song of Solomon 5:16;" and now he is the one object of their love, their praise, their glorying! [Isaiah 45:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.25). [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8). In that day, how will they be filled with wonder at the sight of him!

How will they admire his *sovereign grace*, that chose them from the midst of an ungodly world!

How will they admire his *love*, that undertook to save them by his own blood!

How will they admire his *patience*, that bore with them under all their backslidings!

How will they admire his *power*, that kept them amidst so many enemies!

How will they admire his *faithfulness*, that accomplished to them so many promises!

How will they adore his *wisdom*and *goodness*, in every one of his dispensations towards them!

And how will the countless multitudes of the redeemed unite in one universal chorus, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" "Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb, forever!"

Then also will the Savior be glorified and admired in them. While they were in this world, they sinned as lights in it, and were "his epistles, known and read of all men."

But how will he be glorified in them in that day, when all *their unworthiness*shall be contrasted with *his goodness*, and the work that he has wrought in them shall fully appear! If, in beholding an intricate painting, we begin to admire the artist—then how will God be admired when all the millions of his redeemed people shall stand together, all of them as "his workmanship," transformed from the image of the devil into the very image of their God! How will:  
the virtue of his sacrifice,  
the prevalence of his intercession,  
the efficacy of his grace, and  
all the wonders of his love,  
then appear! When all, without exception, shall ascribe their salvation to him—how, I say, will he be admired in all, and glorified by all!

For this end then will he come, as well as to condemn the wicked. He will come to consummate the happiness of his saints, by revealing to them fully his own unveiled glory, and by putting upon them such a measure of his glory as their diversified capacities shall enable them to bear!

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How studious should we be to obtain the knowledge of the Gospel—~~***

It cannot be too often repeated, that our salvation depends on our "obeying the Gospel of Christ." Yes, there is the greater necessity to repeat it, because men are so riveted to the idea, that morality is all that is needed to enter Heaven. But before we allow ourselves to be thus deceived, let us contemplate the inevitable consequences of yielding to that delusion: perish we must, as sure as God is true. Read but the text, and judge for yourselves. If it is the word of man, reject it; and allow nobody to disturb your peace. But if it is the Word of God, remember that neither you nor all the world can alter it. Let the recollection of what is there spoken dwell upon your minds, until it has brought you to the foot of the cross, and "determined you to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

***~~2. How earnest should we be in diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel—~~***

If we have spoken strongly on this subject, we have done so, because we believe the declaration in the text, and are convinced that those who now deny or disregard it, will find it true to their cost. Does not then this earnestness befit us? If you were in as imminent danger with respect to your bodily life, as you are with respect to your souls—would we not be inexcusable, if we neglected to warn you, and to warn you with all earnestness? Surely, if all ministers felt the importance of these truths, they would "cry aloud, and not spare." If we had a due concern for the welfare of others, there would also be a greater readiness among us to go unto the heathen, and to show unto them the way of salvation. Would a few trials or difficulties discourage us, if we considered the benefit that would accrue to our perishing fellow-creatures, or the recompense which we ourselves would in due time receive?

Beloved brethren, let us not fear the face of man; let us not regard a few scoffs or reproaches for the Lord's sake; let us not be backward to endure hardness as good soldiers. But let us look unto the *end*of all things; when the state of all shall be fixed in perfect correspondence with their present characters and conduct, and every individual in the universe receive a just recompense.

***~~#2212~~***

***~~FITNESS FOR HEAVEN DESIRED~~***

**[2 Thessalonians 1:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.11-12)**

"With this in mind, we constantly *pray*for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We *pray*this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

VARIOUS are the offices of Christian love, but none are more valuable than that of intercession. In all its personal efforts, it communicates only such benefits as a creature can bestow: but in its applications to God in the behalf of anyone, it brings down all the blessings of grace and glory. We do not say indeed that intercession must of necessity prevail to the full extent of the blessings asked, or for every individual in whose behalf they are solicited: but they do prevail to a far greater extent than we are apt to imagine: and *we know of nothing wherein love can exercise itself so profitably, as in frequent and fervent supplications to God for the object beloved*.

Paul's love was of no common cast: in fact, it knew no bounds: the sacrifice of life itself was welcomed by him, if it might but subserve the interests of immortal souls. In his *prayers*for them, there is a richness and fullness which marked at once:  
the ardor of his mind,  
the depth of his knowledge,  
and the enlargement of his heart.

No petition he could offer seemed sufficient to express the full extent of his desires. This appears in many of his prayers: and it is abundantly evident in that which we have selected for our consideration at this time.

Three things we must distinctly notice:

***~~I. The great object which he desired in their behalf—~~***

***~~This was, that they might find acceptance with God in the day of judgment—~~***

Of that day he is speaking in the preceding context: and he declares, that a sweet "rest" in the bosom of their God will be the portion of all who have approved themselves faithful to him under all their trials. This is the "calling" of which he speaks, and which he so designates, because it is the object to which believers are called: "They are called unto God's eternal glory by Christ Jesus, [1 Peter 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.10)."

Of this calling he prays that they may "be counted worthy." The import of this expression, may be seen in the foregoing context, where it evidently refers, not to any merit in man, whereby he shall be justified before God, but to that fitness for Heaven which shall serve to illustrate and display the equity of the Judge in his final decisions. The day of judgment is appointed not altogether for the purpose of awarding to men their proper doom; (for that, in reference to the soul at least, is adjudged to every one at the instant of his death,) it is rather appointed for the displaying before the whole assembled universe the righteousness of God in his dealings with men; on which account it is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [Romans 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.5);" and the description given of that day in the preceding context particularly presents it to us in that view.

We say then, that "the being accounted worthy" of that calling refers to the fitness of the soul for the participation of it; and the petition thus expressed, must be understood to this effect: 'I pray, that in the last day you may be found to have possessed such a character, to have maintained such a conduct in this world, as shall "be an evident token of the righteous judgment of God" when he shall assign to you the everlasting possession of "his kingdom" and glory, verse 5.'

We have dwelt the more carefully on this, that we might cut off all occasion for mistake respecting the Apostle's meaning in the text, throughout every part of which he most determinately marks the whole of our salvation as altogether of grace.

Taking the petition then in this sense, we ask: Is it not such a petition as we are all concerned to offer both for ourselves and others?

Who can reflect on the solemnities of that day, who can think of the discoveries which will then be brought to light, and the unexpected sentences that will be then awarded—and not earnestly desire, both for himself and for all who are dear to him, that the sentence which God shall pass on them may be one of approbation, and not of condemnation?

I beg you, brethren, lay to heart this infinitely important subject; and never cease to pour out your souls before God, that you and yours may find acceptance before him in that solemn day.

In his further petitions for this object, he specifies,

***~~II. The means by which he expected it to be accomplished—~~***

He considers the work as altogether of grace—in its *origin*, in its *progress*, and in its *consummation*. God, in his infinite "goodness," has ordained that his people shall possess such a measure of piety, as shall render them fully fit for the enjoyment of his presence and glory in the eternal world. In reference both to the persons who shall possess it, and the measure in which they shall partake of it, he has exercised "his good pleasure," disposing of all according to his own inscrutable purposes, and the eternal counsel of his own will, [Ephesians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.5); [Ephesians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.9); [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11). This good pleasure the Apostle desired might "be fulfilled in them" by the mighty working of God's power, calling forth into activity the *faith*he had bestowed, and giving it a more transforming efficacy upon their souls.

It is in this way, and this way alone, that the divine life is carried on and perfected.

It is by the production of faith in the soul, that the soul begins to live.

It is by the exercise of that faith, that the soul is enabled to do and suffer what God requires.

It is by the augmentation of that faith, that the soul is perfected after the Divine image.

It is faith which realizes the things that are invisible to mortal eyes, and gives to futurity a present existence, [Hebrews 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.1).

Faith is the one principle in the soul, by which all its energies are called forth, and all its efforts are made effectual. The whole eleventh chapter to the Hebrews proves and illustrates this; and shows with what wisdom, as well as piety, the Apostle poured out his supplications before God.

We shall not wonder at his desiring this great object, if we notice,

***~~III. The end which he foresaw was to be accomplished by it—~~***

***~~Then "will the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in them"—~~***

Even in this world he is glorified in and by his saints, as he himself has expressly declared, [John 17:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.10). But the Apostle has respect rather to that day, wherein Christ will "come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe, verse 10." Truly he will then be glorified in them. In what bright colors will then the whole assembled universe behold the virtue of his sacrifice, and the efficacy of his grace, and his fidelity to all his promises! Of those who have been given him by the Father, not one will be lost, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12); not one will be found to have been ever "plucked out of his hands, [John 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28)." What hosannahs will resound to him from all the hosts of the redeemed, all singing, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen."

***~~Then will the saints also be "glorified in him"—~~***

Already, as members, do they participate in the glory of their Head, "in and with whom they are already sitting, as it were, in heavenly places." They may be considered also as already glorified in and with him, in that they are placed by him as a city set on a hill, and made both the salt of the earth, and the lights of a dark world.

But in that day their glory will be complete: for they shall then be "like him," even in his perfect image, and be acknowledged by him in the presence of his Father and his holy angels, as:  
his own special people,  
the purchase of his blood,  
the fruit of his travail,  
the jewels of his crown!

Then shall all that is his, be theirs: his crown, his throne, his kingdom, his glory—all will be theirs, their inalienable property, their everlasting possession!

***~~Then too will all the wonders of God's covenant, and the purposes of his grace, be unveiled and complete—~~***

All will then be seen to have been "according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ;" between whom all was concerted from eternity: "The counsel of peace," says the prophet, "was between them both, [Zechariah 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 6.13)." What wonder will not the development of these stupendous mysteries excite throughout all the regions of the blessed; and to what songs of praise will it not give rise, through the never-ending ages of eternity!

Contemplate these things, the *object*desired, the *means*by which it was to be effected, and the wonderful *ends*to be attained by it; and this prayer will be found no less instructive to the mind, than it is reviving and refreshing to the soul.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have no experience of the things here prayed for—~~***

How many are at this moment ignorant of "the work of faith," and of that "divine power" with which it operates in the soul! How many are altogether strangers to the idea of Christ being glorified in them, or their being glorified in him, or of the eternal purposes of God's grace being displayed in them! Little have such persons known of true religion: they even "need to be taught the very first principles of the oracles of God."

O brethren, the Gospel is not such a meager thing as you make it to be! The Gospel is a wonderful display of God's mercy and grace in the redemption of a ruined world: and, wherever it is received aright, it will fill the soul with such views and such desires as are expressed in our text. Do not, I beseech you, continue ignorant of these things: for, if you know them not, or feel not their influence, how shall you stand accepted at the judgment-seat of Christ? It will be too late to commence your inquiries then: they must be begun now: yes, you must now glorify Christ by a life of faith in this world, if ever you are to be glorified with him in the world to come.

***~~2. Those whose prayers and intercessions accord with those of the holy Apostle—~~***

Doubtless there are many among you whose hearts go forth with the petitions in our text; and who shall ultimately experience all that our text unfolds. But, in order to this desirable end, we recommend to all to consider the strictness of the scrutiny at that day. Truly, the Judge, as he himself tells us, has "eyes like a flame of fire:" and he "tests the very hearts and thoughts, in order to give to every man according to his works, [Revelation 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.18); [Revelation 2:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.23)."

It will be to little purpose to be "accounted worthy" by your fellow-creatures, if you are not so accounted by your God: and it must not be forgotten, that there are many who "have a name to live, while" yet, in reality, "they are dead." O dread lest that would prove your state at the last! Be earnest with God in prayer, that he would "fulfill in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Be satisfied with nothing short of this. Aspire after the highest possible attainments, that the Lord Jesus Christ may even now be glorified in you, and that your fitness for his glory may be conspicuous in the eyes of all. So shall your intercessions prevail for others also; and in that great day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, you shall shine forth as the sun in the firmament for ever and ever!

***~~#2213~~***

***~~PROGRESS OF UNBELIEF~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.11-12)~~***

"For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie, and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

THE Apostles, even as our Lord himself had done, spoke of the day of judgment as near at hand. To individual souls it was so; because *at the instant of our death our state is irrevocably and eternally fixed*.

But, as it respects the world at large, it was, and still is, far distant; there being many prophecies yet to be accomplished, previous to its arrival. The Thessalonian converts, interpreting too literally some expressions in Paul's former epistle, had formed an expectation that the day of judgment was almost instantly to appear: the Apostle therefore, in this epistle, rectifies the mistake; and informs them that before that time there would be a most grievous apostasy in the Church, which would outcome most fatally to the souls of all who would bear a part in it. It would originate in unbelief, and terminate in perdition.

The words which I have just read will lead me to trace the progress of unbelief from its commencement in the rejection of the Gospel, to its termination in the destruction of the soul.

When allowed to prevail, unbelief leads to:

***~~I. A willful rejection of God's mercy in Christ—~~***

***~~It is not from a lack of evidence that men reject the Gospel—~~***

There is in the Gospel evidence enough to satisfy any candid inquirer. But men have an aversion to the truth. The Gospel requires of them:  
a humiliation of soul,  
a renunciation of self-dependence,  
and a sanctity of heart and life  
—to which they are utterly averse.  
"They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, [John 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.19)."

***~~Their rejection of it arises altogether from "an evil heart of unbelief, [Hebrews 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.12)."~~***

The Gospel offers salvation, "salvation with eternal glory." But, however desirous men may be of happiness, they will not accept it on the terms proposed. The truth is offensive:  
to their pride,  
to their worldliness, and  
to their sensual inclinations.

Therefore they hate it and will not receive it, even though, "if received in the love of it, it would save them, verse 10."

As the just punishment of this unfaithfulness, they are often left to experience:

***~~II. God giving them up to judicial blindness—~~***

***~~Men, from love of error, often persuade themselves that it is truth—~~***

There are no persons more confident than those who reject the Gospel. Some will pour contempt upon it, as foolishness. Others will make it a stumbling-block, as opposing some opinions which they are determined to maintain. And so resolutely will both the one and the other exclude all light from their minds, that they will not only hold fast their delusions, but will really "believe their own lie".

***~~To this delusion God himself will often "give them up"—~~***

"His Spirit shall not always strive with man." Both under the Jewish and Christian dispensation, "he has given over to a reprobate mind" those who shut their eyes against the truth, and "did not like to retain him in their knowledge, [Psalm 81:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.11-12). [Romans 1:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.28). [John 12:39-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 12.39-40)." Nor can there be anything more just, than that, if we determinately "join ourselves to idols," he would say, "Let them alone! [Hosea 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 4.17)."

This sentence once passed, the obstinate unbeliever suffers:

***~~III. A final abandonment to everlasting damnation—~~***

***~~The very thought of damnation is terrible in the extreme—~~***

Who can contemplate what is implied in that judgment and its consequent punishment, and not tremble at it?

**Yet, to that** **punishment shall the unbeliever be finally consigned—**

Plainly is this declared, "Whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for *God's wrath*remains on him! [John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.36)," and our blessed Lord commanded all his servants to declare it to the whole world, [Mark 16:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.16). In truth, this is no other than the necessary consequence of unbelief: for the Gospel is the only remedy for the salvation of fallen man; and those who reject it have no other alternative than this. There is no medium between the salvation of the soul and its eternal condemnation. Those who through "love of unrighteousness," disregard the one, must inevitably and eternally endure the other.

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

***~~1. What is your disposition towards the Gospel?~~***

Do not too hastily conclude that you love it; for if you love it, you cannot but hate and abhor every kind of unrighteousness; yes, and Christ himself must be precious to your souls. "Examine yourselves" by such tests as these, before you persuade yourselves "that you are in the faith," and remember, that there is nothing more fatal, or indeed more common, than an ungrounded hope of Heaven. Many are "given over to a strong delusion; and so believe their own lie," that they will never admit a fear of damnation, until they are left to endure it without a remedy!

***~~2. What are your prospects in the eternal world?~~***

If those who reject the Gospel are given over to damnation, need I say: what is the happy state of those who receive the Gospel? But, if I had the tongue of an angel, I could not adequately declare what salvation is. This however I can declare, that it is yours, it is yours infallibly, if you believe in Christ, and cast yourselves altogether on him. Nothing have you to fear, if He is yours: for "in him you have both righteousness and strength;" righteousness, to justify you before God; and strength, to fulfill his holy will. Look then to the Savior, and you may regard Heaven as yours. Look to the Savior; and, as from Pisgah's top, you may survey the promised land, and live in the sweet anticipation of all its blessedness and glory!

***~~#2214~~***

***~~THE SALVATION OF MEN TRACED TO ITS PROPER SOURCE~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14)~~***

"But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As much as the heart of man rises against the doctrine of election, it must be confessed that it occurs very frequently in the Holy Scriptures; and therefore it ought not to be passed over in silence: and, if the advocates of that doctrine would be contented to state it as the Holy Scriptures state it, and to give it only that measure of prominence which it bears in the inspired writings, I cannot but think that much of the prejudice against it would subside. It is true, that *nothing but deep humility of mind can ever lead a man so to acquiesce in the doctrine of election as to approve of it in his soul, and to adorn it in his life*. But where that humility exists, as it did in the Apostle Paul, the doctrine will be most grateful to the soul, and will form a ground of most sincere praise to Almighty God.

The Apostle is contrasting the state of the Thessalonians with that of many who would, at a future period, arise in the Church, whose presumption would know no bounds, and who, for their impiety, would be given over by God to final impenitence. While those transgressors were doomed by God to everlasting misery, the Thessalonian converts were ordained to eternal life, having been from the beginning *chosen*by God to salvation, and having been in time *effectually called*to the enjoyment of it through the ministry of that Gospel which the Apostle preached. For them therefore he gives thanks, as indeed he was bound to do, since it was a mercy that called for the most devout praises and thanksgivings, from themselves and from all others in their behalf.

The grounds of his thanksgiving are:

***~~I. Their election of God to the blessings of salvation—~~***

In his thanksgiving Paul distinctly specifies:

***~~1. The end to which they were elected—~~***

It was "salvation," even "the salvation that was in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, [2 Timothy 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.10)." It was not to the means of salvation merely; for many enjoyed the means of salvation, on whose behalf he could not give thanks, yes, on whose account "he had continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart:" it was to salvation itself, with all its inconceivable and everlasting blessings that they were chosen! 1 Thessalonians 5:9; and this too, not merely from the beginning of the period when the Gospel was preached to them, or that they began to listen to it, but "from before the foundation of the world, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4). [2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)."

From hence it appears, that there is, and ever has been, "a remnant according to the election of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5)," unknown indeed to man, but known to God, and *from all eternity given by him to his Son, to be the purchase of his blood, and the partakers of his glory!*[John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6); [John 17:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.9-10); [John 17:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.22); [John 17:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.24).

***~~2. The means by which that end is to be attained—~~***

The great argument against the doctrine of election is, that if we are elect, we shall be saved, even though we live in all manner of sin; and that if we are not elect, we cannot be saved, even though we live the most holy and blameless life. But that argument, especially the former part of it, is most effectually answered; for God has ordained the *means*as well as the *end*: and he has ordained the end no otherwise than by and through the appointed means.

God cannot save a man without holiness, because he has declared he will not; and "he cannot lie," "he cannot deny himself:" and therefore to expect to attain salvation in any other way than that which is here ordained, is to expect from God what he has never promised, and what, so far from having ever ordained, he has ordained shall never come to pass: for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

God had chosen them to salvation "through sanctification of the Spirit." Sanctification is necessary for the enjoyment of Heaven. Heaven would afford no happiness to an unsanctified soul. The presence of a holy God would inspire nothing but terror: and an unintermitted engagement in holy exercises would be an insupportable burden to one who had no taste for them. God therefore has connected sanctification with salvation, in order that the soul on its exaltation to glory may possess a fitness for the enjoyment of it. And, that his people may be sanctified he sends down his Holy Spirit into their souls; and, by the same power whereby he raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, raises them from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. Thus by transforming them into his own image, he fits them for his glory.

Further; he had chosen them to salvation "through a belief of the truth." *It is by faith, and by faith alone, that we apprehend the blessings of salvation*.

By faith we lay hold on the promises of God.

By faith we become united to Christ.

By faith we bring down from Christ all those supplies of grace which are necessary for us in this state of warfare.

We would fall and perish instantly, if we were not armed with "faith, as our shield;" and "hope, as our helmet;" and "the word, as the sword," whereby the Spirit of God enables us to inflict a deadly wound on our enemies. It was by holding fast the written word, that Jesus triumphed over Satan in the wilderness: and by a constant reliance on the word are we also to overcome him. Hence God had ordained for them, as he has for all his people, that they shall attain salvation "through belief of the truth."

Thus are faith and holiness inseparably connected with salvation; and to them are men elected, as much as to salvation itself: so that to hope for Heaven in any other way than through a perseverance in these, is an unwarrantable presumption, and will only deceive our own souls.

While the Apostle traces thus all the blessings of salvation to God's electing love, as their true and only source, he reminds his Thessalonian converts of:

***~~II. Their effectual calling by his ministry to a participation of them—~~***

***~~It is by the word that God imparts his blessings to the souls of men—~~***

It is by the word that God acts. As far as his providence concurs in the salvation of men, it is only in subserviency to the word, [Acts 8:26-40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.26-40); [Acts 9:1-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1-24). The word is "the rod of his strength," by which all the wonders of his grace are wrought. Miracles gave credibility to the testimony which Christ and his Apostles bore: but it was the testimony itself, as applied by the Holy Spirit to the soul, that wrought effectually upon the hearts of men. And in all ages it is the same word, either read or preached, that is effectual to convert them to God. Hence the Apostle reminds the Thessalonians that, notwithstanding they were from eternity chosen of God to salvation, they were "called" to the possession of it through the ministry of the Gospel which he had preached unto them.

***~~Wherever that word is received aright, it will operate effectually to the desired end—~~***

Thus the word had wrought on the Thessalonians: it had "turned them from idols to serve the living God, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5); 1 Thessalonians 1:9." And thus it will work on all who cordially embrace it, [Colossians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.6).

"It is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)."

"It is mighty to the pulling down of all the strongholds of sin and Satan, [2 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4)."

"It invariably accomplishes that which God has pleased, and prospers in the thing whereunto he has sent it, [Isaiah 55:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-11)."

It is the instrument whereby God fulfills his eternal counsels in the conversion of men. When the time fixed by him for the bringing home of his wandering sheep is arrived, "he apprehends them" by his word, [Philippians 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.12), and brings them home with power to his fold, constraining them by his grace, and "making them willing in the day of his power, [Psalm 110:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 110.3)."

This is his invariable process towards them: "Whom he has predestined, those he first calls, and then justifies, and then glorifies, [Romans 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.30);" he brings them not to the profession of the Gospel merely, but "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have never yet obeyed "the Gospel call"—~~***

Who these are, may be easily ascertained: they have been "called" to a "belief of the truth," even such a belief as would lead them to rely entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, "and to the sanctification of the Spirit," even such a sanctification as would progressively transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness: and, if you have not these marks upon you—you are the persons whom I now address.

Say not, 'I am not of God's elect, and therefore I cannot help myself.' No! you shall not thus cast the blame of your condemnation upon God. Who has told you that you are not of God's elect? Who has searched the book of God's decrees, or been told by God that your name is not there? Then you have no right whatever to conclude that you are not elect of God, or to make his decrees any excuse for continuance in sin. On the contrary, I am authorized by Almighty God to declare, that "he is not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance and live! [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)." "He would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, [1 Timothy 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.4)." He even confirms this truth with an oath: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)."

The truth is, as our Lord informs us, "You will not come unto me," says he, "that you might have life." "him who would come unto me I would never cast out." Know then that the fault is yours, and not God's. Our Lord complains over you, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not!" Yes, whatever excuses you may now make from the doctrine of election, your mouths shall be stopped in the day of judgment: "I would, but you would not."

Do not reply that until God has given you his grace, you cannot come to Christ: for, if you would only attempt in faith to stretch out your withered hand, in the very attempt he would enable you to do it! [Matthew 12:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.13). Now then, in the name of Almighty God, I call you to him, and invite you to receive freely at his hands all the blessings of salvation, [Isaiah 55:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1-3) And, if you will not obey the call, your blood shall be upon your own heads!

***~~2. Those who through grace have obeyed the call—~~***

Remember, brethren, "who it is that has made you to differ, [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)." You are "beloved of the Lord." "You have not chosen him; but he has chosen you, and ordained that you would go and bring forth fruit; and that your fruit would remain, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16)." "You love him because he first loved you, [1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.19)." "He loved you with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn you, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3)." "He loved you," not for any good that he either saw, or foresaw, in you; but simply of his own will, "because he would love you, [Deuteronomy 7:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.7-8)." Say then, whether you have not reason to thank your God; or rather, whether your every breath should not be an effusion of praise!

But forget not that the path by which alone you can arrive at your desired home is that of faith and holiness. This is the king's "highway, [Isaiah 35:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.8)," by a patient continuance in which you are to "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Hold fast then the faith without wavering;" and pray constantly to God for fresh "supplies of his Spirit," that you may be sanctified throughout, and "be changed into his image from grace to grace, and from glory to glory." Meditate deeply and continually on his word, and treasure it up in your hearts, that you may be "sanctified by the truth, [John 17:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.17);" and ever remember, that to the very last it is by the word that the Lord Jesus Christ will perfect his good work within you, [Ephesians 5:25-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.25-27).

Thus, while "those who loved unrighteousness, and were therefore given over to a delusion to believe a lie," are left to the "damnation" which their own sins have merited, verse 10-12, you shall have all the purposes of God's electing love completed in you, and shall spend an eternity in singing praises "to Him who loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and has made you kings and priests unto your God for ever and ever! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."

***~~#2215~~***

***~~GOD OUR BENEFACTOR~~***

**[2 Thessalonians 2:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.16-17)**

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

IN reading the epistles of Paul, we cannot but be struck with the devout and grateful manner in which he introduces, at all times, the mention of Jehovah's name. He almost invariably combines with it some of those perfections which God has displayed in the Gospel of his Son, and expatiates upon them, either as the theme of his adoring gratitude, or as the foundation of all his hopes. And frequently does he unite the Lord Jesus Christ with the Father, as equally entitled to our adoration with the Father himself, and equally deserving our entire confidence. In the passage before us, both these things are conspicuous: and, that we may bring them clearly before you, we shall endeavor to show:

***~~I. What a Benefactor we have—~~***

***~~Hear what "God, even our Father, has done for us"—~~***

Desperate, even as the state of the fallen angels, was the state of man, through the fall of Adam. But God, "who passed by the angels that sinned," was pleased, of his unbounded mercy and grace, to make provision for the recovery of man, by the gift of his only-begotten Son, to die in his place and stead. In truth, "he loved us with an everlasting love, [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3);" and, in due season, called us by his grace, to the knowledge of his dear Son, and enabled us to believe in him; and thus "gave us a good hope" of re-possessing the inheritance which we had forfeited, [1 Peter 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3-4).

O what "consolation" does this afford us! Truly, it is "strong consolation [Hebrews 6:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.18)," yes, and "everlasting consolation" also: for not only will it abide with us under all possible afflictions: but, when all the things of time and sense shall have passed away, and been utterly forgotten, it shall remain for ever, with unabated vigor, on our souls.

***~~But in all this the Lord Jesus Christ himself has also borne his part—~~***

He willingly undertook our cause; and never ceased from his labors, until he could say, "It is finished!" Truly he "loved us, and gave himself for us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20);" and, by the operations of his grace upon our souls, and his promises that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands," he has "made us to abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit, and has filled us with all joy and peace in believing, [Romans 15:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.13)." While, therefore, we make our acknowledgments to God the Father, we must with equal gratitude trace all our blessings to his only dear Son, by whose transcendent merits alone, and through whose almighty agency, they all flow down unto us.

In this intercessory prayer to our heavenly Benefactor, we see,

***~~II. What benefits we may yet further hope for at his hands—~~***

We are yet exposed to many trials, and to great dangers; and shall be so, as long as we continue in the body. But "God will never leave us nor forsake us." On the contrary, his past benefits are a pledge of future blessings, to the utmost extent of our necessities. He will, under all the circumstances that can ever occur, impart to us:

***~~1. Comfort—~~***

We carry about with us, and shall to our dying hour be oppressed with, a body of sin and death; such as made Paul himself to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am!" Nor can we hope to be freed from the assaults of Satan, even such as Paul complained of, when, with repeated cries, he implored the removal of "the thorn in his flesh," which so sorely pained him. But the same "God who comforted him will comfort us with similar consolations;" and, "if our afflictions abound as his did, will make our consolations to abound also, [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.3-5)." And so effectual shall these be, that we shall be enabled to "glory in our tribulations, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3)," and even to "take pleasure in our infirmities and distresses, 2 Corinthians 12:10."

***~~2. Stability—~~***

To serve the Lord with steadfastness and fidelity, in the midst of all the difficulties which we have to encounter, is no easy matter. But "God is able to hold us up: and we shall be upheld, [Romans 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.4)," if we simply rely on him. Yes, "God is faithful to his promises; and he will establish us, and keep us from evil, [Romans 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.3);" and enable us to maintain our integrity before him, both in word and deed.

And here let me observe, that it is not from "God the Father" only that we may hope to obtain these benefits, but from the Lord Jesus Christ also, whom the Apostle frequently unites with the Father, as equally:  
the object of our worship,  
the source of our blessings,  
the rock of our dependence.  
[Ephesians 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.23). [1 Thessalonians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.11).

If we "are strong, it must be in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)." "His grace," under whatever circumstances, "shall be sufficient for us, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9);" and if we trust in him, we may confidently say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

In all your addresses, whether for yourselves or others, at the throne of grace, look to God,

***~~1. With adoring gratitude—~~***

It is not possible that you would be in any state, wherein this frame of mind is not called for: And think what boldness the recollection of God's undeserved love and unbounded mercies will give you, in your addresses to him: Truly, if you had but the slightest sense of what God has already done for you, you could not but find your hearts enlarged towards him; and would "open your mouths wide," whenever you came into his presence.

***~~2. With humble confidence—~~***

See how God the Father, and God the Son, and I may add too, God the Holy Spirit, have concurred in all that has already been given unto you. For, whether the Father or the Son confers the benefit, it is by the Holy Spirit that it is imparted to you: And with such benefactors, each pledged to the other, by an everlasting covenant, to bestow on you whatever shall most conduce to your welfare, what can you lack? Truly, you shall lack nothing that is good. Only cast all your care on your reconciled God in Christ Jesus, and you shall find, to your comfort, that "he is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy! Jude verse 24."

***~~#2216~~***

***~~THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 3:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.1)~~***

"Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you."

THE light of the material sun is hailed and welcomed by every nation under Heaven: but how much more is the light of the Sun of Righteousness to be desired! If the one is necessary for our comfort in this life, the other is necessary to guide us in the way to life eternal. Hence the Apostle not only labored to spread the Gospel himself, but endeavored to interest all the Lord's people in its behalf; that by their united supplications they might obtain from God whatever would conduce to its establishment in the world.

In this request of his we see,

***~~I. What we would desire for the Word of God—~~***

***~~1. "That the message of the Lord may spread rapidly"—~~***

It is surprising that any would be averse to the circulation of the Scriptures; or would be jealous of the Scriptures, unless accompanied with human compositions to forestall and determine the judgment of the reader. What is this but to supersede the use of that judgment which God requires us to exercise? Yes, what is this, but to return to popery? The Papists locked up the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and forbade the laity to read them; and sent forth among the people small portions of them only, and counteracted those portions by the most erroneous comments and grossest superstitions. Far be such conduct from Protestants: freely have we received, and freely we would give: nor would we relax our efforts to disseminate the Scriptures, until every human being shall have them in his possession, and be enabled to read in his own native language the wonderful works of God. See [Psalm 19:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 19.4) and [Romans 10:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.18).

***~~2. That it would be honored—~~***

What is implied in this expression, we are at no loss to determine. We have only to see how it was honored "with them," that is the Thessalonian converts, and we have the perfect model of its being honored among ourselves.

In two ways is the Word of God honored:  
  first, in the conversion of sinners;  
  next, in the edification of saints.

How the Gospel wrought to the conversion of the Thessalonians, we are distinctly informed: they received it, "not as the word of man, but as the Word of God:" it "came to them, not in word only, but in power:" and by it "they were turned from idols to serve the living God, [1 Thessalonians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.5); [1 Thessalonians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.9); [1 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.13)." Similar effects were produced by it in other churches, [Acts 6:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 6.7); [Acts 19:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 19.20). And who must not confess that the word is honored when such wonders are wrought by it? But that it is so, is expressly affirmed by the voice of inspiration itself, [Acts 13:48-49](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.48-49).

Nor was the Gospel less powerful for their continued edification. This was greatly advanced among them, as the Apostle himself testified, [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4); [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14). Yet nothing but the pure Word of God was, or could be, effectual for this end. 1 Peter 2:2. As the rod of Moses wrought all those miracles in Egypt and the wilderness, so was the Gospel "the rod of God's strength:" and in the production of such miraculous events, both the word itself, and God in it, were greatly honored, [Acts 21:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.19-20). Nor is it possible to see such effects yet produced in the hearts and lives of men, without acknowledging, that "he who has wrought them to the self-same thing is God, [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5)."

Let us next inquire,

***~~II. How that desire is to be obtained—~~***

The Apostle speaks of himself and all his fellow-laborers, as instruments whereby the Gospel was propagated throughout the world. And the same is true of ministers in all succeeding ages, even to the present day: they are God's ambassadors to a rebellious world. But the prayers of God's people are no less necessary than the efforts of his ministers: for it is God alone who can give effect to any exertions; and it is prayer alone that can interest him in our behalf.

It is God alone who can raise up ministers, or fit them for the work, [Romans 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.15) and [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.15-16); [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5). Hence we are directed to "pray that God would send forth laborers into his harvest field, [Matthew 9:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 9.38). [Ephesians 4:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.12-13)."

It is God alone who can open places for them to labor in. Men universally of themselves reject the Gospel: but when God opens a door for his servants, no attempts of his enemies can shut it, [Acts 18:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 18.10-11). 1 Corinthians 16:9 and [Revelation 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.8). It is God alone who can give success to their endeavors. That same divine power, which first opened the understandings of the Apostles, must open the hearts of others to attend to them, [Luke 24:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.45) with [Acts 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 16.14). And then only does the word effect any radical change in men, when it comes "in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power, [1 Corinthians 2:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.4-5); [1 Corinthians 3:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.5-7)."

Hence Paul so earnestly entreated the prayers of the Thessalonian Church, and yet more earnestly the intercessions of the saints at home, [Romans 15:30-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.30-32). God has in mercy made his servants and his people mutually dependent on each other: the people being quickened by the exertions of their ministers; and ministers being strengthened by the prayers of their people: and thus the builders and the building are advanced together, and all are edified in love.

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

***~~1. A word of admonition—~~***

Many profess a reverence for the Bible, and even display a zeal for conveying the Holy Scriptures to heathen lands, who yet make but little use of it for themselves. But this zeal for the good of others will never be admitted as a substitute for personal religion. Many of the religious world also, who study the Bible and profess to love the Gospel of Christ, are far from adorning that Gospel by holy tempers, and by heavenly lives. Let such persons look well to themselves; for "not he who says *Lord, Lord!* shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of our Father who is in Heaven".

***~~2. A word of encouragement—~~***

Let anyone see what was effected in the days of old by a few poor fishermen: and take courage to exert himself for God. The same power that wrought effectually in that day, will concur with us: Let us not then despond, as though our weakness were any obstacle to success; for God will display his own power by means of it, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9), and "ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings." Whether therefore we address ourselves to the translation of the Scriptures into foreign languages, or labor for the circulation of them at home—let us only implore help from God, and we shall not be permitted to "labor in vain, or run in vain."

***~~#2217~~***

***~~ALL MEN DO NOT HAVE FAITH~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.2)~~***

"All men do not have faith."

IF we considered the condition of fallen man, and the merciful provision which God has made for him in the Gospel of his Son, we would think it impossible for anyone who heard the glad tidings of salvation proclaimed to him, not to embrace the offers of mercy, and to bless God for such a marvelous dispensation of his grace. But the fact is, that there is no other thing in the whole world so hated and despised as this very Gospel. Persons of every description combine against it. To the Jews it is a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: and multitudes, even of those who profess to receive the sacred records as inspired, are found among the enemies of the Gospel: for, as the Apostle justly says, "All men do not have faith."

Let me,

***~~I. Show to whom this charge applies—~~***

It doubtless comprehended, in the first instance, the Jews, who professed to believe in the One true God. And it also referred to those who, while they ostensibly embraced the Christian faith, were, in reality, no better than hypocrites; deceiving others, and deceiving also their own souls.

Among those who have not faith, we may fitly number,

***~~1. Infidels—~~***

The very term *infidel*does, in fact, imply this. Not but that persons of this description would be grievously offended, if you would represent them as unbelievers. Yet it is, in fact, their character: for, in holding up to derision the great truths of revelation, they show, beyond all doubt, that they possess not the Christian faith.

***~~2. Moralists and Formalists—~~***

These take credit to themselves as having attained a high degree of righteousness. But, while they "go about to establish a righteousness of their own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God which is by faith in Christ, [Romans 10:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.2-3)," they show, that they have no just views of the Savior's office, or of the salvation which he has wrought out for us by his own obedience unto death. The Gospel which they maintain is "another Gospel, [Galatians 1:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.6-9);" and not that which Christ has revealed, and which his Apostles preached.

***~~3. Hypocrites—~~***

How many of these do we read of in the sacred records; men who, having "a form of godliness, denied the power thereof, [2 Timothy 3:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5-8)." Of such Jude speaks; saying, "Clouds are they without water, carried about of winds; trees, whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, Jude verse 12, 13."

If it is thought hard to say, of all these persons, that they have not faith, I will,

***~~II. Adduce evidence in confirmation of it—~~***

***~~Among the persons that have been specified, not a few are "unreasonable and wicked men"—~~***

All of them will, more or less, unite in reviling and persecuting the Gospel of Christ. Though there is no other point in which they are agreed, they will stand together readily and harmoniously upon this ground. Who were greater enemies to the Gospel than "the false brethren" whom Paul enumerates among the catalogue of those who sought his life, 2 Corinthians 11:26. That a profligate and abandoned rabble would seek to destroy him, we do not wonder, [Acts 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 17.5); but that "devout and honorable women" would lend themselves as instruments to persecute him, we would scarcely conceive, did we not know it as a fact recorded by the inspiration of God, [Acts 13:50](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.50). But the truth is, that no persons under Heaven are more adverse to the pure doctrines of the Gospel and to those who preach it, than the self-righteous Pharisees. The conduct of Paul, previous to his conversion, fully evinces this, [Galatians 1:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.13-14); and the experience of the Church, in all ages, bears witness to it.

***~~The true believer is the very reverse of these—~~***

Compare him with the Infidel. A man who believes in Christ cannot make the truths of revelation a subject of profane mockery. No; he reverences the Word of God, and "trembles at it;" and is as much assured, as he is of his own existence, that every jot and tittle of it shall be fulfilled in its season.

Compare him with the Moralist or Formalist. The believer in Christ, so far from seeing anything of merit in himself, is humbled in the dust, under a sense of his own demerit; and, renouncing utterly all dependence on himself, he looks for salvation simply and entirely through Christ alone.

Compare him with the Hypocrite. The believer endeavors as much to fulfill the law, as if he thought he was to be saved by his obedience to it. Could he attain his heart's desire, he would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Compare him with the "unreasonable and wicked" Persecutor. The true Christian has received "a spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind:" and, so far from wishing to obstruct the Gospel by an envious opposition to those who are more distinguished than himself, he esteems himself "less than the least of all saints," and rejoices in all the good that is done by God's most-favored servants. Whether, therefore, we view the unbeliever as he is in himself, or as contrasted with a believing soul, the truth of the Apostle's assertion will be placed beyond a doubt.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

**1.** "Examine carefully, whether you are in the faith".

**2.** Be careful, also, to show "forth your faith by your works".

***~~#2218~~***

***~~PAUL'S BENEVOLENCE~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.5).~~***

"May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

IT might well be expected that the fundamental doctrines of our religion would be found, not only in passages where the truths were expressly insisted on, but in others where they were casually introduced. Accordingly we find this to be the case respecting every important doctrine of the Gospel; but in none more than that which relates to a Trinity of persons in the Godhead. If we wished to convince an unbeliever, we would doubtless select such passages as most plainly contain the doctrine in question, for example [Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19). [2 Corinthians 13:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 13.14). But to confirm the mind of a believer, we would rather refer to places where it was only incidentally mentioned: because, if once we see that the idea was familiar to the minds of the inspired writers, and to the minds of those to whom they wrote, we have the strongest proof of which any doctrine is capable.

Thus, in the passage before us, the Apostle meant only to express a benevolent wish on behalf of the Church at Thessalonica: but he expressed it in such terms as a person habituated to the doctrine of the Trinity would naturally use: he prayed that "the Lord (the Spirit) would direct their hearts into the love of God (the Father), and into the patient waiting for Christ."

The point however to which we would direct your attention, is not so much the terms in which the Apostle's wish is conveyed, as the objects and reasons of that wish.

***~~I. The objects of that wish—~~***

A very little observation of the world is sufficient to convince us, that "the love of God" is not the predominant passion of mankind; nor a preparation for Christ's second coming their chief employment.

Men in general are not so impressed with a view of God's excellency, as to feel any love to him: much less have they obtained such an acquaintance with him, as to enjoy in their souls any sense of his love to them. Nor is there much of "the patience of Christ." to be found among them. To "deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him," is a lesson which they have never learned. As for looking forward with comfort to the second coming of their Lord, and waiting patiently for it as the completion of their hopes and the consummation of their joys, they know it not. "Their affections are set on things below, rather than on things above;" and the acquisition of some earthly good is that which alone engages their attention.

***~~But to possess the state of mind described in the text, is essential to the Christian character—~~***

How can a man be a Christian, and not love his God? Or how can he belong to Christ, and not resemble him, "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God?"

***~~Yet of ourselves we never shall, or can, attain to it—~~***

The heart is altogether averse to spiritual exercises; and turns away in disgust from the contemplation of those things which make for our everlasting peace. If we try to fix our minds on the love of God to man, or on the nature and extent of that obedience which we owe to him, or on the solemn account which we would give of ourselves before him, we cannot long keep our attention to such subjects, nor can we get them suitably impressed upon our hearts.

***~~Hence Paul prayed, that the Lord, even the Holy Spirit, would direct the hearts of his people into that state—~~***

It is the province of that Divine Agent to give a right direction to the heart, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17), [2 Corinthians 5:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.5). But his influence must be sought by prayer. Nevertheless God will hear also the intercessions of others in our behalf, and give us a supply of his Spirit in answer to them, [Philippians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.19). In the full persuasion of this, Paul poured out the benevolent aspiration which we have been considering.

Such then were the objects of the Apostle's wish; namely, that the Thessalonian Christians might experience more deeply the truths they professed. Nor are we at any loss to state,

***~~II. The reasons for it—~~***

Among the most important of these were doubtless the two following: he knew that the attainment of such a state was,

***~~1. Highly conducive to their present happiness—~~***

There is a most absurd prejudice against religion, that it tends to make persons melancholy. That some religious persons are inclined to melancholy, is true enough: but it is not true, that religion makes them so. In all human probability they would have manifested the same disposition (as thousands of others do) if they had never known anything of religion.

As far as religion is concerned, it is from erroneous and distorted views of religion, and not from any just apprehensions of it, that they are rendered melancholy. Where, in all the Word of God, do we find this effect ascribed to religion, or arising from it? Peter wept bitterly, and Judas hanged himself: but *was it religion, or sin, that was the occasion of their sorrows?*Not religion surely, but sin. Religion was a balm to Peter, and kept him from despair; and it was Judas' lack of religion that drove him to suicide.

But the truth is, that men make this a mere pretext to reject religion; they do not really, in their hours of sober reflection, think that religion has any such tendency. Where will be found a man in the whole universe who really thinks that love to God, or a sense of God's love to him, would make him less happy? Where is there one who really believes that a habitual preparation for death and judgment would make him less happy? Nay, where is there one who does not in his heart envy a truly pious man, and entertain the secret wish, O that I might be found in that man's place at the day of judgment!

The Apostle knew that the graces which he desired for the Thessalonian Christians would make them truly happy both in life and death. He knew it from the universal tenor of the Holy Scriptures, [Psalm 63:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 63.5). [Matthew 5:3-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 5.3-12); and he knew it from his own experience, [2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8); and therefore he prayed the Lord to direct their hearts to the attainment of them.

***~~2. Indispensably necessary to their eternal welfare—~~***

What is a Christian without the love of God? What pretensions has he to the name of Christian? Or how can he call himself a disciple of Christ, who has no delight in following His steps, or in looking forward to his future advent? What an appearance will such a one make at the tribunal of his Judge! Will he not be ashamed before him at his coming? *Has he any reason to think that the God whom he never loved, will love him? Or that the Savior whom he never served, will say to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"*

Whatever they may say to the contrary, the careless world have their misgivings even now; they have a secret fear that God will put a difference between those who served him and those who served him not. On this subject Paul had no doubt: and therefore, "knowing the terrors of the Lord, he both persuaded men" to seek these necessary attainments, and implored of God to communicate to them all needful supplies of his Spirit and grace.

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~Permit me now to express the same benevolent wish respecting you—~~***

We have no wish to proselyte men to a party, or to lead them into any enthusiastic notions or pursuits. All we desire is that they would love that God who has so loved them, and be found patiently waiting for the Bridegroom when he shall call them to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And, I ask, is this unreasonable? Is it anything more than what I ought to wish; or than you yourselves either do, or will soon, wish for yourselves? Be not offended, then, if we express this wish. Be not offended, if we urge upon you what we know will tend so much to your present happiness, and what we are assured is necessary to your happiness in the future world.

***~~Let me also request that you will adopt this wish for yourselves—~~***

Surely I shall have spoken to good effect, if only one among you all shall be stirred up to pray for himself, "Lord, direct my heart into the love of God, and into a patient waiting for Christ." Happy will it be, if any of you begin to wish that you had loved God, and that you might from this time become objects of his favor. Happy will it be, if any of you begin to say, 'I will take up my cross and follow Christ. I will follow him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. He died for me; O that I might have grace to live and die for him! He is coming to judge me. O that I might be ready for his appearing, and give up my account to him with joy and not with grief!'

Cultivate these desires: beg of God to stir them up in your hearts by his Holy Spirit: and when you have attained a measure of this grace yourselves, cultivate it to the utmost in the hearts of others.

***~~#2219~~***

***~~THE DESIRABLENESS OF PEACE~~***

***~~[2 Thessalonians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 3.16)~~***

"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way."

CONTENTIONS too naturally spring from our corrupt nature, which is the fruitful parent of everything that is evil. There are indeed occasions when it is necessary to act in a manner that seems not peaceful; and that too even towards those who call themselves the Lord's people: if, for instance, any member of a Christian society were notoriously defective in any one branch of moral duty, and persisted in his misconduct notwithstanding the remonstrances of those who were both authorized and qualified to advise him, it would be necessary to cut off such a corrupt member from the Church, and to cease from all needless or familiar fellowship with him, until he had repented of his wickedness, verse 14.

But these are only extreme cases, where milder means will not avail. As a general rule, we would strive to the utmost to walk in peace both towards those who are without, and those who are within, the Church: the disposition of our hearts would exactly accord with the desire contained in the words before us.

The expressions in the text being general, it is not necessary to limit them to one particular point: we shall therefore take them in the most comprehensive sense as relating:

***~~I. To nations—~~***

No language can fully express the miseries of war: it turns mankind into ferocious beasts, that seek only to overpower and destroy each other. It spreads desolation over whole countries. It cuts off thousands, and ten thousands in a day; and turns that into an occasion of joy and triumph, which ought rather to overwhelm us with distress and anguish. Even those who are not actively engaged with the enemy, are yet no light sufferers through the burdens which are imposed to support the war, and through the loss of near and dear relatives.

Peace is, under God, the remedy of all these evils: not that it can ever repair the losses that have been sustained; but it prevents the progress of these evils, and restores to the world those friendly and commercial relations which war had interrupted, [Micah 4:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 4.3-4). O that the governors of all nations did but know how to appreciate this invaluable blessing!

But how can this blessing be obtained? It would seem that the termination of war depends wholly on the will of the contending parties. This indeed is true in some sense: but who shall make them willing? who shall put an end to their ambitious or vindictive projects? None but he, "in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and who turns them wherever he will, [Proverbs 21:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 21.1);" he alone can "break the bow, and cut the spear asunder, [Psalm 46:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 46.9); [Psalm 76:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 76.3)." He who in righteous displeasure has "vexed us with adversity by means of war," he it is, even "the Lord of peace himself," who has now caused the din of war to cease, and "given us peace in our borders, [2 Chronicles 15:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 15.6) with [Psalm 147:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 147.14)." O that he might give it to us "always," and dispose us to seek it "by all means!"

Whatever be the terms on which the contending parties have agreed to compose their differences, there will be some found, probably on both sides, to complain of them as below their just expectations. But it were better far to make sacrifices for peace than to persist in a destructive war: and better to exercise forbearance towards an offending enemy, than to precipitate a nation, without the most imperious necessity, into a renewal of such bloody conflicts. *Peace retained almost by any means, is preferable to the calamities of war.*

***~~II. To societies—~~***

Scarcely is there any society of men on earth, where feuds and animosities do not awfully prevail. Nor is this true with respect to the unregenerate only, for even in the Church of God itself disputes and divisions are too often found, [1 Corinthians 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.10-11); [1 Corinthians 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.3). But, O! how lamentable is it when the seamless coat of Christ is rent asunder, and the subjects of the Prince of Peace are engaged in mutual hostilities! Surely the most desirable of all blessings to any society whatever, and above all to the Church of Christ, is peace.

But here again recurs the question, Who shall so govern the sinful passions of men as to bring them into habitual subjection? Who shall impose such restraints on all, as to make them "prefer, not every man his own, but every man another's good, [Philippians 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.4). [1 Corinthians 10:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.24)." No human wisdom or power can accomplish so great a work. He alone who has united Jews and Gentiles in one body, and slain their enmity, can enable us to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, [Ephesians 2:14-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.14-17); [Ephesians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.3)." He engaged to make the wolf and the lamb to dwell together in love and amity, [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6-9); and, when he shall see fit to exert his power, he will realize again what he once accomplished in Noah's ark, and will unite the most contrary dispositions in the bonds of social affection. The oil poured upon the head of our great High-priest, shall descend to the skirts of his clothing, [Psalm 133:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 133.1-2).

Happy are the societies, the families, the Churches, that are governed by such a spirit. Happy indeed if they could "always" enjoy uninterrupted harmony! It is the interest of all the members of a body to forget, as it were, their own individual concerns, and to conspire together for the general good; all using for that end whatever means appear most suitable to the attainment of it. Is forbearance requisite? or friendly rebuke? or even the amputation of an offending member? Every one should be ready to do his part, whatever it may be, and, by his individual exertion, to promote to the utmost the peace and welfare of the whole body. As no means would be left untried for the extinction of flames that threatened the destruction of a city; so would none be omitted, that may secure from injury the union and happiness of mankind by mutual forbearance, [Colossians 3:12-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.12-15); and by fervent intercession, [Psalm 122:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 122.6-8).

Let all of us then look to "the Lord of peace himself," that by the influence of his grace these holy dispositions may be wrought within us; and that through the mighty working of his Spirit we may every one of us supply our part toward the compacting together of all the members, in order that the whole body may be edified in love, [Romans 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.19). [Ephesians 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.16).

***~~III. To individuals—~~***

Whatever is the state of the nation in which we live, or of the society in which our lot is cast, we are concerned at least to obtain peace in our own souls, and to preserve it "always by all possible means." What can ever make us happy if our conscience be disquieted with a sense of guilt, and with apprehensions of God's wrath? Or, "if God has given us quietness, who, or what, can make trouble, [Job 34:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 34.29)."

As far as respects inward tranquility of mind, all are agreed in esteeming it as one of the richest blessings, and in desiring to possess it. But the generality of men are lamentably mistaken with respect to the means by which it is to be obtained. Some hope to find it by dissipating all thoughts of the eternal world: some by silencing all the convictions of their conscience: some by abounding in the external duties of religion: and some by "healing their wounds slightly, and saying, *Peace, peace*, when there is no peace, [Jeremiah 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 6.14)." True peace can never be obtained but from Jesus, "the Prince of Peace, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)." He it is who has purchased it for his believing people, [Colossians 1:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.21-22); and who has left it them as his best legacy, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace give I unto you, [John 14:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.27)."

But though this peace is the gift of Christ, we must seek it in the use of means. We must humble ourselves before him for the multitude of our offenses; and turn from our transgressions with a sincere abhorrence of them. Above all we must view Jesus as making atonement for us, and as reconciling us to God by the blood of his cross. We must renounce all self-righteous methods of appeasing God's anger, or of pacifying the clamors of a guilty conscience. We must trust in Jesus alone; and in him with our whole hearts, [Isaiah 26:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.3-4); and when he has "spoken peace to our souls, we must no more return to folly, [Psalm 85:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.8)." Then shall we have that "peace which passes all understanding," and enjoy it "always," in life, in death, and forever.

Let nothing then be esteemed painful that may be necessary for the acquiring or preserving of so rich a blessing; but let us seek it at the Lord's hands, always and by all means by mortification of sin, [Isaiah 57:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 57.19-21); by fervent prayer, [Philippians 4:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6-7); by glorifying God with our substance, [Isaiah 58:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.7-11)."

***~~1 TIMOTHY~~***

***~~#2220~~***

***~~LOVE, THE TRUE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.5)~~***

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure *heart*and a good *conscience*and a sincere *faith*."

THE Gospel of Christ is thought by many to be a source of evil: and certain it is, that evils have frequently followed in its train. But we must distinguish between two things, which are very often confounded, namely:

the *cause*of evil, and

the *occasion*of evil.

There is not any blessing which divine Providence has bestowed upon us, which may not be an occasion of evil, if it is not used in the manner, and for the ends for which it was intended. Our corporeal and mental faculties may be all abused, for the production of evil; and all the fruits of the earth may be made subservient to the gratification of inordinate desires. This has happened in relation to the Gospel.

Even in the primitive Churches, some, instead of delivering their divine message with the simplicity that befit them, made it, in many instances, an occasion of promulgating their own vain and superstitious notions; thus administering to strife and contention, where they would have labored only for the edification of souls in faith and love. Paul, in order to correct this, directed Timothy to protest against it, as an abuse of the Gospel; and to make it appear that the Gospel was in no respect to be blamed for these evils; since, in its own nature, it tended only to love: "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

From these words I shall take occasion to show:

***~~I. What is the true scope of the Gospel, as contrasted with the use too often made of it—~~***

***~~The use too often made of religion has been to spread disputation and division—~~***

To such a degree did this evil obtain at Ephesus, that Paul, when going into Macedonia, was constrained to deprive himself of the comfort of Timothy's society, in order that he, by abiding still at Ephesus, might charge the teachers to confine themselves to the great truths of the Gospel, instead of "giving heed to fables and endless genealogies," as they were accustomed to do, "whereby they ministered to vain questions, rather than to godly edifying, verse 3-4." This lamentable evil prevailed also at Colosse; and, more or less, in all the Churches. Jewish converts would insist upon some favorite observances of their law, which was now abrogated and annulled: and the Gentile converts strove to blend with the Gospel the notions of their philosophers: so that the Apostle was constrained to guard the people against both the one and the other; bidding them to "beware, lest any man would spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the principles of the world, and not after Christ! [Colossians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.8); [Colossians 2:16-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.16-19)."

In every subsequent age, the Church has been torn and rent with heresies of different kinds; so that, in fact, the history of the Church contains rather a record of successive contentions between different parties in it, than any account of practical and experimental piety. The smallest knowledge of ecclesiastical history will suffice to convince us of this deplorable fact.

And what is the state of things at this day? Is there anything like unity in the Church of Christ? The seamless garb of our adorable Savior is rent into a thousand pieces. On all the leading subjects of doctrine and of discipline, there is in the Church, not merely a diversity of sentiment, but a violent hostility; whole Churches anathematizing each other, and individuals ready to "bite and devour one another" as enemies to the public well-being. Nor is this acrimony confined to those who differ on fundamental points, as Papists and Protestants: it obtains equally among those who are agreed in professing the reformed religion; and sets at a distance from each other the Calvinist and Arminian, the Churchman and Dissenter, as if there were no common bond of union for them in Christ Jesus. This is cast in our teeth by the Papist, from whom we have separated: and it lays a stumbling-block before the Jew; who, with some shadow of justice, says to us, "Do not ask me to embrace your religion, until you are yourselves agreed what that religion is."

***~~But the proper end of the Gospel is love—~~***

"The commandment" of which the text speaks, is, by some, supposed to mean the law; and, by others, the particular injunction given by Paul to Timothy. But its connection with "the pure heart, and good conscience, and sincere faith," from which "the love which is its end," proceeds, clearly shows, in my judgment, that it must be understood of the Gospel.

Now the end of the Gospel is love; its chief object being to bring man back again to the state in which he was originally formed, and to renew him after the image of God, whose name and nature is love, [1 John 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.8); [1 John 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.16). Fallen man possesses it not: he is by nature altogether selfish; and whatever stands in the way of self-gratification and self-advancement, he hates. Hence man universally opposes his fellow-man, as soon as ever a prospect opens to him of promoting his own interests, though at the expense of his neighbor's welfare.

In nations, whether civilized or uncivilized, this universally appears. The same is found in rival societies; yes, to such a degree does this malignant spirit operate, that it is a miracle if even a single family is found altogether united in love. But these malignant passions are mortified and subdued by the Gospel; according to that prediction of the Prophet Isaiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them, [Isaiah 11:6-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.6-9)."

In confirmation of this truth, we need only look to the day of Pentecost, and see what a change was wrought on the most malignant characters that ever disgraced our fallen nature. Three thousand of them, who had but a few hours before concurred in shedding the Savior's blood, became all of one heart and one mind, and gladly surrendered all that they possessed, with a view to the welfare of the whole body, [Acts 2:44-45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.44-45).

Not that the Gospel will prevent all difference of sentiment among men; for, constituted as the human mind is, and different as are the degrees of man's information upon different subjects, it is not possible that all men would have precisely the same views, even of any subject, and much less of all. But Christian love will induce a mutual forbearance, in reference to things that are dubious and non-essential; and will form all the variously-constructed members into one harmonious and compact body, [Ephesians 4:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.15-16). And unless love has this effect, it leaves us without any hope of its ultimate and eternal blessings, [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1-3).

It is of great importance, however, to be informed:

***~~II. When that end may be said to be truly and properly attained—~~***

The love here spoken of is not that which exists in the bosom of the natural man; nor is it that which is engendered by a party-spirit: it is a love formed by the Gospel, through the instrumentality of "a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of sincere faith." Such is the account given of it in the text; and it is of importance to observe the order in which these words are introduced.

"A pure heart" is first mentioned, as being the proximate cause of love: in the production of which, "a good conscience" operates as a more remote cause; while its primary cause, which sets the others in motion, is, "an sincere faith."

***~~These are the immediate effects of the Gospel—~~***

The Gospel, bringing home conviction to the soul, creates there "a sincere faith," without which no one of its truths can be received aright. The faith that is insincere, like that of Simon Magus, [Acts 8:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.13); [Acts 8:18-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.18-20), will soon betray its worthlessness; nor can it ever prevail for the subjugation of our selfish propensities.

But when the Gospel leads us to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices, and to look for salvation through him alone, then it will bring with it "a good conscience," purged from all sense of guilt, and filled with a peace that passes all understanding.

Thence will flow a purification of the heart from everything that is "earthly, sensual, or devilish," and a transformation of the soul into the Divine image. Only let a man so embrace "the promises" as to obtain peace with God, and he will instantly begin to "cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)." Having a good hope that he is "accepted in Christ," he will labor to purify himself, even as Christ is pure, [1 John 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.3)."

***~~Then, through the combined influence of these, it works its destined end—~~***

The soul is, by nature, narrow and contracted—its desires both originate in self, and end in self.*Self is its center and circumference.*The natural man will indeed assume, on many occasions, an appearance of generosity; but, of the "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.4-7);" of that love, I say, he knows nothing. But the Gospel expands the soul; filling it with a sense of the Savior's love, and stirring it up to a holy imitation of it; and bringing home to it, with irresistible force, this blessed truth, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another, [1 John 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 4.10-11)." Thus, at the same time that it disposes the soul for love, it also forms love in the soul. It brings men into the closest union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with each other in him, so as to make of all "one body in Christ." All look to him as their common head; and all regard each other as members of the same mystical body. In consequence of that union, they are penetrated with a love that is reciprocal and universal. The degree of affection that is experienced by them is unknown in the whole world besides. The union, that from thenceforth exists between them, is so close, that nothing short of the union between Almighty God and his only dear Son can adequately describe it. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ himself has affirmed: "I pray for them, that they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me, [John 17:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.21-23)."

This, then, may suffice to show us, not only what the true end of the Gospel is, but when that end may be said to be truly and properly attained: for it never is truly wrought in us, until we are brought into this union with each other in Christ, and are made to exercise the dispositions which must necessarily result from it.

That I may not be thought to have insisted too strongly on this matter, let me confirm it from the express declaration of an inspired Apostle; a declaration in which not only the same truth is maintained, but the very same process is accurately described. Peter, speaking to his believing brethren throughout all the world, says, "Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto sincere love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently, [1 Peter 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.22)."

***~~Let me now address a few words to you on the subject of the Gospel,~~***

***~~1. In reference to its primary operations—~~***

The peculiar process here described is not alike visible in all. In some it advances rapidly; in others with a more tardy step. But it must be found in all.

Brethren, see to it, that "your faith" in the Gospel be "sincere." It must be such a faith as brings you, in penitential sorrow and utter self-renunciation, to the foot of the Cross; and causes you to "live by faith in the Son of God, as having loved you, and given himself for you! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

See to it, also, that you obtain "a good conscience." There must not be a day or an hour in which you do not apply "the blood of sprinkling" to your souls: for it is by that alone that "your conscience can be purged from dead works to serve the living God, [Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.14); [Hebrews 12:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.24)."

Take care, too, that your heart be purified from all "earthly, sensual, and devilish" affections. No evil whatever must be harbored in your bosom. The whole of your life must be occupied in "putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and in putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:22-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.22-24)." These things are absolutely indispensable: and if the Gospel produce them not in your souls, it is in vain for you to expect any blessing from it in the world to come.

***~~2. In reference to its ultimate effect—~~***

Never forget what is the great scope and end of all: it is not to save your soul from *destruction*, but to save your soul from *sin*. Heaven is a region of love; and no man could be happy there who has not been previously "rendered fit for it" in this present world. He would be out of his element, nor would he have no delight in God himself, nor any sympathy with those who were around his throne. Away, then, with selfishness, and apathy, and party-spirit; and begin to realize a Heaven upon earth. This is the way to fulfill the law, [Galatians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.14); this is the way to adorn the Gospel [Galatians 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.6); this is the way to answer all God's purposes of love towards you.

Remember this, then, I beg you. And as I am "charged of God to teach no other doctrine among you, verse 3," so I must charge you, in the name of God, to receive no other among yourselves. You will find persons without number ready to obtrude upon you some matters of doubtful disputation; yes, and within your own bosoms you will find much to contend with that is contrary to love.

But set the Lord Jesus Christ before you. See how love burned in his bosom, until "his zeal had even consumed him," and until he had surrendered his life upon the cross, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1). [Ephesians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.2). So grow you up into him in all things: and as you have been taught of God to "love one another, see that you increase more and more! [1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1); 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10."

***~~#2221~~***

***~~THE LAW IS GOOD, IF USED ARIGHT~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.8)~~***

"We know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully."

TO live under the government of laws that are wisely enacted and well administered, is a blessing of no ordinary kind. But the best of laws, if perverted to ends which were never contemplated by the legislature, may be made sources and instruments of the most grievous oppression.

In like manner, even the law of God itself may be abused, and, through the perversion of it, be made injurious to the souls of men. Of this there is abundant evidence in the passage before us; where we find persons turning the Scriptures into an occasion of disputation; and occupying themselves with subjects which ministered to "vain jangling," rather than to "edification in the Christian faith, verse 4, 6." This, however, afforded no just objection to the law itself; for that was good, and "must ever be good, if only it is used lawfully," according to the ends for which it was given.

In confirming the Apostle's assertion, I shall consider it:

***~~I. In reference to the law which belonged exclusively to the Jewish people—~~***

The Jewish dispensation itself was good, as being well adapted to the persons to whom it was given, and for the purposes for which it was established. God intended to keep the posterity of Abraham a separate and distinct people; and, in due time, to bring forth from them, and in the midst of them, the promised Messiah. For this end were ordinances given to them; even such ordinances, as, if observed, must prevent them from ever becoming blended with the other nations of the earth. Still, if this dispensation were regarded as of universal and perpetual obligation, its excellence would wholly disappear.

But, to speak more particularly of the whole CEREMONIAL LAW, which formed the great line of distinction between them and others; this was good:

***~~It was good, I say, if used lawfully—~~***

The ceremonial law was intended to shadow forth the mysteries of the Gospel, the privileges of the Gospel, the duties of the Gospel; and thereby to prepare men for the Gospel itself.

Does the Gospel hold forth to us the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his substitution in the place of sinful man, and the reconciliation effected between God and man by the blood of his cross? Does it declare, that, by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul of man, the most polluted of sinners may be sanctified and saved? All this was shadowed forth by the special presence of the Deity in the most holy place; by the sacrifices offered upon the altar; by their blood sprinkled upon the mercy-seat; and by all the various washings and sprinklings which were appointed for the cleansing of the offerers, and of everything connected with them.

Even the offices of Christ were distinctly marked: as the Sacrifice, he bled, while, as the great High Priest, he offered up himself; and with his own blood he entered within the veil, there to offer up continual intercession in behalf of those for whom he died. The more this subject is prosecuted, the more excellent will that law appear, which so minutely exhibited every part of this mysterious dispensation.

The privileges too, that are enjoyed by means of the Gospel, are no less clearly marked. For here we see the offender transferring to his victim all his guilt; and liberated from the judgments to which, on account of his transgressions, he had been exposed. Whatever his offense had been, we see him bringing an appropriate offering, which God had promised to accept; and not only receiving a personal absolution on every different occasion; but annually, on the great day of atonement, having the pardon sealed on his soul, in common with every other offender in the whole nation.

Nor was he less instructed in the path of duty by this law which God had given him. The whole life of faith and holiness was here held forth to him. He was taught to approach his God on all occasions through a Mediator; to trust altogether to the blood of the sacrifice that was offered for him; and to expect the renovation of his soul through those very ordinances by which he was reconciled to God. *The water which was sprinkled on him, in conjunction with the blood, taught him, that sanctification must be sought no less than pardon, and that those who obtained remission of their sins must henceforth walk in newness of life*.

***~~Yet, if used unlawfully, its goodness was destroyed—~~***

Many there were who relied upon the outward act which had been prescribed, instead of looking through the act, to Him whom it shadowed forth. Many also put the observance of their ceremonies in the place of morality itself; laying a great stress on some trifling matter, while they disregarded the weightier and indispensable duties of "judgment, mercy, and faith, [Matthew 23:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.23)." Now, this was an abuse of the law, which was never intended for such ends as these. For "how could the blood of bulls and of goats ever take away sin?" Or how could sacrifice ever be accepted in the place of mercy, [Matthew 12:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.7). To make such an use of the law as this, was to "frustrate the grace of God, and to make the very death of Christ himself in vain, [Galatians 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.21)."

Hence God himself, when he found how the law was perverted, spoke of it in the most contemptuous terms, [Isaiah 66:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 66.3). Paul also represents it as consisting of "weak and beggarly elements, [Galatians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.9)," and as "disannulled on account of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, [Hebrews 7:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.18)."

Let us further consider our text,

***~~II. In reference to the law; which, though given by God himself to the Jews, belongs equally to the whole world—~~***

It is of the MORAL LAW that the Apostle principally speaks in my text: for it was that law which forbad all the different kinds of immorality which he proceeds to specify, verse 9, 10. And this law was not, so to speak, "made for the righteous," but, as all human laws are, for the prevention of evil: and hence, with the exception of the fourth commandment, the whole Decalogue consists of prohibitions, rather than commands; and tells us rather what we are not to do, than what we are to do.

***~~Now this law also is good, if used lawfully—~~***

It is good, in that it restrains us from the commission of evil, whether towards God or man. It is good, also, in that it shows how much sin has abounded in the world, and what reason we all have to humble ourselves on account of it. It is good, in that it points out to us the necessity of a Savior, and leads us to welcome that Savior to our hearts. Still further it is good, in that it directs us how to walk and to please God, when we have obtained mercy with him through his dear Son. These are the proper uses for which it was designed: and, when improved for these ends, we may well account it "dearer to us than thousands of silver and gold! [Psalm 119:72](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.72)."

***~~But, if perverted, even this also ceases to be good—~~***

True, in itself it is, and ever must be, "holy, and just, and good, [Romans 7:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.12);" but, in its use, it proves an occasion of death to many souls. Many there are who seek to establish a righteousness for themselves, by their obedience to it. But to fallen man it never could answer any such end as this: and to attempt to make any such use of it, to set aside the whole Gospel, and to make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us. In this very way it proved fatal to millions among the Jews, [Romans 9:31-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31-32), and still becomes an occasion of death to millions among ourselves, [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4). If we will follow it as "a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," it will prove an inestimable blessing to our souls. But if we will set it up against Christ, and found our hopes of salvation on our obedience to it, we shall despoil it of its true excellence, and make it only a stumbling-block to our eternal ruin!

Having thus explained the Apostle's assertion, **I will now endeavor to point out the proper bearings of it, in a few reflections.**

***~~1. How inexpedient is it for novices to dogmatize in matters of religion!~~***

It was in a way of reproof to such persons, that the Apostle uttered the words before us. There were some who "desired to be teachers of the law, while yet they understood not what they said, nor whereof they affirmed, verse 7." Now, such persons there are in the Church at all times: and, in fact, there are no persons more dogmatic than those who have espoused some favorite theory of religion; nor is there any subject whatever on which men express greater confidence than this. And what is the consequence? They are given to "vain jangling;" and all their conversation is on subjects which, when so treated, can never administer to "godly edifying." Earnestly would I entreat all persons, and especially those who are but novices in religion, to remember, that they have yet much to learn; and that they need to be well instructed themselves, before they presume to make their own opinions a standard for all around them.

***~~2. How absurd is it to condemn religion for the faults of those who profess it!~~***

The persons whom the Apostle reproved, had abused the law. But did the Apostle account the law itself responsible for them? No! he said, and said with confidence, "We know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully:" and, if he use it unlawfully, it is he, and not the law, that is to be blamed. So, then, do I say in relation to religion itself. I will grant, that, among those who profess it, there are still many who are full of pride, and conceit, and uncharitableness, and a thousand other evils, just as there were in the Apostle's days.

But must religion itself therefore be condemned? As well might you condemn religion for Judas' sake. Learn to judge righteous judgment. You do not condemn *reason*, because some pervert it in support of error, and assume to themselves the title of rational Christians. Neither, then, should you think the less favorably of religion, because some, under its sacred guise, indulge unholy and injurious dispositions. If, indeed, it generated, or even sanctioned, anything that was unholy, it might well be an object of reproach: but if it inculcates only what is good, then let it have the praise that is due unto it, and those who violate it bear the blame of their own ungodliness.

***~~3. How necessary is it to distinguish justly between the use, and the abuse, of that which is in itself good!~~***

The world is good, to one who makes the proper use of it. Therefore we are told to "use the world as not abusing it." Just so, the law is good, and the Gospel also, if used lawfully; and, as I have said, neither of them is to be condemned on account of the faults or follies of those who profess a regard for them.

But you will ask, perhaps, What is the legitimate use of the Law? and what of the Gospel? I answer, The *Law*must be used evangelically; and the *Gospel*practically. Then will they subserve the best of purposes, and be instrumental in effecting all for which they have been given.

But if the Gospel be not kept in view while we pay attention to the Law, we shall never attain the liberty of God's children, nor ever possess the kingdom which he has prepared for us. So also, if we separate holiness from the Gospel, we shall lose all the benefits which the Gospel is intended to convey: for God has expressly ordained, "that without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

***~~4. How desirable it is to make a just improvement of every portion of the Word of God!~~***

As the law is capable of a right use, so is every Word of God. We are not to take one part of the inspired volume, and to leave another; not to embrace one doctrine because it is agreeable to our minds, and to reject another because it offends our prejudices. Earnestly would I guard you against that.

The law bids you, "Do, and live!"

The Gospel says, "Believe, and be saved!"

Set them in opposition to each other, and you will fall into a fatal error: but take the one in subserviency to the other, and all will be well. So would I say respecting many other points, which have been made grounds of controversy and contention for hundreds of years. Only let the different declarations of Scripture find their proper place, and be improved to their proper end, and numberless difficulties will vanish; and the whole system of divine truth will be found harmonious, even as the stars which move in their orbits. To a superficial observer, the various truths may appear to clash; but to one that is conversant with the design of God in them, they will all be found to promote his glory, and to advance the welfare of those who, with childlike humility, embrace them.

I mean not to say that you are to take anything without examination: for you are to "prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good." But look for the practical use of everything that the Scriptures contain, and then will you derive benefit from all, and have reason to bless your God for all.

***~~#2222~~***

***~~NATURE AND OFFICE OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11)~~***

"The glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

[The reader is recommended to read the Sermons on [Galatians 3:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.19), in connection with, and immediately before, these. The two together contain one continuous exhibition of the Law and Gospel.]

THE words which I have just read, being only an incomplete member of a sentence, without any definite sense, must be considered only as a motto to what I shall have occasion to advance, and not as a foundation whereon any statement is to be established.

The Apostle is exhorting Timothy to check those false teachers, who, under a professed zeal for the Law, in reality undermined the Gospel: some, by insisting only on frivolous questions respecting the law; and others, by making it the ground of a sinner's hope before God. All of these desired to be teachers of the law, while "they understood not what they said, nor whereof they affirmed." The law, properly explained, was good, even as the Gospel itself: they were in perfect harmony with each other: for the Gospel condemned sin as much as the law itself could do, and inculcated holiness as strongly; and, in this view, it deserved that honorable appellation here given to it, "The glorious Gospel of the blessed God." In fact, the Law and the Gospel were one great whole; and, when viewed aright, contributed equally, though in different ways, to advance the honor of God and the welfare of mankind.

The law, with its proper and legitimate uses, I have, on a former occasion, considered. The Gospel is that to which I would wish to draw your attention throughout the present course: and, for the purpose of introducing it to your view, I have selected the very striking expression by which it is here characterized.

The Gospel is called, by the Apostle, "the Gospel of the grace of God! [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24);" because it reveals God's purposes of love and mercy towards sinful man.

He calls it also "the Gospel of salvation! [Ephesians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.13);" because, while it reveals a salvation from God, it imparts that blessing to all who truly receive it.

But the designation given to it in the passage before us is preeminently grand and beautiful; and will properly lead me to take a view of the Gospel in all its boundless extent, and to mark in succession:  
its nature and office;  
its riches and fullness;  
its suitableness and sufficiency;  
its excellency and glory.

And may God of his infinite mercy so reveal it to our minds, and bring it home with efficacy to our hearts, that it may prove "the power of God to the salvation" of all who hear it!

To investigate the nature and office of the Gospel, will be sufficient to occupy us at this time.

To understand the Gospel aright, we must contemplate,

**I.** The state in which it finds us.

**II.** The provision which it makes for our deliverance from that state.

**III.** The means which it prescribes for our participation of its blessings.

***~~I. The state in which the Gospel finds us—~~***

Man is not in the state in which he was first created. He was formed at first, in the very image of his God; as pure as God himself is pure; and as perfect, according to his capacity, as God himself is perfect. But Adam fell; and his children, descending from him in his fallen state, could not but partake of his corruption: for the Scripture says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, [Job 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 14.4)." Now, to mark clearly and distinctly the condition of fallen man, is of the utmost importance; because the knowledge of that lies at the root of all true religion. The Scriptures declare it with the utmost simplicity: and, if we receive with humility the declarations of God respecting it, we shall gain an insight into the whole Gospel, which is, in fact, a provision of God for the necessities of sinful man.

Now, there are two things which characterize the condition of fallen man; namely, guilt, and weakness: as the Apostle has said, "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, [Romans 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.6)."

Let us then contemplate these two points: the *sinfulness*of fallen man, and his *weakness*.

Exceeding great is the depravity of our fallen nature. In every faculty of our mind we are corrupt; nor less so in every member of our body.

Our *understanding*is dark;  
our *will*is perverse;  
our *affections*are sensual;  
our *conscience*is partial;  
our very *memory*is indisposed for the retaining of heavenly truths.

And our *bodies*, being altogether under the influence of a depraved mind, are corrupt in all their parts; every member, instead of ministering unto holiness, being a willing "servant of sin, and an instrument of unrighteousness unto iniquity." Paul not only states this, but accumulates a great number of passages of Holy Writ to illustrate and confirm his statement: and, with a most remarkable particularity, specifies our members, as it were from head to foot, as involved in the general calamity, and as contributing, according to their respective powers, to bring into effect every evil disposition of the mind: "We have proved," says he, "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin: as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God: they are all gone out of the way: they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one: their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes." And this description he gives in order to show that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God [Romans 3:9-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.9-19)."

With equal force the Scriptures mark the *inability of man*to restore himself either to the favor or the image of God. So far is man from being able to recommend himself to God, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil, only evil continually! [Genesis 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 6.5)." Nor can he of himself return to God; since it is "God alone who can give him either to will, or to do, anything that is good! [Philippians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.13)."

I forbear to expatiate upon this; because, as I am anxious not to overstate the necessities of man, so I am desirous that all which I do state would be as far as possible in the words of God himself.

Yet I would observe, that this statement, as brief as it is, ought to be well understood, and well considered: for, unless we clearly discern the necessities of man, we can never duly appreciate the provision which God has made for the relief of them. In truth, we cannot better understand the necessities of man, than by comparing his condition with that of the fallen angels. They, when they had contracted guilt, were unable to remove it; and, when they had lost the divine image in which they were created, were unable to restore it: and, having no provision made for them by God himself, they are left to endure the penalty of their transgression, in endless, irremediable misery.

I am not aware of even a shadow of difference between them and us in this respect, except so far as the sovereign grace of God, in which they found no interest, has interposed for us. I think this is the very truth before God; nor can I conceive that any one of a candid mind can entertain a doubt respecting it. But, if this were really felt, our work in establishing the truth of the Gospel would have no difficulties to encounter.

*It is the pride of the human heart which interposes the great obstacle to men's reception of the Gospel*. They are averse to see the extent of their necessities. They will contend for some remnant of goodness or power in themselves, that shall lessen their obligations to the grace of God. But let a man acknowledge himself as wholly and for ever lost, and then he will be prepared to hear of a Savior, and to embrace the salvation that is provided for him in the Gospel.

***~~II. What provision God has made for our recovery comes now, in the second place, to be considered.~~***

Are we in a state of guilt? God has provided a Substitute and a Surety for us, in the person of his dear Son.

Are we in a state of weakness? God has provided all needful strength for us, in the operations of his Holy Spirit.

I might here enter at large into all the offices of Christ, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church; and unfold all the offices of the Holy Spirit, who has undertaken to work in us the whole work of God, and, by his all-powerful influence, to "perfect in our souls all that concerns us."

But it is my wish to simplify everything; and to exclude from my discussion everything which, however instructive, may have the effect of diverting the mind from the main object—the beauty and simplicity of the Gospel. Let us, then, limit our views of the Savior and of the Holy Spirit to the two points which we have mentioned; and mark distinctly the way in which Jesus removes our guilt, and the Spirit removes our weakness.

When no possible way remained for man to make compensation to the Deity for the guilt he had contracted, God was pleased to give his only dear Son, to stand in our place, and, by his own vicarious sufferings, to expiate our guilt. For this end, God prepared for him a body in the womb of a pure virgin: so that, while he would partake of our nature, he would neither be involved in the guilt of our progenitor, nor inherit his corruption. So far as our sinless infirmities were concerned, God made him like unto us: but so far as anything of corruption was concerned, he made him perfectly without sin: for, if he had had any sin of his own, he could not have been a fit person to take away sin from us. If he must be a victim for the sins of others, he must himself be without spot or blemish. Thus, in the person of the Lord Jesus, were united both God and man. In his own nature he was God equal with the Father, even "God over all, blessed forever! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

By assuming our nature into union with his own, he became capable of suffering in our place and stead. And he did suffer in our place; for we are expressly told, that "God laid on him the iniquities of us all [Isaiah 53:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.6)." Nor did he only suffer the penalties of the broken law, which, without his merciful intervention, we must have endured for ever; but he fulfilled, in its utmost possible extent, all its holy precepts, and thereby wrought out a righteousness for us, "a righteousness which might be imputed to all, and put upon all, those who would believe in him, [Romans 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.22)."

As for considering how all this could be; how God could become a man: how he could stand in our place and stead: how he could, by his vicarious sufferings, atone for sin; how such a plan could avail for affecting a reconciliation between God and man; and how God can accept man through a righteousness not his own, but wrought out for him by another, and imputed to him; and how God's perfections can be reconciled and glorified in such a way of saving man; these are questions which God alone can resolve. It is sufficient for us to know, that God has provided such a way for the removal of our guilt; and that "of those who come to him in his Son's name, not one shall ever be cast out, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)." We sum up, therefore, this part of our subject in the inspired declaration, which we are commissioned to proclaim to the whole world, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them! [2 Corinthians 5:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-19)."

But, to remedy our weakness, a commission also was given to the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, to reveal the Savior to us, and to "fulfill in us all the good pleasure of his goodness" for our full and final salvation. Our incapacity to save ourselves was, in fact, like that of a body actually dead. So far as relates to spiritual feeling or power, we are altogether destitute either of the one or the other. Of natural feelings or powers, I forbear to speak: they may be carried to any extent; and it will make no difference in my positions. I would not degrade man below what he really is: I am willing to allow him all that any man can reasonably wish. It is of *spiritual abilities*alone that I speak; and in relation to them I say, that man is altogether "dead in trespasses and sins [Ephesians 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1)." But the Spirit of God undertakes to quicken us by his Almighty power: and it is by his power alone, even by "the working of that mighty power which raised Christ himself from the dead," that any soul of man attains the least disposition to serve and honor God.

Having quickened our souls, the Holy Spirit proceeds to discover to us the extent of our necessities, and to humble us under a sense of them. Then he stirs us up to cry unto our God: then he reveals the Savior to us (for it is his office to "glorify Christ;" and to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to show them unto us [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14)."). He then enables us to exercise faith in Christ, and to receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he has been sent. He then fills us with a principle of love to Christ, and constrains us to live unto him. He enables us progressively to mortify all our sinful propensities, and to honor God by a holy conduct. In this way he transforms us gradually into the Divine image, and makes us "fit for the inheritance of the saints in light."

For the same reason that I forbore to enter more fully into the offices of *Christ*, I forbear to expatiate upon the different offices of the *Holy Spirit*. This is a subject which would occupy an entire course of sermons by itself; and, if I would ever live to address another course to this assembly, would complete my series. This is done in a Course of Sermons on [Romans 8:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.9). which the reader should peruse after these. But, be that as it may, my object on the present occasion is to simplify everything, that my subject, from beginning to end, may be clearly seen, and fully comprehended.

As to any speculations relative to the mode of the Spirit's agency, they would be altogether beside my purpose. It is sufficient to say, that no man who believes the Holy Scriptures, can doubt of the Holy Spirit being sent of God to *apply*to the souls of men the redemption which Christ has wrought out for them; and that if ever we have "access to God, it must be through Christ, and by the Spirit, [Ephesians 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.18)." It is for this end that the Spirit is given; and this end he will accomplish in all who implore his aid.

***~~III. Now we are come to our third point; which is, to show the means which the Gospel prescribes for our participation of its benefits.~~***

The first thought which occurs to men is, that they must do something to merit and to earn salvation. But, if we consider the condition of our first parents after the fall, we shall see how vain must be such a conceit, how fallacious such a hope. What could they do to recommend themselves to their offended God? As for doing anything to *merit*the gift of God's only dear Son, and the influences of the Holy Spirit upon their souls—it is obvious that no such idea could, by any possibility, enter into their minds. What can the fallen angels, at this instant, do to merit a restoration to God's favor? Yet they are as capable of it as we are.

But it may be said, that now God, of his own mercy and grace, has given us a Savior, we must do something to deserve a saving interest in him. What then, I would ask, can we do? Our blessed Lord has told us, that "without him we can do nothing [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5);" so that the communication of his grace must precede, not follow, the performance of any good act whatever: and, consequently, we must be indebted altogether to the sovereign grace of God, which first "gives us to will, and then to do, of his good pleasure."

The truth is, as the first gift of a *Savior*sprang altogether from the sovereign grace of God, so must *salvation*in all its parts; seeing that "we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought, [2 Corinthians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 3.5)." It is by faith alone that the good work of salvation must be wrought in us. We must first believe God's record respecting his dear Son: then, in the exercise of the same faith, we must look to his Son for the communication of his purchased benefits.

So, throughout our whole continuance on earth, "the life which we live in the flesh, we must live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

Let any one reflect, for a moment, What other way is there for any soul of man to participate in the benefits which God has treasured up for us in his dear Son? Is there any other way of our being united to him, "as branches of the living Vine;" or of our "receiving out of his fullness the grace" that we stand in need of? Is there any other way, I say, than by faith? If we look into the Scriptures, we shall find that faith is continually represented as the means whereby alone we can either receive from God any spiritual blessing, [John 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.12), or perform unto him any acceptable service, [Hebrews 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.6).

I grant that we must repent. But repentance will neither atone for past sin, nor stand in the place of future obedience: and even repentance itself must be *given*to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is exalted to the right hand of God, to give repentance, no less than remission of sins [Acts 5:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.31)." I grant, also, that when we have believed in Christ, we must walk in his ways, and yield obedience to his commandments. But this *obedience*cannot supersede the necessity of faith: on the contrary, it can exist only as the fruit of faith: and, instead of purchasing salvation for us, it is itself a part of that very salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ purchased for us upon the cross.

Now these truths have been greatly controverted, in every age of the Church. Persons have raised subtle questions upon every part of this subject, and made them the occasions of acrimonious dispute: whereas there is nothing under Heaven more plain and simple than the way of salvation as prescribed for us in the Gospel.

I think we may, by one single word, throw such light upon it, as shall supersede, I had almost said, all controversy respecting it. I do not mean to say that persons who love controversy may not yet find, or make, abundant occasion for it: but I do say, that, by one single word, the whole of salvation may be so plainly declared, that a humble and contrite soul shall be enabled, for all practical purposes, to view it in all its length and breadth.

What, then, is that word which will thus exhibit the Gospel in so bright and clear a light? It is the word, remedy.

Let us come back to the state of fallen man: he is in a guilty, polluted, helpless condition. In this state God provides for him a remedy, and both inclines and enables him to apply that remedy. For his *guilt*he applies to himself the atoning blood of Christ: for his *pollution*and *weakness*, he looks to the Holy Spirit to begin and carry on a work of grace within him. By looking to Christ, he obtains peace with God and in his own conscience. By yielding himself to the influences of God's Holy Spirit, he becomes renewed and sanctified in all his powers. His renovated health begins immediately to appear. He is enabled to mortify all his former corruptions; and to "walk holily, justly, and unblamably," before God and man. Gradually, he becomes transformed into the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness.

Ask him now, To what he ascribes the change that has taken place within him? and he will tell you, 'it is owing to the remedy which God has prescribed, and enabled him to apply.' To his last hour he continues applying the same remedy (for, while here, he is only in a convalescent state, and not perfectly recovered,) and when taken hence to his heavenly inheritance, he ascribes all the glory to his Almighty Physician; saying, "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."

Now, what is there in all this to dispute about? What is there that is not perfectly plain and simple? What is there that a humble and contrite sinner needs beyond this, for the peace of his mind, or the sanctification and salvation of his soul? Here all appears to be of grace: both the Savior himself, and salvation through him, are the entire unmerited gift of God.

The whole of the Christian's life, too, is here perfectly plain and simple: *he is continually availing himself of the remedy prescribed, and experiencing its beneficial effects*. If any one applies to him for information and instruction in relation to the soul, he directs him with confidence to this remedy; and attests with thankfulness, from his own experience, its divine efficacy. He even appeals to its effects, as evidences of its divine origin. He not only acknowledges, but is himself forward to assert, that all pretensions to divine communications must be tried by this test. He would say, 'Examine the remedy by this criterion—does it operate to bring man to his primeval state in Paradise; so that, in proportion as it becomes effectual, it:  
subdues his evil propensities,  
regulates his tempers and dispositions,  
enables him to sit loose to the things of this world,  
and makes him to find all his happiness in God alone?

Compare him, he would say, with the Savior in whom he professes to believe, and see whether his faith produces in him somewhat of "the mind that was in Christ, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)," and constrain him to "walk as Christ walked [1 John 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.6)."

Compare him, also, with the Apostles and the primitive Christians, and see whether the remedy operates on him as it did on them. Then we may hope, indeed, that his heart is right before God; and that the remedy which he applies for the benefit of his own soul is that which will prove effectual for the whole world.

You will perceive that I have cautiously abstained from anything which might anticipate my future statements. It is my wish to keep every part as distinct as possible, that the subject may successively grow upon us, until it appears in all its incomprehensible majesty and grandeur. I know indeed, how unequal I am to the task of bringing it properly before you: but this I do hope, in some measure, to attain: namely, to give *clear*views of all which I state, and to exhibit the *subject*in as simple a manner as a due investigation of it will admit of. Not that it will be possible for us to divest the subject of all difficulties. For instance, the remedy of which we have spoken is represented as altogether "the gift of God," no less in the application of it to the soul, than in the revelation of it to the mind: and yet men are called upon to apply it to themselves, as much as if they were originally and of themselves perfectly competent to that task. It may be said, if we can attain it of ourselves, why represent it as a gift? and if we cannot attain it of ourselves, why represent that attainment as a duty?

I answer, To simplify our statements so as to remove all difficulties, is impossible; because the Gospel is, "a mystery, hidden in God from the beginning of the world! [Ephesians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.9);" but, to state it in so plain and simple a way as shall approve itself to every candid mind, is an object which should be aimed at, and may certainly be attained. That which introduces such obscurity into the Gospel is, *the attempt of men to reduce Christianity to a system*, such as man himself would devise, or such as his unenlightened reason would approve.

But "God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor are his ways as our ways [Isaiah 55:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.8-9)." No; they infinitely transcend ours: and the true way to comprehend God's system, is to consider for what ends he has revealed his Gospel.

We have said that His Gospel is a remedy: and it is a remedy, suited in itself to the necessities of man; and suited, in the manner of its proposal, to the powers of man.

Now man, however fallen, has faculties and powers, agreeably to which God will deal with him: for God draws us, not as beasts, or as stocks and stones, but "with the cords of a man, [Hosea 11:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 11.1);" that is, in a way consistently with our intellectual and moral powers. Now man has within him certain principles, as hope and fear; and by these principles God will move him. But, if there were in the Scriptures nothing but promises, what scope would there be for fear? or if there were nothing but commands and threatenings, what ground would there be for hope? But the Scriptures, meeting both of these principles with appropriate declarations, call forth both of them into act and exercise; and thus, as two forces from different angles, striking simultaneously and with equal strength on a given object, will propel that object forward in a straight line—so do these different declarations operate on the mind of man, and urge him forward in the path of duty and of holiness.

As for those who would wrest the Scriptures to make them all speak one language, they, whether Calvinists or Arminians, show that they have not duly considered the true design of God in the revelation of his will. They need to be reminded of this great peculiarity in the sacred records, that they are altogether suited, no less to the powers, than to the necessities, of man; and if the different parties would agree to meet upon that ground, there would be an end of all their controversies and animosities. Only strive to simplify the Scriptures, and they will be simple. But strive to perplex and confound them, and they may soon be made a theater for endless disputes.

To keep out of view everything that is of a questionable nature, has been, and shall be, my earnest endeavor. It is the practical effect of the Gospel which alone I am anxious to promote: and now, therefore, in conclusion, I take the liberty to recommend two things:

First, That we all seek a deep acquaintance with our state before God.

Next, That we apply to ourselves the remedy which God has set before us in the Gospel.

Should we but comply with the former of these requests, what might we not hope for from the remedy which has been set before us? Had we but a due preparation of heart for the reception of the Gospel, surely it would "distill as the dew upon our souls, and come as rain upon the new-mown grass."

The sound of salvation purchased by our incarnate God! Truly, it would transport our souls, as once the angels in Heaven were transported, when they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace; good-will towards men! [Luke 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.14)." What ineffable joy would spring up within us, from the thought of an indwelling Deity undertaking our cause, and working effectually upon our souls! Methinks we would already seize upon Heaven as our own, and, with confident exultation, defy all the powers, whether of earth or Hell, to rob us of it. Especially, if we began in earnest to realize these truths, then would our peace flow down like a river, and "our souls become as a well-watered garden, and as springs of water whose waters fail not."

But let us remember what is indispensably necessary to our profiting by the Gospel: we must feel, and deeply mourn over, our lost estate. "The whole need not a physician, but those who are sick:" and the remedy can be of no use to us, if we are not sensible of our disease. I pray God that this may not be forgotten by us. *A mere speculative knowledge of the Gospel, however accurate, will avail us nothing*. We must all be as patients in a hospital, and receive with thankfulness the remedy prescribed. If we neglect it, or attempt to substitute any other in its stead, we shall do so to our eternal ruin.*We must look to Christ for the justification, and to the Holy Spirit for the sanctification, of our souls*. "There is salvation for us in no other way whatever. There is no other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ!" But "through Him, all who believe shall be justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

Let us, then, implore of God now to "give testimony to the word of his grace;" and so to "shine into our hearts, as to give to every one among us 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)."

***~~#2223~~***

***~~RICHNESS AND FULLNESS OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11)~~***

"The glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

[Ephesians 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8), "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I would preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

OF the *nature*and *office*of the Gospel, I have spoken in my former discourse. Of its *riches*and *fullness*, I am now to treat. But "who is sufficient" for such an undertaking? 2 Corinthians 2:16. The "riches of Christ," as revealed in the Gospel, are declared to be "unsearchable," how, then, can we hope to bring them forth in any measure suited to the occasion? Yet we must make the attempt; because, to bring them forth, and exhibit them to view, is the duty of all who would approve themselves faithful in the ministerial office. This was the work assigned to the Apostle Paul: and it is no less required of us at this day, if we have been called to minister in holy things, and to serve God in his sanctuary.

Yet, methinks, instead of calling this a duty, I would rather call it a privilege; not a work imposed, but rather, as my text expresses it, "a grace given:" for no higher honor can be conferred on mortal man than to be sent forth by God to minister unto his fellow-sinners "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

Let it not, however, be thought that this high commission has any tendency to generate pride in the hearts of those who have received it: on the contrary, it will operate rather to humble and abase the soul under a sense of its own unworthiness and insufficiency. Thus it wrought on the Apostle Paul; who, finding no word whereby to express his unworthiness of such an honor, formed a word for the purpose, and called himself, not the least of all saints, but "less than the least." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I would preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." In like manner, I would now, under a befitting sense of my own utter insufficiency, proceed with the work assigned to me; and endeavor, as God shall enable me, to set before you the riches and the fullness of the Gospel of Christ.

For this end, I would consider the Gospel in a threefold view:  
as an expedient devised;  
as an instrument employed;  
and as a gift bestowed.

I would, under each head, set forth the riches of it:  
The riches of wisdom, contained in it as an expedient;  
The riches of power, as an instrument; and  
The riches of grace, as a gift.

***~~First, then, I will endeavor to set forth the riches of WISDOM contained in the Gospel, as an expedient for the salvation of ruined man.~~***

The Gospel is called "the wisdom of God in a mystery, 1 Corinthians 2:7;" and, truly, the wisdom exhibited in it is deeply mysterious. Suppose, for a moment, it had been left to man to devise a way for his own restoration to the Divine favor; or that all the angels in Heaven had been consulted by him for that end. I conceive that no way but that of an absolute pardon by a sovereign act of mercy could have entered into the mind of any finite intelligence. Whether such an exercise of mercy could have consisted with God's justice and honor, it is not for us to determine. None but God can know what is within the power of God to do. But we may safely declare, that, even supposing such an exercise of mercy, under the existing circumstances possible, it was not the way which was most suited to the occasion, nor the way that would bring the most honor to God. Therefore it was not the way which a God of infinite wisdom thought fit to adopt. God, at all events, determined to *make the fall of man an occasion of displaying his own glorious perfections*. Therefore, the question to be resolved was, How the removal of man's guilt, and the restoration of a ruined world to the favor of God would be made to subserve that end? In a word, How God should be glorified, and the sinner saved!

The *holiness*of God was called, to express its abhorrence of sin.

The *justice*of God was called, to execute vengeance on those who had committed sin.

The *truth*of God was called, to fulfill the threatenings denounced against sin.

But how shall *holiness*be displayed, justice be *honored*, and *truth*be kept inviolate—if the offender receives a full, gratuitous remission of his guilt? Here are difficulties, which not all the wisdom of men or angels could surmount.

No means had been devised for the restoration of the fallen angels; nor was it within the reach of any finite intelligence to declare, how any remedy could be found for fallen man.

Suppose that the idea of a *substitute*had entered into the mind of any, how could an innocent creature be punished in the place of the guilty? How could it be conceived, that God would ever consent to accept such a vicarious offering? How could it be imagined, that he would ever be induced to inflict, with his own hand, on one that was innocent, the wrath due to the guilty, and to punish the innocent for the guilty?

But suppose such a thought was suggested—where was there to be found one capable of representing the whole world, and of sustaining the punishment due to all the millions of mankind? Was there an *angel*that could take upon him this office? Were all the angels in Heaven capable of rendering such a service to mankind?

Could anyone less than God himself undertake so great a work? Could it be conceived possible that God would exercise such love towards those who had trampled on his laws, and risen up in rebellion against him? But, supposing that God was willing to undertake the office of restoring man, how shall he do it? How shall *God*endure sufferings for man? How shall he put himself in the place of man? How shall anything that he can do be made available for man, so as to be put to man's account, as if he had done it?

And, supposing that God were to become a man for the purpose of putting himself in the place of man, and doing and suffering what man was bound to do and suffer—how could it consist with the holiness and justice and truth of God, to let the innocent suffer, and the guilty go free? Yes, to let the innocent suffer on purpose that the guilty might go free?

The more we enter into the consideration of these things, and contemplate the difficulties which lay in the way of man's recovery to God, the more we shall see how impossible it was that any created wisdom would devise a way for effecting it, in consistency with God's honor.

But here Divine wisdom interposed; and in the councils of the Eternal Three it was determined, that God's co-equal, co-eternal Son would "undertake for us;" that "a body would be given him;" that, in the fullness of time, he would be born into the world, and, as the Substitute and Surety of all mankind, would bear their sins in his own sacred body; and, by his own obedience unto death, would work out a righteousness for all who would believe in him, even a righteousness commensurate with the fullest demands of God's law; so that, Divine justice being satisfied, "God might be just, and yet the justifier" of our sinful race! [Romans 3:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.26).

Contemplate now this mystery:  
A Mediator! that Mediator, God!  
That God, man!  
That Deity incarnate, suffering!  
Those sufferings, vicarious!  
His whole obedience, too, accepted as vicarious, and imputed to sinful man!  
  
Man, so rescued, brought into a state of peace with God!  
Man, so rescued, restored to the Divine image, accepted by his God, justified before the whole assembled universe, and exalted to a throne of glory!  
And all in perfect consistency with the honor of God himself! Yes, and all the Divine perfections glorified in this very way!

What shall we say?  
We are amazed!  
We are confounded.

We can scarcely believe our own statement—it must surely be "a cunningly devised fable."

But no! It is God's plan for the salvation of a ruined world! In the contemplation of it, we can do nothing but exclaim with the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [Romans 11:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.33)."

Now this Gospel is, as I am to show in the next place, the great instrument which God is pleased to employ for the restoration of the world to him.

***~~II. The riches of his POWER as so exerted, and as effecting the complete deliverance of man from his fallen state, is now to be set before you.~~***

It will be remembered, that while, in the eyes of the self-righteous Jews, the Gospel was a stumbling-block, and among the conceited Greeks was accounted foolishness, the Apostle declared it to be "the wisdom of God, and the power of God! [1 Corinthians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.24)." It seemed, to those who confided in their own wisdom, inconceivable that the salvation of man would ever be effected by means which they judged so unsuited to the end. But the Apostle hesitated not to affirm, that the Gospel would surely answer all the ends for which it had been ordained; would prove alike powerful for us, through the work of Christ; and in us, through the operation of his Spirit on our souls.

Behold its power for us! Satan had ruined our first parents, and, with them, their descendants also throughout the whole world; over whom he had usurped and exercised the most despotic sway. Hence he is called "the god of this world," and "the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that works in all the children of disobedience, [2 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.4) and [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2)." But the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to rescue us from his dominion, and to establish his own empire over man. And how would he effect this? Would it be in the way of mighty conquerors, who subdue the world by force? No, but by giving himself up into the power of his enemies, and allowing them to put him to death upon the cross. Yes, as strange as this way of conquering was, "by death he overcame him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage, [Hebrews 2:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14-15)."

When he hung upon the cross as an expiring malefactor, and was himself to all appearance subdued, it was even then that "he spoiled all the principalities and powers of Hell, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them by his cross, [Colossians 2:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.15)." And this one record, 'That he died for sinners upon the cross,' is the instrument which, from that very moment, has been effectual for the demolition of Satan's empire, and for the establishment of Christ's kingdom throughout the world.

This Gospel has been a weapon which neither men nor devils have been able to withstand: it has been "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, and bringing the very thoughts of men into captivity to the obedience of Christ, [2 Corinthians 10:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.4-5)."

See the effect of it throughout all the Roman empire: how did all the gods of the heathen fall before it; and all the prejudices and passions of mankind yield to its sway! Yes, as foolish as it seemed, and weak, "the foolishness of God was wiser than men, and the weakness of God was stronger than men, [1 Corinthians 1:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.25); and "this stone, cut out without hands, shall break in pieces all the powers of the universe" that shall attempt to withstand it, [Daniel 2:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 2.34-35).

And as the Gospel is thus powerful for us through Christ, so shall it also be powerful in us, through the influences of the Holy Spirit. Look at every soul of man: that wicked adversary, the devil, "takes us all in his snare, and leads us captive at his will, [2 Timothy 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.26)." And how are any delivered from his chains? Is it by human eloquence, or by the powers of moral suasion? No! in no instance have they been ever able to prevail. Nothing but the Gospel has ever truly emancipated one single soul, or brought one to the enjoyment of solid peace. But the Gospel has been "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, and been a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, [Hebrews 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 4.12)." See, on the day of Pentecost, what a change it wrought on thousands of the most blood-thirsty murderers! See, in instances without number, how it "turned men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)." There are multitudes at this day, who are living witnesses of its power; multitudes, who, by its enlightening, comforting, and sanctifying efficacy, are created altogether anew, and "filled with joy and peace in believing." These effects the world beholds, and wonders at, and is unable to account for. But they are seen in every place where the Gospel is faithfully administered. Yes, the simple exhibition of Christ crucified is still, as truly and as effectually as ever, "a hammer to break the rock in pieces! [Jeremiah 23:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.29);" and a mold, to form into Christ's likeness all that are "delivered into it, [Romans 6:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.17)," even all that are subjected to its divine influence.

If it is asked, how all this comes to pass: I answer, that the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, has undertaken to "glorify Christ," and to render his word effectual for all the ends and purposes for which it has been proclaimed; and the miracle wrought by Peter on the man lame from his birth is still realized, in a spiritual way, from day to day: "for the name of Jesus, through faith in his name, does still make many whole; so that, whereas they were from their very birth both lame and impotent, they now walk and leap for joy in the temple," and in the service of their God.

How great the power is that thus restores them to God may be seen in the comparison by which Paul sets it forth, when he prays for the Ephesian Church, and that in terms which no translation can ever adequately express, that they "may know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power towards those who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead." I say, then, that we may here behold the riches of power exerted by this apparently weak instrument in converting men to the Christian faith; and that it is at this hour, no less than in the apostolic age, "the power of God unto salvation to all those who believe, [Romans 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.16)."

But, agreeably to the plan proposed, I must go on further, in the third and last place, to show:

***~~III. The riches of GRACE which are displayed in the Gospel, as God's gift to sinful man.~~***

Paul, you will remember, states, that in the whole work of salvation, as revealed in the Gospel, God especially designed, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus, [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7)." We are called upon, therefore, to enter somewhat more fully into this part of our subject; and the rather, because it falls more within the reach of our comprehension, and seems capable of more easy development. I think, too, that the impression which this part of our subject is calculated to make, will be of a deeper and more abiding character; not only because it is of a less abstract nature, but because it applies itself more to the best feelings of our hearts.

But, while I enter on this part of my subject, I feel that, from the mode in which I propose to illustrate it, I may, to those who are not conversant with the Scripture history, be thought to treat it with less reverence than so deep and mysterious a subject demands. But I beg permission to say, that no man under Heaven would more revolt from anything that was irreverent in the ministry of the Gospel, than he who is about to submit to you the statement which is now contemplated.

It must be remembered, that the condescension of the Deity is that which is particularly to be set before you; and that, if it is brought before you in a way that is not usual, it is exhibited in the very light which the Scriptures themselves most fully authorize.

I need not remind this audience of the condescension of God to Abraham, when he permitted him to intercede for Sodom; and to reiterate his requests with continually increasing enlargement, until he had reduced the number of those for whose sake he desired the cities devoted to destruction to be spared, from fifty to forty-five, from forty-five to forty, from forty to thirty, from thirty to twenty, and from twenty to ten, [Genesis 18:23-32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 18.23-32).

Nor need I remind you of God's condescension to David, in reference to the judgments to be inflicted on him for numbering the people, in that he left altogether to the decision of the offender himself the judgment with which he would be visited, [2 Samuel 24:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Sam 24.12). But there is yet another instance of condescension which comes more fully to our point, and that is, God's own permission to Solomon to ask for himself whatever he chose ("Ask what I shall give you.") and his high approbation of the petition offered, in that he not only granted the thing desired, but added also other valuable blessings which the petitioner had forborne to ask, 1 Kings 3:5; [1 Kings 3:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 3.12-13).

Now, if we take these Scripture examples, and consider Adam after the fall as summoned into the presence of his Maker, and as having the same liberty accorded to him as had been given to these favored servants of the Deity; if we suppose the Almighty saying to him, in like manner as to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give you," in order to the restoration of yourself and all your descendants to my favor; and then as permitting him to offer successive requests in the form of a dialogue with the Deity, after the manner of Abraham—we shall behold the grace of God in a most astonishing point of view; and, I may add, in a point of view which will fill all our souls with gratitude and praise.

But I must again entreat that my statement may not be misconstrued as bearing the least appearance of irreverence: for I again say, that I would on no account whatever utter a single expression that would be justly open to such a reproach. But, indeed, my statement shall not be misapprehended, if only you will bear in mind what we ourselves, under the New-Testament dispensation, are authorized to do in our approaches to God, and to expect at his gracious hands. Our blessed Lord has expressly said to us, "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you, [John 15:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.7)." And Paul, to encourage our boldness and confidence in prayer, assures us, that "God is able, and doubtless willing too, to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think! [Ephesians 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.20)." So that, in fact, God says to us, "Ask of me all that your necessities require; and when language fails you, stretch your imagination to the uttermost, in order to comprehend all that can, by any possibility, be desirable for you; and I will do it; I will do it all; I will do above all; I will do abundantly above all; I will do exceeding abundantly above all, even above all that you can ask or even think!" "Open your mouth ever so wide, I will fill it! [Psalm 81:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 81.10)."

Now with this cautious and labored endeavor to bespeak your candid reception of my statement, I will proceed to suppose Adam, after he had fallen, standing in the presence of his Maker, and addressed by his Maker to the following effect: 'You have fallen; and all your descendants, whose head and representative you are, are fallen in you. But I have designs of love and mercy towards both you and them. I have already declared to your adversary the devil, that one shall spring from you to bruise his head, [Genesis 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 3.15); and now I say to you, that I will not only send you a Savior, but I will give you salvation in any way that you yourself shall desire, provided only it be not derogatory to my honor, or inconsistent with my perfections. Now, therefore consider your necessities, and I will supply them all; so that nothing shall be lacking, either to yourself or your posterity, that can conduce to their happiness in time or in eternity. I tell you again, that I will grant you a Savior; and in him shall be combined everything that you yourself shall desire.'

To this we may suppose Adam to reply: 'O my God, I am filled with wonder at your condescension and grace, to one who deserves nothing at your hands but wrath and indignation: and I would rather refer it back again to you, to give me such a Savior as you shall see fit: for, indeed, "I know neither what to ask, nor how to ask it [Romans 8:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.26)." I feel that I am so deeply fallen, that not the highest archangel about your throne could save me.'

'True,' we may suppose Jehovah to say; 'no creature could be sufficient for that end. But "the person whom I will appoint to that office shall be my only begotten Son, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16);" "My Fellow [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)," who is altogether One with me, [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30); in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal.'

'But, O my God, how shall I dare to approach him, or to spread my wants before him? I would fear that he would spurn me from his footstool, and never condescend to look on so vile and worthless a being as I am.'

'No; in order that he may sympathize with you, he shall assume your nature, [Hebrews 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.14); and from his own experience of temptation, be prepared and qualified to support you in your temptations, [Hebrews 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.18). "I will prepare a body for him" for this very end, [Hebrews 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.5). And, that he may not inherit any taint from you, I will form him in the womb of a pure Virgin; so that in his human, no less than in his divine nature, he may be the Son of God, [Luke 1:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.34-35).'

'But how shall I know his love towards me?'

'You shall have evidence of it, beyond all conception. For, notwithstanding "he has from all eternity been in my bosom, [John 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.18)," "a partaker with me in all my glory, [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.5)," he shall "empty himself of it all," in order that he may accomplish the work entrusted to him, [Philippians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6-7). Nor shall he only do this great thing, but he shall suffer for you all that you have deserved to suffer, "bearing your sins in his own sacred body, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24)," and expiating your guilt by his own obedience unto death, [Philippians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.8). Yes, "his visage shall be so marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men, [Isaiah 52:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 52.14)," that "by his chastisement your peace may be effected," and "by his stripes you may be healed, [Isaiah 53:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-5)."'

'I marvel, O my God, at this stupendous grace. But how shall I get access to him, to spread my wants before him?'

'He shall be ever with you, and with every one of your believing posterity, even to the end of the world, [Matthew 28:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.20); so that, wherever you are, and under whatever circumstances, you may have the most endearing "fellowship with him, [1 John 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.3)," and pour your every request into his gracious ear, [Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.6).'

'But how can I hope that his merciful interposition shall so prevail, as to procure for me an everlasting acceptance with you?'

'He shall make an atonement for your sins, and work out a righteousness for you and for all your believing posterity, [Romans 3:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.25); [Romans 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.18). He shall also, by the influence of my Holy Spirit, whom he will impart unto you, restore you to mine image, which you have lost, [Acts 2:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.38-39); and he shall be ever at my right hand, to plead his own merits in your behalf, and, by his effectual intercession, to prevent any expression of my displeasure on account of your short-comings and defects, [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 7.25).'

'But, O my God, you know what a subtle adversary I have, even that cruel enemy that has reduced me to my present calamitous condition. And, if he prevailed against me when I was yet in innocence, then how shall I be able to withstand him now that I am so weak, and encompassed, as I shall be, with such incessant and powerful temptations?'

'This I will do for you: "I will set Him upon my throne, even upon my holy hill of Zion, [Psalm 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 2.6);" and I will especially constitute him "Head over all things to the Church, [Ephesians 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.22)," and "He shall reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, [1 Corinthians 15:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.25);" so that, if only you trust in Him, you may be assured, that "not all the powers of darkness shall ever be able to separate you from his love, [Romans 8:38-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.38-39)."'

'May I then venture to hope, that, while ordering the affairs of the whole universe, he will condescend to notice such a worm as me?'

'Yes; he shall have such an interest in you, as a monarch would have in his jewels, [Malachi 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.17). and in his crown, [Isaiah 62:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 62.3); of which he would never, if by any means he could prevent it, allow himself to be stripped.'

'But, O my God, what shall I do when I am called to your bar of judgment? Oh! what hope can I entertain of acceptance with you in that solemn hour?'

'The fixing of your doom shall depend on Him, [John 5:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.22). [Romans 14:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.10). He, in whose atoning sacrifice you have trusted for the remission of your sins, and by whose effectual grace you have been sustained even to the end; He, whose interests are bound up in yours, and who is to possess you as the reward of all his travail; even He, I say, who witnessed all your tears, your struggles, your services, your pleas; He, who has been your *Savior*, shall then, in the capacity of a *Judge*, complete his work, and assign to you the kingdom of Heaven as your inheritance. So that, instead of trembling at the prospect of the judgment day, "you may have confidence before him at his coming, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28)."

'Let there now be an end of all your fears, and hear what I have decreed to do for you, for the magnifying of my own grace and mercy! [Ephesians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.7).

'I would "lay help for you on One that is mighty, [Psalm 89:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 89.19). Your Savior shall be "the Mighty God, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6)," even "God over all, blessed for evermore, [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5)."

'Notwithstanding his greatness, you may be able to approach him with humble confidence. He shall partake of your very nature, and be a man even as you are, [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3), "bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30);" so that, while, by reason of his *Deity*, he is one with me—he shall, by reason of his *humanity*, be one with you also. He shall be "God manifest in human flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16);" and "the very name whereby you shall be privileged to call him shall be, Emmanuel; which, being interpreted, is God with us! [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23)."

'Do you desire some assurance of his love? You shall have such evidence of it as shall remove from you even a possibility of doubt: for, for you he shall give up all the glory and felicity of Heaven, [John 6:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.38); for you he shall sustain, for a season, what shall be equivalent to all the horrors and miseries of Hell, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13); and for you he shall work out a righteousness, wherein you shall stand before me without spot or blemish, [Philippians 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.9); and by his effectual grace he shall "transform you into my image, in righteousness and true holiness, [Ephesians 4:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.23-24)."

'Do you desire that, as your Mediator, he may be ever present with you, to learn your wants; and at the same time be ever present with me, to obtain for you a supply of them? This also shall be done. He shall ever dwell, by his Spirit, in your very bosom, [Ephesians 3:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17); and shall ever be at my right hand in Heaven, as your Advocate and Intercessor, [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2).

'If you have any fears respecting his *sufficiency*to help you, know this, that for your sake I will commit the government of the whole universe into his hands, [1 Peter 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.22); so that nothing shall be done, "not even a hair of your head shall fall" to the ground, without his special permission, [Luke 12:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.6-7).

'Nay more; for your satisfaction and security, there shall be a perfect identity of interests between him and you; so that "whoever touches you, shall touch the apple of his eye, [Zechariah 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 2.8);" and "whoever shall give but a cup of cold water to you, shall be considered as having given it directly and personally to him, [Matthew 25:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.40)."

'And, that there may not remain a wish of your heart unaccomplished, I have ordained that this Savior shall be your Judge. Yes, He who has "lived in you, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)," and "been your very life, [Colossians 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.4)," shall bear testimony to you before the assembled universe, that you are his redeemed child, [Matthew 10:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.32); and shall claim you, as "his treasure, [Exodus 19:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 19.5)," "his inheritance, [Deuteronomy 32:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 32.9)," "his purchased possession, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14)."'

Of course, this *supposed conference*between Jehovah and his fallen creature, Adam, will not be taken by you in a strict sense, but only as a mere illustration of the condescension and grace of God. And, if it is remembered how Moses pleaded, and even expostulated, with God, [Exodus 32:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 32.11-14); and how "Jacob wrestled with Jehovah the whole night in prayer, saying, I will not let you go unless you bless me," and yet, instead of being reproved as guilty of presumption, was commended for his perseverance, and was honored with the name of Israel in remembrance of it, [Genesis 32:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen 32.24-28); and, above all, if it is borne in mind that not one word has been put into Jehovah's mouth which has not actually proceeded from his lips—this fictitious statement, or ideal conference, will not be thought more than what the whole Scripture justifies; and that, in fact, it places in the clearest light what I so earnestly wish to impress upon your minds; namely, *the infinite extent of God's grace*, which so far transcends all that it was possible for any created intelligence to "ask, or even think."

But, dismissing from our minds the illustration, what must we think of the point illustrated? What must we think of the grace of God displayed in this dispensation, when there is not any one thing which the whole universe assembled in council, could ask, provided it were really good for them, and consistent with God's honor to bestow, which is not actually given to them, unsolicited and unsought, in the Gospel of Christ? Even things the most remote from human apprehension, and which we would have been ready to imagine incapable of being combined in the same person, are actually made to meet in the Savior, whom God has raised up for us. Methinks, even the slightest knowledge of this incomprehensible mystery is sufficient to fill all our souls with wonder and admiration, with gratitude and praise!

Having already trespassed upon your time too long, I must wave much which the occasion calls for; and content myself with suggesting, in conclusion, that if it is a minister's duty, as doubtless it is, to "preach the riches of Christ," and to dig deeply into the mine of Scripture in order that he may be able to bring them forth; and if these riches be absolutely "unsearchable; then ought we all to seek after them with our whole hearts, and to account all other acquisitions "as dung and dross, in comparison with them."

This was, beyond all doubt, the judgment of the Apostle Paul, who says of all his high privileges and attainments, "Whatever things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8)."

To this same judgment and experience I would invite all who hear me this day: for, what is there under Heaven that can be compared with these riches? It is much to be lamented, that the great mass, even of those who read the Scriptures, content themselves with a very superficial view of all the wonders contained in them. But I would that the riches of redeeming love were sought out by every one of us with all diligence; and treasured up in our minds as of inestimable value. It is by these that the souls of men are enriched; and by these that they are adorned. It is by "beholding, with an unveiled face, the glory of Christ, that we are changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18." It is "by comprehending the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of his unbounded love, that we are filled with all the fullness of God, [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19)." I do therefore again invite you to contemplate this subject, and to explore the riches of divine wisdom contained in it. I would also have you experience in your souls the riches of its power; that, being transported with a sense of God's grace and love, you may enjoy, in all its fullness, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

***~~#2224~~***

***~~SUITABLENESS AND SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11)~~***

"The glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

[1 Corinthians 10:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.3-4), "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."

ON entering upon my present course, I proposed to take a comprehensive view of the Gospel; and to set it before you in:  
its *nature*and *office*,  
its *riches*and *fullness*,  
its *suitableness*and *sufficiency*,  
its *excellency*and *glory*.

The first two parts have been submitted to your consideration: the third part, the *suitableness*and *sufficiency*of the Gospel, comes now to be considered by us; and the words which I have read will afford me a very fit occasion for bringing the subject before you. They refer to the sustenance afforded to the whole Jewish nation in the wilderness; and they distinctly mark the parallel that is to be drawn between the food given to them, and that on which our souls are to live under the Gospel dispensation.

To all the people of Israel there was but one bread, and one stream of water that followed them. The oldest and the youngest were alike sustained by that food; and all found it equally sufficient for them: nor could anyone have desired any other food, without sinning against God, and against his own soul. Had anyone refused that food, he of necessity must perish.

Just so it is under the Gospel dispensation. Christ is that *Bread*that came down from Heaven; and that *Rock*also from whence the living water proceeds: and, if we make light of that provision, and refuse to partake of it, we die. So our blessed Lord assures us: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you: but whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life: for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, [John 6:53-55](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.53-55)." That is, the provision made for sinners in my Gospel, while it is necessary for all, is also suited to all, whatever be their states; and sufficient for all, whatever be their necessities.

Let us consider, then,

***~~I. The SUITABLENESS of the Gospel.~~***

There are three points of view in which it commends itself to us as suitable, namely:  
as offering to us freely,  
and communicating to us fully,  
and securing to us finally,  
all the blessings which it has provided for us.

**First, the Gospel offers to us freely, all the blessings which it has provided for us.** It requires nothing to be done by us, in order to merit its blessings, or to earn, if I may so speak, a saving interest in them. They are altogether a free gift of God to man; as much as ever the *manna*was, which was rained about the tents of Israel; or the *stream*which followed them through all their wanderings in the wilderness. In this light they are represented throughout the whole inspired volume.

It is remarkable, that the very first promise of a Savior was not only given without any solicitation on the part of our first parents, but it was not, strictly speaking, given to them at all; it was included in the threatening denounced by God against the serpent who beguiled them, and was not given directly either to Adam or to Eve: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Not only was the Lord Jesus Christ himself the gift of God to man; but every blessing which he has purchased for us comes to us also under that endearing character, as it is written, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23)."

Hence all the invitations of the Gospel are sent to us unclogged with any conditions: nothing is required but a desire after them, and a willingness to receive them freely at the hands of God. "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." Again, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come: and let him who hears, say, Come: let him who is athirst come: and whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely! [Revelation 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 22.17)."

Now this renders the Gospel suitable to us all: for if we were required to do something to deserve its blessings, what could we do? Or what hope could we entertain of acquiring a saving interest in the Gospel?

Were an offer of salvation now made to the *fallen angels*upon such conditions, what would it avail them? They, in their present state, are incapable of doing anything to merit God's favor in the slightest degree: and in that same state, that state of incapacity to help ourselves, are we also. But, through mercy, no such work is required at our hands.

Both Moses in the law, and Paul in the Gospel, concur in this beneficial counsel: "Do not say in your heart, Who shall ascend into Heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above: or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach, [Romans 10:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.5-8)." Yes, we do preach that to receive everything by faith is the duty that is assigned to every man: and though, after we have embraced the Gospel, there is much for us to do in order to honor and adorn it—our first reception of its blessings must be altogether free, and we must stand indebted for them solely to the sovereign grace of God.

But, in truth, I say too little, if I merely affirm that the Gospel offers everything to us freely. The fact is, that Paul expresses the greatest jealousy upon this head; and declares, that if we attempt to do anything, however good in itself, with a view, either in whole or in part, to *merit*salvation by it—then we make void the whole Gospel, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you become circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing, [Galatians 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.2); [Galatians 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.4)." He tells us, that salvation must be "wholly of works, or wholly of grace, [Romans 11:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.6)." He reminds us, that if salvation were of works, in ever so small a degree, there should, in that degree, be room for boasting: whereas boasting must be wholly and for ever excluded, [Romans 3:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.27); and salvation, from first to last, be received as a free gift of God for Christ's sake, [Ephesians 2:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.8-9).

This is not pleasing to the proud heart of man; because *we are ever looking for something within ourselves, as a ground of self-preference or self-delight*. But, what if God had waited until Israel had done something to merit the heavenly food with which he supplied them? It was a free gift which they needed: and it is that which we also need, and which renders the Gospel altogether suitable to fallen man.

**Next, the Gospel communicates its blessings to us fully.** There is not a want in man which it does not supply. Are we "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" The Gospel "gives us gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich; and white clothing to cover us, that the shame of our nakedness may not appear; and it anoints our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see, [Revelation 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.17-18)."

This is a feature of the Gospel which the Prophet Isaiah portrays in very lively colors: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor! [Isaiah 61:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 61.1-3)."

Now, this passage peculiarly illustrates the point before us; because it takes a view of mankind in a vast diversity of conditions, and represents the Gospel as adapting itself to every different state, and as supplying the precise wants of every individual. And it is the more to be noticed, because our blessed Lord, in the first public discourse that ever he delivered, turned to that very passage, and cited it, and declared it to be that very day fulfilled in their ears, [Luke 4:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 4.18-21).

Now, conceive of man in every state that can be imagined, conceive of him as:  
bowed down with a sense of guilt,  
or harassed with temptations of Satan,  
or sinking under persecutions from men,  
or under the hidings of God's face,  
or in the prospect of immediate death;  
the Gospel contains that very thing which he needs:  
pardon for all sin,  
strength against every temptation,  
support under every trial,  
comfort under every affliction,  
and life by the simple exercise of faith, precisely as it was given to the dying Israelites by a view of the brazen serpent, [John 3:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.14-15).

Were there any one situation for which the Gospel did not yield a supply, or any one thing which it required us to provide from our own store—it would not be a suitable remedy for us. Suppose, for a moment, that the Israelites in the wilderness had been provided with bread and water; but that they had been left to their own guidance, or that no miracle had been wrought to preserve their clothes, or to keep their feet from the common effect of long and wearisome toil; the lack of any one thing would have rendered all their other blessings vain and void.

And so it would be with us. Say, for instance, to a dying man, 'You must render such and such services to the Lord, before you can be accepted by him'—what hope would such painful tidings inspire? But tell him that "Christ died for the very chief of sinners," and that "those who come unto him he will never cast out, [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)," and you will comfort his soul. And though such *death-bed experiences*are by no means to be trusted in—yet he may perhaps be made such another monument of grace as was the dying thief, and may be a "jewel in the Redeemer's crown" for ever and ever!

But, thanks be to God! There is nothing which the Gospel does not impart to us in the hour of need: pardon, peace, holiness, glory—all are given to us for Christ's sake, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption! [1 Corinthians 1:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.30)."

But that which renders the Gospel preeminently suitable to us, is that it finally secures to us the full possession of its blessings:

It represents salvation, with all its attendant benefits, as contained in an everlasting covenant, and made over to all who truly believe in Christ, [Hebrews 8:8-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 8.8-10).

It represents that covenant, also, as "confirmed by God himself with an oath, in order that, by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us, [Hebrews 6:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.17-18)."

It further represents Christ as the Mediator of that covenant, [Hebrews 9:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.15), and all its blessings as treasured up in him for our use, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19); and therefore treasured up in him, because, if they had been committed to us, they would have been insecure, or, rather, would infallibly be lost.

The statements of Scripture upon this head are as strong and express as can well be conceived. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is said to live in the believer: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live. Yet not I; but Christ lives in me! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)."

But stronger still is the Apostle's language in another place: "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4)." Here, not only is Christ called our life; but our life is said to be "hid with Christ in God:" and from that very circumstance we are justified in hoping, that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory!

But I apprehend that the real force of these words is not generally seen. I conceive the true import of them to be to the following effect: When God first made man, he committed the life of the whole universe to Adam, as their head and representative, that they might stand in him, or fall in him. But, notwithstanding Adam was perfect, and had but one single restraint imposed upon him as a test of his fidelity, he fell; and, by his fall, brought death and destruction upon all his posterity.

Now, in restoring men to his favor, God says, 'I will not commit your eternal interests into your own hands; for if I do, as weak as you are, and surrounded with temptations, and having your own interests alone confided to you, what can I hope, but that you will cast them all away, and perish? I will therefore give you another Covenant Head and Representative, even my only dear Son, and commit all your interests to him: he shall be your hope: "he shall be your very life;" yes, "your life shall be hidden with Christ in God!" Then I shall be sure that no enemy shall prevail against you: for "none can pluck you out of his hands; much less shall any pluck you out of my hands, [John 10:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.28-29)."'

In what I have said on this sublime portion of Holy Writ, I would be understood to speak with diffidence. But I believe that the interpretation which I have put upon it is the true sense, and that no one can enter into its full meaning who does not view it in this light. But the point I am insisting on depends not on one or two particular passages: it is the statement of the whole Scriptures. Every soul is given into the hands of Christ, that he may "keep it by his own power, through faith unto salvation, [John 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.2), [1 Peter 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.5)." Hence it is that he could appeal to his Father in his last intercessory prayer, that "of those who had been committed to him he had lost none, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12)." And hence it is that Paul was so "confident, that, wherever the good work was begun in a soul, it would be carried on and perfected unto the end, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)." He knew that Christ was the Author of true faith, wherever it existed; and that he, who was "the Author, would also be the Finisher, of it, [Hebrews 12:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.2);" and hence he assured both himself and every believing soul, that, inasmuch as "Christ has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you, [Hebrews 13:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.5-6)," we may dismiss all fear, and rest in perfect confidence, that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform, [Romans 4:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 4.21)."

Now, then, see how suitable to us the Gospel is, in this point of view. It shows us where our hope is; and that, as "Christ is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, Jude verse 24," we have nothing to do, but to commit ourselves into his hands, and to "live the life which we now live in the flesh, simply by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." And, if we only know and remember "in whom we have believed," we may be assured, that "he will keep that which we have committed to him, [2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)," and "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom! [2 Timothy 4:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.18)."

If any suppose that such a confidence in Christ would supersede the necessity of holy fear and watchfulness, I beg permission, once for all, to say, that, notwithstanding all that God has treasured up for us in Christ, we are still weak in ourselves, and to our last hour "must we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, [Philippians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12)." We are saved by faith, as far as it respects God; but we are saved by fear, as far as it respects ourselves. To every soul under Heaven are those words addressed, "You stand by faith: be not high—minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)."

***~~II. The SUFFICIENCY of the Gospel comes now, in the second place, to be considered.~~***

Truly, it is sufficient for every soul of man, even as the manna and the water were for the whole nation of Israel. For our comfort, for our sanctification, and for our complete salvation—the Gospel is perfectly sufficient.

**The Gospel is sufficient for our comfort**. Suppose a man to be brought, by a view of his own sinfulness, to the very borders of despair; what can he need more, than to hear that God himself has undertaken his cause, and assumed his nature, and expiated his guilt—by his own sufferings unto death?

What would he wish to add to this? What can, by any possibility, be added to it? If this is not sufficient, what can be? His sins, even though they were as numerous and heinous as those of Manasseh himself, are but finite: whereas the atonement offered for him is of value infinite; yes, and the righteousness wrought out for him is also of value infinite. We are told expressly 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, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)." Let a man's sins be of ever so deep a dye, even "though they were red as scarlet or as crimson, they shall be made as white as snow! [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18)."

We can scarcely conceive of greater guilt than that of *David*, after all the mercies that had been given to him, and all the profession of piety which he had made. Yet he prays, "Purge me with hyssop, 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);" and then he acknowledges the efficacy of this remedy, saying, "You have made the bones which you have broken to rejoice, [Psalm 51:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 51.8)."

The instances in the New Testament of the efficacy of the Gospel to comfort a believing soul, are numberless. Behold the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, whose hands were yet reeking with the Savior's blood: scarcely had they believed in Christ one hour, before they "ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God, [Acts 2:46-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.46-47)." Wherever Christ was preached, great joy sprang up in the hearts of those who heard the word, [Acts 8:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.5); [Acts 8:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.8).

And is it not so at this day? What "though we do not see Christ—yet we love him; and, believing in him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, [1 Peter 1:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7-8)." This is declared to be the invariable effect of the Gospel throughout the whole world: "Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel, [Isaiah 44:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.23)."

Only let the Gospel descend as dew upon any place, and "the wilderness will be glad, and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose! [Isaiah 35:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.1);" for "the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody! [Isaiah 51:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 51.3)."

I forbear to speak of other sorrows, and of the consolation which the Gospel will administer under them; because there is no sorrow whatever, which, in weight or poignancy, can be compared with that which a sense of *guilt*creates in the soul: and, if the supports of the Gospel are so effectual under that, we may well suppose that all minor sorrows shall flee before it, even as the mists before the noon-day sun.

I would observe therefore next, that**the Gospel is sufficient for our sanctification**. Never was anything found to change the heart of man, but the Gospel. Let anyone call to mind the labors of the ancient philosophers, and inquire whether any one ever prevailed so far as to sanctify the hearts, of many, shall I say? nay, of one single individual? No, never, from the foundation of the world, did philosophy effect this, in one single instance.

But, when the Gospel was preached, what effects were produced in every place!

The passions of men were subdued;  
their lusts were mortified;  
their habits were changed;  
their dispositions were made altogether new;  
and those who had borne in every feature a semblance of their father the devil, were "transformed into the image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness."

This was nothing but what the voice of prophecy had long before announced: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater—so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed! [Isaiah 55:10-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.10-13)."

If it is asked, How the Gospel effects this change? I answer, *It reveals a Savior to us in all the wonders of his love; and thus generates in the soul a desire to serve and honor him*. No sooner do we see that we have been "bought with a price," than we desire to "glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his, [1 Corinthians 6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.20)." In aid of these new desires, it brings down the Holy Spirit into the soul. That Divine Agent is promised to all who believe in Christ: and Christ does send him down into the hearts of his people, to "strengthen them with might in their inward man, [Ephesians 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.16)," and to "work all their works in them, [Isaiah 26:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.12)." Thus they become "sanctified in body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23," and are rendered "fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, [Colossians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.12)."

Thus does the Gospel sanctify men; filling them with new principles, to which they were utter strangers before; and imparting to them new powers, which none but a believing soul can ever exercise.

I add once more;

**The Gospel is sufficient for our complete salvation.** In no situation whatever can we be placed, wherein it does not afford us "strength equal to our day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25)." It not only makes us conquerors, but "more than conquerors;" rendering our very troubles a source of joy, [Romans 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3), and our conflicts an occasion of more exalted triumphs.

Behold the Apostle Paul under a trial of no ordinary kind; a trial so grievous that it seemed almost entirely to overwhelm him: yet, when the Lord Jesus had given an answer of peace to his soul, he was not only reconciled to his trials, but actually took pleasure in them, "I take pleasure," says he, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong! [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10)."

More, when in expectation of martyrdom itself, he not only felt no apprehensions, but regarded his sufferings rather as an occasion of joy; and not only rejoiced upon his prospects, but desired his Christian friends to rejoice with him also, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

But, to enter properly into this part of our subject, we should see what an inconceivable superiority to all the powers, whether of earth or Hell, the Gospel imparted to that highly-favored servant of Christ. Hear his own words, even while he was yet contending with all his enemies: "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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 8:31-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31-39)."

Now here I wish it to be particularly noticed, that not one word of all this is spoken by him as an attainment peculiar to himself as an Apostle. The whole is spoken upon principles common to the whole Christian world. Is God for us? did Christ die for us? and is he risen and making intercession for us? then is the whole of this experience proper for us also, as well as for him: and in it we see, that the Gospel is sufficient to perfect everything that concerns us; and so to carry us through things temporal, that we may finally attain the things eternal!

Such then, is the spiritual food which God commends to you this day. And now let me invite you all to partake of it. In rich abundance is your heavenly Father causing the *manna*to fall around your tents; and at this moment are the *streams*gushing out like a river, for the satisfying of your thirsty souls. O that we all felt our need of the bread and water of life, as the Israelites did of the food that perishes! Imagine to yourselves the sense of obligation which they felt at having all their wants supplied; and the avidity with which they seized the provisions which were thus afforded them. Would to God that we had some resemblance to them, and could feel an intensity of interest suited to the occasion, now that Christ is freely offered to us for the support of our souls!

Remember, I beg you, that not one among them was benefitted by merely hearing or seeing what God had done for them. No, it was by applying to themselves the heavenly gift, for their own personal comfort and support. In like manner must we also apply to ourselves all the rich provisions of the Gospel. We must "eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood," if we would have our souls nourished unto eternal life.

Earnestly would I wish that this distinction would be made, and carefully remembered. We are ready to think that we have done enough when we have heard the Gospel, and approved of the truths contained in it. But we must receive them into our hearts by faith. Yes, they must enter into our very souls; and we must live upon them from day to day. Never are we to be weary of feeding upon Christ. We must see and feel that "his flesh is food indeed, and his blood is drink indeed," and, feeding daily upon him, we must hunger for nothing else, and thirst for nothing else! [John 6:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.35).

At the same time, we must take care to show that we are really invigorated by this heavenly food, and fitted to prosecute our journey through this dreary wilderness. In a word, while we take it to ourselves as suitable, we must show to others its sufficiency for all that our necessities can require.

Let none despise this food. Whether we be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, Christ is alike *needful*for us, and will be alike *sufficient*for us.

There is one peculiarity, however, in which the parallel fails, and must be turned into a contrast. Those who ate of that spiritual food, died. But shall anyone perish who feeds on Christ? No, truly: whoever he may be, he shall become*a monument of saving grace*, and his soul shall live for ever.

And now, need I add anything more to show the importance of receiving Christ, and feeding upon him? Alas! alas! The Israelites in the wilderness needed none to urge them to use the food provided for them, notwithstanding all the benefit to be derived from it was the prolongation of their bodily life, which must at all events terminate in a few years.

But what exhortations and entreaties are necessary to induce us to feed on Christ, for the life of our souls! Some feel no need of Christ, others pour contempt upon him, as unsuitable: others, again, think they must add to him, as insufficient: and few, very few, will live upon him, as "all their salvation, and all their desire."

To those, however, who do see the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ, I would say: Gather up your portion of the manna daily, before the rising sun has had time to melt it; and refresh yourselves with the living waters with exquisite delight: and, in the strength of this your food, go on your way rejoicing, [1 Kings 19:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Kings 19.8).

Yes, "as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, [Colossians 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.6-7)."

***~~#2225~~***

***~~THE EXCELLENCY AND GLORY OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.11)~~***

"The glorious Gospel of the blessed God!"

[Ephesians 3:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.17-19), "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

FROM no part of Holy Writ do we obtain a deeper insight into the great mysteries of the Gospel, than from the prayers of the Apostle Paul. He there embodied, as it were, all his views of divine truth, and poured forth his soul to God in terms altogether out of the reach of an uninspired mind; in terms so vast, so grand, so comprehensive, that, with the utmost stretch of our imagination, we find it exceedingly difficult to grasp the thoughts contained in them.

I will not detain you with any comment on this prayer, because the subject which I have to bring before you is of itself sufficient to occupy all the time that can reasonably be devoted to one discourse. I have omitted the former part of this prayer, because it is the latter part alone that is applicable to the subject before us, or proper to be brought forward as introductory to this discourse. But to that part I would wish to draw your more particular attention; because, in praying for the Ephesians, that they might "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God," he not only adverts to the subject which I am about to bring before you, but declares that "all saints in the universe ought in some good measure to comprehend it." It is obvious, on the most superficial view of these words, that the Apostle saw a glory and excellency in the Gospel, beyond what it was in the power of language to express, or of any finite imagination fully to comprehend; and that he regarded a discovery of that excellency as the appointed means of accomplishing in men the whole work of divine grace, and of ultimately filling them with all the fullness of God. Hence it will be seen how appropriate these words are to our present subject; wherein I am to set before you, as God shall enable me, the Gospel of Christ, in all its excellency and in all its glory.

In prosecution of this great object, I will endeavor to exhibit the Gospel:  
as honoring God's law;  
as glorifying his perfections;  
and as laying a foundation for greater happiness, both to men and angels, than either of them could ever have enjoyed, if man had never fallen.

***~~First, I am to set the Gospel forth as honoring God's law.~~***

This is a point of view in which it deserves the most attentive consideration. For, if we proclaim a free and full salvation, and that, simply by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—we immediately appear to men to set aside the law. And more particularly, when we state, that the law cannot justify any man—that it is not to be observed with any view to obtain justification by it—that we must not so much as lean to it in the slightest degree—and that the placing of the smallest dependence upon it will invalidate the whole Gospel—we are supposed to be downright Antinomians in principle, whatever we may be in practice; and our doctrines are represented as quite dangerous to the community.

Now, it must be remembered that Paul's own statements were, in the judgment of many, obnoxious to this very reproach; and that he was, therefore, constrained to vindicate them from this charge: "Do we, then, make void the law through faith? God forbid," says he: "yes, we establish the law [Romans 3:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.31)."

The law, you will remember, requires perfect obedience to all its commandments, and denounces a curse against every one who shall violate even the least of them in the smallest possible degree. Now, it is manifest that we have broken them in ten thousand instances, and are consequently obnoxious to its heaviest judgments: and yet we say to those who believe in Christ, that they have nothing to fear; for "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Here, then, we seem to set aside the law altogether, both in its *commanding*and *condemning*power. But the truth is, that we establish the law in both respects: for the Gospel declares, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of Heaven and earth, was "made of a woman, made under the law," on purpose that, in his own person, he might fulfill the law which we had broken, and endure the penalties which we had incurred; so that not a jot or tittle would pass from the law, until the whole of it, in every possible view, would be fulfilled. This work he both undertook and executed. He obeyed the law, in its utmost possible extent; and he endured the wrath due to the sins of the world.

Now, consider how greatly the law was honored by this. It would have been honored, if all mankind had obeyed it: and it would also have been honored, if they had all been consigned over to the punishment they had merited by their disobedience. In either case, its authority would have been displayed and vindicated. But when the Lawgiver himself, the Mighty God, becomes a man, and puts himself under its authority, and obeys all its precepts, and suffers all its penalties, and does this on purpose that the law may be honored, and that the salvation of man may be rendered compatible with its demands—this puts an honor upon the law which it would never have obtained by any other means, and must for ever render it glorious in the eyes of the whole intelligent creation.

But it is not in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, as our Head and Representative, that the law is honored. The Gospel engages that every sinner who is savingly interested in its provisions shall himself also honor the law in his own person. For every one, at the time that he comes to Christ for mercy, must acknowledge, that he is justly condemned by the law; and that, if, for his transgressions of the law, he is cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, it will be no more than his just desert. And this must he acknowledge, not in mere words only, that carry not the heart along with them; no; he must feel that he is actually in danger of this very punishment; and that nothing but a most wonderful act of mercy can ever deliver him from it. He must go to God, as one that sees this very punishment awaiting him; and must, from his inmost soul, cry out with Peter, when sinking in the waves, "Save me Lord, or I perish!"

Moreover, in his supplications for mercy, he must plead the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ in his behalf. He must not even desire that the authority of the law would be made void; no, not even for the salvation of his soul: he must found all his hopes on the honor done to the law by the sufferings of Christ; and must desire that those sufferings may be put to his account, as if he himself had endured them. Nor is his own mind to be satisfied with anything which does not satisfy the law, and put honor upon the law. Nor is this all: for he must acknowledge, that without a righteousness commensurate with the utmost demands of the law, he never can be, nor ever ought to be, accepted by God. He must deeply lament his utter inability to keep the law in this manner; and must renounce all hope in himself; assured, that nothing but perfect obedience can ever be received by God, or be acknowledged by him as honoring his law.

A man rightly instructed would deem it an insult to the law to desire that his partial and worthless performances would be regarded as answering its demands: and, in this view, renouncing all hope in himself and his own works, he will plead the obedience which his incarnate God has paid to the law, and trust in that alone for righteousness and salvation. He will not even wish for acceptance with God on any other terms than those of having rendered, either in himself or in his divine Surety, a perfect obedience to the law. In a word, he will regard the Lord Jesus Christ as "the end of the law for righteousness to the believing soul, [Romans 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.4)," and trust in him altogether under that character, "The Lord our Righteousness, [Jeremiah 23:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 23.6)."

Thus you perceive that the Gospel provides for the honor of the law, not only in showing that it has been honored by the obedience and sufferings of our incarnate God, but in requiring every sinner in the universe to honor it in his own person, by founding all his hopes on that very mediation by which the law has been so greatly honored.

Nor have we yet attained a full view of this part of our subject: for the Gospel further requires that all who in this way have found acceptance with God shall endeavor to honor the law by their own obedience to it in every respect. True, indeed, the believer feels that he cannot perfectly obey it: he feels too, that he can never, by his best attempts to obey it, recommend himself to God, so as to obtain a justifying righteousness before him. Yet he regards the law as "holy, and just, and good;" and endeavors to fulfill it, as much as if he were to be saved altogether by his obedience to it. "The grace of God, which brings salvation, teaches him this: it teaches him, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, he would live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)."

While, therefore, he embraces the promises of the Gospel as the one ground of his hope, he will make use of those promises as an incentive to "cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God, [2 Corinthians 7:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 7.1)."

Now, this effect of the Gospel is not produced only in a few particular instances; it is universal: nor is there so much as one sinner that ever finds acceptance through Christ, without having this experience realized in his soul. If any person under Heaven professes to have obtained salvation through Christ without having:  
this humiliation under a sense of sin,  
this conviction of his lost estate,  
this acquiescence in the justice of God as consigning him over to perdition,  
this consciousness of his inability to repair his breaches of the law,  
this persuasion that the law ought to be honored both in its commanding and condemning power,  
this hope in Christ, as having so honored it in both respects,  
this utter renunciation of every other hope  
—and, in addition to it all, this desire to obey the law, and this determination to honor it in every possible way—I say, if any person without this, as the deep and abiding experience of his soul, would profess an expectation of salvation by Christ, we would not hesitate to say of him, what the Apostle said of the self-deceiving Jews, that, however he may be "seeking after righteousness, he neither has attained it," nor ever will attain it, in the way in which he is proceeding, [Romans 9:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.31); he is yet a stranger to the law, and the glory of the Gospel is yet hidden from his eyes. He has yet to learn, that, as the Gospel honors the law, so every one that is saved by the Gospel does, and must, in every possible way, and to the utmost extent of his power, contribute to this good work of "magnifying and making honorable the law of God, [Isaiah 42:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 42.21)."

***~~II. The next point of view in which the excellency of the Gospel is to be shown, is that it glorifies all the perfections of God.~~***

That there was a difficulty in making the salvation of man to consist with the honor of the Divine perfections, was mentioned in a former discourse; wherein were shown the *wisdom*of God in contriving a way, the *power*of God in effecting it, and the *grace*of God in accommodating it to all the wants and necessities of fallen man.

My present point will lead me to show, not merely that this consistency is secured, but that all the perfections of God are more glorified in this way than they could have been in any other.

For instance, suppose that man, with all his descendants, had been consigned to misery: the justice of God would have appeared; and his truth also would have been seen: but it would not have been known that there existed in the Deity any such attribute as mercy; or that, if it did exist in him, it could never find a fit scope for exercise: since the exercise of it must, of necessity, involve in it some remission of the rights of justice, and some encroachment on the honor of the law.

On the other hand, if free and full remission of sins had been granted unto man, it would not have been seen how such an act of grace could consist with the rights of justice and holiness and truth. But, in the method of salvation which the Gospel reveals, not only are these perfections reconciled with each other, but all of them are exceedingly enhanced and glorified.

That I may keep as clear as possible of my former subject, I will now confine myself to three of the Divine attributes: justice, mercy, and truth; and show how a tenfold luster is reflected upon them in the Gospel salvation, beyond what could ever have beamed forth in any other way.

**JUSTICE**, as I have said, would have been seen in the condemnation of the human race. But what shall we say of it as exhibited in the Gospel? Behold, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "God over all," puts himself in the place of sinful man, and undertakes to endure for man all that the sins of the world had merited. But what will justice say, when it finds our sins transferred to him? Will it venture to seize on him? Will it exact the debt of him? Will it draw forth the sword against him, who is "Jehovah's Fellow? [Zechariah 13:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Zech 13.7)."

Methinks the sword, stretched out, would fall from the hand of justice, and refuse to execute its appointed work. But, no! Sin is found on our incarnate God. True, it is in him only by imputation: yet, being imputed to him, he must be made answerable for it, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7), and must himself endure all that it has merited at the hands of God.

Behold, then, for the honor of God's justice, the cup is put into the hands of our blessed Lord: and the very dregs of the cup of bitterness are given him to drink: nor is he released from his sufferings, until he can say, "It is finished!"

Contemplate, now, this mysterious fact; the God of Heaven and earth becoming man, and, by his own obedience unto death, satisfying the demands of law and justice, in order that God, through his vicarious sufferings, may "be just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Christ, [Romans 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.20)."

But could justice be satisfied with nothing less? would it accept of nothing less? would it not consent to the salvation of a human being on any other terms than these? Behold, then, I say, how exalted is its character! how inalienable its rights! how inexorable its demands! Truly, in all that it inflicts, either on men or angels, the law is not so glorified, as it is in this stupendous mystery.

Next, let us take a view of the same subject in reference to **MERCY**. This Divine attribute would doubtless have been displayed, if man, by a mere sovereign act of grace, had been pardoned. But it did not seem good to the Deity that mercy would so triumph over all his other attributes. It shall indeed be brought forth to light, and have full scope for operation; but its actings shall be such only as shall consist with the honor of every other attribute of God.

But what way shall be devised for this? Divine wisdom, as I have before shown, contrived a way, wherein God might be at the same time "a just God and a Savior, [Isaiah 45:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.21)." The plan proposed was, that God's only dear Son would be substituted in the place of sinners.

But shall mercy be exercised at such an expense as this? Better were it that all its gracious purposes would be abandoned, than that Almighty God would stoop to such a condescension as this! What! that mercy shall be shown towards a number of rebellious worms—of creatures that can never contribute anything to the happiness or honor of their God—of creatures, millions of whom, if necessary for God's honor, could be created in an instant, in the place of those that would perish; that mercy, I say, might be shown to these:

Shall the God of Heaven divest himself of his glory?

Shall the Creator of the universe become a man?

Shall he have the sins of a rebellious world laid on him?

Shall he become a victim, and be offered upon the altar of divine justice—that man, worthless man, may be spared?

Surely mercy can never require this! It will be content to lie hidden in the bosom of the Deity to all eternity, rather than that such a sacrifice would be made for its honor!

But no! Mercy cannot be so restrained: it pants for an opportunity of pouring forth its benefits into the souls of men. Its affections are so moved at the sight of a perishing world, that it will not, it cannot, rest. Everything but God's honor shall give way to it: and now that that can be secured, no price shall be too great for its descent from Heaven to bless our ruined race.

Go now to *Bethlehem*, and see in the manger that new-born infant, your incarnate God, "God manifest in the flesh." Who sent him thither? Who brought him from his throne of glory, into this world of sin and misery? It was *mercy*, struggling in the bosom of Almighty God, and prevailing for its own development in this mysterious way.

Go again to *Gethsemane*and *Calvary*: behold that innocent sufferer: see him prostrate on the ground, bathed in a bloody sweat! see him hanging on the cross, agonizing under a load of his creatures' guilt, crying in the depths of dereliction, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" and expiring under the wrath of Almighty God, the wrath due to him as the Surety and Substitute of a guilty world!

Who has brought him to this wretched state? 'Twas mercy: mercy would not rest: it would break forth: rather than not exercise itself towards mankind, it would transfer to God himself the penalty due to them, and write in the blood of an incarnate God, the pardon it designed for sinful man.

Say, now, whether mercy be not glorified in this astonishing mystery, which the Gospel has so fully revealed?

And **TRUTH**, also, has derived to itself no less a measure of glory from this stupendous mystery. God had said, "In the day that you eat of the forbidden fruit, you shall surely die!" When, therefore, man had eaten, what remained but that the threatened penalty would be inflicted on him? The word had gone forth: it could not be revoked: nor could its sentence be reversed, consistently with the sacred rights of truth. What then shall be done? If the sentence is executed on man, the veracity of God is displayed and honored: but how can man be spared, and truth be kept inviolate? The suggestions of wisdom being approved, and the substitution of God's only-begotten Son in the sinner's place admitted—truth willingly accepts the proposal, gladly transfers the penalty, and joyfully inflicts on the victim the sentence due to the offender! [Isaiah 53:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.10). Thus is consummated that mystery which none but God could ever have devised, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other! [Psalm 85:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 85.10)."

Thus are not only the different perfections of God made to harmonize in the salvation of man; but justice is exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy is exercised in a way of justice; and both of them, in a way of holiness and truth.

***~~III. But the glory and excellency of the Gospel yet further appears, in that the Gospel lays a foundation for greater happiness, both to men and angels, than either of them could ever have enjoyed—if man had never fallen.~~***

The felicity of **ANGELS**doubtless is great; as would that of men also have been, if man had never fallen. But, from the Gospel, both the one and the other derive a vast accession to their happiness, beyond all that they would otherwise ever have possessed.

In reference to angels, I may say, that if in no other respect they were benefitted by the Gospel, they would derive an immense advantage from it, in that, from seeing how great a sacrifice was necessary to restore man to happiness, they must of necessity form a higher estimate of the happiness that has been freely conferred on them: and, in proportion to the sense which they feel of the obligations conferred upon them, must their love to God be augmented, and their felicity advanced.

But independent of this consideration, I doubt not but they have received by the Gospel a vast accession to their bliss.

I think it will readily be acknowledged, that the happiness of the angelic hosts is derived chiefly, if not entirely, from beholding the glory of their God. From the first instant of their creation, they must therefore have been inconceivably blessed; because, without intermission, they have been basking, as it were, in the beams of divine glory. But, when some intimation was given of the Divine purpose to restore to happiness our fallen race, what astonishment must have seized the whole heavenly choir! They had seen millions of their own species consigned to misery, and Hell itself created for their sad abode: and, when man had fallen, they could expect nothing, but that those who were partners in transgression would also be fellow-heirs of the doom assigned to it. But, when they saw that a purpose existed in the Divine mind to pardon man, an entire new view of the Deity must have struck their minds, and filled them with wonder and admiration.

From that moment, the great mystery of redemption has been gradually unfolding to mankind: and by every discovery made to the Church, the angels themselves have gained a deeper insight into it. They were represented, under the Mosaic dispensation, by the two cherubim who covered the ark. Those were formed in a bending posture, looking down into the ark, as if desirous of discovering more fully the wonders contained in that typical emblematic ordinance, [Exodus 25:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 25.20). Peter assures us of this; when, speaking of the prophecies relating to the sufferings and glory of our Lord, he says, "Which things the angels desire to look into, [1 Peter 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.12)." The very word he uses refers to their bending posture, which I have before mentioned.

And that they are brought to more enlarged views of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ, by the revelation of it which is given to us, is expressly asserted by Paul, who says, that "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Ephesians 3:8-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.8-11)."

Hence we find that, at the incarnation of our Lord, a new song commenced in Heaven: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men, [Luke 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.13-14)." From that hour, they have been contemplating all the wonders of his love: and still are they beholding the radiance of his glory, and of the glory of God beaming forth from his face; and from every discovery of the divine perfections they receive a still further augmentation of their bliss!

Until the foregoing method of reconciling and glorifying the divine perfections had been revealed to us, the angels could have had no more conception of it than we. They had seen in the works of creation, and had experienced in their own bosoms, a marvelous display of the *wisdom*and *goodness*and *power*and *love*of Almighty God: but they could never have conceived the least idea of them, as they are exhibited in the gift of his only begotten Son to die for man. All this they learn from the Gospel only: and, consequently, the Gospel, which has contributed so greatly to their happiness, has, on that very account, an excellency of glory deserving of the highest admiration.

And how is the happiness of **MAN**also advanced by this great salvation? Doubtless, as I have said before, he would have been happy, if he had never fallen. But what is his happiness in glory now! What views must he have of the divine perfections! What a sense must he feel of "the love of Christ, the breadth and length, and depth and height, of which are utterly incomprehensible!"

If, as beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, man is on a par with angels, in this respect he is elevated far above them, in that he can say, in reference to the whole work of Christ, 'All this was done for me!'

When he beholds the Lord Jesus Christ in his human nature, he must say, 'My God assumed that nature for me!'

When he sees Christ "upon his throne, as a Lamb that has been slain," and surveys the wounds once inflicted on his hands and side, he must say, 'Those wounds were endured for me!'

When he contemplates all the glory and felicity of Heaven, he must say, 'This *throne*was bought for me. This *crown*for me! This *inheritance*for me! Yes, and bought too with the blood of my incarnate God!'

Every smile of God the Father must be endeared to him, by the thought, that *it was purchased for him by the agonies of God the Son*, and secured to him by the agency of God the Spirit. Truly, this realizing sense of a saving interest in all the wonders of redemption must augment the felicity of the saints far beyond that of the angels themselves: and accordingly we find, that the saints are nearer to the throne of God than the angels themselves. "The saints stand round about the throne; and the angels stand round about the saints, [Revelation 7:9-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.9-11)."

We find, too, that the saints lead the chorus, with an exulting acknowledgment of their own interest in Christ; saying, "You are worthy: for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and have made us kings and priests unto our God!" But all that the angels can do, is to join in the acknowledgment that Christ is worthy: not one word can they add about their own interest in his work: all that they can say is, "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! [Revelation 5:9-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9-13)."

Say now, Whether there be not a glory and excellency in the Gospel, not only beyond anything which is generally contemplated, but far beyond what any finite capacity can ever fully comprehend? Yet, how is it regarded among us? Does it in any degree corresponding with its importance, occupy our minds as Christians, and our ministrations as ambassadors of Christ? On the contrary, is it not rather viewed with suspicion, and in too many instances loaded with contempt? But would it be so treated, if it were properly understood? See what effects are ascribed to it, and what blessings a just comprehension of this mysterious subject is calculated to impart.

In my text it is said, that a view of this sublime mystery will "fill us with all the fullness of God." And what can be meant by this? Can it be supposed that a creature would ever resemble God in his natural perfections? No! but in his moral perfections we both may and must resemble him, if ever we would behold the face of God in peace. Nay more; we must not only partake of his moral perfections, but must have them all united and harmonizing in us, even as they unite and harmonize in God himself, and in this stupendous mystery, which has emanated from him.

For instance; while justice, and mercy, and truth, and love, find in us on all occasions, their appropriate operations; we must be careful that the opposite graces of faith and fear, humility and confidence, meekness and fortitude, contrition and joy, have full scope, not only for occasional, but for constant and harmonious exercise.

In a word, we should resemble "God, who is light" itself, [1 John 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 1.5). In light, you know, there is an assemblage of widely-different rays; some of which, if taken separately, might be thought to approximate rather to darkness than to light. But if the more brilliant rays were taken alone, though they might produce a glare, they would never make light. It is the union of all, in their due proportion, and in simultaneous motion, that constitutes light. Just so, when all the different graces are in simultaneous exercise, each softening and tempering its opposite, then only, I say, do we properly resemble God.

But how shall this character be formed in us? How shall we "be filled thus with all the fullness of our God?" Can it be effected by philosophy, or by the operation of any natural principles? Can anything but the Gospel of Christ effect it? No! Nothing under Heaven ever did, or ever can, form this character, but an overwhelming sense of the love of Christ in dying for us: and it is on this account that I have endeavored to bring this great subject before you. O, that it might have a suitable operation upon your souls! Truly, it should fill the soul: it should produce in us somewhat of the effect which it is at this very moment producing in Heaven. Behold both saints and angels, all of them prostrate on their face before the throne of God, [Revelation 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.8); [Revelation 7:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 7.11).

And why is it that those happy spirits are in such a posture as this? They are all, without exception, overwhelmed with admiring and adoring views of God and of the Lamb. And would not such be the prostration of our souls also, under a sense of the incomprehensible love of Christ, as revealed in the Gospel? Behold the seraphim in Isaiah's vision: each of them had six wings; with two of them covering his face, as unworthy to behold the Deity, and with two his feet, as unworthy to serve him; and with the remaining two flying through the vast expanse of Heaven, to fulfill their Maker's will, [Isaiah 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.2).

Now this is the use that we also should make of our powers: humiliation and contrition should be united with zeal, throughout our whole deportment: and if we so employ our powers, we may be sure that our progress in the divine life will be advanced, rather than impeded, by these holy self-abasing exercises. In truth, if with David we desire that "the beauty of the Lord our God may be upon us, [Psalm 90:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 90.17)," it is by this assemblage of graces, so qualified and so tempered, that we must attain the desired blessing.

And now let me entreat, that all, who have heard the subjects which have been discussed, will bear in mind their true scope and intent.

Let our aim be high.

Let our desires be enlarged.

Let none of us be satisfied with low attainments in religion.

Let us be content with nothing less than being "filled with all the fullness of God."

Let us take our incarnate God himself for our pattern: for we are expressly told, that "he has set an example for us, that we would follow his steps, [1 Peter 2:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.21)." "Let the same mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, [Philippians 2:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5)," so that "Christ himself may be formed in us, [Galatians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 4.19)."

You have seen what self-denial he exercised for us: what then, I would ask, should we not be ready either to do or to suffer for him? Should there be any bounds to our gratitude and zeal and love? Truly, if we are not brought to a sense of his love, and a corresponding devotedness of heart to him, I shall have spoken in vain, or rather worse than in vain: for "the word, which should have been a savor of life to our salvation, will only prove a savor of death," to our heavier condemnation! [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16).

But I trust you will not allow the subject to pass from your minds; but that you will seek to experience it, in all its sanctifying and saving efficacy. Let "the love of Christ" be contemplated by you, until it has "constrained you to live altogether unto him:" and never cease to "behold, as in a looking-glass, the glory of the Lord, until you are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord! 2 Corinthians 3:18."

And now, having closed my subject, I humbly "commend you all 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! [Acts 20:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.32)."

***~~#2226~~***

***~~CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)~~***

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst!"

IT is said of the Athenians that "they spent their time in nothing else but in telling or hearing some new thing." This, to say the least, was a very unprofitable way of employing their precious hours: for of the reports that are most industriously circulated, many are false, many doubtful, many frivolous; and of those that are true and important, the far greater part do not properly concern us. But there is one report that has spread far and wide, in which we are all deeply interested; the particulars of which, together with the general character of the report itself, it is our intention to lay before you.

***~~I. The report itself—~~***

In general the report is, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!" But because of its singular importance, it will be proper that we enter into particulars, and tell you distinctly,

***~~1. WHO Jesus Christ was—~~***

He was a man in every respect like ourselves, sin only excepted. But he was God also: he was the only-begotten Son of God, "God of God, light of light, very God of very God." To declare fully who he was, is beyond the power of any finite being: since "none knows the Son but the Father, [Matthew 11:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.27);" yet we know infallibly from Scripture that he was the eternal, [Micah 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 5.2) with [John 17:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.5), immutable Jehovah! [Hebrews 13:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.8), God manifest in the flesh, [1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16), God over all, blessed for ever! [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5).

***~~2. HOW he came into the world—~~***

He was born like other men; but he was not begotten in the way of ordinary generation. He was formed by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a pure virgin, that he might partake of our nature without inheriting our corruption, [Luke 1:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 1.35). He was *born*under circumstances of peculiar baseness: his *life*also was spent in poverty and disgrace: and his *death*was the most cruel and ignominious that could be inflicted on him. But he foreknew from the beginning all that he would suffer, and yet voluntarily took upon him our nature, that he might both do and suffer all that was appointed of the Father.

***~~3. For what END he came into the world—~~***

Never was there such an errand before, or since. His own creatures had ruined themselves; and he came to save them. Though it was his law that they transgressed, and his authority that they despised, and his yoke that they cast off; yes, though he was the one great object of their contempt and abhorrence, he came to save them! Though he knew that they would murder him as soon as ever he would put himself into their power—yet he came to save them; to save the vilest of them, not excepting those who unrighteously condemned him, or insultingly mocked him, or cruelly pierced him with the nails and spear! When there was no alternative but either that they must perish, or he come down from Heaven to suffer in their stead—down he came upon the wings of love, and "saved them from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them! [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)." He suffered that they might go free. He died, that they might live for ever.

That this is "not a cunningly-devised fable," will appear, if we consider what is said in the text respecting,

***~~II. The character of this report—~~***

Paul, who had examined it thoroughly, declares that it is,

***~~1. Trustworthy—~~***

So strange a report as this ought on no account to be believed, unless it can be proved beyond a possibility of doubt. Credulity in a concern that so deeply involves the honor of God and the welfare of all the human race, would be criminal in the highest degree. But we need be under no apprehensions respecting the truth of this report. "It is a faithful saying:" it is attested by the accomplishment of prophecies the most numerous, the most minute, the most opposite and irreconcilable; of prophecies, which no human wisdom could have devised, and no human power could accomplish.

It has been credited by thousands who were at first most adverse to it: it has always appeared with more convincing evidence in proportion as it has been scrutinized and examined: and multitudes have propagated it at the peril of their lives, and sealed the truth of it with their blood. There is no species of evidence lacking to confirm it: so that it is impossible to doubt of its truth, if only we inquire into it with diligence and candor.

***~~2. Worthy of full acceptance—~~***

There are many reports that are true, which yet are unworthy of any serious concern. But this is of universal interest, and withal so precious, that it is worthy to be received by all mankind with the liveliest joy and exultation. If it is considered only as affecting the present happiness of men, there is no other report deserving of the smallest attention in comparison with this. None but God can tell how many myriads of souls it has delivered from the deepest distress and anguish, and filled with peace and joy unspeakable. In truth, there is no solid comfort upon earth but what arises from the belief of these joyful tidings.

But if we extend our views to the *eternal*felicity which the crediting of this report has occasioned; if we look at the myriads of saints that are already around the throne of God, and consider what numbers are continually adding to them from this lower world, and what an innumerable host there will be at the last day who will have been rescued from Hell, and exalted to glory solely through their believing of this report, surely we shall say it is "worthy of all acceptance," worthy, not merely to be credited, but to be entertained in our hearts with the devoutest gratitude and thanksgiving.

***~~We shall conclude with recommending "this saying" to the attention of:~~***

***~~1. Those who have lived in a willful course of sin—~~***

You cannot but have some secret apprehension that "your end will be according to your ways," How acceptable then ought these tidings to be to you! Do not despise them. Do not aggravate your eternal condemnation by rejecting them; neither put them away from you, as though they were too good to be true: for Christ came to save even the very "chief of sinners;" and you, if you will believe on him, shall experience his salvation!

***~~2. Those who have been more exemplary in their lives—~~***

Do not imagine that you are able to save yourselves: if you have not been such profligate sinners as others, still you are "sinners," and must be saved by Jesus Christ, or not at all. You are but too apt to overlook all that Christ has done and suffered for you, under an idea that your moral and religious duties will conciliate the Divine favor. Hence it too often happens, that, while "tax collectors and harlots enter into his kingdom, persons of your description exclude themselves from it. But know, that "there is salvation in no other!" Christ is, and must be, your only refuge, and your only hope, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12).

***~~3. Those who have already received it into their hearts—~~***

Doubtless this report has already been a source of joy and consolation to you. But you cannot even conceive how rich a source of blessing it will be, if only you continue to reflect upon it. In it are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, [Colossians 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.3);" it has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, that no finite being can comprehend! [Ephesians 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.18-19). Through eternal ages it will afford incessant and increasing cause for wonder and adoration! Let this report then be your meditation day and night, and while we, as God's ambassadors, endeavor to propagate it with our lips, you must endeavor to recommend and confirm it by your lives!

***~~#2227~~***

***~~PAUL'S CONVERSION~~***

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

"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

THE first question that should occur to our minds, is this:*Have I obtained God's mercy?*If a favorable answer can be returned to that, we would inquire: In what manner, and for what ends, has mercy been shown to us?

There can be no doubt, but that if persons who are converted to God would frequently look back upon the state in which they were previous to their conversion, they would find the retrospect attended with the most beneficial consequences. Their recollection would furnish them with innumerable facts, which would tend to humble them in the dust, and to excite adoring thoughts of that grace which has so distinguished them.

Paul appears to have taken peculiar pleasure in this exercise of mind. He embraces every opportunity to speak of his former hostility to Christ, in order to exalt to the uttermost the honor of that God, by whom he had been elected, redeemed, and sanctified. In the preceding, verses he had expatiated on this painful subject: and now he improves it for the benefit of others.

In discoursing on his words, we shall notice:

***~~I. The circumstances under which the Apostle obtained mercy—~~***

If Paul had more to boast of than any, on account of his birth, his education, his strictness, and his zeal—he had also more to be humbled for than almost any other person. For consider:

***~~1. His ignorance of himself—~~***

He had been educated under the most celebrated teacher of his day, Gamaliel; and had made a proficiency beyond any of his age. Yet, as skilled as he was in Rabbinical learning, he was wholly ignorant of his own state and character! He knew not that he was a condemned sinner! He knew not the spirituality and extent of the law. He had no idea that it required perfect unsinning obedience, and consigned men over to perdition for one single offense, whether in thought, word, or deed! Through his ignorance of the law, he imagined himself to be "alive," and entitled to everlasting life, [Romans 7:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.9). He moreover judged that he was practicing all the moral duties, while he was destitute of almost every just sentiment and proper feeling. *Instead of being humbled as a sinner in dust and ashes, he was lifted up with pride and self-conceit.*Instead of being animated with love, and pity, and compassion, he was inflamed with a fiery and wrathful zeal. "He knew not at all what spirit he was of." *In short, he was the very reverse of what he afterwards became.*

***~~2. His enmity against Christ—~~***

He might have had many opportunities of seeing and hearing Christ, on a supposition he had chosen to embrace them. But, like proud and ignorant bigots of later ages, he would not condescend to hear one who was so generally despised. He probably believed all the scandalous reports that were circulated respecting Jesus, and therefore thought him unworthy of his attention. From the prophecies indeed, he could not but know that the promised Messiah was to appear about that time: but having imbibed the prejudices of his countrymen respecting a *temporal Messiah*, he concluded that Jesus was an impostor; and no doubt rejoiced when the influence of that deceiver (as he thought him) was terminated by his death. But when the doctrines of the Gospel were propagated with such success by the Apostles, then his disappointment appeared, and he broke forth into the fiercest rage against Christ. He determined to exterminate his followers, and to blot out, if possible, the very remembrance of his name.

Such was his opinion of Christ, that "he thought he ought to do everything in his power contrary to his name, [Acts 26:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.9)," and adverse to his cause. Nor can we doubt, but that if Jesus had put himself again in the power of the Jews, Paul would have been among the first to apprehend and destroy him. *None would have been found more ready than he to nail Jesus to the cross, or to pierce his heart with the spear!*

***~~3. His cruelty to his fellow-men—~~***

He was present at the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen. He heard the discourse of that holy man; he saw "his face shining like the face of an angel;" he heard him with his dying breath praying for his murderers; but was unconvinced, unrelenting, unmoved. One would have thought that a young man (whose feelings are quick), and a man pretending to morality, would have felt some pity towards one whose whole appearance was so devout and holy: and that, when the first stone made the blood to gush out, he would have turned away with disgust and horror. But no such effect was produced on him.

On the contrary, he feasted his eyes with this bloody spectacle; and testified his consent to the murderous deed, by holding the garments of the murderers, and giving in his looks very evident tokens of his approbation, [Acts 7:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.58); [Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.1); [Acts 22:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.19-20).

Having thus tasted of human blood, he thirsted for it, and, like a blood-hound, would be satisfied with nothing else. He volunteered his services in hunting down the victims of his rage, [Acts 9:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.2). He obtained authority from the chief priests; and in the exercise of it, not only drove the Christians from Jerusalem, but followed them to foreign cities where he had no jurisdiction, [Acts 26:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.10-11). He showed no pity even to helpless females; but dragged all, men and women, to prison, [Acts 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 8.3); [Acts 22:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 22.4-5), and gave his voice against them that they should be put to death, [Acts 26:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.10). He allowed none to escape, on any other condition than that of blaspheming the name of Jesus, [Acts 26:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.11); and thus, while he inflicted on some the pains of martyrdom, he consigned others over to the damnation of Hell. *From his own description of himself, he more resembled an incarnate fiend than a human being!*[Acts 9:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.1). [Galatians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.13) and 1 Timothy 1:13.

So strange were the circumstances under which this fiery bigot obtained mercy, that we are peculiarly concerned to inquire into,

***~~II. The ends for which mercy was given to him—~~***

Doubtless many blessed ends were answered. But, without attempting to enumerate them, we shall notice only those that are specified in the text. It was,

***~~1. For "the manifesting of Christ's unlimited patience"—~~***

The patience of Christ appears in the forbearance he exercises towards mankind at large. It was eminently conspicuous in his conduct towards the antediluvian world, whose wickedness he endured for the space of a hundred and twenty years! [1 Peter 3:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.20). It was wonderfully displayed also in *not*executing the most signal vengeance on his cruel adversary, and setting him forth as a distinguished monument of his wrath and indignation! But how truly wonderful does it appear, when we see him stopping this blood-thirsty persecutor in the midst of his career, and revealing his pardoning love and mercy to his soul! To take such a viper to his bosom! to make such a creature "an elect vessel," an eminent saint, a distinguished Apostle! to exalt such a one to the most honorable service on earth, and the highest throne in glory! How does this love surpass all knowledge and all conception! How is Jesus now glorified in him! And how must Jesus be admired in him for ever, both in the Church militant, and the Church triumphant, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10).

This then was one principal end of so marvelous a conversion, namely, that the exceeding riches of the Redeemer's grace might be displayed before the whole universe, both in time and eternity.

***~~2. For the encouraging of sinners to believe in him—~~***

It is not uncommon for persons to think themselves so vile that they cannot be forgiven. But our blessed Lord has given a most effectual antidote to this in the conversion of Paul. It is not without reason that Paul repeatedly styles himself "the chief of sinners!" and he expressly tells us, that he was designed to be a "pattern to all who would hereafter believe in Jesus."

Our adorable Savior points, as it were, to him, and says: 'See, O tempted soul, if you are as blind as that infuriated bigot, I can make "the scales to fall from your eyes! [Acts 9:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 9.18)." If your enmity against me is as deeply rooted as his, I can slay it! If you possess all that is malignant and diabolical, I can change you! There is nothing too great for me to do, nothing too good for me to give, even to the chief of sinners! I am the same gracious and almighty Savior that I was in the day that I converted him; and I am able and willing to do the very same things for you. You see how freely I bestowed my grace on Paul. If wrath and malice, and murder and blasphemy, could entitle him to my favor, then certainly he had as good a title as man could have: but if these things rather entitled him to a distinguished place in Hell, then you see how free and sovereign my grace is; and have a proof, that where sin has abounded, grace can, and shall, much more abound! [Romans 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.20).'

Who, after beholding this pattern, can despond? Who will put away mercy from him under the idea that he is unworthy of it? Who will be afraid to come to Jesus, because he has no good work to bring as a price of his favor? *None who reflect on the salvation of Paul, can ever doubt either the freeness of Christ's offers, or the sufficiency of his grace.*

***~~There are two things which, on account of their singular importance, we will further endeavor to impress upon your minds:~~***

***~~1. No good thing that we are or possess, will supersede our need of saving mercy—~~***

Paul, as has been hinted at before, had much to boast of, [Philippians 3:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.4-6); but, notwithstanding all his learning, and strictness, and zeal, he would have perished for ever, if he had not "obtained mercy." Let all consider this; and, renouncing all dependence on themselves, trust in Christ alone, and seek "life everlasting" solely "by believing in him".

***~~2. No heinous evil that we have committed, shall exclude us from saving mercy, if we believe on Christ—~~***

This is the grand scope of the text, and of the discourse upon it. But it never can be repeated too often, or impressed too earnestly on the heart and conscience. It is uniformly attested by all the inspired writers, [Isaiah 1:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 1.18); [Isaiah 55:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.7) and [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39). May God help us to believe the record; and cause us all to experience its truth!

If our guilt have been as extraordinary as Paul's, it may, for anything we know, have been permitted, on purpose that, like him, we may be extraordinary monuments of grace! At all events, we may urge it as a plea with God, that he will be transcendently glorified in our salvation! [Psalm 25:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 25.11).

***~~#2228~~***

***~~SALVATION FOR ALL~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.3-4)~~***

"God our Savior…will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

*IT is truly lamentable to see how men, in every age, have strained and wrested the Holy Scriptures, in order to make them speak the language of their own particular creed.* Some, averse to the idea that God would express his good-will to all the sinners of mankind, limit the word "all," and make it signify nothing more than some of all descriptions and characters; while others run to a contrary extreme, and deduce from this expression a persuasion that none shall ever perish!

*It would be best if, instead of contending for human systems, and especially those of Calvin and Arminius, we were content to receive the Scriptures with the simplicity of little children*; for, after all that has been said or written in support of those two most prominent systems, it is impossible to reduce the Holy Scriptures either to the one or to the other of them; for, on both hypotheses, there are difficulties which can never be surmounted, and contrarieties which man can never reconcile. It is by attempting to be wise above what is written, that we involve ourselves in all these difficulties. If we would be content to take the Scriptures as they are, and to leave the reconciling of them unto God, by whose inspiration they were written, we would find them all admirably calculated to produce the ends for which they were designed.

How delightful is the truth here intimated! And how strange is it, that, instead of enjoying it, and adoring God for it, men will make it only a ground of acrimonious contention! I thank God, that all the Scriptures, whatever be their bearing, are alike acceptable to me; and that, whether they mark the sovereignty or the mercy of God, I am alike ready to understand them, in accordance with their plain and obvious meaning.

By attending to the original, we shall often find our way clear, when, from a diversity of idiom, a translation may scarcely convey the precise idea. The passage before us, for instance, does not convey in the original anything like a secret determination in God, but only a willingness that all would be saved: it is precisely parallel with what is spoken by Peter, when he says, "God is long-suffering to us; not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance, [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)."

This is assigned as a reason why God would have us pray for all men. Our intercessions for them are pleasing and acceptable to him, because "he is willing to save all," without exception and without reserve.

In the words before us, then, we see,

***~~I. The disposition of God towards our fallen race—~~***

We are not to understand the text as expressing any decree, either in reference to some favored individuals, or in reference to all mankind. We have said, that it imports only a willingness to save; and that in that sense it has no limit whatever; the whole human race being objects of his tender compassion, and equally accepted of him, when they seek him in his appointed way, [Acts 10:34-35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.34-35).

***~~1. For all, without exception, has God given his only dear Son—~~***

This is affirmed by our Lord himself: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, [John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.16)." And with this agrees what God spoke to the Messiah by the Prophet Isaiah, "I will give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth, [Isaiah 49:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 49.6)." With this agrees also what is spoken in immediate connection with my text: "Christ gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, verse 6."

***~~2. To all has he commanded also his Gospel to be preached—~~***

"Go into all the world" says our Lord, "and preach the Gospel to every creature, [Matthew 28:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.9). [Mark 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 16.15)." How amazing is it, that, after such a command, any would call in question the propriety of offering salvation indiscriminately to every man! Nor is it the mere tidings of the Gospel that we are to proclaim; but we are to "preach expressly repentance and remission of sins, in the name of Christ, to all the nations upon earth," and to every individual under Heaven, [Luke 24:47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 24.47). Wherever there is a sinner doomed to wrath, there is a person in whose ears the voice of mercy would be made to sound.

***~~3. Nor is there a human being whom God is not willing to receive—~~***

What can be the meaning of that invitation, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)." or of that, "Ho! every one that thirsts, come to the waters; come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price! [Isaiah 55:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.1)." What can our Lord mean, when he says, "him who comes unto me I will never cast out! [John 6:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.37)." It can import nothing less than what Paul has said: "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon him: for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, [Romans 10:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 10.12-13)."

***~~4. God has made these things the subject of the strongest possible asseveration—~~***

To the whole world does God appeal respecting it: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked would die, says the Lord, and not that he would return from his ways and live? [Ezekiel 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.23)." What answer can any man, who maintains the doctrine of absolute reprobation, return to this? But, to put the matter beyond the possibility of doubt, God makes it also the subject of a solemn oath: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel! [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11)." Truly, if such declarations do not determine the point, then there is no certainty in language: but if they do, in what an endearing light is God here set forth to us; and with what delight would we contemplate him under the character of "God our Savior!"

We must not, however, forget to notice,

***~~II. The means whereby his gracious purposes are to be accomplished—~~***

***~~There is but one way of salvation for fallen man—~~***

"I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord Jesus: no man comes unto the Father but by me! [John 14:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.6)." This is plain and positive: and it is confirmed by many passages of Holy Writ, that are equally plain, and equally express: "Other foundations can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11)." And again: "There is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ, [Acts 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 4.12)."

***~~And this way of salvation must be known and embraced—~~***

"By his knowledge," says God, "shall my righteous servant justify many, [Isaiah 53:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.11)." An unknown Savior is no Savior at all. There may, it is true, be different degrees of knowledge required, agreeably to the different degrees of information that we have received. The Jews, before the coming of Christ, could not be expected to have such clear views of him as we possess, because he was not then so fully revealed. As to what shall be required of the heathen, we know but little: nor is it for us to determine what God shall do respecting them. But, in relation to ourselves, the matter is clear: we must know the Savior, every one of us for ourselves: for "this is life eternal," says our Lord, "to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent, [John 17:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.3)."

On the other hand, "to them that *know*not God, and *obey*not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, God will come to take vengeance on them" in the great and awful day! [2 Thessalonians 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.8). In confirmation of this truth, Peter appeals even to our own consciences: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17)."

Our text informs us that we must "come to the knowledge of the truth," yes, and to the acknowledgment of it also. In other words, we must believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins, and must make him all our hope and all our salvation: then shall the blessings of *grace*and *glory*be accorded to us, and all God's purposes of love be accomplished in us.

***~~From hence we may see,~~***

***~~1. Whence it is that any are saved—~~***

To God alone must all the glory be given, if so much as one is ever admitted to the realms of bliss. For what but his *love*provided a Savior for us? Or what but his *grace*ever enabled us to believe in him? Never would we have "come to the knowledge of the truth," if he had not revealed it in our hearts; nor would it ever have proved effectual for us, if his almighty power had not made use of it for the renovation and salvation of our souls. It was "He, and he alone, who of his good pleasure wrought in us either to will or do" what was acceptable in his sight, [Philippians 2:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.12-13).

***~~2. Whence it is that any perish—~~***

To none but ourselves can any blame attach in this matter. Even the most ignorant heathen are "without excuse," because they walk not according to the light they have, [Romans 1:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.20). And as for us, to whom the Gospel is revealed, our blessed Lord complains, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not, [Matthew 23:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 23.37)." The fault is altogether in yourselves: "you will not come unto me, that you may have life, [John 5:40](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.40)."

Yes, brethren, I testify against you this day, that whatever excuses you may now urge, when the Judge of living and dead shall call you to account, you will be "speechless" even as he was who had not on the wedding-garment, [Matthew 22:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 22.12). And to all eternity will your anguish be inconceivably enhanced by this reflection, that *in all you suffer, you only reap the fruit of your own obstinacy and unbelief!*

***~~#2229~~***

***~~THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 2:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 2.5-6)~~***

"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

IT is deeply to be regretted that the Holy Scriptures, instead of being improved for the ends for which they were given, have been made an occasion of the most bitter contentions by the very persons who have most professed to reverence their authority. Men have not been satisfied with receiving the dictates of inspiration with child-like simplicity, but have determined to reduce them to systems of their own; and have wrested to their own views every passage that militated against their pre-conceived opinions. The partisans on each side have been equally guilty in this respect.

Among modern controversialists, none have more divided the Church, or indulged more acrimonious feelings against each other, than Calvinists and Arminians. The one party have taken all those passages which represent God as a Sovereign, dispensing his blessings according to his own will and pleasure, and *have made all the rest of the Scriptures bend to them*. The other party have done the same with respect to the passages which assert the freedom of the human will, and which speak of men as the sole authors of their own condemnation. It seems never to enter into the minds of either party, that those passages which they set at variance, may, like wheels moving in opposite directions, be in perfect harmony with each other; and that there may be a subserviency, where they see nothing but direct opposition. If they were once brought to consider this, they would be more candid in their interpretation of each other's opinions, and more cautious of wresting from their plain and obvious meaning, the passages which they cannot reconcile with their own exclusive system.

The words we have just read are a stronghold for those who adopt the opinions which are called Arminian. And how does the Calvinist get over them? How does he make the universality of redemption accord with his particular election? He knows not how to do it in a way that shall agree with his own system; and therefore he denies at once that Christ did give himself a ransom for all; and says, that by "all" is meant some of every description; that is, some of all different ranks and orders of men, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor.

But how much better were it for men to confess their own ignorance, than thus to pervert the Word of God! It is true that God acts as a Sovereign; and that salvation, from first to last, is all of grace, whether we can reconcile this truth with every other portion of God's word, or not. Nor are we any more at liberty to distort the passages that appear to militate against this system, than Arminians are to misinterpret those which obstruct their views.

There is beyond all doubt a harmony in all the parts of the inspired volume, though we cannot exactly see it; (not but that we might see it, and clearly too, if we entered fully into the idea of the subordination of one set of truths to another,) and if we determine to speak all that the Scripture speaks, and as the Scripture speaks it, we shall not be far from the very truth of God. This will not please the partisans of human systems: but it will, as far as such a plan is adopted, produce moderation in our own minds, and forbearance towards all who differ from us.

The way in which the text is introduced deserves particular attention. The Apostle inculcates the duty of "interceding, and giving thanks, for all men" without exception, but especially "for kings and all in authority," because on them in a very great degree depends the peace and welfare of the Church. As a reason for extending our regards to all, he observes that God does so in the government of the world, and that Christ has done so in the exercise of redeeming love, seeing that he "had given himself a ransom for all." *The Apostle, whatever be the subject he is treating of, finds an easy and natural transition to Christ*, and especially when speaking upon anything connected with Christian love, of which the love of Christ to us is the great exemplar. This is discovered chiefly in his mediation between God and man: and of *that mediation*we are led to speak:

***~~I. As ordained of God—~~***

***~~"There is one God," the Creator and Governor of all—~~***

Among the heathen "there were gods many, and lords many; but there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, [1 Corinthians 8:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 8.5-6)." "He is the God of the Jews, and the God also of the Gentiles, [Romans 3:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.29);" and both the one and the other he will justify in the same way, [Romans 3:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.30), "having no respect of persons." "In every nation under Heaven, he who fears God, and works righteousness, shall be accepted of him, [Acts 10:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 10.35)."

***~~He has also given one Mediator for all—~~***

He is justly offended with his creatures of mankind, because they have sinned against him. In respect of transgression they are altogether on a par with the fallen angels; and might well have been left, like them, to perish in their sins. But God provided a Mediator for them, that through him reconciliation might be effected with them in perfect consistency with his own perfections.

This Mediator is his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who being in the form of God, and accounting it no robbery to be equal with God, was found in fashion as a man, and took upon him the form of a servant. This "man, Christ Jesus," is the "one Mediator" between God and men. There is no other; there needs be no other; seeing that he is equally the Mediator of all, and equally ready to effect reconciliation for every sinner under Heaven. The typical mediators, Moses and Aaron, and the high-priests in all successive ages, executed their office for the Jews only: but Christ, whom they typified, is the Advocate of all, and "an atoning sacrifice equally for the sins of the world."

Seeing then that God is alike the Father of all, distributing blessings to all with an indiscriminating hand; and that he has given his own co-equal co-eternal Son to be alike the Mediator for all, it befits us to testify our common concern for all, and to promote by every possible means their eternal welfare.

Let us next view the mediation of Christ—

***~~II. As executed by himself—~~***

***~~"He gave himself a ransom" for sinful man—~~***

A ransom is a redemption-price. Man was in bondage to sin and Satan, death and Hell; and to liberate him from this was the end of Christ's mediation. But how was this deliverance to be effected? The *law*, which had been broken, must be honored; and divine *justice*, which demanded the punishment of the offender, must be satisfied. But fallen man could neither honor the one, nor satisfy the other. Nothing was left for him, but to endure to all eternity the penalty which justice demanded and the law denounced.

To render the salvation of man compatible with the rights of law and justice, Jesus assumed our nature, and "was made man," that in the nature which had sinned he might suffer, and by his own sufferings make an atonement for our transgressions. Having undertaken this great work, he executed it: and there being no other sacrifice sufficient for the occasion, "he gave himself as a ransom for us."

"The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin." They were acceptable to God as shadowing forth his sacrifice: but it was his sacrifice alone that could atone for sin, and effect the desired reconciliation between God and man: this therefore he offered, and, when the cup of bitterness was put into his hands, he drank it to the very dregs!

***~~And this he did "for all" without exception—~~***

To say that he died for the elect only, is neither scriptural nor true. He died for all: according as it is elsewhere said, "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that those who live would not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again, [2 Corinthians 5:14-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.14-15)." If all are not ultimately saved by his death, it is not owing to any lack of sufficiency in his sacrifice to procure acceptance for them, but to their own impenitence and unbelief. And if all do not come to him for a saving interest in his sacrifice, it is not owing to any decree of God that of necessity excludes them from a participation in the benefit, or to any lack of inclination in the Lord Jesus Christ to save them—but to their own obstinacy in sin. Our Lord said to the whole Jewish nation, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings; but you would not."

This is applicable to the whole human race; and at the last day it will be said to all the ungodly, and especially to those to whom the Gospel of salvation had been sent, "I would, but you would not."

Here again then we see the propriety of interesting ourselves with God in behalf of all, since for all without exception did Jesus die.

It will be proper to consider the mediation of Christ yet farther,

***~~III. As attested by the Holy Spirit—~~***

This mediation was "to be testified of in due time."

***~~1. It has been abundantly attested by the Holy Spirit in times past—~~***

In the writings of the Old Testament it is fully declared. "He was cut off, but not for himself, [Daniel 9:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 9.26);" "he was wounded for our transgressions: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all, [Isaiah 53:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.4-6)." Of the New Testament this truth forms the sum and substance. When Jesus was just beginning his ministry, he was pointed out by his forerunner as "the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world, [John 1:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29)." Our Lord spoke of himself as "giving his life a ransom for many, [Matthew 20:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 20.28)." Paul tells us, that "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, [Ephesians 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.7)," and "reconciliation through the blood of his cross, [Colossians 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.20-22)." Peter assures us, that "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, and suffered, the just for the unjust, [1 Peter 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.24); 1 Peter 3:18."

It would be endless to accumulate passages; since the whole Scriptures testify of this blessed truth in every part. Suffice it to say, that it forms the one theme of all the glorified saints in Heaven, who sing praises day and night "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood;" saying, "You are worthy, for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation! [Revelation 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5); [Revelation 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 5.9)."

***~~2. We also are called to testify of it at this time—~~***

To preach Christ crucified is the one employment of ministers: and our ministry is called "the ministry of reconciliation" on this very account, because we proclaim to sinners, "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, [2 Corinthians 5:18-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.18-21)."

O that our testimony among you on this subject were more fully believed, and more deeply felt! We do declare it: we declare it with joy: for "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief! [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)." None are excluded from a saving interest in him, but through their own fault. God has no pleasure in the death of any sinner, [Ezekiel 18:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.23); [Ezekiel 18:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 18.32). He even condescends to confirm this truth with an oath, [Ezekiel 33:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.11). Paul bears witness to it in the, verse before our text. Peter also confirms it, and assures us, that "God is not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance and live, [2 Peter 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.9)." And, to add no more, John says, "If any man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the world! [1 John 2:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.1-2)."

Away with the systems that discard these blessed truths, and wrest from their obvious meaning these reviving declarations. Believe it, brethren, that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all;" and know, that at this moment he addresses you by my mouth, saying, "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else! [Isaiah 45:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 45.22)."

***~~O brethren,~~***

***~~1. Stand amazed at this mystery—~~***

"Great indeed is this mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh," and dying under the load of his creatures' sins!*Whence is it that this mystery is so little contemplated among us, and so little felt? Is it that there is any other subject which deserves our attention in comparison with it? No! there is nothing worth a thought in comparison with it. "For the excellency of the knowledge of it, all that the world holds dear is but dung and dross." Let it then occupy your minds day and night, and fill your souls with transport, as it does the souls of the glorified before the throne of God.

***~~2. Improve it for the salvation of your own souls—~~***

On your acceptance of this testimony your everlasting salvation depends. "If you believe in Christ, your salvation is sure; if not, you are condemned already, and 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)." Believe then, every one of you, that Christ died for you; and pray to God, that you may be able to see your interest in him, and with joyful confidence to exclaim, "He has loved me, and given himself for me! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." Thus shall you be feasted with the foretastes of Heaven, and grow up into an increasing fitness for the glory prepared for you.

***~~#2230~~***

***~~THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 3.16)~~***

"Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory!"

IT has been often said by infidels, that, where mystery begins, religion ends. But, if this were true, there would be no uniformity or consistency in the works of God. All his works both of *creation*and *providence*are full of mysteries: there is not any one substance, of which we know all the properties, or any one event, for which we can assign all the reasons.

If then there were nothing in religion above the comprehension of man, it would afford a strong presumption, that our religion was not from Heaven: for why would it be revealed, if man could have devised it without a revelation from God? But the inspired writers represent the Gospel:  
as "the wisdom of God in a mystery, [1 Corinthians 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.7),"  
as "a mystery hidden from ages, [Colossians 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.26),"  
"kept secret from the foundation of the world, [Romans 16:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.25);"  
they speak of many of its fundamental doctrines as a mystery, [1 Corinthians 15:51](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.51),  
a great mystery, [Ephesians 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.9); [Ephesians 5:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.32),  
a gloriously rich mystery, [Colossians 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.27);  
and of its ministers as "stewards of the mysteries of God, [1 Corinthians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.1)."

In the words before us, many of the principal events relating to Christ, and the establishment of his religion in the world, are enumerated, and confessedly declared to be a "great mystery." Let us then contemplate them in their order, and enter with deepest reverence into the investigation of them.

***~~I. "God appeared in a body"—~~***

It was not a mere creature that took upon him our nature, but God himself, as the Scriptures both of the Old, [Isaiah 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 9.6); [Isaiah 7:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 7.14) with [Matthew 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 1.23); and New Testament [John 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.1). [Romans 9:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.5). [Philippians 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.6). [John 10:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 10.30), uniformly assert. He had for many ages manifested himself in the Shekinah, the bright cloud that first abode upon the tabernacle, and afterwards resided in the most holy place of the temple: but at the appointed time he assumed our very nature, with all its sinless infirmities, into a real union with himself, and dwelt substantially on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, [Colossians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.9).

What an astonishing mystery was this! that the Creator of all things would become a creature, and that the infinitely holy God would be made "in the likeness of sinful flesh! [Romans 8:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.3)." Let us incessantly adore him for his ineffable condescension, and his incomprehensible love.

***~~II. He was "vindicated by the Spirit"—~~***

So deep was the humiliation of Christ throughout the whole period of his sojourning on earth, that he needed the most signal evidences from Heaven to justify his pretensions, and to vindicate his character from the charges of blasphemy and imposture. The office of vindicated him was committed to the Holy Spirit, who visibly interposed on many occasions to attest his divine mission.

When our Lord submitted to baptism, and thereby seemed to acknowledge himself a sinner who needed to be washed in the laver of regeneration, the Spirit bore witness to him as God's beloved Son, and as the spotless Lamb that was to take away the sin of the world, [John 1:29-34](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.29-34).

When he was accounted a deceiver, and a confederate with the devil, the Spirit enabled him to work the most stupendous miracles in proof of his being the true Messiah, [Matthew 12:24-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.24-28).

When he was dead, and imprisoned in the grave, so that his very disciples thought they had been deceived by him, the Spirit raised him from the dead, [1 Peter 3:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.18), and thereby declared him to be the Son of God with power, [Romans 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 1.4).

And when Christ had, as it were, staked the whole credit of his Messiahship on the descent of the Holy Spirit after his own ascension to Heaven, the Holy Spirit descended according to his word, and not only rested visibly on the Apostles, but endued them with power to speak divers languages, and to confirm their word with signs following, [John 15:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.26). [Acts 2:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 2.3-4). [Hebrews 2:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.4).

And is not this a mystery, that God would reduce himself to such an abject state as to need these attestations to his character; and that the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity would be thus necessitated, as it were, to "vindicate him," in order to counterbalance the offense which his humiliation had occasioned [John 16:7-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.7-11); [John 16:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.14).

***~~III. He was "seen by angels"—~~***

The angels had beheld his face, and had worshiped before his throne from the first moment of their existence: but when he became incarnate, they had views of him, which, before that period, they could not have conceived. How did they exult when they saw him a helpless babe lying in a manger, [Luke 2:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 2.12-14). But what different feelings must have been excited in their bosoms, when they beheld him conflicting with Satan in the wilderness, and sinking under the load of his Father's wrath in the garden of Gethsemane, and in both seasons needing their friendly aid, [Matthew 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 4.11). [Luke 22:43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.43).

Nothing is spoken of their viewing him on the cross; but doubtless they, who had been so deeply interested about him from his very birth to the hour of his crucifixion, could not but gaze upon him with astonishment and sympathy in his expiring moments. And how gladly did they obey the mandate to confound his adversaries, and to rescue him from the tomb, [Matthew 28:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.2-4). With what joy did they attest his resurrection, [Matthew 28:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.5-6), and wait upon him in his ascension to the highest heavens, [Psalm 68:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 68.17-18), and announce his intention to return again, in like manner as he had ascended, to judge the world, [Acts 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 1.10-11).

It is perhaps to these testimonies which the angels bore to Jesus, rather than to the mere circumstance of their seeing him, that the Apostle alludes in the words of our text. And surely, if it is mysterious, that the Spirit of God would bear testimony to him, it is no less a mystery, that his own creatures would be employed in such an office.

***~~IV. He was "was preached among the nations, and believed on in the world"—~~***

The Jews, who had for two thousand years been the peculiar people of God, could not conceive that any but their own nation would be admitted to the Divine favor: and indeed, to such a degree were the Gentiles immersed in ignorance and sin, that they seemed as if they were utterly excluded from the hope of mercy. But "God's thoughts were not as man's thoughts, or his ways as man's ways:" for, by his express appointment, the Gospel was preached to all nations, and salvation through Christ was proclaimed to every creature.

The Apostle himself had been the honored instrument of conveying this mercy to them; and had the happiness of seeing, that he had not labored in vain, or run in vain. There were multitudes in every place who received the word with all readiness of mind, and rested all their hopes of salvation on their incarnate God. Their prejudices vanished; their passions were overcome; and their whole souls were subdued to the obedience of faith.

And were not these things also mysterious, that the poor idolatrous Gentiles would have such glad tidings proclaimed to them; and that he, who had not saved himself, would be regarded as the Savior of the whole world?

***~~V. He "was received up into glory"—~~***

The return of Jesus to his heavenly mansions is generally thought to be here referred to: but perhaps the reference rather is to the glorious reception which he met with among those who believed on him. It seems that the different members of the text received their accomplishment in a successive order of time: and, if this be duly considered, the interpretation here given to the last clause will appear the most suitable of any: and it is certain that the words in the text may very properly be translated, he was received gloriously, [Acts 20:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.13-14). [Philippians 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.19).

They did not merely assent to the truth of his Gospel, but received him into their hearts with most fervent love. "No sooner did they hear of him, than they obeyed him, [Psalm 18:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 18.44)," and accounted his service to be perfect freedom. So unreserved was their surrender of themselves to him, that they desired "every thought," as well as every action, "to be brought into captivity" to his will, [2 Corinthians 10:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.5). In short, they "counted all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord;" nor were their goods, their reputation, their liberty, or their life, of any value, when put in competition with his will, or when an opportunity was offered to sacrifice them to his honor, [Philippians 3:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.7-8).

Such was the reception given to him wherever his name was preached: multitudes in every place "blessed themselves in him, [Psalm 72:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 72.17)," and "rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, [1 Peter 1:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.8)." And what a glorious mystery was this! that Gentiles would so highly honor one who had not only been abhorred by all his own countrymen, but had been executed by them as the vilest of malefactors! and that men of every nation under Heaven would feel such love to one whom they had never seen, as to renounce for his sake all that their eyes had seen, and all that was held dear among them! This was astonishing indeed: yet, wonderful as it is, it is still daily experienced, and daily manifested, by all that believe.

***~~We conclude with submitting to your consideration two important questions:~~***

***~~1. What reception have you given to this mystery of the Gospel?~~***

Are the great subjects of Christ's humiliation and glory entertained by you with that reverence which is due to such mysterious truths? I thank God they are preached among you; but are they not in too many instances neglected by you, instead of meeting with that reception which they deserve? Beg then that the Holy "Spirit would take of the things that are Christ's and show them unto you, [John 16:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 16.15)." And endeavor to give the Lord Jesus such a reception now, that you may be welcomed by him in the great day of his appearing.

***~~2. Are you experiencing the Gospel to be indeed a mystery of godliness?~~***

It is to but little purpose to "call Christ Lord, if we do not obey the things which he says." He will "save us *from*our sins;" but never *in*them. He came to "redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works, [Titus 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.14)." Let us not then attempt to make him "a minister of sin, [Galatians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.17);" but endeavor to show the *sanctifying*, as well as *saving*, efficacy of his Gospel. Let us show, that while "the grace of God brings salvation to us, it teaches us to deny all sin, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world! [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12)."

***~~#2231~~***

***~~GODLINESS PROFITABLE UNTO ALL THINGS~~***

**[1 Timothy 4:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.7-9)**

"Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance!"

AS in the natural man there is a total alienation of heart from God. Just so, after that he has been in some measure awakened to a sense of his duty, there is in him a constant proneness to turn aside from God, and to rest in something short of a total surrender of the soul to him.

This appears from the numerous controversies which were agitated in the apostolic age. Christians even in that day were not contented with receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, but labored to blend with it some favorite notions, either of Jewish superstition or Gentile philosophy; by means of which they drew away the minds of many from the simplicity of the Gospel, and from that practical regard to it which constitutes our highest duty.

It is observable, too, that persons addicted to this habit always lay a very undue stress on their own peculiar notions, and display more zeal in the propagation of them than in the diffusion of the Gospel itself. It is in reference to such practices that the Apostle is speaking in the words before us. He is cautioning Timothy against being led astray by them, or giving any countenance to them in his ministrations, which would rather be directed to the inculcating and enforcing of vital godliness: "Refuse profane and old wives' fables," says he, "and train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This (this character of godliness, as deserving and demanding our exclusive regards) is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance!"

In confirmation of this saying, I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. The profitableness of true godliness—~~***

"Godliness" here stands in opposition to all that superstitious or contentious men would place in its stead. It is to be understood as comprehending *a surrender of ourselves to God, as his redeemed people, and a life of entire devotedness to his service*. Now this is profitable,

***~~1. In relation to the present life—~~***

What is it that has deluged the whole world with misery? What but sin? The world would still have been a paradise, if man had continued to retain his primitive holiness: and, so far as divine grace prevails to restore holiness to man, the world is again restored to its paradisiacal state of happiness. True it is that the best of men are yet subject to wants, diseases, and death; so that however holy they may be, they must yet partake of the bitter consequences of sin.

But the advantages enjoyed by the godly over all the rest of mankind are exceeding great.

First, The godly are delivered from the dominion of evil passions, which agitate all the rest of mankind. See what the state of the world is by reason of pride, envy, malice, wrath, revenge. See what evils abound by reason of covetousness, ambition, lewdness, and selfishness, in ten thousand forms. Mark the jealousies of rival kingdoms; the contentions in smaller societies; the feuds in families; and the workings of evil tempers in individuals: see how almost every human being has his life embittered by something inflicted by others, or brooding in his own bosom: and then say, Whether he has not the advantage, who has learned to "mortify his earthly members," and to "crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts?"

Next, The godly are enabled to live under the influence of love—and need I say what a source of comfort that is? Read the description of love as set forth in the 13th chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, and judge whether the exercise of such dispositions are not conducive to the happiness of the soul.

Again, The godly are freed from numberless temptations, into which the ungodly rush without restraint.

The *ungodly*, by their fellowship with each other, are walking, either in the midst of thorns and briers, where they constantly receive or inflict some painful wound; or, if their path is more pleasant, they only countenance each other in ways, which bring guilt upon their souls, and involve each other in irremediable ruin.

The *godly*, on the contrary, by keeping at a distance from such snares, avoid the evils connected with them; and by their mutual fellowship promote the edification of each other in faith and love, in peace and holiness.

Lastly, The godly enjoy peace with God, and a blessed prospect beyond the grave. Oh! who can estimate this advantage? Who can tell what joy a sense of God's pardoning love brings into the soul? Who can declare what the believer feels:

in his secret walk with God,

in pouring out his soul before him,

in apprehending and pleading God's gracious promises,

in surveying the fullness of righteousness and grace which is treasured up for him in Christ Jesus,

in contemplating every event as ordered for his spiritual and eternal good,

and in looking forward to an eternity of bliss in Heaven?

Who, I say, can calculate these advantages, which are the exclusive portion of the godly!

If it is said, that this description of the believer's advantages is not realized in fact, I grant that the generality of religious professors do not experience them to the extent that we have spoken of them. But why do they not experience them to this extent? It is because vital godliness is but at a low ebb among those who profess to live under its influence. Were the professors of religion more like to the Apostles in vital godliness, they would, in the same proportion, be elevated above all the rest of the world, both in their character and enjoyments. They would indeed have their afflictions, as the Apostles had: but their "consolations would abound far above their afflictions," yes and even by means of their afflictions.

As it is said that "godliness has the promise of all this," I will leave it all to rest upon that one saying, "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 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." Let the love of God the Father, and the indwelling of the Father and of Christ Jesus in the soul, be duly estimated, and we will leave any man in the universe to judge whether godliness is not profitable as it respects this present life.

***~~2. In reference to the life to come—~~***

Of this there is so little doubt, that we need scarcely stop to confirm it, more especially as our further views of this subject demand a very peculiar attention. Let it only be recollected, that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God has promised eternal life! [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7). [1 John 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.25);" and that "those who overcome in this warfare shall sit down with Christ upon his throne, as he sits on his Father's throne! [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21);" and nothing more need be added to establish this obvious and acknowledged truth.

Such being the profitableness of true godliness, we proceed to state,

***~~II. The importance of godliness in that particular view—~~***

Those who have not duly considered this subject would not have expected to find such a peculiar confirmation of it as the Apostle has added in our text. When, in a preceding chapter, he was about to declare the stupendous mystery, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," he prefaced it with this declaration, that the truth he was about to utter was "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, [1 Timothy 1:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.15)."

There the importance and mysteriousness of the truth easily account for the solemnity with which it is introduced: but where there is nothing affirmed but the profitableness of godliness, we seem to think so solemn a confirmation of it quite unnecessary. But we shall soon be of a different opinion, if we contemplate this truth in connection with the subjects which both precede and follow it. We say then, that the profitableness of vital godliness ought to be regarded as a matter of primary and universal importance:

***~~1. Vital godliness is profitable, for it tends to keep the mind from unprofitable speculations—~~***

The whole preceding context refers to speculations which either already existed in the Church, or would at a future period be introduced, verse 1-3, 7. Heretics and apostates were even then at work to spread their pernicious doctrines; those who were of Jewish origin "giving heed to fables and endless genealogies, which ministered questions rather than godly edifying that is in faith, [1 Timothy 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 1.4) and [Titus 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.9);" and those from among the Gentile converts obtruding upon the Church their "profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, 1 Timothy 6:20." The effect of these speculations was exceedingly pernicious: for while "conceited and ignorant men doted about such questions and strifes of words, they filled the Church with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings, and perverse disputings, [1 Timothy 6:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.4-5)," and eventually turned many from the faith, [1 Timothy 6:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.21).

Now in every age of the Church there are many, who, being themselves, through the subtlety of Satan, turned away from the simplicity of the Gospel, labor to propagate their own peculiar opinions, and to "draw away disciples after them." Their views are often extremely specious, as were those of the *Jews*who sought to honor Moses, [Colossians 2:20-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 2.20-23), and those of the *Gentiles*who from a professed regard for the honor of Christ pleaded an exemption from obedience to the moral law, Jude verse 4. [2 Peter 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1); [2 Peter 2:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.17-19). Frequently there is much truth mixed up with their errors; and their mistake lies not so much in what they would maintain, as in *the undue importance which they attach to some points to the exclusion or neglect of others that are equally important*. In a word, they, though "false apostles" in reality, are often so specious, that they appear like apostles of Christ himself, [2 Corinthians 11:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.3-4); 2 Corinthians 11:13-14.

How then are we to guard against such deceivers? I answer, By having our minds fully intent on practical and vital godliness. We shall see in a moment, that *by allowing our minds to be turned into the channel of controversy, we shall lose much of that heavenliness of mind, that sweetness of temper, that expansion of love, and that singleness of eye, which are the brightest ornaments of our religion, and indispensably necessary to our true happiness*. And what shall we *gain*to compensate for this loss? Nothing but a conceit of our own superior wisdom, and an uncharitable contempt or hatred of all who differ from us.

This is the point which the Apostle labors so strenuously to impress upon our minds. "Refuse," says he, "all such exercises; for they are of little profit: but exercise yourself unto godliness," the profit of which can never be duly estimated. Keep habitually upon your minds a sense of the value of true godliness, and you will have no disposition for controversies, nor any satisfaction in the company of those who would obtrude their noxious opinions upon you. You will act rather in conformity with the apostolic injunction, "From such withdraw yourself, [1 Timothy 6:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.5)."

***~~2. Vital godliness is profitable, for it tends to sustain the mind under all the trials and difficulties of life—~~***

To this the Apostle refers, in the words following my text. Exercise yourselves, says he, in this, which will be so profitable to your souls, "for" from my own experience I can declare, what support you will find from such conduct, in all the trials that you may be called to endure, "for therefore we both labor (gladly), and suffer reproach (cheerfully), because" we are upheld by a consciousness that we are living entirely upon God, and for God, verse 10.

That the lovers of subtle questions and needless disputations have a zeal, we acknowledge; and that they will often make sacrifices in defense of their tenets, we acknowledge: but in self-denying labors, and patient sufferings for the honor of God and the welfare of mankind, their exertions are paralyzed. Their minds become contracted; and they are altogether occupied in maintaining their peculiar notions, and in gaining proselytes to their own party.

Not so the persons who steadily labor for the attainment of vital godliness. They have their hearts more and more enlarged with love both to God and man. They feel so rich a recompense sweetly and continually flowing into their souls, that they only regret they cannot do a thousand times more for God, and that they would ever experience anything but unqualified delight in what they suffer for him, [2 Corinthians 12:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.10). They will "forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before;" like persons in a race, who have no desire but to fulfill the will of God, and to "finish their course with joy." In this respect then, no less than in the former, is godliness truly profitable; and that it is so, "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance."

***~~Let me then, in this view of the subject, entreat you all,~~***

***~~1. To esteem vital godliness according to its true character—~~***

The greater part of mankind deny the necessity of godliness even to their eternal welfare: and, if you justify your zeal by a reference to the future judgment, they will not hesitate to affirm, that such exertions are not necessary to the salvation of the soul, and that to abound in them is to be "righteous over-much."

Then, as to the present life, almost all will maintain, that such godliness as the Gospel requires will be subversive of our interests and our happiness in the world; and from those considerations will urge us to lay aside what they call our needless peculiarities.

But be assured that *there is no real happiness even in this world, and much less in the world to come, but through an entire devotion of the soul to God*. Let no man deceive you in relation to this matter; for "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." The whole Scripture, from the beginning to the end, bears testimony to this truth, that God's service is perfect freedom, and that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness and peace."

If it is said, that piety will involve us in trouble, for that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" we reply, It is true: but nevertheless the consolations of the godly shall infinitely over-balance their afflictions; nor are "the sufferings of this present life worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us, [Romans 8:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.18)." Let this then be a fixed principle in all your hearts, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

***~~2. To seek vital godliness according to its real worth—~~***

The word which we translate, "exercise yourself" unto godliness, is taken from the Grecian games, in which those who engaged stripped themselves of all unnecessary clothing, in order that they might be able to exert themselves with more effect.

Now in this manner would we address ourselves to the work of godliness. We would feel that the utmost possible exertions are necessary for the attaining of such a measure of it as will secure the prize. We would cast off everything that may impede our progress in it; and determinately engage in it as those who will at least take care not to lose the prize through any fault or negligence of their own.

You well know how those who were to contend in the Olympic games denied themselves, and by what a long course of training they endeavored to fit themselves for their respective contests. O, brethren, enter thus into the prosecution of true piety, "avoiding all foolish questions as unprofitable and vain! [Titus 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.9);" and keeping your eye steadily fixed on the attainment of the Divine image in your soul. Then will you "grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head," and then will you find that "you will not labor in vain or run in vain."

***~~#2232~~***

***~~ADDRESS TO YOUNG PERSONS~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.12)~~***

"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

To be earnestly engaged in advancing the welfare of our own souls, is doubtless our first concern. But we should consider, also, how far our conduct may affect the souls of others; and would endeavor so to demean ourselves, that we may prove stumbling-blocks to none, but helpers to all. Of course, those who are engaged in the ministerial office, inasmuch as their conduct is more noticed than that of others, and their influence consequently more extensive, are peculiarly bound to walk with all possible circumspection, "giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed."

But the same care is requisite in all, and the exhortation addressed by Paul to Timothy may with great propriety be addressed to all young persons professing godliness: "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." To such, therefore, would I apply the Apostle's directions, which may be regarded as delivered:

***~~I. In a way of caution—~~***

***~~It is certain that young persons are liable to err—~~***

Their *knowledge*is contracted, in comparison with what it most probably will be at a more advanced period of life: and consequently their *judgment*cannot yet have been matured. Their *experience*too must, of necessity, have been small; so that, as yet, they do not exactly see what will be the probable result of any line of conduct upon the world around them. They are apt also to take but a *partial view*of things, and to be actuated more by *feeling*than by sound judgment; and to be more anxious about what relates to their present real or supposed interests, than about what shall eventually prove most beneficial to themselves and others. Hence, as may reasonably be expected, they do not always approve themselves to the judgment of those who are more considerate and wise.

It must also be acknowledged, that **there is among those who are more advanced in life, a proneness to condemn what is done by their younger brethren, especially what is done by them under the influence of religion—**

Persons of maturer years have no conception that the young and inexperienced would have juster views of things than themselves: and they judge it to be presumptuous in the young and arrogant to depart from the line prescribed and followed by their elders. To see persons just entering into life averse to *pleasures*which their fathers have so long pursued, and observant of *duties*which their fathers have altogether disregarded, is very offensive to the world; who are thus reduced to a necessity, of either acknowledging their own ways to be evil, or of condemning the ways of their younger brethren as fanatical and absurd. Which alternative they will prefer is obvious enough: and therefore it is always found, that *the piety of young persons is a matter of offense to their ungodly superiors*. "To the natural man, universally the things of the Spirit are foolishness, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)," even though they are found in persons of the most mature age and of the soundest discretion: much more, therefore, are they so reputed, when found in persons who possess not the advantages attached to age and experience: and, consequently, those who profess religion in early life must expect to be sneered at and despised by those whose habits are unfriendly to religion, and who "hate the light, because it reproves their evil deeds."

But from hence arises **a necessity for peculiar care on the part of young persons, that "no man may have occasion to despise their youth"—**

It will be well for young persons to bear in mind the two points which we have just adverted to, namely:  
their own liability to err, and  
the proneness of their seniors to judge them harshly.

To obviate both these evils, the greatest circumspection is necessary: nor can I give any better rule to the young than to exchange places with their seniors; and to consider, on every particular occasion, what judgment they themselves would form in a change of circumstances. I know, indeed, and they also should know, that "God alone can give them a right judgment in anything, [2 Timothy 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.7)."

But *multitudes deceive themselves, while in praying to God for direction, they are yet following blindly the way of their own hearts*. To obtain a right direction, the mind must be divested of every undue bias: and this will be effected by nothing better than the plan which I have just suggested.

It is highly desirable, also, that young persons *be on their guard against raising matters of trifling consideration into an undue importance, and laying a stress on them, as though they were of vital interest to the soul*. This is too much the habit of youth and inexperience; and it affords but too just an occasion for their seniors to complain of them, as ignorant, and willful, and pertinacious, and absurd.

Let it be remembered then, that if piety spreads the sails, wisdom should be at the helm; and that the determination of all, and of young persons in particular, should be in unison with that of David: "I will behave myself wisely before you in a perfect way! [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)." Everything that is extravagant should be avoided. Times and circumstances should be taken into the account. The *manner*of doing everything would also be an object of attention.

In a word, it would never be forgotten, that we are in the midst of enemies, who will be glad to cast blame upon us; and that our wisdom is so to conduct ourselves, that "those who are on the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of us, [Titus 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.8). See also 1 Peter 3:16."

But, with the Apostle, let us prosecute the same idea:

***~~II. In a way of encouragement—~~***

Young people are condemned for not keeping their religion to themselves. But they are not to put their light under a bushel: on the contrary, they are, as much as they ever will be at any future period of their lives, bound to "let their light so 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)." There is no eminence to which it is not their duty and their privilege, to attain. And, if Timothy, at his early age, was to be "an example," not to the world only, but "to believers" also; so should every young person endeavor to be, in the place and station where God has appointed him to move.

***~~Let every one of you, then, be an example even to believers.~~***

***~~1. Be an example in WORD—~~***

The statements of Timothy were to be made in perfect accordance with God's revealed will: and so should yours be also. Your adversaries will be glad to take advantage of anything that is unsound in your opinions; and, in order to find occasion against you, they will be urging you upon difficult questions and on matters of doubtful disputation. But, in all your interaction with them, I would advise you to take your stand on ground that is utterly unassailable.

That to seek the salvation which God offers us in the Gospel, is of indispensable consequence to every man; and so that *to live, as, at the hour of death, we shall wish we had lived, is the part of sound wisdom*.

These, and such like topics, I would recommend to the young when conversing with their seniors who are of an adverse mind. It will be time enough to enter into deeper subjects, when the *ears*of persons are open to hear, and their *hearts*are also open to receive, the truths which you may be able to lay before them. To spread pearls before swinely persons who are disposed only to trample them under their feet, is at all times inexpedient and unwise. And even when young persons do make fuller statements of their views, they should do it with modesty, and caution, and moderation.

***~~2. Be an example in CONDUCT—~~***

The whole of a young person's deportment, too, would be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ. Everything of levity and folly should be put away, and nothing admitted but what is consistent with "sound wisdom and discretion".

***~~3. Be an example in LOVE—~~***

Nothing should be said or done that is contrary to "love." Whether in judging others, or in acting towards them, we should breathe nothing but love. True it is, that the treatment which persons in the exercise of early piety are likely to receive, is calculated to generate somewhat of resentment in their minds: but they must be much on their guard to "render nothing but good for evil," until they shall have "overcome the evil with their good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)."

**4.** **Be an example in SPIRIT—**

There is a peculiar need for young persons to guard against everything of conceit and forwardness, and every disposition that is contrary either to humility or love. Who does not admire modesty, and gentleness, and kindness, and all similar graces, which combine to render a person amiable? Let those graces then be ever cultivated, and ever in exercise, so that you may ever be seen "clothed with humility." This will do much to recommend godliness: and this will render you worthy of imitation by all who behold you.

**5.** **Be an example in FAITH—**

There is in young persons too great a readiness to yield to discouragement, and to rely on an arm of flesh in times of more than ordinary trial. But you must look to God with all simplicity of mind, and confide in him, as engaged to make "all things work together for your good." Never must you stagger at any promise through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God."

***~~6. Be an example in PURITY—~~***

The very regard which is first created by sympathy and concord on the subjects of religion, may, if not watched, degenerate into feelings of a less hallowed kind; and especially at a period of life when the passions are strong, and a lack of experience may put us off our guard. *Every word and every look, yes, and every thought, ought to be well-guarded*, in order that Satan may not take advantage of us, and that not even the breath of scandal may be raised against us.

In a word, the counsel given to Titus is that which every one of us should follow: "Young men exhort to be sober-minded; in all things showing yourself a pattern of good works! [Titus 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.6-7)."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are inclined to take offense at true religion or its professors—~~***

There is an extreme unreasonableness in many, who expect that the very instant a person becomes religiously inclined, he shall be freed at once from every infirmity incident to our fallen nature; and however young he may be, he shall become at once as wise and judicious as the most experienced Christian. But wisdom is not so soon attained; *nor are the corruptions of our nature subdued without many severe conflicts, and many humiliating falls*. The fair way to judge any man, is, to inquire what he would have been without religion, and then to compare that with what he is as professing godliness. I may go further, and say, that even that is scarcely a fair criterion; because he is, by means of his new dispositions, brought into circumstances so entirely new, as that no part of his former experience will avail him for the direction of his conduct: and, inasmuch as the considerations of religion infinitely outweigh all others that can operate upon his mind, it is no wonder if they sometimes divert his attention from matters of subordinate importance, which yet ought to be noticed by him in order to a perfect regulation of his conduct.

But, if it is unreasonable for men to "despise the youth" of a religious professor, it is still more *unreasonable to despise religion itself on account of the faults of those who profess it.*Religion itself is the same, whatever be the conduct of its advocates; and it enjoins nothing but what is holy and just and good: and *as well might a man despise the sun because of the exhalations of a dunghill, as despise religion on account of anything which it may draw forth from the infirmities of our fallen nature*. If we received it aright, and improved it as we ought—it would uniformly and universally assimilate us to our God!

Let candor then be exercised towards religion and its adherents. Let each stand or fall by their own merits. If those who profess religion walk unworthy of it, let *them*be condemned: but let not religion be condemned for their sake. And before they are finally condemned, let that allowance be made for them, which would be made for others of the same age, and similarly circumstanced. And if this candor is exercised, we fear not but that religion itself shall stand approved; and we trust, that the prejudices which exist against it shall be greatly diminished, if not utterly destroyed.

***~~2. Those who would recommend true religion—~~***

Certainly, it is of vast importance that the professors of religion would adorn it, and walk worthy of it. To those who would approve themselves to God in this respect, I would say, remember how much the welfare of your fellow-creatures, yes, and the honor of your God too—depend on you.

Be not hasty in your decisions, nor over-confident that you are right. Be willing to be advised by those of whose wisdom and piety you have reason to hope well. And be careful not to plead one duty as a reason and ground for the neglect of another. Sins and lusts may counteract each other; but graces and duties are, for the most part, harmonious: and if, in any case, you are compelled, for conscience sake, to refuse to man the submission he demands, let it be clear that you act from conscience only, and not from wilfulness. Be ready, not only with meekness and fear to assign your reasons for your conduct, but to submit those reasons to the test of sound wisdom and of real piety.

In a word, endeavor "by your good and blameless conduct to win those" who would not listen to God's revealed will. So shall you prove blessings to those around you; and bring glory to that God, in whom you trust, and whom you profess to serve.

***~~#2233~~***

***~~THE QUALITY OF MEN'S WORKS DISCOVERED IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 5:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.24-25)~~***

"The sins of some people are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there."

***~~AN attention to the context is of the greatest importance in explaining the Holy Scriptures: for there is not any error into which we may not run, if we overlook the connection in which every different expression stands. Yet it is possible to err even on that side: for the inspired writers are not so fettered, but that they sometimes pass from one subject to another without any connection except what existed in their own minds, and sometimes with an easy, though not a logical, transition.~~***

Many able commentators, through an excessive attention to the context, would limit the words before us to the admission of persons to the ministerial office, of which the Apostle is speaking in the foregoing, verses. But I am persuaded, that they ought not to be so limited. They arise indeed from that subject; but they carry the mind beyond it; and were intended to encourage Timothy to execute with fidelity the trust reposed in him: he must "not lay hands suddenly on any, lest he become a partaker of their sins:" but if, after all his care, he would be deceived, he shall not be deemed guilty on that account, since *God alone can see the heart: and the mistakes which are made respecting the characters of men in this life, shall all be rectified in the life to come.*

Taking the words in this sense, they will be found to express the very same idea, and in the very same connection, which the same Apostle has suggested in other places; to which, in the progress of our subject, we shall have occasion to refer, [1 Corinthians 3:9-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.9-15); 1 Corinthians 4:2-5. In both of these places the Apostle is speaking of the ministry of the word: in the former, he refers to the day of judgment as determining the quality of the fruits produced by it; and in the latter, as deciding upon his character as to fidelity in the discharge of his ministerial office. Indeed so intimate was the connection between the ministerial office and the day of judgment in his mind, that he scarcely ever mentions the one without referring to the other.

Fully persuaded in my own mind that the words do ultimately refer to the day of judgment, I shall proceed,

***~~I. To mark the truths which are here declared—~~***

These relate to all the different works of men, to:

***~~1. Their evil works—~~***

Many sins are so flagrant, that, as they render a person manifestly unfit for admission to the ministerial office. The reader will observe, that the more limited sense of the words is not lost sight of, though the more enlarged sense is decidedly preferred, so they leave no doubt respecting the judgment which will be passed upon him in the last day. Nor do we include in this number those only which are of the grosser kind, and which are stamped with infamy by even the better kind of heathen, (such as fornication and adultery,) but those sins also which, though they bring with them no stigma in the estimation of mankind, are decidedly reprobated by the Word of God.

Among the foremost of these we must mention a *worldly spirit*, which as decidedly proves a person to be destitute of true religion as any other sin whatever: for to serve God and Mammon too is impossible! [Matthew 6:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.24). The true disciple of Christ is no more of the world than his Lord and Master was, [John 17:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.14); [John 17:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.16).

A disregard of the Gospel too is another of those sins which will infallibly bring condemnation upon the soul: for "if judgment begins, as it surely will, at the house of God, what shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of God, [1 Peter 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.17)." How is it possible that any would "escape, who neglect so great salvation, [Hebrews 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 2.3)."

We might mention a variety of other sins, which, though they are accounted light and trivial by the ungodly world, stamp the character so clearly and manifestly, that no one who believes the Scriptures can doubt one moment what the outcome of them will be in the day of judgment, [1 Corinthians 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 6.9-10). [Galatians 5:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.19-21).

But while these "go before to judgment," others of a more secret and dubious nature "follow after." *There are many sins in the heart, which, though harbored and indulged there, escape the eye of men, and are known to God alone. It is no uncommon thing for men to stand well both in their own eyes and in the estimation of others, and yet to be hateful in the sight of the heart-searching God.*Their works may externally be good, and yet not be perfect before God, [2 Chronicles 25:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 25.2). [Luke 8:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 8.14). Men may "have a name to live, and yet in reality be dead, [Revelation 3:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.1-3)." They may have much religion in appearance, and yet "all their religion be vain, [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

But it is not until the day of judgment that their real character will be known: and, when disclosed by God, and visited with merited displeasure, it will cause the utmost surprise in all who once knew and admired them upon earth! [Job 20:5-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 20.5-7). What language can convey all the pathos that is implied in that expression, "Where is he?" Then, if not before, "be sure your sin will find you out! [Numbers 32:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 32.23)"

***~~2. Their good works—~~***

Some men are so eminently holy, that no one could hesitate to pronounce them fit to be employed in the sacred ministry of the Gospel: nor can anyone doubt respecting the safety of their state when they die. It is said of mariners, that, though the most experienced may sometimes mistake a cloud for land, the most inexperienced never mistake land for a cloud; there being in the land something which carries its own evidence along with it.

Thus vital godliness, when exhibited in bright colors, and in an uniform consistent tenor, commends itself to all who behold it: it is a light which needs nothing else to testify of it, or to set it forth: its own effulgence is the most convincing evidence of its existence. The ultimate happiness of those who possess it, is foreseen with an assured confidence by all who mark its course.

But there are some whose piety, in consequence of the slenderness of their attainments, or the privacy of their situation, or the insuperable diffidence and reserve of their minds, is concealed from public view. External circumstances too may sometimes occasion the light, though real, to be obscured; as was the case with those "seven thousand men in Israel," who, though unknown to the Prophet Elijah, had never bowed their knee to the image of Baal.

*Indeed, it is of the nature of true religion to affect secrecy.* The sighs, and groans, and prayers, and tears of the real penitent are poured forth in secret: and the consciousness of being seen or heard by any mortal man, would be sufficient to stifle all. The inward affiance of the soul too, is unknown to any but God; as indeed are also all the sublimest workings of the affections towards God. None but "He who searches the heart and tries the thoughts" can discern that entireness of heart which constitutes a man "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit." But God does see, yes, and mark also, those more secret and refined exercises of the soul, which are hidden from all besides.

It is not for those only who speak often one to another, that God records his approbation in the book of his remembrance, but for those also who in modest silence "think upon his name, [Malachi 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.16);" and though those thoughts were altogether hidden from their earthly friends, he will bring them forth at the last day as evidences in favor of those who fostered them in their bosoms, and will recompense them with testimonies of his warmest approbation! [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13). "Their works do follow them." "The hidden man of the heart" is that which constitutes our brightest ornament in this world, [1 Peter 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 3.4), and which most insures his plaudit in the world to come.

Such being the truths contained in our text, we go on,

***~~II. To deduce from them some important observations—~~***

In the view of the future judgment:

***~~1. We should diligently acquaint ourselves with God's rule of judgment—~~***

*The written Word of God is the rule of our conduct; and it is that also by which we shall be tried in the last day.*We are told, that "in that day, when the judgment is set, the books shall be opened, [Daniel 7:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 7.10). [Revelation 20:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 20.12)," for the express purpose "that all may be judged out of them;" and though there may be various other books, as the book of *providence*, the book of *conscience*, and the book of *life*—yet we are sure that the book of the *Scriptures*must be one. Now that book changes not, nor accommodates itself to the wishes of any: and it is in vain for us to complain of it as too strict, or to say respecting anything in it, "This is a hard saying; who can bear it?" It is in vain to reduce its demands to any standard of our own. Whatever we or the whole world may say, God's requirements will be the same, and his judgment will be in perfect correspondence with them.

We should not therefore be inquiring, what the opinions of men are in relation to these things, but what God speaks in his word. We should study that word with care.

We should bring ourselves to it as a touchstone [John 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 3.21).

We should pray over it, with a pledge desire to understand its true import, and with a full determination of heart, through grace, to follow it in every particular.

We should beg of God to "write his law in our hearts," and to "cast our souls, as it were, into the very mold of his Gospel:" for, when "truth exists in our inward parts," we need not fear but that "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will confer upon us a crown of righteousness in the great day of his appearing, [2 Timothy 4:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.8)."

***~~2. We should contentedly refer ourselves to God's judgment—~~***

Let our conduct be ever so pure, and ever so wise, it will not be possible for us to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world. Even those who profess godliness are not always candid in their judgment: on the contrary, they are very *apt to put an unkind construction on the conduct of others, especially when it militates in any degree against their wishes or interests*.

Who would have thought that even the Apostle Paul would be traduced as a time-serving man, whose views, and aims, and habits, were altogether carnal? Yet thus was he judged, even by many who professed a great zeal for religion, [2 Corinthians 10:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 10.2). Who then can hope to escape the censures of men? *Who can hope so to walk as never to be misrepresented by those who see his actions only, but are unacquainted with his motives and principles?*It may be that even the heaviest charges may be brought against us without any foundation; and that we may be persecuted, as David was by Saul, with unrelenting fury, when our conduct has been as discreet and blameless as the most consummate piety could inspire.

Well, if such be our lot, let it not weigh too heavily on our minds: let us say with Paul, "It is a small matter with me to be judged by man's judgment;" for God will, before long, "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man" who has deserved it, "have praise from God, [1 Corinthians 4:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.3); [1 Corinthians 4:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.5)."

The expression here in the original is remarkable, "It is a small matter to be judged of man's day." Man has his day: but God has his also. Man's day consists of but a few hours: but God's shall endure for ever. Therefore we may well commit our cause to God without anxiety, and wait with patience the time of his coming, when "he will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day."

***~~3. We should however be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy—~~***

*As our conduct may be misrepresented by others, so may it also be misjudged by ourselves. Self-love is very apt to blind us, and to make us form a favorable opinion of ourselves, when we are in reality widely deviating from the path of duty.*How little did the Apostles imagine that they were actuated by a sinful principle, when they would have called fire from Heaven to consume a Samaritan village! They gave themselves credit for a holy zeal, while they were altogether under the influence of pride and revenge. What our blessed Lord said to them, is but too applicable on many occasions to ourselves, "You know not what spirit you are of." We should bear in mind that we are partial judges in everything that relates to ourselves; and that excessive confidence of our own innocence is replete with danger, not only as preventing a careful self-examination, but as creating in us an unhallowed boldness before God: for "not he who commends himself shall be ultimately approved, but he whom the Lord commends, 2 Corinthians 10:18."

The Apostle Paul himself, though he was unconscious of anything amiss within him, would not venture too confidently to assert his innocence; but commended himself to the judgment of the heart-searching God: "I know nothing against myself," says he, "yet am I not hereby justified: but he who judges me is the Lord [1 Corinthians 4:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.4)."

Thus we also should cultivate within ourselves a holy fear, lest some hidden "evils, which went not before to judgment, would follow after," and "find us out," when they can neither be rectified nor forgiven. There is "a fire that shall test our every work:" and that only shall be approved which stands the test of that day! [1 Corinthians 3:13-15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.13-15).

***~~4. We should act to God in all that we do—~~***

It is in vain to seek to please man, or to seek the applause of man: for his judgment, whether favorable or unfavorable, will not affect our future state: the judgment of the whole world will not influence our Judge: he will "judge righteous judgment;" and either acquit or condemn, according as we are found conformed to him in holiness, or destitute of his blessed image. Man's rule of duty is so defective, that we shall greatly err, if we satisfy ourselves with that: yes, it is in the most essential matters so erroneous, that "if we seek to please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ [Galatians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.10)." Our great object must be, to approve ourselves to God; and then we need not be much concerned whether our actions be followed by an "evil or good report" from the partial judges that are around us.

I mean not by this that we should be inattentive to the opinions of men, or that we should disregard their censures: for, as far as we possibly can, "we would provide things honest in the sight of all men:" but *it is God's word only that we should take as the rule of our conduct, and him alone whom we would strive to please*. And, if men are not satisfied with us for serving God according to his written word, we must be content to suffer obloquy from them, and determine to "obey God rather than man." However we may be "judged according to men in the flesh," we need fear nothing, if "we live according to God in the spirit, [1 Peter 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.6)." We shall "enjoy the testimony of a good conscience," as Hezekiah did, [2 Corinthians 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 1.12). [2 Kings 20:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.3), "and have confidence before God now, and not be ashamed before him at his coming, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28); [1 John 3:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.19-21)."

***~~#2234~~***

***~~THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF GOOD WORKS~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.3)~~***

"The doctrine which is according to godliness."

THE objections which men urge against the doctrines of the Gospel, originate for the most part in their aversion to its *precepts*. The restraint which it imposes on their lives and actions is irksome to them. They wish to follow the impulse of their passions, or the dictates of self-interest: and when they are checked in their progress, they complain that the path marked out for them is too strait, and the yoke which we would put upon them is too heavy.

Paul is giving directions for the conduct of masters and servants towards each other: but, however "wholesome his words" were, he foresaw that some would "not consent to" them, notwithstanding they were "the words of Christ himself," and in perfect unison with the Gospel, which was, in that, as well as in every other respect, "a doctrine according to godliness." He then proceeds to speak upon such characters, and to show that their dislike to the injunctions given them was owing only to their own pride, and ignorance, and love of sin.

The expression contained in the text is peculiarly worthy of our attention. It gives a just, and very important view of the Gospel; to illustrate and confirm which is the intent of this discourse.

In order to prove that the Gospel is indeed "a doctrine according to godliness," let us consult:

***~~I. The doctrines of the Gospel—~~***

We might, if our time would admit of it, illustrate this in every one of the doctrines of our holy religion. But we shall confine ourselves to,

***~~1. The representations which the Gospel gives us of God—~~***

The systems of religion which prevailed among the heathen, were calculated rather to promote, than to repress, iniquity: for even their gods themselves, according to their own representation of them, were monsters of iniquity. But our God is holy and just. He is so *holy*, that he cannot look upon sin without the utmost abhorrence of it [Habakkuk 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.13); and so *just*, that he will never suffer it to pass unpunished [Exodus 34:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Exod 34.7).

If indeed these were his only attributes, men might sit down in despair, and take their fill of sin, because they would have no encouragement to depart from it. But "there is *mercy*also with him, that he may be feared;" yes, so "rich is he in mercy," that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."

How must the contemplation of such perfections tend to deter men from the commission of evil, and to foster in them every holy sentiment and desire!

***~~2. The means which the Gospel prescribes for our reconciliation with God—~~***

The leading feature of the Gospel is, that it proclaims pardon to penitent sinners, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let anyone reflect on this stupendous mystery, the incarnation and death of the Son of God; let him consider, that no less a sacrifice than that made by our incarnate God was sufficient to atone for sin; and will he then be willing to incur all the penalties of sin, and to bear them in his own person? Will not the tears and agonies of an expiring Savior compel him to exclaim, "If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" And will not the love of Christ in submitting to such an ignominious death, on purpose that he might redeem him from iniquity, have any influence on his mind? Will he readily trample on the blood that was shed for him, and crucify his Lord afresh by continuing in sin?

Let us prosecute the same inquiry, in relation to,

**II. The precepts** **of the Gospel—**

***~~View the precepts relating to God and our neighbor—~~***

The two great commandments of the law are confirmed and ratified by the Gospel, "You shall *love*the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." Now can any man love God, and not endeavor to do his will? Or, if he makes his own self-love the rule and measure of his love to others, can he willingly injure them in anything or forbear to do them good? would not a sincere love to these commands lay the axe to the root of all sin, and transform men into the very image of their God?

***~~View the directions which Scripture gives for self-government—~~***

*The Gospel does not regulate the actions only, but the heart.* It extends its dominion over all the most secret motives and inclinations; and requires every thought to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The Gospel makes no allowance for temptations, as though they extenuated the guilt of sin, or were an excuse for the commission of iniquity; but teaches us to "heap coals of five on the head of an enemy" by acts of kindness, and "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

The Gospel tolerates no kind or degree of sin, but enjoins us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God." It requires us to "be holy as God himself is holy," and "perfect, even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect."

Can anyone that considers these precepts, doubt what is the nature and tendency of the Gospel?

Let us examine further,

**III. The examples** **of the Gospel—**

It calls us to an imitation of:

***~~1. Our blessed Lord—~~***

He was virtue itself embodied. Neither friends nor enemies could ever find in him the smallest spot or blemish. Under circumstances the most trying that can be imagined, he preserved the same serenity of mind, the same meek and heavenly disposition. While he was suffering the most injurious treatment, he was like a lamb led to the slaughter: and in the very agonies of death, he prayed for nothing but blessings on the head of his cruel murderers. Now we are told, that in all this "he set an example for us, that we should follow in his steps:" and that all his followers must "walk even as he walked."

***~~2. His holy Apostles—~~***

These were far inferior indeed to their Divine Master, yet were they bright patterns of everything that was excellent and praise-worthy. As being men of like passions with us, they manifested on some occasions their infirmities: and, in these instances, they are warnings to us, and not examples. But, for the most part, they conducted themselves in a way that excites our highest admiration. And though on account of their defects we cannot follow them in everything—yet we are called on the whole to tread in their steps, and to "be followers of them, as they were of Christ."

Are not these sufficient proofs of the holy tendency of the Gospel?

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How little reason is there for objecting to the Gospel as unfriendly to morality!~~***

Men ground this objection upon the doctrine of our being "justified by faith alone, without the works of the law." But if they would consider that *saving faith is always accompanied by repentance, and followed by obedience*, they would see that there was no foundation at all for their objection. If we said that people might live and die in an impenitent and disobedient state, and yet be saved by their faith, then there were good reason to condemn the Gospel which we preach: but while we maintain the character of God as it is exhibited in the Gospel, together with the obligation of its precepts, and the purity of its examples, no man need to tremble for the ark of God.

A roof is not the less necessary to a house, because it is not to be laid as a foundation: nor are works less necessary, because they cannot justify us before God. Let them but stand in their proper place, and they are as necessary as faith itself.

***~~2. How deluded are those who hold the truth in unrighteousness!~~***

*There doubtless are many who profess to believe in Christ, while yet by their works they utterly deny him.*There was one of this description even in the family of Christ himself. But will that faith which they exercise be sufficient to save them? No! their faith is dead, being alone: it is no better than the faith of devils: nor will it be productive of any benefit to their souls: yes rather, inasmuch as it argued light and knowledge, it will only enhance their guilt, and aggravate their condemnation.

Let those who are not occupied in a careful imitation of their Lord, and an unreserved obedience to his will, know assuredly, that if, on the one hand, he who believes shall be saved, so, on the other hand, "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of Heaven."

***~~3. How great are the obligations of God's people to walk circumspectly!~~***

*The world will judge of the Gospel, not so much by what they hear, as by what they see.* Now, though they have no right to act thus, we would be careful not to lay a stumbling-block before them. We would endeavor rather to make a good impression on their minds, and to give them no occasion from our conduct to speak evil of the truth itself. We would show them by our lives, that their fears respecting the licentious tendency of the Gospel are groundless. By walking as it befits saints, we would put to silence their ignorant objections, and constrain them to confess, that, however the Gospel may be dishonored by its friends, or calumniated by its enemies, it is indeed a doctrine according to godliness!

***~~#2235~~***

***~~GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 6:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.6)~~***

"Godliness with contentment is great gain!"

TO the great dishonor of Christianity, there are many professors, and even preachers of it, who are more intent on promoting their own temporal interests, or the interests of their party, than on advancing practical religion in the world. Of such persons Paul is speaking in the context: and he enjoins Timothy to withdraw himself from them, as from persons who disgraced the Christian name, by giving reason to people to conclude, that "they supposed gain to be godliness."

In opposition to such characters, the Apostle reverses that which he had stated as their opinion; and declares, that though gain was not godliness, godliness was gain, yes, and "great gain," if it were joined "with contentment."

In vindication of this sentiment, we shall show,

***~~I. What we are to understand by "godliness"—~~***

The frame of mind which we may conceive the angels to enjoy, would be by no means suited to our state: we are sinners, redeemed sinners; and therefore "godliness" must include such a frame of mind as befits persons in our condition. In this view, it implies,

***~~1. A sincere trust in Christ for salvation—~~***

This is the foundation of all true religion. Whatever a man may possess without this, he has not one particle of real godliness. If we could suppose him to be as just and honest, as kind and amiable, yes, as devout and fervent, as ever man was—still, if he had not the heart of a sinner, of a sinner justly condemned, and delivered from condemnation solely by the blood of Christ, he would be utterly destitute of true religion.

***~~2. A devotedness to God in Christ—~~***

This must spring from the former: for though faith and practice differ from each other, as much as the root of a tree does from the fruit it bears—yet we must by no means separate them, since they are equally essential to real godliness. A reformation of the external conduct, or a partial surrender of the heart to God, will not suffice: if we would be approved by God, we must have "our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified" to his service: And as Christ is the only mediator through whom we approach to God, so must Christ, that is, God in Christ, be our only Lord and Governor.

When we have just views of the nature of godliness, we shall see,

***~~II. Its connection with contentment—~~***

Such godliness as has been described must bring contentment along with it, since all who possess it must feel,

***~~1. A consciousness that they deserve the miseries of Hell—~~***

No person can have an entire trust in God through Christ, until he has felt his desert of God's wrath and indignation. And can such a person be discontented with any lot that may be assigned him? Must he not, even in the most afflicted situation, say, "Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" *Will he not call every affliction light, yes, lightness itself, in comparison with the misery he deserves? Will he not, under the pressure of the heaviest calamities, thank God that he is not in Hell?*

***~~2. A sense of infinite obligation to God for mercies received—~~***

One who has within him the constituents of real godliness, must see himself to be infinitely indebted to God for the gift of his dear Son, for the knowledge of salvation by him, and for the prospect of everlasting glory. His sense of these mercies cannot but be heightened also by the consideration that they were never once offered to the fallen angels, nor accepted by the great majority of those to whom they have been offered. Can such a one repine that he has a less measure of health, or riches, or temporal conveniences than others, when he is so far exalted above them in things of infinitely greater consequence? "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, [Romans 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.1)"

***~~3. An earnest desire to be conformed to the image of Christ—~~***

No true disciple of Christ expects or wishes to be in a state different from that which his Lord and Master experienced when on earth. But what was the condition of Jesus in the world? Did he live in ease and affluence and honor? No! "he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He existed oftentimes on the benevolence of his friends and followers; and often had not so much as "a place where to lay his head."

Who that reflects on this, will murmur at his lot, even though nothing but poverty and persecution are his lot? Will he not check the first risings of discontent with this obvious reflection, "The disciple cannot be above his Lord: it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Lord?"

The connection of godliness with contentment being thus plain, let us consider,

***~~III. The advantage of it as so connected—~~***

Paul tells us, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Let us view it then,

***~~1. In reference to this life—~~***

Money has obtained the exclusive title of "gain;" but godliness has an incomparably greater right to that appellation. There are three principal ends for which money is considered as valuable, namely:  
to provide present gratifications,  
to secure against future troubles, and  
to benefit our children and families.

But in these respects it cannot for one moment stand in competition with godliness—that godliness I mean which is connected with contentment.

Suppose money to afford ever such high gratifications, (though it is very much overrated by the generality)—will not pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and the enjoyment of the Divine presence, far outweigh them all?

Suppose money to afford effectual relief in trouble, (though it cannot assuage our pain either of mind or body)—what consolations can it afford equal to those which result from godliness and contentment? The utmost that money can do, is to procure some outward relief; whereas the piety above described will convert every cross into a comfort, and every trouble into a fountain of joy.

We are ready to acknowledge that money has its uses, and very important uses too, in reference to our children or dependents, (though it not unfrequently is a curse to them rather than a benefit,) yet even in this view is it far inferior to religion: for the godly and contented man will instruct his children and dependents in those principles which he has found so beneficial to himself: and who can duly estimate the benefit of such instructions, confirmed and enforced by such an example?

Who can value sufficiently the intercessions of such a friend? Suppose a dying man to address his surviving relatives, 'I have not wealth laid up for you in my coffers, but I have thousands of prayers treasured up for you in Heaven, which, I trust, will come down in blessings on your heads, when I lie moldering in the dust. I have engaged my God to be the Husband of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless; yes, my dear wife and children, I have entreated him to take care of you; and I believe that my prayers have not gone forth in vain.' I say, such a legacy would be far better than thousands of silver and gold.

***~~Thus in every view for which money is coveted, godliness with contentment is a richer portion.~~***

***~~2. In reference to the world to come—~~***

The blindest worldling in the universe is not foolish enough to think that "riches will profit him in the day of wrath." In the words following the text this point is established beyond all contradiction, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out," Here therefore all competition ceases; and "gain" must be confessed to belong exclusively to the godly and contented mind.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who boast of contentment, while they are destitute of godliness—~~***

That persons may feel contentment while enjoying all that they can wish, we readily acknowledge. But we have not genuine contentment, unless we could be contented with any change of circumstances which God might see fit to appoint. Nor indeed can this fruit spring from anything but real godliness. Therefore the delight which many take in their own *imagined*contentment, while they are uninfluenced by vital godliness, is a delusion, which, if not rectified in time, will outcome in the most fearful disappointment and misery.

***~~2. Those who profess godliness, but manifest a worldly or discontented spirit—~~***

The tree must be judged of by its fruits. *In vain are the highest pretensions to Christian experience, if we are not pursuing deadness to the world, and resigned to the will of God.*O brethren, how many professors of godliness have, "through a desire to be rich, verse 9-11, fall into snares and temptations, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which have drowned them in destruction and perdition!" Remember, that "the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows." But you man of God, flee these things, and seek rather to be "rich towards God."

***~~3. Those who possess both godliness and contentment—~~***

Know that you have a richer portion than crowns or kingdoms! You never can have occasion to envy any man. Only seek to grow in these divine graces. Give yourselves up wholly to God; and "having food and clothing, be therewith content, verse 8." Godliness is "durable riches;" and one grain of contentment is worth a ton of gold. Let it appear, beloved, that you live under a full persuasion of these things; and that your ardor in pursuit of Heaven is accompanied with a proportionable indifference about the things of time and sense.

***~~#2236~~***

***~~LOVE OF MONEY~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.9-10)~~***

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

THERE is one general sentiment in the world, that riches will contribute greatly to our happiness, and that it is our wisdom to make use of all our time and talents in the acquisition of wealth. But widely different from this was the advice of the Apostle Paul, who tells us, that "having food and clothing, we should be therewith content, verse 8;" and that the very disposition so universally cherished and inculcated in the world, "the love of money," "is a root of all kinds of evil."

In speaking of the love of money, we will,

***~~I. Contemplate the love of money as a "root"—~~***

Truly, as a root, it is very widely spread and deeply fixed in the heart of man; and richly does it deserve the character given of it in my text. For it is,

***~~1. The love of money is an ignoble principle—~~***

There is no intrinsic worth in money, nor anything that would make it in any respect an object of our regard. The man that possesses most of it has no advantage from it beyond "the beholding it with his eyes, [Ecclesiastes 5:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles 5.10-11)." It is well compared to "thick clay" adhering to the feet of a man engaged in a race; and which serves only to impede his way, and to endanger his success, [Habakkuk 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 2.6). How unworthy it is of the affections of a rational and immortal being, may be seen by the contempt poured upon it by our blessed Lord; who, when he came into the world, was born in a stable; and when he lived in the world, "had not a place where to lay his head."

***~~2. The love of money is a vitiating principle—~~***

There is not a faculty of the soul which the love of money will not debase:

It will pervert the *judgment*; so that we shall not be able to see our way; where a unselfish person would find no difficulty whatever.

It will blind the *conscience*; so that, under its influence, we shall put evil for good, and mistake darkness for light.

It will also harden the *heart*, and despoil it of all the finer feelings of compassion and love.

***~~3.The love of money is a domineering principle—~~***

No better principle can find scope for operation where this prevails. It will swallow up every other principle, and govern with unbounded sway. In fact, so completely will it occupy the soul, as to make all its faculties subservient to the acquisition of gain.

***~~4. The love of money is a damning principle—~~***

I am aware that I speak strongly. But would you have me withhold this awful truth? would it not be cruelty to you to conceal this, or to soften it, when an inspired Apostle warns you, that this principle "drowns men in destruction and perdition?" Only let it be remembered, that "covetousness is idolatry! [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5);" and it will be seen at once that the Apostle's representation is fully justified. Millions upon millions, it is to be feared, are at this very instant bewailing its fatal influence in Hell!

In confirmation of this, let us,

***~~II. Examine its fruit—~~***

See what it brings forth,

***~~1. In the world at large—~~***

What falsehood, in every species of commercial dealing!

What injustice, wherever it exists on the side of power!

What cruelty, in enforcing claims, and satisfying its demands!

Who does not cry out on account either of oppression or fraud? But what shall I say of thefts, and robberies, and murders? Truly, notwithstanding the vigilance of magistrates, and the terror of legal penalties—these things exist to a vast extent. What, then, would the state of the world be, if these restraints were removed?

***~~2. In the religious world in particular—~~***

Let but "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches," be allowed to grow up in the soul, and they will soon "choke all the good seed that has been sown in it," and render it unfruitful, [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22).

How many, through its malignant influence, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows!

Unhappy *Judas!* What "a pillar of salt" are you! an everlasting monument of the misery entailed by this fatal principle!

*Ananias*, you had better prospects—you appeared superior to these base feelings: but you had not gained the victory: and you yourself did fall a victim to this accursed lust.

And you, *Demas*, you of whom even Paul did entertain so high an opinion as repeatedly to rank you with the Evangelist Luke; what became of you at last, through your love of money? "Demas has forsaken us, having loved this present evil world; and has gone to Thessalonica," a trading city, where he may find ample scope for indulging his predominant propensity.

No doubt, multitudes of professing people, who have not thus openly made shipwreck of their faith, have, by their inordinate concern about their worldly interests, destroyed all the comfort of their souls; and, if they have been saved at all, "have been saved only so as by fire, 1 Corinthians 3:15."

And here let me guard you against a common mistake. When it is said, "Those who *desire*to be rich fall into temptation and a snare," and so on, it is *supposed*to refer to those only who are determined to be rich at all costs. But this is not the meaning of the passage: the utmost that it means is, "those who are *desirous*to be rich" for the desire, harbored in the soul, is amply sufficient to draw after it all the bitter consequences which are here said to result from it.

We see this in the rich young man, who turned his back upon the Lord rather than renounce his wealth, [Matthew 19:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 19.22); and Peter has associated, what will be ever found inseparable, "Covetous practices, and cursed children! [2 Peter 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.14)."

***~~Do you ask, How shall I counteract in my soul this sad propensity?~~***

I answer,

***~~1. Think how little the riches of this world can do for you—~~***

Beyond "food and clothing," what can you possess? Your food may be of a more luxurious kind; but, after a time, you will not enjoy it more than the laborer his homely provision. And your fine clothing may tend to make you admired, but will not really answer the end better than clothing of a coarser texture.

Believe it, brethren, the rich have very little, if any, advantage over the poor. Thousands of servants may see clearly enough that they have even a happier lot than their employers: and those who have amassed wealth to ever so great an extent, will, for the most part, be constrained to acknowledge, that they have rather *accumulated troubles*, than *acquired ease*. *They are not the happiest who have the largest means of indulgence, but those who have the fewest cares*. Let this be well settled in your minds, and the principle we have been speaking of will be divested of its baneful influence upon your souls.

***~~2. Think what infinitely better riches are offered you in the Gospel—~~***

In Christ there are "unsearchable riches;" and all for you, if only you sincerely believe in him. Oh! how rich is the soul that has peace with God! How rich is the soul that has all the glory and felicity of Heaven! Yet "is it all yours, if you are Christ's." In your desires after spiritual riches, you cannot be too enlarged. You may "covet as earnestly as you will these gifts," nor will this principle ever operate, but for the production of good; good in yourselves, and good to all around you. Nothing but joy will ever result from this: the fruit of this will be *joy in time, and glory in eternity*. Get this principle rooted in the soul, and all the riches of this world will be as the *dust*upon the balance, yes, lighter than vanity itself!

***~~#2237~~***

***~~PRACTICAL PIETY ENFORCED~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.11)~~***

"But you, O man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."

NEVER can we lay too great a stress on the practical duties of Christianity, provided we keep them in their proper place, and perform them not for the purpose of making them a justifying righteousness before God, but of evincing the sincerity of our faith in Christ, and the truth of our love to him.

The things of this world always stand, as it were, in competition with him; and the carnal man gives to them a decided and habitual preference. It is in vain that men are told how unsatisfying and transient a portion the world is, or what evils the love of it will entail upon us. The ungodly imagine that riches are a source of happiness, and hence will pursue them as their chief good. But the true Christian must not do so: "You, O man of God, whoever you are, you must flee these things," and "follow after the things which will make for your eternal peace." There is in this exhortation a peculiarity worthy of our attention: and, that I may present it to you in its just view, I will point out,

***~~I. The duties here inculcated—~~***

They are two:  
the avoiding of evil,  
the cultivating of good.

Let us mark:

***~~1. The evils to be avoided—~~***

An inordinate desire for wealth, and an eager pursuit of it, are unworthy of the Christian character. Contentment is that virtue which rather befits him: for, in truth, it is but little that a man needs in this world, The richest man in the universe, what has he beyond "food and clothing?" That his food is more delectable, and his clothing more splendid, is of very small importance: the more homely comforts of the poor are as acceptable to them, as the luxuries of the rich to them. *Habit soon familiarizes the mind to the situation in which we are placed; and equally reduces the zest with which abundance is enjoyed, and the pain with which poverty is sustained*. Under a conviction of this, the Christian maintains a holy superiority to the world and all its vanities; and learns, "in whatever state he is, therewith to be content, [Philippians 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.11)."

***~~2. The graces to be cultivated—~~***

Here is a chain of graces, no link of which would be broken. "Righteousness" should pre-eminently characterize a child of God. There would be in us no disposition to encroach upon the rights of others; but a firm determination of mind to do unto all men as we, in a change of circumstances, would have them do unto us.

But with this must be blended "godliness;" for, if we are to render unto man his due, so must we also unto God; giving to him our heart, and exercising continually those holy affections towards him, which insure the entire affiance of our souls, and the unreserved obedience of our lives.

By the term "faith" we may understand either that belief in Christ, which is its general import: or a "fidelity" in executing whatever can be justly expected of us. In both points of view, it is a most important grace: for, in the former sense, it is that which interests us in the Lord Jesus, and in all that he has done, or is doing, for us; and, in the latter sense, it is that whereby alone we can approve the sincerity of our faith and love.

To these must "love" also be added: for, what is a Christian without love? Let him know all that man can know, and do all that man can do, and suffer all that man can suffer, and "without love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

Together with these active graces, we must possess also such as are passive: we must exercise self-government, under all the circumstances that may occur, "possessing our souls in patience", under all the trials of life; and "showing all meekness unto all men," however perverse they may be in their heart, or however they may endeavor to irritate and inflame us.

These graces are absolutely indispensable to the Christian character; and while we "flee" the foregoing evils, we must "follow after" these, without exception or intermission.

But to feel the force of the Apostle's exhortation in reference to these duties, we must consider,

***~~II. Their mutual influence and relation to each other—~~***

***~~"The love of money" will altogether despoil the soul of these graces—~~***

Only let *self-interest*get an ascendant over us, and we shall no longer listen to the claims of justice: there will be a bias upon our minds, that will affect, not our actions only, but our very judgment. We shall lean to *self*in all our decisions; and shall be led to infringe upon the rights of others, almost without a consciousness or suspicion that we are going beyond the bounds of justice and equity.

As for "godliness," it is impossible that it would flourish, where such noxious weeds, as the love of money generates, are allowed to grow. Truly that accursed evil will eat out everything that is good. It is called "the root of all evil," and it well deserves that character; for to serve God and Mammon too is absolutely impossible: whichever we adhere to, we must, of necessity, renounce the other.

The graces too of "faith and love," what scope have they for exercise in a heart imbued with selfishness? Darkness is not more opposed to light, than this evil is to those divine principles: nor can any person under its malignant influence follow, or even discern, the path which those sublime feelings would prescribe.

As for "patience and meekness," we must not look for them in a mind debased with the love of filthy lucre. Whenever the favorite disposition of the heart is thwarted, impatience will evince itself in no questionable shape, and irritability break forth, both in word and act.

In proof of these assertions, we need only survey the spirit of rival nations, when their interests are thought to clash. Or we may look at kindred societies in our own country; or at individuals that are engaged in the same profession; or even at members of the same family, whenever their financial interests have been at stake. I speak not too strongly, if I say, that discord is almost the invariable fruit of conflicting interests; and that, *in proportion as the love of money reigns in any bosom, the graces of which we have spoken, are weakened and dispelled*.

***~~On the other hand, the exercise of these graces in the soul will keep down that hateful lust which we have been contemplating—~~***

*It is manifest that the high principles of righteousness and godliness, of faith and love, of patience and meekness, will give to the soul an elevation above the degrading and debasing feelings of selfishness.* They give to the mind a far different cast: they open to it sublimer views; they inspire it with nobler opinions; they furnish it with a more exalted employment.

*Suppose an angel to be sojourning on earth; what a contempt would he feel for wealth, and what a pity for all who are fascinated by its allurements!*So, in proportion as the grace of God operates in our souls, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," will be held as objects worthy only to be despised and shunned.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. The man of this world—~~***

What clearer proof can you have of the vanity of wealth, than by viewing the disorders which the love of it produces through the whole world? Truly, the coveting after money is incompatible with real happiness, and has been the means of piercing the souls of men with many sorrows. Let me, then, entreat you to "flee these things." Flee not only from the inordinate pursuit of wealth, but even from the secret love of it in your hearts. You should have higher objects in view, even the attainment of the Divine image, and the ultimate possession of the heavenly glory. Flee, then, from those things, and follow after these with your whole hearts.

***~~2. The true Christian—~~***

What a name is this by which you are here called—"a man of God!" Doubtless, in the first instance, it designates rather those who are in the office of the ministry: but as all saints are children of God, they may with propriety be addressed by the term that is here used.

Consider, then, "you man of God," what line of conduct befits your character. Surely you should be "as a city set on a hill:" you should be as "a light in a dark world." Oh! see to it that you "walk worthy of your high calling," and "worthy also of him who has called you." Let no earthly lusts debase your soul. Live to God—live as those who are born from above, and as those "whose treasure is in Heaven." Especially cultivate the graces that are here commended to your pursuit; and "let all who see you, acknowledge you as the seed whom the Lord has blessed."

***~~#2238~~***

***~~THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH~~***

***~~[1 Timothy 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.12)~~***

"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called"

THE Apostle Paul, being particularly conversant with the cities of Greece, and writing many of his epistles to Churches which he had established in that country, frequently alluded to the Olympic games which were there celebrated, taking from them metaphors whereby to illustrate the blessed truths of the Gospel. The public exhibitions of running, wrestling, fighting, formed the chief scenes of amusement to that people: those actions therefore being familiar to their minds, the terms by which they were commonly designated were well calculated to convey to them a full and comprehensive view of the different duties which they were called to perform. Indeed this is the great use of *metaphors*: they bring to the mind a vast accumulation of ideas under one single term; and serve at once, in a very peculiar manner, to instruct and edify the soul. The exhortation here given to Timothy is of this character.

At the games, the prize for which the people contended was held forth to view: in allusion to which, the Apostle says, "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life." The words indeed which are here used by Paul are not quite so definite as those which are used in our translation. If the English language admitted of it, they would be better translated, "Contend the good contest of faith." The substance of them, however, may be considered by us under these two heads:

Maintain the Christian's contest.

Secure the Christian's prize.

***~~I. Maintain the Christian's contest—~~***

***~~The life of a Christian is a life of faith—~~***

The God whom he serves is invisible to mortal eyes, "being one whom no man has seen, or can see." Nor has the Savior, whom he loves, ever been revealed to his organs of sense. It is by faith alone that he apprehends both the Father and the Son; deriving from their love all his motives to action, and from their power all his ability to act.

It was thus that Paul lived: "The life which I now live in the flesh," says he, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me! [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)." The object too, after which he aspires, is altogether unknown to him as an object of sense. He has never been carried up to *Heaven*, to behold the glory that is there; nor has Heaven been brought down to him, that he might know wherein its blessedness consists. But he believes that there is such a place, and that the blessedness of it will be an ample compensation for all that he can do or suffer in the way to it: and therefore "he looks not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal! 2 Corinthians 4:18." In the whole of his way to Heaven, "he walks by faith, and not by sight."

***~~This life, however, involves him in continual conflicts—~~***

It is thought, by some, that a life of faith must, of necessity, be very easy, since the person so living has nothing to do but to believe. But it is no easy matter to go contrary to the dictates of sense; and to act, in reference to things invisible, as we would if they were present to our sight. In living by faith, we are withstood continually by those mighty enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world presents to us its temptations on every side, if by any means it may engage us to follow some object of time or sense, and relax our pursuit of those higher objects on which our souls are bent.

The flesh too solicits us, and pleads, yes, and strives and fights for indulgence; and, being ever present with us, is at all times ready to betray us into the hands of our enemies, and to bring us into subjection to its unhallowed lusts.

And need I say, that Satan, too, is active to destroy us? So inveterate is his enmity, and so powerful his opposition, that all other enemies together are nothing in comparison with him. Paul says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, [Ephesians 6:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.12)." Who can tell what "devices" that subtle foe puts forth in order to destroy us? His wiles are absolutely innumerable: they are such as nothing but Omniscience can guard us against, and Omnipotence enable us to defeat!

***~~And these conflicts he must steadily maintain—~~***

It is "a good fight" which we have to fight: no contest was ever so reasonable as this, or so profitable to the soul, or so pleasing to Almighty God. But remember, no truce is to be made with any one of our enemies; we must contend with them as for our very life. We are "not to fight as one that," in a fictitious combat and in sport, "beats the air;" but with all our might, "keeping our body under control, and bringing into subjection" every appetite, [1 Corinthians 9:26-27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.26-27); and never resting, until "Satan himself is bruised under our feet, [Romans 16:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 16.20)."

In maintaining this combat, we must use "faith" as our most effectual means both of assault and defense. No other "shield" have we in comparison with that, [Ephesians 6:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.16); nor can we find any better weapon, whereby:  
to withstand *Satan*, [1 Peter 5:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.8-9),  
or subdue the *flesh*, [Acts 15:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.9),  
or overcome the *world*, [1 John 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.4).

To this exhortation the Apostle adds:

***~~II. Secure the Christian's prize—~~***

Eternal life is that prize which is set before him. The conquerors in the Grecian games had only a corruptible crown for their reward; but the victorious Christian has "a crown of glory, that never fades away! [1 Corinthians 9:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 9.25)." Yes, "this is the promise that God has promised us, even eternal life! [1 John 2:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.25)." To this "he is called;" and with nothing short of this would he be content.

***~~Let us, then, ever keep this in view—~~***

The sight of the prize held out to them, animated, no doubt, the people that were engaged in the various contests. *And shall not the hope of eternal life encourage us?*What could withstand us, if we kept that steadily in view? What could for a moment fascinate our minds, or what prevail to damp our ardor in the pursuit of it? In vain would the *world*offer its delights, or menace us with its displeasure. In vain would our *corrupt appetites*plead for a momentary indulgence, or *Satan*endeavor to beguile us with any promises whatever. If our eyes were only fixed habitually on the glory of Heaven, we would prove as victorious as Moses himself, when "he refused to become the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward, [Hebrews 11:24-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 11.24-26)."

***~~Let us never rest, until we are in actual possession of it—~~***

We must "lay such hold upon it," that none shall ever be able to wrest it from us: as our Lord has said, "Hold fast what you have, that no man take your crown, [Revelation 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.11)." "See that you lose not the things that you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward, 2 John, verse 8." It is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing that we can attain to glory and honor and immortality, [Romans 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7)." "If we draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in us, [Hebrews 10:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.38);" nor can we ever be "partakers of Christ in the eternal world, unless we hold fast our confidence in him firm unto the end, [Hebrews 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 3.14)."

In every one of the epistles to the seven Churches of Asia, the final happiness of the saints was suspended on their fighting manfully unto the end, and *overcoming*all the enemies of their salvation: "Be then faithful unto death, and God will give you the crown of life, [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 2.10)."

***~~To what is here said, let me add,~~***

***~~1. A word of direction—~~***

"Put on, and keep ever girded upon you, the whole armor of God, [Ephesians 6:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.11)." Yet rely not on any preparation of your own; but "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, [Ephesians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10)." Go forth, like David, in a simple dependence on your God; and he shall bring your every foe, however formidable, into the dust before you, [1 Samuel 17:45-47](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 17.45-47). True it is, that you must be good "soldiers of Jesus Christ," and "be strong like men," and "war a good warfare." But "the battle is not yours, but God's." "By his own strength shall no man prevail, [1 Samuel 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.9);" but "he who trusts in the Lord shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

***~~2. A word of encouragement—~~***

It is no just ground of discouragement to any man, that he is weak: "when he is weak—then is he really strong; because God will perfect his own strength in his weakness." Nor need any be afraid because they are young. Timothy was but young: yet to him was the exhortation in my text directed.

Are any of you fainting by reason of the difficulties which you have to encounter? Think who it is that is engaged in your behalf—even Jesus, "mighty to save." Think, also, what reflections you will have in a dying hour; when, in the retrospect of your present conflicts, you will be able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 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)." Above all, think of the plaudit which in that day you will receive from your Lord and Savior: "Well done, good and faithful servants; enter into the joy of your Lord!"

It is but a little longer that you will have to fight. Soon shall you rest from all your conflicts and from all your labors, and enjoy the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!

***~~#2239~~***

***~~THE TRUE USE OF RICHES~~***

**[1 Timothy 6:17-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.17-19)**

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

*TO inculcate duties, is no less the office of a pious minister, than to establish principles: nor should he show less zeal in the one than in the other.*Our Lord commanded his Apostles to enforce the observance of what men ought to do, as well as the reception of what they ought to believe, [Matthew 28:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19-20). And Paul, whose zeal was so conspicuous in establishing the doctrines of the Gospel, evinces in every epistle not a whit less zeal to bring men under the influence of its precepts. He even descends to particularize all the duties pertaining to the different relations of life, as of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects; and he solemnly enjoined Timothy and Titus to do the same in their respective ministrations. Nay more, he "charged them" to speak on these subjects with all authority, verse 13, 14; and to press them on the attention of every distinct class of hearers, so that each might fulfill the duties which pertained more immediately to himself. The rich were not in this respect to be overlooked, any more than the poor; nor were they to be addressed with less authority than the poor.

Timothy, though quite a young minister, was to consider himself as speaking in the name and with the authority of Almighty God; and was not merely to exhort, but to "charge," the richest and most powerful of his flock, and most solemnly to enjoin on them a conscientious use of their wealth, for the honor of God, and for the benefit of mankind.

In the charge which Timothy was to give to the **rich**, we see,

***~~I. The temptations which they are to avoid—~~***

To fix the standard, and to draw an exact line between those who are "rich in this world," and those who are not, is no easy task: because what would be wealth to a peasant would be poverty to a man whose rank and station in life called for a more enlarged expenditure. But we shall mark the character with sufficient precision, if we say, that the rich in this world are those who possess already, or are able by their different vocations to obtain, what is sufficient for their support in that rank of life wherein Divine Providence has placed them: for all persons so circumstanced have it in their power, by frugality and self-denial, to appropriate a portion of their income to the uses that are here specified.

But to persons so circumstanced many temptations will arise. They will in particular find occasion to guard against:

***~~1. Pride—~~***

If from any source whatever a man has acquired an increase of wealth, and especially if he has acquired it by his own skill or industry, he immediately conceives himself entitled to a greater measure of respect and honor from all around him. He seems by that circumstance to have attained somewhat of intrinsic worth and excellence; never reflecting, that, *as a horse is not a whit better for the trappings with which he is decorated, so neither is a man for the splendor with which he is encompassed*. Even good *King Hezekiah*was led away with this folly, when the Babylonish ambassadors came to visit him: and the judgments inflicted on him on account of it, sufficiently show how hateful it is in the sight of God.

Yet, such is the infirmity of human nature, that a man of this description is ready to arrogate also to himself some superior value even before God. He is now no longer to be addressed with all that plainness and fidelity which he admitted when in a lower station. Because "he is full, he is ready to deny the authority of God, and to say, Who is the Lord? [Proverbs 30:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 30.9)." Or, if he pays attention to the outward observances of religion, he does it, not because they are due from him, but because he thinks it right to set a good example to others; just as if the duties incumbent on others did not attach equally to himself.

A remarkable instance of such folly and impiety may be seen in*King Uzziah,* [2 Kings 20:12-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Kings 20.12-18) and [2 Chronicles 32:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 32.25-26); who, because he had greatly increased in military power, conceived himself authorized to invade the priestly office, [2 Chronicles 26:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 26.16). But *all such high thoughts of ourselves are most offensive to God*, and therefore we solemnly caution all of you against admitting them into your minds; and "charge the rich in particular, that they be not arrogant."

***~~2. Creature-confidence—~~***

It is exceeding difficult to possess riches, and not to trust in them for some measure of security or happiness; for both of which we ought to trust in God alone. Our Lord intimates this: for, when his disciples expressed their wonder at that saying of our Lord, "How hard it is for those who have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" he immediately explained himself, by saying, "How hard it is for those who *trust*in riches enter into the kingdom of God:" by which he would have them to understand, that very few could possess them without trusting in them, [Mark 10:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.23-24). "The rich man's wealth is his strong city," says Solomon, [Proverbs 10:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 10.15). He imagines himself to be encompassed with that which will protect him from evil, and secure to him the possession of present good. But this is greatly to dishonor God. He has given us all that we possess: he has given it to be enjoyed, yes, and *richly*to be enjoyed. But he never gave it to be trusted in: he never designed that men would rest in the gifts, and forget the Giver; or fix on senseless vanities the regards which are due only to "the living God."

To them belongs nothing but "uncertainty:" they cannot be depended on for one moment: they may, even while we think ourselves most secure of their continuance, "make themselves wings, and fly away!" Or, if they are not removed from us, we may in an instant be removed from them by Him who said to the rich man, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you." Let me then guard you all against "making gold your hope, or saying to the fine gold, You are my confidence;" for it is a grievous impiety in the sight of God, and "an iniquity to be punished by the almighty judge, [Job 31:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.24-25); [Job 31:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 31.28)."

Wealth is given for far other purposes than these; as will be seen, while I point out to the possessors of it,

***~~II. The duties they are to perform—~~***

***~~To be dispensed in acts of benevolence is the true use of wealth—~~***

Nothing is given to us for ourselves alone. As the sun in the firmament possesses not its light and heat for its own aggrandizement, but for the benefit of the whole creation, so *all that we possess is for the good of those who lie within the sphere of our influence*. It is a talent committed to us by Almighty God, who will call us to an account for the improvement we make of it. He permits us, as we have before said, "richly to enjoy" whatever he has bestowed upon us: but our richest enjoyment of it should be in the exercise of Christian benevolence. We should "do good" with it: we should be "rich in good works;" accounting ourselves rich, not in proportion to what we can amass or spend upon ourselves, but in proportion to the good which we are thereby qualified to dispense, and the benefits which we are enabled by it to confer upon the Church and on the world around us. Nor should our wealth be disposed of in this way "grudgingly, or of necessity;" we should be "ready to distribute, and willing to communicate;" precisely as one member of our body would be to administer to any other that needed its assistance. These are the *dispositions*which the rich are to cultivate, and these the *works*in which they are to abound.

***~~Nor is this less their interest than it is their duty—~~***

By such acts as these "we lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, and eventually lay hold on eternal life." In *hoarding*up money, we lay it up for others, not by any means knowing who shall actually inherit it. But by dispersing it in acts of piety and beneficence, we store it up for ourselves, rendering that "a firm foundation," which was in itself "uncertain;" and that "eternally" permanent, which was in itself confined to "this present world."

If the present enjoyment alone were considered, this mode of disposing of it would be our truest wisdom, since *there is an infinitely richer joy arising from the exercise of love to God and of benevolence to man, than from all the selfish gratifications that wealth can ever purchase*. But besides the present satisfaction arising from these sources, there is a full confidence in the soul that God himself will minister to our necessities in the time of need, [Psalm 41:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 41.1-3), and an assured hope of his approbation in the day that he shall judge the world.

Not that there is anything meritorious in works of charity, or that they shall go before us to procure for us an entrance into Heaven: but "they will follow us, [Revelation 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 14.13)," as evidences of our faith and love, and be brought forth before the universe for special approbation and reward. God has pledged himself, that "what we give to the poor, he will regard as lent to him, and that he will repay it again, [Proverbs 19:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 19.17);" not even a cup of cold water being forgotten, but every smallest act of kindness being "recompensed at the resurrection of the just, [Luke 14:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.14)."

Such then being the duty of the rich in relation to their wealth, I come.

***~~In conclusion, to address to them a solemn charge respecting it—~~***

Brethren, if I were addressing you as persons ignorant of Christ and of his salvation, I would, notwithstanding I come as an ambassador from God himself, and speak to you in Christ's stead, be satisfied with the language of entreaty; and would "beseech you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God." But since you profess to have believed in Christ, you acknowledge your obligation to fulfill his will: and therefore, instead of beseeching you to make this use of your property, I solemnly charge you, or, as the word is elsewhere translated, "command" you, 1 Timothy 4:11, to comply with his injunctions in respect to these things.

***~~1. If you would approve yourselves upright before God, fulfill this duty—~~***

*Guard against the snares of wealth!*Mark the operation and effect of riches upon your mind. See whether they produce a haughtiness of spirit, or a delight of mind, as if they could afford you any substantial comfort: and beg of God that you may, to your last hour, be as humble as the poorest of men, and as dependent upon your God as are the ravens, which exist by his providence from day to day. Remember, that God is a jealous God; and that a departure from this line of conduct will subject you to his heavy displeasure, [Mark 10:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 10.23-24).

God in having imparted more liberally to you than to others, has conferred on you the distinguished honor of being *his almoners*. Yes, if I may so speak, of being in his place to your more necessitous fellow-creatures: and by your cheerful execution of your trust, he will judge of your love to him: for "if you see your brother have need, and shut up your compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in you?" Be then like the Savior himself, who "went about doing good:" and let it be the joy of your heart so to minister of your abundance to the poor, that "every ear which hears you may bless you, and every eye that beholds you may bear witness to you, [Job 29:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Job 29.11-13)." If you are essentially defective in this duty, then you are destitute of pure and undefiled religion. [James 1:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.27).

***~~2. If you would be accepted of God in the eternal world, be obedient to this command—~~***

It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord has given us of the day of judgment, the discharge or neglect of this duty are the prominent grounds of the sentence that shall be passed on the whole race of mankind. Doubtless there will be many other subjects of inquiry: but still the peculiar stress laid on the offices of love sufficiently prove, that whatever else may be brought forward, these must occupy the most distinguished place, [Matthew 25:34-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.34-46).

"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings, [Luke 16:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 16.9)."

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, [Luke 12:33-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.33-4)."

The farmer scatters his seed, in order to a future harvest: you do the same: and know, that, "if you sow bountifully, you shall reap bountifully:" but, if you cast your seed with a niggardly hand, your harvest will be proportionably small and scanty, [2 Corinthians 9:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.6). In a word, if you are rich in this world, endeavor to be "rich towards God [Luke 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.21);" and so act, that God himself may bear this testimony to you in the day of judgment, "he has dispersed, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever; and his horn shall be exalted with honor [Psalm 112:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 112.9) with [2 Corinthians 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.9)."

***~~2 TIMOTHY~~***

***~~#2240~~***

***~~THE SPIRIT OF VITAL CHRISTIANITY~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.7)~~***

"God has not given to us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

THE real character of Christianity, as infused into the soul of the believer, and exhibited in his life, is by no means generally understood. It forms a man of energy; but of energy combined with kindness, and regulated with discretion. In whoever it exists, it operates like a new creation. *It changes, to a very considerable extent, the views, the dispositions, the habits of the soul, so as gradually to "transform a man into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness."* It does not, indeed, so assimilate men, that they shall be in all things the same: there will still remain in every man so much of his original cast, as will occasion an endless diversity in the characteristic features of different saints. Not all the grace that God ever bestowed would produce a perfect identity of character between Peter and John: but *the principles which divine grace instills into the soul are the same in every age and every place*: and of all its subjects it may be said, "God has not given to us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

With a view to open and illustrate these gracious words, I will show,

***~~I. The spirit which God infuses into the souls of his people—~~***

***~~It is "not a spirit of fear"—~~***

"Fear" is discarded from the soul that is truly given up to God. There may remain, indeed, what I may call a constitutional fear; (some persons, whose piety cannot be doubted, have a strange and unaccountable fear of this or that animal. A toad, for instance, or a mouse, or a spider, or some other insect,) and no depth of religious principle will prevent its operation; for its seat is in the imagination, and not in the heart. But the fear of man, which has so great an ascendant over the carnal mind, will be dismissed; being subjected to, and, if I may so express myself, swallowed up by, the fear of God, [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 12.4-5).

***~~It is a spirit "of power"—~~***

A holy resolution will be formed to serve the Lord, and "to follow him fully." Whatever means be used to deter a child of God from his purpose, he will hold on his way. Father, mother, brother, sister, houses, lands, yes, and life itself, are regarded by him as of no account, in comparison with his duty to God. He "hates them all" in comparison with his God and Savior [Luke 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 14.26). As for sin, it is a foe which he pursues with unrelenting animosity, determined, through grace, that not one lust shall continue in him unmortified and unsubdued. His besetting sin, whatever it may be, is pursued by him with more than ordinary vigilance, if by any means he may prevail to bring it into subjection, and to destroy it utterly, [Hebrews 12:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.1). And he does advance from victory to victory; finding that, however weak he is in himself, "through the strength communicated to him from above, he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him, [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

***~~This power, however, is blended with a spirit "of love"—~~***

The energy which we have just spoken of has somewhat of an unamiable aspect; and would be unamiable in the highest degree, if it were not tempered with love. To resist all authority of parents, and the solicitations of most endeared relatives, bears with it an aspect of culpable self-will, and of deplorable self-conceit. The believer, therefore, must be particularly on his guard to cut off all occasion for such misapprehensions. His whole spirit must savor of love. He must show, that whatever he does, he does from absolute necessity: and that, as far as love can operate in conformity to God's will, no man shall exceed him in the cultivation of it. Even towards his persecutors this must be in active and continual exercise; his fixed determination being, "not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good, [Romans 12:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 12.21)."

***~~Yet, not even love must be left to operate but under the direction of "a sound mind"—~~***

Wild enthusiasm is no part of true religion: it is rather in decided opposition to it: and is always the offspring of an ill-regulated mind. True religion is wisdom; and God, when infusing it into the soul, gives us "sound wisdom" and discretion, [Proverbs 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.7). A man under the influence of divine grace will pause before he acts; and will weigh, as in a balance, the claims of duty, as they may be affected by times and circumstances. He will carefully distinguish between things necessary, and things of only subordinate importance. He will attend to the time and manner of doing what he judges to be necessary; so as to strip it of all needless offense, and to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against him." Both in the world and in the Church, he will be anxious so to demean himself, that all who behold him shall acknowledge that God is with him of a truth, [1 Corinthians 10:32-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.32-33). He will give no needless offense in anything; but will labor, with David, to "behave himself wisely with integrity, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

But, that we may the better appreciate his spirit, we will mark,

***~~II. Its peculiar importance, in order to a due discharge of the ministerial office—~~***

The words before us were addressed more immediately to Timothy, a young and pious minister: and they deserve the very special attention of all who either are, or hereafter may be, engaged in the ministerial office.

***~~In such must be found no spirit "of fear"—~~***

A minister is a standard-bearer: and if he faints, what must be expected of others? He must go with his life in his hand: he must "set his face as a flint" against the whole world, [Isaiah 50:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7). No confederacies, whether of men or devils, must appal him, [Jeremiah 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 1.17) and [Ezekiel 2:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 2.6-7). His spirit must be that which is described by the prophet: "Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord; and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin, [Micah 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Micah 3.8)." And, in the midst of all the afflictions that can come upon him, he must say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God! [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24)."

***~~But in them must be conspicuous a spirit "of power"—~~***

They have more difficulties to encounter than others. They stand in the forefront of the battle: and they must be examples, not to the world only, but to the whole Church of God. To Timothy, while quite a youth, it was said, "Be an example of the believers, in word, in conduct, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, [1 Timothy 4:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.12)." If a minister is overcome by any evil, the injury done to the Church of God is incalculable. The whole ungodly world will take occasion from it to exult over him, and to "blaspheme the very name of God himself, [Romans 2:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.24)." Yes, they will harden themselves in their own iniquities, and impute to the Gospel itself the evils which they see in him, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2). He must "be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for only then shall his labor not be in vain in the Lord, [1 Corinthians 15:58](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.58)."

***~~In them too, more especially, must be a spirit "of love"—~~***

*Nothing but a love to immortal souls can reconcile them to all the labors and difficulties which they have to sustain.* They would therefore "have compassion on those who are ignorant and out of the way, [Hebrews 5:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.2);" they would be able to "call God to witness that they have great heaviness and continual sorrow in their hearts" for their perishing fellow-creatures, [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-2); and they would be ready to welcome even death itself, if it may but be subservient to the spiritual welfare of their brethren, [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18).

At the same time, their whole deportment would be regulated by this benignant principle. Everything they do would proceed from it; everything which they suffer would call it into exercise: and their whole walk would be, like that of their Divine Master, in a spirit of love.

***~~But, in all their diversified circumstances, they must show themselves under the influence of "a sound mind"—~~***

In no situation is wisdom so requisite, as in the discharge of the ministerial office: for, as the circumstances of the minister are more arduous, and his trials more diversified, than those of others—so a lack of judgment in him is more deeply felt than in any other person; because the prejudices of many are strengthened by it, and the souls of many are hardened in their sins.

A minister, therefore, must be particularly attentive to this point. He must have a well-regulated mind. His views, both of truth and duty, must be clear. His judgment, in relation to everything, must be accurately and wisely formed. He must be freed from every *bias*that may influence his mind, and from every *lust*which may blind his eyes. He must be cool, considerate, prayerful: he must feel his entire dependence on God to guide him aright: and must cry to him for that "wisdom, which is profitable to direct."

Where God has really fitted a man for the ministry, there will be, though in different degrees, "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; all concurring to make him quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, [Isaiah 11:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 11.2-3)."

***~~APPLICATION—~~***

***~~1. To you, then, who have not received this spirit, I would say, "Seek it from the Lord"—~~***

It is the gift of God: it cannot proceed from man: it may come to us through man; but it is from God alone, even from Him, "from whom comes every good and perfect gift, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17)." Whether we be ministers or private Christians, this spirit is indispensable to our eternal welfare. No man can be saved without it.

"The *fearful*" shall go into the lake of fire, as certainly as "adulterers or murderers, [Revelation 21:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 21.8)."

The man who for lack of *strength*draws back, "draws back unto perdition, [Hebrews 10:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 10.39)."

The person destitute of *love*is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1)."

The the man devoid of *wisdom*will perish, [Proverbs 29:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 29.10).

I say then, seek this spirit, "so shall you have good understanding, in the sight both of God and man [Proverbs 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 3.4)."

It is remarkable, that, when Paul is instructing Titus how to speak to the cases of both old people and young, he specifies many things which he would have him insist upon with old men and old women, and with young women also. But with young men, everything that was essential was comprehended in one single point, "Exhort young men to be sober-minded, [Titus 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.6)." On this, therefore, I would particularly insist; because with sobriety of mind every grace will flourish; but without it, no man can ever walk worthy of the Gospel, or adorn, as he ought, the doctrine of God our Savior.

***~~2. To those who have received it, I would say, "Stir it up within you"—~~***

This was the direction given to Timothy: "Stir up the gift of God that is in you;" that is, stir it up, as you would a fire which is in a anguishing condition, verse 6. The fire which burned upon the altar, came down, as you well know, from Heaven; but it was to be kept alive by the care of man. So must the fire that is kindled in us be ever kept burning on the altar of our hearts. We must "stir it up," by reading, meditation, and prayer: and the very opposition which is made to the Gospel must call forth in us the greater energy in its defense.

Paul was now imprisoned for the Gospel sake. This might be a source of alarm to Timothy, and induce him to draw back from that measure of activity and zeal which might bring down similar vengeance upon his head. But the Apostle says to him, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God, verse 8."

So I say to you: Let "none of you be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;" but rather account it an honor if you are called to bear a measure of those *afflictions*which are allotted to the followers of the Lamb. They will try your graces: they will also tend to quicken them, and make them burn with redoubled brightness. Let growth in grace, then, be henceforth your great concern; and, whatever will conduce to that end, do it with diligence, or welcome it with delight.

***~~#2241~~***

***~~EFFECTUAL CALLING~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 1:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.9)~~***

"Who has saved us, and *called*us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

THE deepest truths of our religion were familiar to the mind of the Apostle Paul. He introduced them, on all occasions, as the most forcible motives to obedience. The consideration of God's electing love is here urged as a motive to induce Timothy to constancy and perseverance in the path of duty. Among us, their practical efficacy is denied, and their importance questioned. The very maintaining of them is frequently deemed a crime; but we must not conceal the truth, because some reprobate it as error. We will state it cautiously; and it will commend itself to all. In the text, we have ample instruction in relation to the Christian's calling. We see:

***~~I. The nature of our effectual calling—~~***

There is an outward call of the Gospel, which is resisted by many; but that calling of which the text speaks, is inward and effectual—

***~~1. It is a call to salvation as the end—~~***

If it were only, as many think, a call to outward privileges, it still would establish God's right to bestow his blessings on whoever he will. If God has a right to confer the *means*of salvation on some and not on others, he has a right to confer salvation itself. If the one would be unjust, so must the other be; and if the one is admitted, so must also the other. But the Scriptures represent it as a call:  
to the adoption of children, [Ephesians 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.5),  
to eternal life, [Acts 13:48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.48),  
to everlasting salvation, [1 Thessalonians 5:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 5.9).

The connection between salvation and the call, is, as in the text, uniform and inseparable, [Romans 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.30).

***~~2. It is a call to holiness as the way—~~***

If holiness were not included in the call, the doctrine of election would certainly be open to insurmountable objections: but holiness is that to which we are immediately and distinctly called, 1 Thessalonians 4:7. Hence it is denominated in the text, "a holy calling." It is required of us, not only in general, [Hebrews 12:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 12.14), but in this particular view, [1 Peter 1:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.15-16). It is declared to have been particularly in the mind and intention of God, in our:  
predestination, [Romans 8:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29),  
election, [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4),  
effectual calling, [2 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.3), and  
in the whole work of his grace upon our hearts, [Ephesians 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.10).

Our perseverance also in good works was equally in his contemplation, [John 15:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.16). When our acceptance and salvation are most distinctly spoken of as the end, holiness is carefully stated as the medium through which we are to attain them, [1 Peter 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.2). [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13-14).

The Christian's calling is further to be considered, in reference to,

***~~II. The grounds of our effectual calling—~~***

Nothing can be more plain than the Apostle's statement: he tells us, both negatively, what our calling does not arise from; and positively, what it does arise from:

***~~1. Our effectual calling is not founded on our works—~~***

It cannot be founded on any good works *already done*; for we never had done, or could do any, until we were called by grace. It could not be founded on *foreseen* good works: for they were to be the fruits of our calling, and therefore could not be the ground or occasion of it. Had our works, whether done or foreseen, been the proper ground of our calling, we would have had a ground of boasting before God. Hence God has repeatedly and expressly declared, that they never operated in any respect or degree as inducements with him to confer upon us his converting grace, [Romans 11:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5-6). [Ephesians 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.9). [Titus 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.5).

***~~2. Our effectual calling is founded solely on his purpose and grace—~~***

God formed his purposes from all eternity, [Acts 15:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.18); and agreeably to them he acts, [Ephesians 1:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.11). In consequence of them we were given to Christ, as his purchased possession, [John 17:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.6) with [Ephesians 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4); and a promise of life was given to us in him, and for his sake, [Titus 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 1.2). It was in conformity to them that the Jews were made God's peculiar people, [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-8); and in conformity to them we Gentiles also are called to a participation of his favor, [Romans 9:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.11); [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16).

***~~From hence we shall take occasion to answer some important questions:~~***

***~~1. How shall I know whether I have been effectually called?~~***

It cannot be determined by any dreams, or visions, or fanciful experiences. It can be known only by the *fruits*which we produce, [1 Thessalonians 1:4-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.4-10). Paul judged by the change wrought in the life and conduct of his converts.

***~~2. What have I to do on the supposition I have been called?~~***

You are not at liberty to indulge supineness, as though you were sure of Heaven at all events. You should exceed all others in holiness, as much as you profess to surpass them in your prospects. You should walk worthy of the favors conferred upon you [Ephesians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.1), and of the Benefactor who conferred them, [1 Thessalonians 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.12).

***~~3. What privileges do I enjoy as one of God's elect?~~***

Survey the wheels of a watch, and see how, in all their complicated motions, they accomplish one important end. Thus does all the machinery of the universe, whether more or less connected with men or devils, move in reference to your present and eternal good. Of this you may be assured; and it may well endear to you the doctrines in the text, [Romans 8:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.28).

***~~#2242~~***

***~~DEATH ABOLISHED, AND LIFE REVEALED~~***

**[2 Timothy 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.10)**

"Our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

*TO the free and sovereign grace of God must all our blessings be traced. Nothing did we ever merit at his hands, or can we ever merit, but wrath and indignation.*From all eternity did God ordain to give us whatever he has bestowed. The gift of a Savior was the fruit of his eternal love; as was also the gift of salvation by him. Both the one and the other are the fruit of his eternal counsels: and the appearing of Jesus Christ, as the author of these blessings, was, not the cause, but the result and evidence, of purposes already formed, even of "purposes which from all eternity he had purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, verse 9, 10."

But, not to insist on this, I would call your attention simply to the *fruits of God's purpose*; and show you what, in consequence of his eternal counsels, the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. I will show,

***~~I. What he has done for us in his own person—~~***

Death had been introduced by sin; and it reigned over the whole human race, [Romans 5:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.12); [Romans 5:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.17). [1 Corinthians 15:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.22). In the curse denounced against transgression, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die," both the body and the soul were alike consigned to death. But from this curse the Lord Jesus Christ has delivered us. "He has abolished death!"

***~~1. He has abolished death from the soul—~~***

The soul, by reason of transgression, was despoiled of all spiritual life, and was doomed to everlasting death. But the Lord Jesus Christ, by "becoming a curse for us, [Galatians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 3.13)," has so cancelled our guilt, that "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, [Romans 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.1)." His death has been a sufficient "atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, [1 John 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.2)." and "all who believe in him are justified from all things, [Acts 13:39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.39)."

By his Holy Spirit, too, the same Divine Savior removes spiritual death from our souls. He infuses into us a principle of life, whereby we are enabled to live unto our God in righteousness and true holiness. Previous to the implantation of this principle in our souls, we have no more activity in spiritual exercises than a dead body has of sense and motion. But, when raised by him, every sense receives a spiritual power and direction. We see, and hear, and taste, and feel, and savor the things of the Spirit: and "walk from thenceforth in newness of life".

***~~2. He has abolished death from the body—~~***

True it is, that "the body is still subjected to death, [Romans 8:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.10);" as it is said, "It is appointed unto men once to die, [Hebrews 9:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.27)." But to those who believe in Christ, the nature and character of death are changed. It is not so properly death as sleep: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, [John 11:11-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 11.11-13)." "Stephen," in martyrdom, "fell asleep, [Acts 7:60](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 7.60)." And all the saints, instead of dying, merely fall "asleep in Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14." Hence we find the saints triumphing over it as a vanquished enemy, [1 Corinthians 15:55-57](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.55-57);" yes, and numbering it among their richest treasures: "All things are yours, whether life or death! 1 Corinthians 3:22."

But, allowing it a short and momentary triumph, death will at last be totally "abolished." For in the last day, all that are in the graves shall come forth, every one possessing his own proper body: for "what has been sown in corruption and weakness and dishonor, shall be raised in incorruption and power and glory;" and "this mortal shall put on immortality! [1 Corinthians 15:42-43](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.42-43); [1 Corinthians 15:52-53](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 15.52-53)." We see in our Lord Jesus Christ both a pattern and a pledge of our own resurrection: for "our vile bodies shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body, [Philippians 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.21)," and be partakers with the soul in all the glory and felicity of Heaven.

But let us further view,

***~~II. What he has done for us through the instrumentality of his Word—~~***

"He has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

These were not known to the heathen world. As for the resurrection of the body, it was derided by them, as a vain and foolish imagination: "What will this babbler say?" And, though some of the wiser philosophers entertained some faint conceptions about the immortality of the soul, it was in their minds a matter of surmise or of opinion only, and not of knowledge: it was never a fixed and operative principle in the minds of any, except the Jews; and even in their minds its operation was but very rare and partial. But the Lord Jesus Christ "brought life and immortality to light,"

***~~1. As a matter of undoubted certainty—~~***

Through the whole of his ministry, he inculcated as of primary and indispensable importance, a regard to eternal life, both of body and soul, [Mark 9:43-48](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 9.43-48). [Matthew 10:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.28).

***~~2. As the portion and inheritance of all his people—~~***

Though he declared that an eternal state awaited all, he made a broad distinction between his believing people and others. To the impenitent and unbelieving it would be a state of inconceivable misery; but to the obedient, a state of inconceivable and endless bliss! "The hour is coming," says he, "in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth, they those who done good, unto a resurrection of life; and they those who done evil, to a resurrection of damnation, [John 5:28-29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.28-29)." Indeed, he sets before us the whole process of the day of judgment, and the doom that shall be assigned to all, according to their respective characters, "the wicked going away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal, [Matthew 25:31-46](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.31-46)."

***~~3. As equally deserving the attention of every man—~~***

How merciful is the warning which he has given to all to "enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow way, [Matthew 7:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.13-14)." Surely the thought of an eternal existence, either in happiness or misery, would operate upon all; and, if duly contemplated, it will operate on all to deter them from evil, and to stimulate them in the path of duty. It is impossible for one who cordially embraces this sentiment not to set himself in earnest to secure the happiness provided for him in the Gospel.

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

***~~1. How highly you are privileged above the heathen—~~***

There is not a child among us, that is not wiser in this respect than all the philosophers of Greece and Rome. But what if we do not improve our knowledge? Shall not the heathen rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us? Yes, truly: "the people of Tyre and Sidon, yes, of Sodom and Gomorrah, will find it more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than we," if we do not avail ourselves of the light afforded us, to "flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life."

***~~2. What obligations we owe to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—~~***

To Him we owe both the light that has discovered these things, and the salvation that renders this discovery so delightful. To what purpose would the eternity of rewards and punishments be made known to us, if a way to avoid the one, and obtain the other, had not been revealed? It would have only been to "torment us before our time." In truth, there are none more miserable than they, who, being assured of the immortality of the soul, are ignorant of the way in which they may obtain acceptance with God. Glad would they be, if there were no future judgment. Glad would they be, if, when the time of their departure from the body arrives, they could be annihilated altogether.

*What is it that makes the very mention of death so painful to the generality of men? It is the dread of a hereafter, which offers to their view no prospect but of "wrath and fiery indignation to consume them.*" But to you who believe in Christ, and look to him for the remission of your sins, all this gloom has passed away, and "glory and honor and immortality" present themselves to your view as your assured portion!

O! bless that adorable Savior, who by his own death has abolished death, and by his own ascension to glory has shown to you're the felicity that awaits you. Only hold fast your confidence firm unto the end, and his crown shall be your crown, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory, for ever and ever!

***~~#2243~~***

***~~CONFIDENCE IN GOD A SOURCE OF CONSOLATION~~***

**[2 Timothy 1:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.12)**

"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day!"

MAN is born to trouble: and it is of the greatest importance to him that he would know where to turn his eyes in the day of adversity. The Gospel directs us to a reconciled God in Christ Jesus, who has engaged to be our support and comfort under every distress. The Christian has many trials peculiar to himself: but the Gospel is fully adequate to his necessities. Its power to support him may be seen in the passage before us.

Paul is exhorting Timothy to steadfastness in the cause of Christ, verse 8; and, for his encouragement, he tells him what was the ground of his own consolations under the heavy afflictions which he was now enduring for the sake of Christ. He tells him, that, notwithstanding he was immured in a dungeon, and in daily expectation of a violent and cruel death, he was neither "ashamed" nor afraid: for that he had a firm persuasion of God's ability to keep him; and that persuasion afforded him ample support.

To illustrate the text, we may observe,

***~~I. The Christian commits his soul to God—~~***

The Apostle doubtless committed unto God the concerns of the Church: but it is rather of his soul that he is speaking in the words before us, because it was that which alone could be in danger at the day of judgment. In like manner,

***~~Every Christian commits his soul to God—~~***

We know what it is to commit a large sum of money to the care of a banker: and from thence we may attain a just notion of the Christian's conduct. He has a soul which is of more value than the whole world: and he feels great concern that it would be preserved safely "against that day," when God shall judge the world. But to whom shall he entrust it? He knows that none but God can keep it; and therefore he goes to God, and solemnly commits it into his hands, entreating him to order all its concerns, and, in whatever way he shall see best, to fit it for glory.

***~~To this he is prompted by manifold considerations—~~***

He reflects on the fall of man in Paradise, and says, 'Did Adam, when perfect, and possessed of all that he could wish, become a prey to the tempter, when the happiness of all his posterity, as well as his own, depended on his steadfastness; and can such a corrupt creature as I, surrounded as I am by innumerable temptations, hope to maintain my ground against my great adversary? O my God, let me not be for one moment left to myself; but you take the charge of me; and let "my life be hidden with Christ in God:" then, and then only, can I hope, that at the last coming of my Lord I shall appear with him in glory! [Colossians 3:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.3-4).'

He bears in mind also his own weakness and ignorance. He is conscious that "he has not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" and that "it is not in him to direct his way aright." Hence he desires to avail himself of the wisdom and power of God; and cries, "Lead me in the right way, because of my enemies!" "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

But more especially he considers the gracious commands of God. God has not only permitted, but enjoined, this surrender of our souls to him, [1 Peter 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.19) and [Isaiah 26:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 26.20). O what a privilege does the Christian account it to obey this divine injunction! How thankful is he who God will condescend to accept this deposit, and to take care of this charge! Hence he avails himself of this privilege, and says, "Hide me under the shadow of your wings!" "O save me for your mercy's sake!"

While he acts in this manner,

***~~II. He is persuaded of God's ability to keep him—~~***

He does not merely presume upon God's sufficiency: he is well persuaded of it,

***~~1. From the report of others—~~***

He is informed by the inspired writers, that God created the world out of nothing; and that he upholds and orders everything in it; insomuch that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his express permission. Hence then he argues; 'Did God create my soul, and can he not uphold it? Did he form my enemies also, and can he not restrain them? See this argument suggested by God himself, [Isaiah 54:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 54.15-17). Has he numbered even the hairs of my head, and will he overlook the concerns of my soul?'

He is told that God is ever seeking opportunities, not only to exert, but also to magnify, his power in his people's cause, 2 Chronicles 16:9. This is meant by "showing himself strong." Shall all that vigilance, then, be exercised in vain? Or shall any be able to prevail against him?

He is assured also that God never yet lost one whom he had undertaken to keep: he never allowed "one of his little ones to perish, [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14). "None was ever plucked out of his hand John, 10:28-29;" not the "smallest grain of wheat, however agitated in the sieve, was ever permitted to fall upon the earth, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9)." "The gates of Hell have never been able to prevail against his Church." Then, says the Christian, "I will trust, and not be afraid." My Savior, in the days of his flesh, "lost none that had been given him, [John 18:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 18.9);" "Whom he loved, he loved to the end, [John 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.1);" and therefore I am persuaded he will perfect that which concerns me, [Psalm 138:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 138.8), and "complete in me the good work he has begun, [Philippians 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 1.6)."

***~~2. From his own experience—~~***

The Christian well remembers what he was by nature; and knows by daily experience what he would yet be, if Omnipotence were not exerted in his support! And hence he argues thus; 'Has God created me anew, and by an invisible, but almighty, influence turned the tide of my affections, so that they now flow upward to the fountain from whence they sprang; and can he not keep me from going back? Has he kept me for many years, like the burning bush, encompassed, as it were, with the flame of my corruptions—yet not consumed by it; and can anything be too hard for him?'

These arguments are indeed of no weight for the conviction of others; but to the Christian himself they are a source of the strongest conviction, and of the richest consolation: yes, from these, more than from any others, he is enabled to say, "I know whom I have believed."

Moreover,

***~~III. This persuasion is a strong support to him under all his trials—~~***

Many are the difficulties of the Christian's warfare: but a persuasion of God's ability to keep him:

***~~1. Encourages him to duty—~~***

The path of duty is sometimes exceedingly difficult: and too many have fainted in it, or been diverted from it. But we may see in the three Hebrew youths what a persuasion of God's power will effect. They braved the furnace itself, from the consideration that God could deliver them from it, or support them in the midst of it, [Daniel 3:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan 3.17-18). And thus will every Christian "encourage himself in God," and "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

***~~2. Strengthens him for conflict—~~***

Under temptations of Satan, or the hidings of God's face, the most exalted Christian would sink, if he were not supported by this hope: "I had fainted," says David, "unless I had believed truly to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." But the thought that the grace of Christ is sufficient for him, will turn all his sorrows into joy, 2 Corinthians 12:9 and [Romans 7:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.24). He will chide his dejected spirit, [Psalm 42:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 42.11), and return again to the charge, knowing that at last "he shall be more than conqueror through him who loved him! [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)."

***~~3. Enables him to endure sufferings—~~***

Many and great were the sufferings of Paul; yet says he, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." Thus every Christian must "go through much tribulation in the way to the kingdom." But he learns, not only to bear, but to "glory in tribulation," because it gives him a more enlarged experience of God's power and grace, and thereby confirms his hope, which shall never make him ashamed, [Romans 5:3-5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 5.3-5).

***~~4. Assures him of final victory—~~***

Those who have not just views of God, are left in painful suspense: but those who know whom they have believed, are as much assured of victory, as if all their enemies were lying dead at their feet. Compare [Isaiah 50:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 50.7-9) with [Romans 8:33-39](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.33-39).

***~~We shall further improve the subject,~~***

***~~1. For conviction—~~***

All persons are ready to think that they are possessed of true and saving faith. But *faith is not a mere assent to the truths of the Gospel, or even an approbation of them*. Saving faith includes three things:  
a committing of the soul to Christ;  
a persuasion of his ability to save us;  
and a determination to go forward in dependence upon him, doing and suffering whatever we are called to in the path of duty.

Have we *this*faith?

***~~2. For consolation—~~***

If there be any among us weak and dejected, let them turn their eyes to God as their Almighty Friend. Let them know that "He is able to make them stand, [Romans 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.4);" he is "able to make all grace abound towards them, that they, 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)." It is God himself who suggests to the fainting soul these very considerations; and he requires nothing, but that we wait on him in order that we may experience their truth and efficacy, [Isaiah 40:27-31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 40.27-31).

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. [Jude 1:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jude 1.24-25)."

***~~#2244~~***

***~~STRENGTH IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.1)~~***

"My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

HOW shall it be that all of us who are assembled here this day, would *ever get to Heaven, so weak as we are, and so corrupt, and in the midst of so many and great dangers?* I look back to the Apostle's days; and find, that when he was in prison at Rome, "all the converts that were of Asia, turned away from him;" but that one pious man, "Onesiphorus, sought him out with great diligence," to relieve his necessities, and to comfort his soul, [2 Timothy 1:15-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.15-18). Now, if reduced to such straits as the Apostle *Paul*was for the Gospel's sake, how would *we*hope to stand? How would we avoid the apostasy of the many, and retain the fidelity of the few?

This instruction the Apostle gives to his beloved Timothy: "You, therefore, my son, (seeing how hard it is to stand in times of severe trial,) be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus:" that is, 'know that *there is grace treasured up for you in Christ: and, in dependence upon that, you shall be able to sustain all the trials that shall come upon you*.'

To elucidate these words, I will show,

***~~I. What a fullness of grace there is treasured up for us in Christ—~~***

But how can I present this to your minds in any intelligible shape? Methinks it can be done only in a way of illustration. Take, then, some scriptural illustrations by means of which you may apprehend, in some considerable degree, the mysterious truth which I wish to submit to you.

Consider Christ, then:

***~~1. As a Vine—~~***

This is our Lord's own suggestion: "I am the Vine; you are the branches, [John 15:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 15.5)." Now we know, that every branch derives all its sap and nourishment from the vine; and that, if separated from the vine, it can bring forth no fruit whatever. This, then, will convey a very just idea of the connection that exists between Christ and his people; and of their entire dependence on him for every fresh supply of grace.

But a gardener prunes the luxuriant branches of his vine; lest the sap being too widely diffused, its influence be weakened, and its fructifying power be abridged. In this, therefore, the image altogether fails: and we must look for one more suitable, by regarding Christ,

***~~2. As a Sun—~~***

This supplies the whole universe with light: and every individual of mankind, when exposed to its rays, enjoys as much of it as if he alone existed upon earth. Nor has he the less of its influence from its being extended to all the millions of mankind. Thus has *every believer as much of Christ's gracious influence as his soul can need*; having it neither increased by the paucity of those who partake of it, nor diminished by the numbers: "The Sun of Righteousness" is alike sufficient for all.

Yet the sun affords us not the same genial warmth in winter, as in the summer months; and at night it is altogether hidden from us. In these respects, therefore, this image also fails. But we shall find an illustration more complete, if we consider Christ,

***~~3. As a Fountain—~~***

Under this character our blessed Lord commends himself to us: "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink." But especially is he compared with the *smitten rock*in the wilderness, "from whence gushed rivers of water," for the supply of all the people of Israel; and which followed them in very abundant streams, through all their journeying in the wilderness, [1 Corinthians 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.4).

Here then we have a more appropriate image: for as *He is the only source of grace to every living soul, so may every one have access to him at all times, to obtain a supply fully commensurate with his utmost necessities*. And in this does this image pre-eminently display the fullness that is in Christ Jesus, and the benefit to be derived from it; because "every soul that drinks of that living water has within himself a well of water, springing up to everlasting life:" so that, *having Christ within him, he can never thirst again, nor need any other source, either of strength or comfort*, [John 4:13-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 4.13-14); [John 7:37-38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 7.37-38).

Without attempting to give any further illustration of what, after all, can never be adequately comprehended, I will only observe that the representation is truly scriptural; since we are expressly told, that "it has pleased the Father that in Christ would all fullness dwell, [Colossians 1:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.19)," and that all his people are said to "receive, out of his fullness, grace upon grace [John 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 1.16)."

Let us then consider,

***~~II. Our duty in relation to it—~~***

We are to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" that is,

***~~1. We are to apply to him for it with simplicity—~~***

We should have it as a settled principle in our minds, that there is no strength in man, nor any other source of grace than Christ Jesus: and without hesitation we should go to him from day to day, and from hour to hour, to receive it out of his fullness. We would not dream of meriting it at his hands, or of earning it by anything that we can do: we would receive it as freely as the Israelites did the waters that issued from the rock; and would go to it as the only source of all that we need.*Do you think that the Israelites attempted to dig wells in the wilderness, when they had access to that stream? Just so, we should we go to Christ for grace continually, and derive from him all that our necessities require*.

***~~2. We are to rely upon it with confidence—~~***

*We should never for a moment entertain doubts or fears respecting Christ's sufficiency to supply our needs*. Whatever dangers threaten us, we would say, "There are more with us than with them, 2 Chronicles 32:7;" and, "If God is for us, who can be against us, [Romans 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.31)." He has told us, that, whatever be our necessities, "his grace is sufficient for us:" and therefore, instead of dreading trials, lest we would be vanquished by them, we should "take pleasure in them, that the power of Christ may rest upon us, and his strength be magnified in our weakness 2 Corinthians 12:10." "Knowing in whom we have believed," we would look upon "our enemies as bread for us, [Numbers 14:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Num 14.9)," and view their assaults as preludes only to victory and triumph.

***~~Let me now add,~~***

***~~1. A word of caution—~~***

The circumstance of there being such a fullness treasured up for you in Christ does not in the least degree supersede the necessity for exertion on your part; no, nor of fear and watchfulness. To your last hour you must be like 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)." You will see in the context, that you are to "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, verse 4;" and your strength in Christ is not to render you forgetful of, but to fit you for, the warfare, which he has called you to maintain, [Ephesians 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.10-11).

***~~2. A word of encouragement—~~***

Now, *for eighteen hundred years has grace been flowing from the Lord Jesus for the supply of all his people.* But do you suppose that his ability to supply is therefore lessened? When "virtue went forth from him," in the days of his flesh, "to heal all the multitudes that waited on him," was there less virtue in him than before? Or has the *sun*lost any of its splendor by all the rays that it has emitted these six thousand years?

Know then, that Christ is still as able to save as ever, and that the very weakest among you all is authorized to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me! [Philippians 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 4.13)."

***~~#2245~~***

***~~CONSIDERATION ENFORCED~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.7)~~***

"Consider what I say, and the Lord will give you understanding in all this."

HERE we behold a parent addressing his beloved son: here we behold an Apostle addressing the whole Church of God. In like manner would I now, with a union of parental love and apostolic authority, address you, my brethren: and I beg you to consider what I say: and "may the Lord give you understanding in all things!" The points to which I would draw your attention are,

***~~I. The things proposed for Timothy's consideration—~~***

Of course, we must look to the preceding context, to see what the Apostle had been saying. He had been urging Timothy to a performance of his ministerial duties: and to ministers the subject primarily belongs. But the duties are also of general import, and we may all consider ourselves as included under the different images that are here set before us:

***~~1. As soldiers—~~***

In soldiers are required energy and devotion; such energy as will bear them up under all difficulties; and such devotion, as supersedes every other engagement, and determines them fully to approve themselves to the commander under whom they fight. Now, my beloved brethren, to this character all of us, both ministers and people, are to be conformed.

We are all engaged to "fight the good fight of faith," and to "war a good warfare," under "the Captain of our salvation." For every one of us is armor provided, even "the whole armor of God; which we are to put on," and by means of which we are to withstand all our enemies. But in this warfare we must, of necessity, meet with great trials, yes, and must sustain many afflictions. For, where is there a Christian who has not "his cross to bear, while following his Lord?" A soldier, by his very profession, expects to encounter difficulties: and his mind is made up to bear whatever evils he may meet with in the discharge of his duty: and precisely thus must we, having once girded on the sword, be prepared for privations, exertions, conflicts; and we must never think of rest, until all "our enemies are bruised under our feet."

As for other occupations, the soldier feels that he has no time for them. He cannot alienate his time and attention from the duties of his calling. The concerns of agriculture and commerce he leaves to others: and he concentrates all his energies in the more immediate duties of his profession; having no wish, no desire, but to approve himself faithful to his commander and his king.

Thus, my brethren, it must be with us: with ministers in a more especial manner; because for them, by divine appointment, is a provision made, in order that they may be able to give themselves wholly and exclusively to the service of the sanctuary: and it is greatly to be regretted, that, in our Church, the provision made is so small as to render a compliance with God's appointment in this respect, in many instances, impractical. But I hesitate not to say, that for a minister to "entangle himself in the affairs of this life" beyond what is necessary, is not the way to "please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier."

The same would I say, to a certain degree, respecting Christians in general. They have, it is true, and must have, their temporal employments, to which it is their duty to pay very diligent attention. But yet these must all be subordinated to the higher duties of religion: they must "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and disregard "the food that perishes," in comparison with that which "endures to everlasting life." Every man must perform his duties in social and domestic life: but we must be "without anxiety" and, while our heads and our hands are occupied with earthly pursuits, "our affections must be altogether set upon things above." To please our God must be, at all times and under all circumstances, our one concern.

***~~2. As wrestlers—~~***

The Apostle often takes his illustrations from the Grecian games. Here he compares us with wrestlers, who, however much they might exert themselves, were not crowned, unless they conformed exactly to the rules which were prescribed to the contending parties. Now we, both ministers and people, are called to "wrestle, not with flesh and blood only, but with all the principalities and powers of Hell," and we have laid down for us, in the inspired volume, rules, to which we must rigidly adhere in all our conflicts. It is not sufficient that we put forth all our strength: we must put it forth in God's appointed way. For instance: Are we assaulted with evil? We must "not render evil for evil," but rather "do good to those who hate us;" and must persevere in this contest even to the end, "not being overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good."

Our blessed Lord has "set an example for us," under every species of conflict and of suffering: and we are "to follow his steps."

Paul, also, is a pattern which we should follow. He was "a man of like passions with us:" and therefore we may hope, that the grace which wrought so powerfully in him will work effectually in us also; and enable us "to be followers of him, as he was of Christ."

A soldier never thinks of following his own mind or will in anything. He looks to the orders issued by his commander; and to them he strictly adheres. Thus also must we, having not so much as a thought or wish to follow our own will, but a full determination to conform, in every particular act, and in the whole state and habit of our mind, to the revealed will of God. In a word, "we must strive lawfully," and in the precise way that God has marked out for us: and it is in that way alone that we can hope to have the crown of victory accorded to us.

***~~3. As gardeners—~~***

We all know that the gardener prosecutes his labors with a patient expectation of a distant, but rich reward. He does not expect the seed to produce a harvest the instant that it has been sown. He looks for many changes of the weather; and passes through many alternations of hope and fear; but he is sustained, through all, by a humble hope, that, in the end God will give to him the fruit of his labors.

Thus also must we, both ministers and people, go on in the work assigned to us; and, "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality." We must not be discouraged because events do not turn out according to our wish or expectation. We must "wait the Lord's pleasure;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." "He who believes, must not make haste." "Every vision is for an appointed time: and if it tarries, we must wait for it, assured, that it shall come in due season, and not tarry one instant beyond it."

God had promised to Abraham to bring his posterity out of Egypt, at the distance of four hundred and thirty years: and had they been kept there one day longer, his promise would utterly have failed. But that self-same day that the period was completed, he brought them forth.

Just so, however long we may have to wait for a successful outcome of our labors, we must "never faint or be weary in well-doing;" but must proceed with cheerfulness, assured, that "in due season we shall reap," and "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Now then attend, I beg you, to,

***~~II. The injunction given him in relation to them,~~***

First, says the Apostle,

***~~1. "Consider what I say"—~~***

*No good can be hoped for, even from apostolic instructions, if they are not duly and attentively considered.* Now then let all of you consider:

How vast and arduous are your duties. In the preceding context you have seen how all the offices of a soldier, a wrestler, and a gardener, are combined in you: and, in fact, there is not any office sustained by any man on earth, from the king upon the throne to the basest slave, that is not concentrated in you. You are called "a royal priesthood:" and if you, every one of you, are "kings and priests unto God," then you may well suppose that every subordinate employment must find its counterpart in you. Conceive, then, all the diversified occupations of all the human race to devolve on you, so far at least as to have their respective energies required at your hands; and then you will form some notion of the duties to which you are called.

But "consider," also, how great and indispensable are your obligations to fulfill them. Ministers, doubtless, are bound by the most solemn ties to "fulfill their ministry;" not only because they have been most solemnly called to this office, and have pledged themselves to the performance of it, but because the souls of their people will be required at their hands. But every Christian, in his baptism, has consecrated himself to God: and every one, inasmuch as he professes to "have been bought with a price," acknowledges himself bound to "glorify God with his body and his spirit, which are his."

Now then, consider this. Consider what that price is with which you have been redeemed, even with the precious blood of your incarnate God; and is there any service which you will account too arduous to engage in, or any suffering too heavy to endure, for the honor of his name? It was well said by Paul, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, as your reasonable service." And truly this is your reasonable service, that, as the burnt-offerings were wholly consumed upon the altar in sacrifice to God, so would every faculty of your souls be wholly and exclusively devoted to your God.

Yet one thing more I beg you to "consider;" and that is: How rich is the recompense that awaits you! Look at the gardener toiling at his work in the midst of winter; what a hopeless task does he, in appearance, perform! But look at his fields in the time of harvest, and you will say he is richly compensated. Thus will a minister find all his labors and sufferings abundantly repaid, when he shall bring before his Lord "those whom he has begotten by the Gospel;" saying, "Here am I, and the children you have given me."

Just so, how richly will every Christian be recompensed, when he shall hear, from the lips of his adored Lord, those glorious words, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Go, survey the glory and blessedness of Heaven; and then say, my brethren, whether anything can be too much for us either to do or suffer, in the prospect of such a recompense. Would you but consider these things as you ought, you would think that all the labors of the most devoted *soldier*, all the exertions of the most strenuous *wrestler*, and all the patience of the most laborious *gardener*, are but faint representations of what may well be required at your hands.

***~~2. Seek of God an experimental acquaintance with them—~~***

Truly it is God alone who can bring you to such a state as this. He alone can enable you to discern even the necessity of it, and much less its excellency. The unenlightened man would account such a life as this "foolishness;" and a person aspiring after it would be condemned as a weak enthusiast, that was "righteous over much." To long for it, as the perfection of your nature, and as a Heaven upon earth, is a feeling which no man on earth can possess, until he is born again, and renewed in the spirit of his mind by the Spirit of the living God. It is altogether a new creation in the soul of man.

Moreover, God alone can guide you in such a path as this. Whether a person be a minister or a private Christian, he shall find, that, in this high and heavenly course, there are situations wherein no human wisdom could guide him aright. There is a film over the eyes of man which obstructs his sight, and a bias in his heart that perverts his judgment. Never, until God has opened the eyes of our understanding, shall we see our way. When God has given us "a single eye, our whole body will be full of light;" but until then, "the light that is in us will be all darkness." See the situations and circumstances to which Paul was often reduced; and think how an unenlightened man would have acted in his place: and you will soon see that, however "man may devise his way, God alone can direct his steps."

Once more: *It is God alone who can uphold us in the discharge of such duties.*Recall to mind all that has been set forth under the images to which my text refers; and then say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who can support the soul, so as that neither the *world*with all its temptations, nor the *flesh*with all its corruptions, nor the *devil*with all his wiles, shall be able to divert it from the path of duty, or to obstruct its progress in the heavenly life—who can do this but God alone? I say then, look to God to give you these high attainments, and to "fulfill in you all the good pleasure of his goodness." Limit not either his power or his grace; but "open your mouth wide, and he will fill it."

I conclude with repeating the injunction in my text: "Consider what I say, and the Lord will give you understanding in all this."

***~~#2246~~***

***~~PAUL'S LOVE TO THE ELECT EXEMPLIFIED~~***

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

"I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

THE labors of faithful ministers are, for the most part, but ill requited by a wicked and ungrateful world. But, in the midst of all the opposition they meet with, they have the consolation to know that all efforts to stop the progress of the Gospel shall be in vain. This was Paul's comfort, when imprisoned at Rome for the word's sake, that, however he might be bound, the word was not; and "therefore" he submitted the more cheerfully to his troubles, being assured that his endeavors to save the souls of his fellow-creatures would be crowned with success.

This subject leads us to consider,

***~~I. Paul's love to the elect—~~***

Notwithstanding the word "elect" has passed into a term of reproach, there most assuredly is an elect people, "a remnant according to the *election*of grace, [Romans 11:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.5)," whom "God has *chosen*to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, [2 Thessalonians 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 2.13)."

***~~Towards these Paul felt a peculiar regard—~~***

He loved all, even his very enemies, and would gladly have submitted to the heaviest afflictions for their sake, [Romans 9:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-3). But his love to the elect was both more exalted in its nature, and more abundant in its degree. He considered them as the special objects of God's love; as children of the same heavenly parent; as members of the same mystical body; and as fellow-heirs of the same glory. Hence they were all engraved on his very heart: and hence he exhorts us, while we do good unto all men, to do it more especially unto the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10).

***~~For their sake he willingly endured every trouble that would come upon him—~~***

No man ever endured so much as he in his Master's cause. This we may see from the long catalogue of his troubles which he himself has left us, [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.23-28). But, says he, "None of these things move me, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24);" "I rejoice in my sufferings for the elect's sakes [Colossians 1:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.24);" "most gladly will I spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly I love them, the less I am loved, [2 Corinthians 12:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.15);" I am so "affectionately desirous of them, that I am willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but my own soul also, because they are dear unto me, [1 Thessalonians 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.8);" "yes, if I am offered (and my blood be poured out as a libation) upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, I joy and rejoice with them all, and desire them also to rejoice with me, [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17);" for, so far am I from looking forward to it with fear, or accounting it an occasion of grief, that I esteem it a blessed subject of mutual thanksgiving.

***~~How amiable and praiseworthy was this heavenly disposition!~~***

Certainly the love of Christ in dying for us, infinitely exceeds all that ever was manifested by any human being. But, next to Christ, Paul seems to have most abounded in love to man. He was indeed a very bright resemblance of his Divine Master. And what a world would this be, if all were actuated by the same spirit and temper! Even those who cultivate least of this spirit themselves, must confess, that the universal prevalence of it would make a very Heaven upon earth.

But the Apostle's regard to the elect was not a mere carnal affection, as we shall see, if we consider,

***~~II. The end he aimed at on their behalf—~~***

***~~The happiness provided for the elect, is exceedingly great and glorious—~~***

For them is reserved "salvation," even salvation from sin and Satan, death and Hell. It is, moreover, a salvation "with glory;" not a mere exemption from punishment, but an unspeakable felicity in the immediate vision and fruition of their God. Nor is it ever to come to an end: its duration will continue as long as the soul itself shall exist. To crown the whole, it is a salvation in Christ Jesus, not merely as it is purchased by his blood (though that will infinitely enhance its value) but as it is treasured up in him, and shall be enjoyed in and through him, as the one medium of its communication for ever and ever.

***~~That they might obtain this great salvation, was the main object of his desires, the one scope of his labors—~~***

He had no doubt at all respecting his own salvation, 2 Corinthians 5:1. But could he be content to go to Heaven alone? No; he would gladly have drawn all he could along with him. So the church, Song of Solomon 1:4. It was for this end that he became all things to all men, 1 Corinthians 9:22; and to this he looked forward as his joy, his hope, his crown of rejoicing, [1 Thessalonians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 2.19). There was not one weak, but he sympathized with him; not one turned aside, but he burned with an ardent desire to restore him, [2 Corinthians 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 11.29).

To such a degree was his soul bound up in the welfare of the elect, that he could say, "Now I live, if you stand fast in the Lord," nor did anything appear too great for him either to do, or suffer, provided he might be instrumental in accomplishing this blessed end, [1 Thessalonians 3:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 3.7-9).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. What reason have most professors of religion to be ashamed of their attainments!~~***

Beyond a doubt, the Apostle's spirit ought to be the spirit of all Christians, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16). But how little of it is seen in the Christian Church! How many are there who are ready to "bite and devour one another," instead of being willing to lay down their lives for each other! And how little self-denial is there even in the best of us! How little will we do, or suffer, either for the temporal or spiritual welfare of our brethren! Let us blush at our lack of love; and labor henceforth to benefit the bodies, and more especially to save the souls, of all around us.

***~~2. How foolish are those who have no concern for their own souls!~~***

Why was Paul so earnest for the salvation of others, but because he knew somewhat of the value of a soul? He knew its happiness, if saved; and its misery, if lost. Shall another then be more concerned for us, than we for ourselves? Shall another be ready to do and suffer all things for us, and we be unwilling to do or suffer anything for our own good? Let us remember, that no present gratifications can compensate for the loss of salvation; and that eternal glory will infinitely over-balance all that can be endured in the pursuit of it.

***~~3. How must they be blinded by the devil, who oppose the salvation of their fellow-creatures!~~***

There are too many who scoff at piety, and endeavor, by ridicule or persuasion, to turn men from the practice of it. Alas! what a solemn contrast do their characters form with that of the Apostle! Let such consider the warning given to them by our Lord, that it were better for them to have a millstone hanged about their neck, and to be cast into the sea, than they would offend one of his little ones, [Luke 17:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.2).

***~~#2247~~***

***~~THE EQUITY OF GOD'S PROCEDURE~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.11-14)~~***

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen."

STRANGE as it may seem, it is no uncommon thing for men to arraign the equity of God, and to accuse him of undue severity in the execution of his judgments. The Jewish people of old complained, "The ways of the Lord are not equal:" and God, for his own honor's sake, was constrained to vindicate his character in this respect; which he did in an open appeal to their judgment, and a candid exposition of the modes of his procedure. "O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?" 'If a man has sinned and repent, I forgive him: but if he turn back to his former wickedness, I make no account of his temporary reformation, but visit all his iniquities upon his head. Is this unequal? Is it not consonant with strict justice? [Ezekiel 33:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.17-20).'

In like manner Paul declares, in the passage before us, that God will act towards men as they act towards him; requiting with good his faithful servants, and marking the disobedient as objects of his displeasure. And that he may the more deeply impress this truth upon our minds, he introduces it with assuring us, that "it is a faithful saying."

From his words we shall be led to consider,

***~~I. The rule of God's procedure in reference to our future destinies—~~***

The whole Scripture declares that he will deal with men according to their works; that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but that to those who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there shall be indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, even upon every soul of man that does evil, [Romans 2:7-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.7-9).

To this effect we are here told how God will deal:

***~~1. With the godly—~~***

It is here supposed that the godly will "die with Christ, and suffer with him." And it is true, that all his faithful followers are "crucified with him, [Galatians 2:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.20)," and "dead with him." As he died for sin, so they, in conformity to him, and by virtue derived from him, die to sin: they no longer allow sin to act without control, as once they did, but they "mortify it in all their members," and "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)." In acting thus, they of necessity condemn the "world around them, who are lying in wickedness, [1 John 5:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.19)," and ordering their course agreeably to the will of Satan, who works in them, [Ephesians 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.2), and "leads them captive at his will, verse 26."

In consequence of this, they are hated, reviled, and persecuted, as their Savior was; and are called to "suffer," even as he suffered. There is not one of them who has not his cross to bear. Times and circumstances may cause a difference as to the degree in which they shall suffer; but there is no exception whatever to that declaration of the Apostle, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, [2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)."

Now how will God deal with these? Will he overlook them as unworthy of his notice? Will he afford them no support, and recompense them with no reward? Far be it from him; for "If we are dead with Christ, we shall also live with him;" that is, he will enable us to execute our holy purposes, and to rise superior to all our spiritual adversaries, even as he did when he rose again from the dead.

This is the explanation which Paul himself gives us: "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, [Romans 6:5-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.5-11)."

The same Apostle also gives it as his own actual experience: "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body: for we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh, [2 Corinthians 4:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 4.10-11)." Thus does the Lord Jesus fulfill the promise which he made in reference to this very point, "Because I live, you shall live also, [John 14:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.19)."

Moreover our God engages, that, "if we *suffer*with Christ, we shall also *reign*with him." Our services shall not be forgotten. There is "a crown of glory prepared for all those who love him, 2 Timothy 4:8. [1 Peter 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 5.4);" even on that very throne which Christ himself occupies, shall they be seated with him, [Revelation 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 3.21). Yes; it is a faithful saying, that "those who suffer with him shall also be glorified together, [Romans 8:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.17). [1 Peter 4:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 4.13)."

This then will be the mode of God's procedure towards his faithful people: and according to the same rule will he proceed,

***~~2. With the ungodly—~~***

These are here designated as "those who deny him." Now there are two ways in which this may be done; namely, either by an open and avowed rejection of his Gospel, [2 Peter 2:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.1), or by a timid concealment of our convictions. Of the former we shall have no occasion to speak, because it is the latter class only that are referred to in our text; and because all that we shall have occasion to say respecting the latter, must of necessity be in a yet stronger degree applicable to the former: for, if those who do believe in Christ, but through fear of persecution are deterred from confessing him openly, will be disapproved by him, much more will those who impiously blaspheme his name, and pour contempt upon all the wonders of his love and mercy.

Our Lord requires, that we would confess him openly before men. But there are many, who, "when persecution or tribulation arises because of the word, are offended, [Matthew 13:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.21)," and dare not face the obloquy, or encounter the perils, that await them. And how will the Lord Jesus Christ deal with them? Will he take no account of their cowardice? Will he be satisfied with such a mode of requiting all his love? No; he will deal with them in the way that they deal with him: "they are ashamed of him; and he will be ashamed of them, in the day that he shall come in the glory of his Father, and of all his holy angels, [Mark 8:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.38);" "they deny him; and he will deny them, [Matthew 10:33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 10.33)."

This is nothing but what they may reasonably expect: for if their love to him is so small, that they will not endure a little shame, or submit to some trifling loss, for his sake, then how can they expect to be approved as good and faithful servants? How can they suppose it possible that they would partake of that felicity which is reserved for those who fought the good fight of faith, and "loved not their lives unto death, [Revelation 12:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.11)." This indeed would be unequal: such inequality shall never be found in the judgments of our God: for "those who loved their lives, shall lose them; and they only who are willing to lose their lives for Christ's sake, shall save them unto life eternal, [Mark 8:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.31); [Mark 8:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mark 8.35)."

That no doubts on this subject may rest upon our minds, I will go on to state,

***~~II. The assurance we have that he will proceed according to this rule—~~***

***~~The declarations of God on these subjects do not obtain the credit they deserve—~~***

Many of the *godly*are apt, through the weakness of their faith, to yield to doubts and fears. When feeling the depth of their corruptions, they think it almost impossible that they would ever be able to subdue them: and, when menaced with heavy trials, they doubt whether they shall ever be able to support them.

The *ungodly*, on the other hand, boldly question whether God ever can proceed with them according to his word. They do not hesitate to say that such a procedure would be cruel and unjust. 'If indeed they were to abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, they might then expect the Divine judgments: but *when they can have no gross evils laid to their charge, is it to be supposed that God will punish them to all eternity, merely because they do not (as they will call it) make a parade of their religion? That is nothing but a conceit of enthusiastic zealots: God is too good to act in such a way, or to visit with such unmerited severity*what, at the worst, can only be deemed an excess in the exercise of prudence'.

***~~But, whether believed or not, they shall all be fulfilled in their season—~~***

"Our unbelief will not make the truth of God of no effect, [Romans 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 3.3)." Whatever he has spoken, he will surely execute; as it is said, "God is not a man, that he would lie; neither 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)." Were he to reverse his word for us, he would cease to be a God of truth. He has pledged himself for the accomplishment of every word that he has spoken, and "he cannot deny himself."

True it is, that he is not pleased with the weakness of his people's faith. He complained of it in Peter, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" But he will not on this account neglect to fulfill to them his promises. He has engaged in behalf of those who die unto sin, that "his grace shall be sufficient for them, [2 Corinthians 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 12.9);" that "their strength shall be according to their day, [Deuteronomy 33:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 33.25);" and that "they shall be more than conquerors, through him who loved them [Romans 8:37](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.37)." Their doubts and fears will indeed distress their minds, and weaken their efforts, and subject them to many anxieties from which a stronger exercise of faith would have freed them: but still he will not cast them off because they are weak: "he will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax; but will bring forth judgment unto victory, [Matthew 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 12.20)."

And in the last day he will recompense into their bosom all that they have done or suffered for him. He will say, "You have been faithful in a few things; be ruler over many things! [Matthew 25:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.23); and the precise measure of their glory shall be proportioned to the labors and sufferings to which in this life they had submitted for his sake, 2 Corinthians 4:17.

In like manner, to the ungodly he will award a sentence of condemnation proportioned to their deserts. It will be to no purpose that they expostulate, and ask, as if aggrieved by his sentence, "Lord, have we not in your name cast out devils, and in your name done many wonderful works?" He will be altogether inflexible; and will say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23)."

The importance of this subject appears from the solemn charge with which Paul enjoins Timothy to "put his hearers in remembrance of it." The same charge is in fact given to every minister of God's word:

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

"Put your people in remembrance of these things." In compliance with this command I will now proceed yet further to remind you of them,

***~~1. For your conviction—~~***

It is to no purpose to dispute against God. A criminal may dispute against human laws if he will, and may determine beforehand that they can never be executed against him. But the only effect of his confidence will be, to deceive his own soul, and to involve himself in irremediable ruin. Let him be ever so assured of impunity, he will not be able to stop the course of the law, or to prevent its execution upon him.

How much less then can we suppose that the arm of God's justice shall be arrested, and the very truth of God violated, to rescue a man from perdition, merely because he will not believe that God will fulfill his word. I must declare to you, that all such hopes are groundless: and I call upon you carefully to examine the state of your own souls.

Are you "dead to sin," to all sin, so that no iniquity whatever is allowed to have dominion over you?

Are you openly confessing Christ before men, so that it is seen and known "whose you are, and whom you profess to serve?"

Are you "following him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, [Hebrews 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 13.13);" and not bearing it only, but "rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake, [Acts 5:41](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 5.41)."

In a word, are you Christians, not in word only, but in deed and in truth?

These are the inquiries which you must make; for by them alone can you ascertain your state before God. Say not, that, in requiring these things, we require too much: for if God requires them, and will receive to mercy those only in whom these requisites can be found, it will be to no purpose to contend with him. Be wise in time: and so endeavor to approve yourselves to God now, that he may approve of you in the day of judgment.

***~~2. For your comfort and support—~~***

The workings of unbelief have harassed many who were truly upright before God: and therefore we would not write bitter things against ourselves, merely because we possess not a full assurance of faith. David on some occasions was quite overwhelmed with doubts and fears. Hear his complaints: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Does his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

But whence arose all this? Had it any foundation in truth? No! He immediately acknowledges, "This is my infirmity, [Psalm 77:7-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 77.7-10)." So then when doubts and fears assail your minds, remember, God is a faithful God, and not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail. "Of those whom the Father gave to Jesus, he lost none, [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.12);" nor will he ever lose one: "not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever fall upon the earth, [Amos 9:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Amos 9.9);" nor "shall one of God's little ones ever perish, [Matthew 18:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 18.14)." Only commit yourselves to God, and leave the outcome of events to him. Your part is to be seeking a conformity to Christ in his death and resurrection; and his part is to carry on and perfect his work within you. Be intent on your part; and leave His to him: and you shall be able at the last to say with Joshua, that "of all the good things which the Lord your God has spoken concerning you, all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed, [Joshua 23:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Josh 23.14)."

***~~#2248~~***

***~~THE STABILITY OF THE COVENANT~~***

**[2 Timothy 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.19)**

"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

*GOD has a people whom he will preserve from apostasy: but he will keep them by the instrumentality of their own care and watchfulness.*There were some in the apostolic age seduced from the faith, and led to think that the resurrection was passed already. But Paul entertained no fears for the ark of God. He was persuaded that God would keep his faithful people: "they overthrew the faith of some: nevertheless," etc.

***~~I. What is meant by the foundation of God—~~***

It does not seem to refer to the doctrine of the resurrection. The context indeed mentions this doctrine; but the immediate connection of the text is with the apostasy that had prevailed. The "foundation" relates rather to the covenant of grace. In some respects Christ is the only foundation, [1 Corinthians 3:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.11). Nevertheless the covenant of grace may be represented in this light—

***~~The covenant of grace is the foundation of God's dealings towards us—~~***

From a regard to it he bears with us in our *unconverted state*, [Ezekiel 36:21-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.21-23); [Ezekiel 36:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 36.32).

From a regard to it he effects our *conversion*, 2 Timothy 1:9. [Jeremiah 31:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 31.3).

From a regard to it he endures our *backslidings*after conversion, [1 Samuel 12:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 12.22).

From a regard to it he restores us after we have *fallen*, [Luke 22:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 22.32).

***~~The covenant of grace is also the foundation of our hope towards God—~~***

We have no claim upon God independent of the covenant; but in his covenant with Christ, and with us in him, he has engaged to give us all that we need, [1 Corinthians 3:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 3.22-23). We receive spiritual blessings, only as being parties in the covenant, [Romans 8:29-30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.29-30); the continuance of those blessings to us is only in consequence of our interest in it, [Romans 9:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.16).

This foundation stands sure.

***~~II. Wherein its stability consists—~~***

The foundation of God is represented as having a seal. There is no confusion of metaphor here, because foundation stones often have an inscription (as the word means, [Revelation 9:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 9.4).) But there is peculiar propriety in the metaphor of a seal as applied to a covenant. This seal is God's unchanging love, "The Lord knows those who are his."

Knowledge is here, as in many other places, put for love, [Psalm 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 1.6); in this sense it is represented as a seal of the covenant. Love is stamped, as it were, on every part of the covenant, gives a kind of validity to it, and is inseparable from it.

***~~This unchanging love is the stability of the covenant—~~***

We would continually forfeit our interest in it: no believer whatever, if left to himself, would be steadfast in it. Our daily transgressions are sufficient to exclude us from it for ever; but God's love changes not, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17). [Romans 11:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.29). He betroths us to himself in faithfulness for ever, [Hosea 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 2.19)." He loves and keeps us, not for our sake, but for his own name's sake, [Deuteronomy 7:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Deut 7.6-8); hence all our security arises. Paul considers the steadfastness of the foundation as connected with, and depending on, God's immutable regard for his people; and to this is their final salvation to be ascribed, [Malachi 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal 3.6).

The covenant, however, does not make void our obligations to holiness,

***~~III. The improvement we should make of it—~~***

The privileges of Christians are exceeding great: but we are in danger of turning the grace of God into licentiousness. Hence the Apostle cautions us against abusing this covenant.

Those "who name the name of Christ" are those who profess Christ's religion; and that profession supposes them to be savingly interested in the covenant. But continuance in sin would be inconsistent with that profession: the covenant prohibits the indulgence even of the smallest sin. The covenant of grace:  
provides strength for the mortification of every lust;  
secures holiness to us as well as salvation;  
engages for our salvation only in a way of holiness.

Let it not then be made a ground of presumptuous security. Let it rather operate as an incentive to diligence. Let it incline "every one" to stand at the greatest distance from sin.

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

What rich consolation is here for every true believer!

There ever have been some apostates from the Church of Christ; but their defection does not disprove the stability of God's covenant. The reason of their departure is accounted for by John, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us, [1 John 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.19)."

Let not then any be dejected when they see the falls of others. God "knows his sheep, and will suffer "none to pluck them out of his hands." Nor need any despond on account of their indwelling corruptions: *it is not sin lamented, but sin indulged, that will destroy the soul*. Let every one be more anxious to lay hold on this covenant: it will be found at last, that it is "ordered m all things and sure."

***~~#2249~~***

***~~SAINTS, VESSELS OF HONOR~~***

**[2 Timothy 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.20-21)**

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

IT was said by a heathen poet, and the truth and importance of the sentiment are strongly marked by its being cited by an inspired Apostle, that "*Bad company corrupts good character*, 1 Corinthians 15:33." But there is by no means such attention paid to this aphorism as its importance demands. Men will indeed caution their friends against the society of those who are dissolute and profane; but, against those who may distract our minds with matters of doubtful disputation, or lower our standard of Christian duty, no one judges it necessary to put us on our guard. But Paul, that vigilant watchman, that faithful servant of the Most High God, has taught us to *shun everything which may pervert our judgment, or corrupt our minds, or in any way impede our progress in the Divine life*. In the words which I have now read to you, he shows us,

***~~I. What we must guard against, as injurious to our souls—~~***

Two things he mentions, as necessary for us to be purged from;

***~~1. Error in principle—~~***

Even in that early age of the Church, there were many, who, instead of upholding the faith, sought, by all imaginable subtleties, to turn men from their adherence to it. False teachers there were in great numbers, who "strove about words which were of no real profit, but tended only to the subverting of the hearers, verse 14." Against these Paul strongly guarded his son Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as does a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred; saying, that the resurrection is passed already; and overthrow the faith of some, verse 16-18."

Such persons there have been in the Church, from that day even to the present hour:

Some will magnify beyond due bounds the importance of some favorite doctrine, to the utter exclusion of other doctrines which have a different aspect.

Others will dwell upon the *circumstantials*of religion, to the neglect of the points that are most essential.

Others, again, will attack the *fundamentals*themselves, "bringing in damnable heresies, and denying the Lord who bought them."

Some, like the Pharisees of old, will make all religion to consist in the observance of rites and ceremonies.

Others will cast off every kind of ritual, and divest religion of every outward form.

Some will discard from religion everything that is mysterious or spiritual.

Others will spiritualize everything, and involve the most common truths of Scripture in mystery and allegory, like those who reduced the doctrine of the resurrection to the mere introduction of another dispensation; or the moral change that is wrought on the hearts of Christian converts.

In fact, there is no end of the absurdities which men will introduce into religion, according to their respective imaginations: and their zeal for their respective peculiarities will be considered by them as the best proofs of their zeal for religion.

But it will be our wisdom "to purge ourselves from all such persons and opinions; and to hold fast, with childlike simplicity, the truth as it is in Jesus." For, in fact, these dispositions and habits are the fruits of vain conceit; and they gender nothing but strife and contention. In a word, they all "eat like a gangrene;" which, if not healed, will gradually destroy the whole body!

***~~2. Corruption in practice—~~***

This is invariably connected with the former: for the very alienation of heart, both from God and man, which controversial habits generate, must, of necessity, give advantage to Satan for the infusion of all manner of evil into our souls. Hence Paul, in his advice to Timothy, combines with a caution against *error*, a caution against *sin*also: "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels, verse 22, 23."

Among youthful lusts we must doubtless, in the first place, number those corrupt propensities which are so powerful in the time of youth: but we must also number those which are more nearly allied with heresies, while yet they are peculiarly influential on the youthful mind, such as:  
a love of novelty,  
a fondness for disputation,  
a desire after notoriety and distinction.

The tempers which these habits generate are extremely hateful to God, and injurious to man. "The filthiness of the *flesh*," as the Apostle speaks, is, in appearance, more opposite to true religion than what he calls "the filthiness of the *spirit*," but it is not so in reality: and we must be purged from this, no less than from the other, if ever we would serve God acceptably, or be approved by him in the day of judgment.

*Much of the beauty of true religion consists in humility and a childlike spirit, which are the very reverse of that pride and forwardness which characterize the controversialist and vain disputer.* I must therefore guard you, with all earnestness, against everything which may corrupt your mind from the simplicity that is in Christ, or weaken the influence of real piety in your souls.

And, that my exhortation may have the greater weight, let me proceed to show,

***~~II. What benefit we shall derive from this care—~~***

In a great house, the Apostle observes, there is a great variety of vessels; some of purer, and others of baser, materials; some to honor, and others to dishonor.

So also, in the Church of Christ, there is a great variety of persons; all indeed in some way or other subserving his interests, and widely differing from each other in their value, their use, and their ultimate destination.

***~~Those who are infected with evil principles or practice are of no estimation before God.~~***

Their spirit is hateful to him, as is their conduct also; nor are they of any use in the Church of God. They tend rather to corrupt others, than to benefit their souls; and to dishonor their profession, rather than adorn it. In fact, they are base in themselves, and subserve only base purposes: and "their end will be according to their works."

***~~But "those who are purged from these will be regarded by him as vessels of honor, fit for their Master's use.~~***

Under this image, the Apostle means to suggest, that persons of humble minds and pure habits shall be favored with God's peculiar regard, be set apart for his special service, and be made use of for his honor and glory. These are the distinctions conferred on "vessels of gold and silver in a great house or palace;" while the vessels of wood and of earth are disregarded and despised.

Those nobler vessels are polished with care, in order that they may appear worthy of their owner, and of the uses to which they are applied: so are the godly "sanctified" by the Holy Spirit, and "prepared for every good work" to which they are destined.

Now, I would ask, is not this a great encouragement to us to keep ourselves pure? Is not this honor an abundant recompense for all the self-denial we can exercise, and all the caution we can maintain? See the golden vessel in the hand of the prince; its beauty, its symmetry, its splendor, admired by him; yes, and his own honor, as it were, advanced by it: and can you contemplate yourself thus in the hands of the God of Heaven, and not feel a desire to be accounted worthy of that honor? I say, then, "purge yourselves from" everything which, in a way either of *principle*or of *practice*, may defile you, and this honor shall be yours.

***~~Now, then, say whether there be not in this subject abundant matter,~~***

***~~1. For anxious inquiry—~~***

To which of these widely-different vessels may you be compared? Which of them do you resemble, in their essential qualities, or in their habitual use? Are you of gold or silver—or of the baser materials of wood or earth? Are you altogether consecrated to God—or are you occupied solely about the things of time and sense?

To assist you in this inquiry, I must observe, that no man possesses, by nature, those higher qualities: they are all the fruits of grace. By nature we are earthly, sensual, devilish. It is by grace alone that we become heavenly, spiritual, divine. And, to judge whether this change has been wrought in us, we must not look to our outward conduct merely, but to that inward purification from erroneous principles and corrupt affections.

See, then, whether you have yet been brought to humble yourselves before God, as guilty and undone sinners.

See whether you are living altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as your only source, either of righteousness or strength.

See whether you are devoting yourselves, unreservedly, to God in all holy obedience.

This is the proper test of conversion. All other conversions are of no value—you may go the whole round, from one Church to another, espousing every one of them in succession, and zealously maintaining every distinction, whether in principle or practice—and yet be vessels in which God can take no pleasure, and which shall finally be hidden from his eyes as objects of shame only and dishonor.

Let this then be, as in truth it ought to be, a matter of anxious inquiry among all of you: for I must again declare, that they alone shall be approved of their God who correspond with the character drawn of them in our text.

***~~2. For necessary distinction—~~***

Here, you perceive, are "vessels of gold and of silver, as also of wood and of earth;" and, though all of one common origin, and alike of base materials—yet destined, some to honor, and others to dishonor. You perceive, also, that*it is God alone who makes the difference between them*; changing the nature and end of some, while others are left to their original worthlessness and debasement.

Against this our proud hearts would be ready to rise; just as that of the objector did, when Paul declared, that "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Hear the Apostle's statement of the objector's argument; and his reply to it: "One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory, [Romans 9:18-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.18-23)."

This is the answer which I also must make to anyone who shall object to the statement which has been before made. I grant, yes, I assert, that all, as born into this world, are sinful in their nature, their use, and their end: and it is grace alone, even the sovereign grace of God, that changes them so that they become vessels of honor for his use. I assert, too, with the Apostle, that the same power which the potter has over the clay, our God has over all the works of his hands.

But there is a distinction which the Apostle has made, and which we must ever bear in mind, that, *though it is God alone who prepares any for glory—yet man fits himself for destruction. So that, while the godly have no ground for boasting, the ungodly have no reason whatever for complaint. To all eternity must those who are vessels of honor ascribe the glory to their God; but the vessels to dishonor will, through all eternity, be constrained to take all the shame to themselves.*-

***~~3. For grateful adoration—~~***

Let anyone contemplate the state of a pious soul in glory. Let him see the feast that is there spread, at which God himself presides. Let him behold the vessels of gold and silver, polished to the utmost possible perfection, the ornament of the feast, the honor of their God; and every one of them filled to the utmost brim with all the richest effusions of blessedness and joy.

Then let him contrast with these the vessels of wrath, filled with the overflowings of God's wrathful indignation.

Let any one, I say, contemplate the contrast; and then determine, whether those monuments of grace and mercy have not grounds for gratitude and praise?

I trust, that to many of this description I am now addressing myself; and to them I would say: See to it that nothing which can defile be admitted within you. See also that you be more and more polished every day and hour, that you may grow in a fitness for the honor that awaits you. And be looking forward to the time when your final destiny shall be awarded to you; and you shall, as objects of God's love, and monuments of his grace, be for ever "filled with all the fullness of your God!"

***~~#2250~~***

***~~THE GREAT ENDS OF THE MINISTRY~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 2:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.25-26)~~***

"Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

THE work of the ministry is arduous in the extreme, not only on account of the *labors*in which a pastor has to engage, but on account of the *opposition*he meets with from those whose welfare he seeks. He has to call men from all which by nature they desire, and to stimulate them to much for which they have an utter distaste. But the hope of ultimately benefitting immortal souls is sufficient to carry him forward; and, if he be himself of a befitting spirit, he will persevere with patience and long-suffering, "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

To enter fully into the subject before us, I must set before you,

***~~I. The state of unconverted men—~~***

I am not aware that there is any other passage of Holy Writ that places this matter in a more humiliating view, than that which we have just read.

***~~The unconverted man is altogether a slave of Satan—~~***

The agency of Satan is but little thought of by us, though it occupies a very prominent place in the Scriptures of truth. His influence over Judas and Ananias shows what he can effect, if God see fit to withdraw the restraints which, from love to mankind, he has imposed upon him. This malignant fiend is, in fact, "the god of this world;" and all mankind, while in their unconverted state, are his vassals. Yet it is not by force that he reigns over them, but by subtlety. He "takes them captive;" but it is by "snares" that he allures them, and draws them into his net. He knows what is suited to each, as a fowler or a fisherman does to the taste and appetite of the different creatures he would decoy. He finds the whole human race ready enough to yield to his wicked devices, and to surrender up themselves to him according to his will.

To persons in early life he offers the gratifications of the flesh; and to those at a more advanced period the acquisition of wealth and honor. Nor is he more anxious to ensnare them, than they are to swallow the bait which he has laid for their destruction. In truth, if they were to form a deliberate purpose to serve Satan as far as they possibly could consistently with the preservation of a good character among men, they could not do it more effectually than they already do. Satan would not wish them to live in a more entire neglect of God and of eternity than they do: nor could he wish them more habitually to cheat themselves with a mere name and form of godliness than they do.

***~~And this is the state of all people, without exception—~~***

Men have their different tastes: one loves gross immorality, while another prefers a round of outward religious duties. But these are only the baits which they desire: their radical neglect of God and of his Christ is the same in both. The Apostles themselves, not excepting Paul in his unconverted state, were once subjects of this great usurper: "We ourselves," says Paul, "were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, [Titus 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.3)." And by whose influence they were kept in this awful condition, he tells us in another place: "And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past you walked 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: among whom we all had our conduct in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, [Ephesians 2:1-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.1-3)." Here, you perceive, they were actuated by their own lusts; yet did they most effectually accomplish the will of the great deceiver, [Revelation 12:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 12.9), "His they were, and him they served;" and from that kingdom of darkness must all be delivered, if ever they would "be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, [Colossians 1:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 1.13)."

The directions given to Timothy, for the regulation of his conduct towards them, leads me to notice,

***~~II. The efforts of ministers in their behalf—~~***

Ministers are appointed of God to instruct the world in the things which belong to their everlasting peace.

***~~They are to rescue men, if possible, from the power of Satan—~~***

They find men sleeping in security, and, like persons in a state of intoxication, unconscious of their danger, [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18). This seems to be implied in the term "that they will come to their senses"; and they endeavor to awaken them. With this view they cry, "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light! [Ephesians 5:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.14)." They call the poor unhappy victims to "repentance, and to an acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Jesus." They set forth the claims of their God and Savior to their allegiance, and the evil and danger of continuing in rebellion against him. They declare, that if they will submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, he will forgive all their past sins, and bring them into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This they do, to lead the poor captives to cast off the yoke of Satan, and serve the living God.

***~~But their only hope of success is in God alone—~~***

They know how vain it would be for them to engage in this warfare, if God himself does not interpose to give them the victory. They know, that though "Paul would plant, and Apollos water, God alone can give the increase." Nor are they sure that he will work by them: much less do they know for whose particular benefit they may be sent. They can only "draw their bow at a venture," and leave it to God to direct the shaft.

A mere "perhaps," however, is quite sufficient to stimulate their exertions. If they are but the happy instrument of delivering one soul from Satan's yoke, they will account it an ample recompense for a whole life of labor. With their ministrations to men, therefore, they unite their supplications to God; if perhaps he may "give to any a repentance leading to the acknowledging of the truth." Only let the gifts of repentance and faith be given to any soul, and there will be an end of Satan's power over them. Their chains and bars shall all give way before them: and, like Peter, they will come forth out of their prisons, as monuments of the Redeemer's power, and as witnesses for him to an ungodly world.

***~~Let me offer two requests:~~***

***~~1. Acknowledge your state to be as God has described it—~~***

It is so, whether you will acknowledge it or not. O submit no longer to such a degrading vassalage. Awake from your delusion, and contemplate the outcome of your present bondage. And may God of his mercy overcome the resistance which you have hitherto made to our ministrations, and turn you, even by our feeble efforts, "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God! [Acts 26:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 26.18)."

***~~2. Unite your own efforts with ours, for your deliverance—~~***

There must be a concurrence on your part for your ultimate deliverance. We cannot effect it: and God will not, without your own cordial cooperation. Doubtless it is he who must give you both to will and to do: but still you must "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Though you are "drawn by God, and made willing by him in the day of his power," you are "drawn by the cords of a man," and from thenceforth act as willingly as ever you did in the ways of sin. Arise then to the work of repentance, and to an open acknowledgment of the truth. So shall your chains be broken, and "Satan himself be bruised under your feet shortly!"

***~~#2251~~***

***~~SELF-LOVE REPROBATED~~***

**[2 Timothy 3:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.1-2)**

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves."

THERE is in the inspired writings frequent mention of what will take place "in the last days." But in these words very different and distant periods are referred to. Sometimes they designate the time of the Christian dispensation, [Hebrews 1:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.2); sometimes the day of judgment, [James 5:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.3); and sometimes, as in our text, a season between these, when very great and important changes will take place in the Church of Christ, [2 Peter 3:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.3). Immensely important changes have already taken place, as in the successful efforts of Antichrist, both in the Mohammedan and Popish powers: and still further changes we look for in their overthrow. But it is remarkable, that every event predicted, as to take place at these distant periods, actually commenced in the apostolic age: and John says, "Even now are there many Antichrists, [1 John 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.18)."

As for the evil spoken of in my text, the Apostle declares, that, though predicted as to occur "in the last days," it did exist at that very time, to a great extent, verse 6-9; and that, when it would prevail in the way that he described, very perilous and troublesome times would have arrived. For the elucidation of the subject before us, I will endeavor to show,

***~~I. What is the disposition here reprobated—~~***

It is inordinate self-love: "Men shall be lovers of their own selves." But we are not to imagine that every kind and degree of self-love is sinful. On the contrary, the desire which God has infused into the soul of every man to promote his own welfare, is proposed by God himself as a standard agreeably to which we are to regulate our love to our neighbor: he calls it "a royal law," as being established by himself; and he declares, that, in accommodating ourselves to it and "loving our neighbor as ourselves, we do well, [James 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.8)."

Nay, more; our blessed Lord compares with it the love which he himself bears to his own Church and people: "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church, [Ephesians 5:29](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.29)." Still, however, when it becomes *inordinate*, it is a very hateful disposition, evil in itself, and abominable in the sight of God.

***~~1. Self-love is sinful when it induces a forgetfulness of God—~~***

God would be acknowledged by us as the only source of all good; for "from him proceeds every good and perfect gift, [James 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.17);" and for his glory should everything be done; as it is said, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God, [1 Corinthians 10:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 10.31)."

But self-love robs him in both these respects: it leads men to ascribe their success of every kind to their own wisdom and power; and at the same time to seek their own gratification only in the enjoyment of all that they possess.

Now what can be more hateful, than for a man to be "Therefore he sacrifices to his own net and burns incense to his own dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food, [Habakkuk 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hab 1.16). [1 Corinthians 4:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 4.7)," when he should be adoring God for the mercies given unto him? What is more abominable, than for a man to be "living to himself," when he should be consecrating all his powers to the service of his Creator and Redeemer, [Romans 14:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 14.7-8). In fact, what is this, but to idolize ourselves, and to put ourselves in the very place of God?

Covetousness and sensuality are expressly called idolatry Philippians, 3:19. [Colossians 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 3.5); yet these are but branches proceeding from the root of inordinate self-love; which is nothing less than practical atheism, or a "banishing of God from all our thoughts, [Psalm 10:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 10.4); [Psalm 14:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 14.1)."

***~~2. Self-love is sinful when it operates to the injury of our neighbor—~~***

Our neighbor, in his place, has claims upon us, no less than God himself. Whoever we are, whether of high or low degree, what are we but members of one great family; yes, and members too of one body, 1 Corinthians 12:20. Now, in a body, no member is to consult its own separate interest at the expense of others, but every one to seek its own happiness in the welfare of the whole, [1 Corinthians 12:25-26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25-26).

But self-love banishes all these considerations, and sets aside every obligation arising from them. Now, we are told, from authority, that whatever a man may possess, or whatever he may either do or suffer in the service of the Lord, "if he has not charity" towards his neighbor, so as to render unto him his dues, "he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, [1 Corinthians 13:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 13.1)." Whatever he may pretend, "his faith is dead;" his love is hypocritical, [James 2:15-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.15-17); and his "religion is vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

Lamentable are those times, and pitiable is that society, where this disposition reigns. Consider, I beg you,

***~~II. The danger attendant on it—~~***

***~~1. Consider the danger to those who are under the influence of inordinate self love—~~***

There is no evil which will not find a ready access to their minds; nor is there any situation in which they will not betray their selfish propensities. Whether in civil or social life, they will render themselves hated and despised. Towards the *state*, they will be always full of murmurs and complaints. And, in their fellowship with their *families*and *neighbors*, they will be occasions of pain to all around them. They will be displeased with every person that stands in any respect in competition with them; and will quarrel with everything that militates in the least degree against their favorite propensity.

In all their transactions in business they will be straining to gain some undue advantage, and will make the minutest differences subjects for dispute. See what the Apostle connects with this character: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [2 Timothy 3:2-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.2-4)."

It is not necessary, indeed, that all these evil qualities would be combined in the same person: but there is in self-love a tendency to produce them, so far as a person's circumstances are calculated to call them forth. Nor will there be found in such persons any redeeming quality, or anything to compensate for these evil dispositions. *Their selfishness so engrosses their minds, as to render them incapable of any noble exertion*, either in a way of piety or benevolence. The lover of self will love none else, at least not in such a degree as to make any great sacrifice either for God or man.

***~~2. Consider the danger of inordinate self love to the cause of Christ in the world—~~***

It is granted that a man who is "a lover of his own self" may be instructed in the truths of religion, and observant of its *forms*: "He may have a *form*of godliness; but he will be destitute of its power." Nor is there any great hope of ever benefitting him by the ministry of the Gospel. The word preached either sinks not into his mind at all, or, if sown in his heart, is "choked with thorns and briers, so as to bring forth no fruit to perfection." Nor is this all the evil that accrues from his hateful dispositions. He sets others against the Gospel; and "causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of," and "the very name of God to be blasphemed."

Besides, by his spirit and conduct he stirs up corruption in all around him; and even foments in them, by re-action, the very dispositions exercised by himself. Hence, instead of unity in the Church, there will be dissension; and the minister will derive nothing but grief from those over whom he ought rather to rejoice. This I apprehend to be the primary idea in the Apostle's mind, when he calls the times, of which he speaks, "perilous," that is, troublesome, grievous, and perplexing. And certainly it must go ill with any Church where such characters abound.

***~~We may see, then, what is mainly to be looked to:~~***

***~~1. In estimating our own character—~~***

I would not undervalue religious opinions: but they are of no worth, if they are not productive of suitable dispositions and conduct. Do not then inquire, whether you have attained a scriptural creed, and "a form of godliness;" but whether "the truth has made you free;" *free from selfish principles and selfish habits*. The man whose heart is right with God will account nothing of any value, any further than it can be improved for the honor of God and the good of man. Even life itself is held by him only as a victim ready to be sacrificed, whenever a proper occasion shall call for it.

See how the Apostle Paul acted: he accounted not his life dear to him: on the contrary, if called to lay it down for his brethren, he regarded it as an occasion, not of grief, but of joy [Philippians 2:17-18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17-18). Ah! brethren, see how much you have acquired of that spirit; and how much you possess of "the mind that was in Christ Jesus, who, when possessed of all the glory and felicity of Heaven, emptied himself of it all for you; and for your benefit became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! [Philippians 2:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.5-8)."

*Self*has by nature wholly occupied your minds. The proper effect of the Gospel is, to root out that hateful quality, and to fill your souls with love both to God and man. Let this, then, serve you as a test whereby to try your state; and assure yourselves, brethren, that a work of grace is no further wrought within you than this great change is accomplished.

***~~2. In selecting our companions and friends—~~***

Paul guards you particularly on this head: "Men will be lovers of their own selves.…from such turn away, verse 5." So say I, my brethren: "From such turn away." You can get no good from such men; nor can you hope to do any good to them: and your whole fellowship with them will be productive only of pain. As Solomon says, "Make no friendship with an angry man, lest you learn his ways, and get a snare to your soul, [Proverbs 22:24-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 22.24-25);" so I would say in reference to a selfish man.

He alone will be a source of comfort and benefit to you, who is divested of self, and who lives for God, and lays himself out for the good of man. That is an honorable character, worthy to be esteemed; and an useful character, from whom you may hope to derive much benefit; and a blessed character, with whom you may hope to spend a happy eternity. If you find such a one, take him to your bosom: and be thankful that, in this poor vain world, God has raised up to you such a treasure as this, that may well be dear to you even as your own soul.

***~~#2252~~***

***~~THE FORM AND POWER OF GODLINESS~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 3:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.5)~~***

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

THERE were, even in the Apostolic ages, many awful declensions from piety and sound religion: but in the last days we expect they will prevail to a far greater extent. Even at the present day, a thorough acquaintance with what is called the religious world will bring to our minds many sad characters, who do not indeed fully answer to the description given in the preceding context, but in many respects approximate to it. It is not, however, my intention to take the whole of the character here portrayed; but only the last trait of it, which I have selected for our consideration at this time.

Let me, then:

***~~I. Unfold the character that is here drawn—~~***

***~~They "have a form of godliness"—~~***

*By "godliness," I understand an entire devotion of the soul to God.* This must, of necessity, have *forms*and *services*wherein it must display itself: for, circumstanced as we are in the world, it is impossible to serve God without forms. The reading of the Scriptures, the attending on divine ordinances, the duties of family worship, and of secret prayer—are all *forms*, in and by which vital godliness must display itself.

Now many have, in these respects, the form of godliness: they live in the external discharge of these duties: they are conscious that without an observance of these things they could have no credit whatever for true godliness; and therefore they fulfill their duties in these respects; and then flatter themselves that they have performed all that is required of them.

***~~But they deny its power—~~***

As for real delight in God, notwithstanding all their profession of religion, they are strangers to it. *Their prayers are a mere service of the lip and knee; their praises are no other than cold, unmeaning acknowledgments; and the whole service of God, in the Church, the family, and the closet, is nothing but "a form"—a lamp without oil, a body without the soul.* Nor does godliness pervade their souls, so as to produce the mind that was in Christ, or to transform them into God's image. They seem not to think that religion is to operate to such an extent as this; and that, provided they observe the outward duties of religion—the tempers and dispositions of the soul may safely be overlooked. Hence their self-love, their covetousness, and their numberless evil dispositions, retain their full ascendency, and reign without control. In fact, "they have a name to live; but in reality they are dead!"

And now let me,

***~~II. Show in what estimation it should be held—~~***

The Apostle says, "From such turn away." To explain this, I will show,

***~~1. In what sense we are not to turn away from such characters—~~***

We are not to turn away from them in *contempt*. That were highly unfitting to us; who, if we differ at all, owe the whole of that difference to the distinguishing grace of God. And it would be most offensive to God, who cannot endure such hateful pride. If we say to any man, "Stand off; I am holier than you!" then God will regard us as "a smoke in his nostrils, a fire that burns all the day, [Isaiah 65:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 65.5)."

Nor are we to turn away in *indifference*, as though we cared not what became of them.

We should rather mourn over them, as Paul in [Romans 9:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.1-2); and weep over them, as our Lord did over the murderous Jerusalem. Nor would we turn away from them in despair; for God is able to save them; and he will hear prayer in their behalf.

***~~2. In what sense we are to turn away from them—~~***

We are not, on any account, to make them our close companions. We would in this respect turn away from them, for *their*sake, for our *own*sake, for the *Church's*sake, and for the *world's*sake. If we associate with them, we shall make them think well of themselves; when, by a befitting departure from them, we may bring them to a measure of self-diffidence and compunction. If we closely associate with them, we shall be in danger of drinking into their spirit, and of learning their evil ways. We shall have our zeal and ardor damped by them; who, instead of rising with us, would soon bring us down to a level with themselves.

By associating with them, also, we would lead our weaker brethren to conceive that there is no evil in their ways: and we would justify the world in all their censures of religion, when, for the sake of some ungodly professors, they decry all serious religion, and represent all the servants of God as hypocrites.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have not even the form of godliness—~~***

It is a lamentable truth, that the greater part of nominal Christians live altogether "without God in the world." Had they been born Pagans or Muhammadans, they would not, as far as Jehovah is concerned, have differed in any essential particular. Now then, I ask, if those who have a form of godliness may yet be in a state so hateful to God, what must be the condition of those who are destitute even of the form? Can it be that they would be approved of the Lord? They will indeed, and with great confidence too, affirm, that they have no ground to fear: but they awfully deceive their own souls: for to them does that declaration of God belong, in its utmost force, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God! [Psalm 9:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 9.17)." O that they would be wise, and consider their latter end, before it be too late!

***~~2. Those who have the form, but not the power of godliness—~~***

To what purpose is it that you "*profess*to know God, if in works you deny him?" In truth, if you will look into the Scriptures, you will find that real godliness is a far different thing from what you are accustomed to think it.

Look at the *precepts*—do they extend only to forms?

Examine the *promises*—are they limited to forms?

See the examples of piety—do they rise no higher than to mere formal services?

The whole of God's blessed word declares, that God must "be worshiped in Spirit and in truth;" and that the heart, the whole heart, must be consecrated to his service. Anything short of this is a mere mockery, and a fatal delusion.

***~~3. Those who have both the form and power of godliness—~~***

It is well to combine the two—yet to keep them both in their proper place. We must not elevate either, to the exclusion of the other. As we must not rest in forms, so neither must we rise above them, as though the eminence of our piety superseded the use of them. All external duties, of whatever kind, must be observed: only we must take care that we be filled with the Spirit, in the use of them.

Forms are like Jacob's ladder, by which you are to ascend to God, and God will descend to you. But see to it that your access to God be daily more near, and your enjoyment of him more sweet. See to it that you show forth daily, with increasing evidence, the efficacy of his grace, and the beauty of his religion. Let your whole spirit and temper evince the power of godliness in your souls; and then not only shall all the saints turn unto you in love, but God himself will embrace you as the objects of his tenderest affection.

***~~#2253~~***

***~~A LACK OF PROFITING BY THE GOSPEL, CENSURED~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 3:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.7)~~***

"Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

FROM what we know of the excellency of the Gospel, we would naturally conclude that it can never produce anything but good. And this is true. But, as the *law*, notwithstanding it is good, is sometimes, through the corruption of our nature, an occasion of evil, [Romans 7:5](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.5); [Romans 7:8-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 7.8-13). Just so, the *Gospel*often gives occasion to the corruptions of our hearts to manifest themselves to a very awful extent.

Who, for instance, would imagine that persons calling themselves Christians would be liable to the charge brought against them in all the preceding context, verses 1-7, and answer in any degree to the character there drawn? Yet it is a melancholy fact that some did answer to that character, even in the apostolic age; and, at different periods of the Church, multitudes have fully corresponded with the description there given. Yes, and not only corresponded with it themselves, but labored also with zeal and industry to infuse into others the same malignant spirit, and taken advantage of those who were less instructed, or more easily wrought upon, to propagate it to the utmost of their power.

There is reason for thankfulness, that the Christian Church is not much agitated by such turbulent and unchristian teachers at this time: but still the spirit exists to a considerable extent among some classes of Christians; who, while they are running after every new preacher, exactly answer to the character here given of them, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

To counteract this great evil, I will endeavor to show:

***~~I. What little improvement many make of the Gospel which they hear—~~***

The Gospel, in this age, has acquired a considerable degree of popularity; so that, wherever it is preached, it is attended by multitudes who previously had shown no regard whatever for religion. Yes, to such a degree does it interest many, that their whole souls appear to be engaged in an attention to it.

Yet of these, not a few may be characterized by the words before us: they are "ever learning," losing no opportunity, whether in public or in private, of gratifying their thirst for spiritual instruction, and "yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," either in *principle*or in *practice*.

***~~1. In principle—~~***

Of those who indulge a spirit of scepticism, and who make all that they hear an occasion for calling in question the truth of God, it is not my intention to speak.

The persons alluded to in my text are rather those who take partial views of the Gospel; insisting on some particular truth, to the exclusion of many others; or espousing some great error, to the utter subversion of the whole Gospel. Such are those who deny:  
the corruption of human nature,  
the necessity of an atonement,  
the divinity of our blessed Lord,  
and the influences of the Holy Spirit.

Persons of this description find pleasure in nothing which does not foster their heretical opinions: and to diffuse their principles is as much their labor, as it was the labor of the Pharisees of old; who "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte," whom, by their hostility to the truth, they reduced to a still more abject condition than themselves.

Nor are Antinomian heretics less zealous, or less pernicious, than they. All the *fruits*of Christianity upon the spirit and temper are as much overlooked as if they were of no importance whatever to the soul.

But, not to speak of those who magnify any peculiar tenet to the neglect or exclusion of other truths, a great multitude of those who hear the Gospel get only a vague and indistinct view of it; discerning nothing of its transcendent excellency, as displaying the glory of the Divine perfections, or as suiting the necessities of fallen man: so that, amidst all their zeal for the Gospel, they never get their souls duly impressed with it as "the wisdom of God in a mystery," or "the power of God unto salvation."

I grant that a truly correct and systematic view of Christianity is not to be expected of those who are altogether illiterate, and whose opportunities of investigating truth are very contracted: but still, the crude notions which many form of it clearly prove that they have never received the Gospel aright; because, if they had really been taught of God, they could not but discern its fundamental truths; since, "what God has hidden from the wise and prudent, he does clearly and most intelligibly reveal to babes."

***~~2. In practice—~~***

Truly it is very humiliating to see how little the preached Gospel answers the end for which it is delivered. It is intended to transform men into "the image of God in righteousness and true holiness:" but on how few does it produce this saving change! Many love the preaching of the truth, like *Ezekiel's hearers*, who heard him with delight, "as one that played well upon a musical instrument:" but, like them, they still retain all their former lusts, "their heart goes after their covetousness" and worldly-mindedness as much as ever; and their tempers are as unsubdued as ever. See them year after year: their besetting sins are still their besetting sins, with very little, if any, diminution in their power and ascendency.

It is painful to think how many satisfy themselves with embracing the *doctrines*of Christianity, without experiencing its *sanctifying effects*. Would to God there were no room for this complaint! but indeed it is so: and there are many professors of religion who are as much under the dominion of unhallowed tempers as if they were utter strangers to divine truth: and, in speaking peace to themselves, they fearfully "deceive their own souls:" for, whatever they may think, "their religion is altogether vain! [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)."

But there are others, who, though not left under the dominion of any particular sin, are still liable to the censure in my text; because they never attain that knowledge of the truth which would introduce them into the full liberty of the children of God. They have heard and learned of men: but they have never "heard and learned of the Father, as the truth is in Jesus, [Ephesians 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.20-21). [John 6:45](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 6.45)." See what the truth is, as it was revealed by the Lord Jesus, and as exemplified in his life and conduct: such is that which we also ought to receive and experience: and it is a shame to us, if, after having been instructed in the Gospel for months and years, we do not, in some good measure at least, attain unto it.

But many, "who, for the time that they have been instructed, ought to have been capable of instructing others—yet need again to be initiated into the very first principles of the oracles of God, [Hebrews 5:12-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 5.12-14)," and "to be fed with milk, rather than with meat, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4," which their feeble powers are not able to digest.

Let me, then, go on to show,

***~~II. Whence their lack of proficiency proceeds—~~***

Many more reasons might be assigned for it than we shall have time to notice. All the different classes which we have mentioned may trace their ignorance to causes in some respect peculiar to the class to which they belong. On the other hand, there are some causes common to them all, which therefore it will be more proper for me to specify.

Men come not to the knowledge of the truth:

***~~1. Because the obstacles to knowledge are not removed from their minds—~~***

The love of this world, and of the things thereof, casts a thick veil over the human mind, and incapacitates it for the reception of divine truth. It is like a film over the eyes, which either distorts objects, or renders the vision of them very indistinct. Our blessed Lord says, "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)." In the parable of the Sower, the cares and pleasures of life are represented as choking the word, and rendering it unfruitful, [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22); and, until the ground has been in a measure cleared from thorns and briers, it is in vain to hope that any instruction can avail for the renovation and salvation of the soul.

***~~2. Because the means of attaining it are only partially used—~~***

Men will hear the Word with an almost insatiable avidity; but if you follow them to their own homes, you will not find them *meditating*upon what they have heard, with an application of it to their own souls; nor *praying*to God to render it effectual for the ends for which it has been delivered. When they have heard the Word, they think they have done their duty; but meditation and prayer are not a whit less necessary for the improvement of the mind, than either written or oral instruction.

This is particularly noticed by Solomon, who tells us, that we must add prayer to study; and not only search, but "lift up our voice for understanding," if ever we would attain it, [Proverbs 2:1-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 2.1-6); and*if we will not use every effort to improve what we have heard, it is no wonder that the instruction we have received fails of conveying any saving benefit to our souls*.

***~~3. Because the knowledge acquired is not conscientiously improved—~~***

Men, under the word, are made to see their own faces in a looking-glass: but, having no desire to comply with its requisitions, they soon "forget what manner of persons they are, [James 1:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.23-24)." If they would follow the instruction which they receive, and take it as a light to search the inmost recesses of their souls, and as a touchstone whereby to try their experience before God—then what progress would they make in the divine life! How clear would their views become! How eminent their attainments!

But they hear not for this end. The Gospel is not contemplated by them in this view. The ordinances are attended by them more for the amusement of their minds, than for the edification of their souls. And hence, though they are "ever learning," they never acquire that self-knowledge that shall abase them in the dust, or that knowledge of God that shall assimilate them to his likeness.

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who have not yet attained the knowledge of the truth—~~***

Consider your responsibility for so abusing the privileges you enjoy. Were it an earthly science which you could not dive into or comprehend, then you might plead your incapacity to understand the things submitted to you. But no man is too weak to comprehend divine truth, *if*God "opens the eyes of his understanding to understand it." Seek, then, to be taught of God; and you shall not be left in darkness. There are, indeed, two keys of knowledge, which you must obtain; and they are, *integrity*and *contrition*.

Get but "a honest and good heart," with a soul truly humbled before God; and you shall be "guided into all truth," and "be made wise unto everlasting salvation."

***~~2. Those who think they have acquired it—~~***

Remember, it is not by its clearness, but by its efficacy, that you are to judge of the knowledge you have acquired. Remember, too, that you are still to be "ever learning." Never, in this world, will you have arrived at a full knowledge of the truth—your views of it will be increasing through all eternity. Of its sanctifying efficacy, also, you must have a progressive experience to the last hour of your lives. Be careful, then, that you "grow in *grace*, as well as in the *knowledge*of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ;" so shall you, before long, "see him as he is, and be like him for ever!"

***~~#2254~~***

***~~PAUL'S CHARACTER~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 3:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.10)~~***

"You however, you have fully known all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance."

IN every age of the world there have been persons adverse to the truth of God, and actively engaged in frustrating his designs for the salvation of men. In the days of Moses, Jannes and Jambres sought to harden the heart of Pharaoh: and in the apostolic age, many seducers arose to draw away from the faith those who had embraced the Gospel of Christ. Against their influence Paul guards his son Timothy: and that this young minister might be the better able to distinguish them, the Apostle reminds him of "all that he had heard and seen in him."

The word which, in the text, is translated, "you have fully known," is in the margin translated, "you have been a diligent follower of." And from this little diversity of construction, I shall take occasion to propose to you the character of the Apostle for your investigation, that you may "fully know it;" and for your imitation, that you may "diligently follow it."

I propose it, then,

***~~I. For your investigation—~~***

Take notice, then, what was:

***~~1. His doctrine—~~***

This was uniformly an exhibition of the Lord Jesus Christ, as crucified for the sins of men, and as effecting thereby our reconciliation with God. On this subject he maintained the utmost jealousy; allowing nothing, either in himself or others, to obscure it. When Peter himself had, by undue concessions, endangered the purity of this doctrine, Paul reproved him before the whole Church, [Galatians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 2.14). And if an angel from Heaven had attempted to establish any doctrine in opposition to this, he was prepared to denounce him as accursed, [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9). All that he preached, either led to this doctrine, or arose out of it; for "he had determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified."

***~~2. His spirit—~~***

This was in perfect accordance with the doctrine which he preached. "The whole manner of his life" was regulated by it; and marked a determined "purpose" to live only for the Savior in whom he believed, and to put forth all his abilities for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ. In the discharge of this duty he had shown the utmost *fidelity*. This is here the import of the word translated "faith" concealing nothing that could be profitable to his hearers, but boldly "declaring to them the whole counsel of God." He knew that, "in every place, bonds and afflictions awaited him:" but "none of these things could move him:" neither did he count his life dear to him, if only he might discharge, to the satisfaction of his own conscience, the high office which had been committed to him. This was his uniform course of life, from the first moment of his conversion: and all who knew him could bear witness to it.

***~~3. His conduct—~~***

*His zeal for God was duly blended with love to men.*He bore with all, however weak, however ignorant, however perverse, they were: nor could the most cruel treatment divert him from his purpose. In the midst of all the injuries he sustained, he still prosecuted his labors of love with all imaginable "long-suffering, and charity, and patience," "becoming all things to all men, if by any means he might save some;" and accounting it rather a matter of thanksgiving than of grief, if he would be called to pour forth his blood as an offering upon the sacrifice and service of his people's faith, [Philippians 2:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 2.17). O that men would study this character, and seek to have it embodied in their own experience! For this end I will propose it:

***~~II. For your imitation—~~***

Paul himself says, "Be followers of me, as I am of Christ." And so would I say to you, as in my text: Be diligent followers of him in the above respects.

***~~1. Embrace Paul's principles—~~***

It is observable, that the Apostle himself takes for granted that every true Christian will resemble him in his views of divine truth: for, having spoken of the sufferings which he had been called to endure, he adds, "Yes, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus *will*suffer persecution." "The living godly in Christ Jesus" marks at once "his doctrine and his manner of life."*"A life of faith in the Son of God" is that which characterizes every Christian under Heaven*. Yet it is not the faith alone which so distinguishes him, but its operation on the heart and life: it is "the living godly in Christ Jesus." The *faith*and *practice*must go together. If separated, they are of no value: *faith is of no value, if not productive of works; and works are of no value, if not proceeding from faith*. I wish this to be clearly and fully understood. In truth, there is not a person in the universe who can act up to this high standard, unless he lives under the influence of faith. *Nothing but a sense of redeeming love can constrain any man to such an entire surrender of his soul to God*. But, on the other hand, no man who truly believes in Christ will ever stop short of it. Be therefore, followers of Paul in this respect.

***~~2. Expect Paul's trials—~~***

We are ready to think, that sufferings for righteousness' sake were the portion of the Apostles alone, or of the primitive Christians: but they are, and will inevitably be, the portion of all believers; as Paul tells us in the words which we have just cited, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Christians may be ever so wise, and ever so prudent, and ever so blameless in the whole of their conduct—but they never can escape persecution of some kind. They may not, indeed, be called to endure the sufferings inflicted on Paul; through the tender mercy of our God, that measure of persecution is now prevented by the laws, which afford protection to all classes of the community. But *hatred, and contempt, and obloquy, will attach to all who resemble our blessed Lord, and to all who tread in the steps of the Apostle Paul*.*It is in vain for any one to hope that he shall be a follower of Christ without having a cross to bear*, for, "if men called the Master of the house *Beelzebub*, much more will they those of his household." In this respect, therefore, as well as in his religious opinions and feelings, every one of you must prepare to resemble this bright pattern of all that was great and good.

***~~3. Maintain Paul's conduct—~~***

Imitate his zeal for God, and let it be seen that you live only for God. Let your whole manner of life be consistent. Let your determined purpose be manifest. Let it be evident to all, that you have but one wish, one desire. And let nothing under Heaven cause you to turn aside, even for a moment, from the path of duty. "Be steadfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."

At the same time, imitate his love to man. Whatever treatment you meet with in the world, be long-suffering and loving towards all; and "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." In all this, let your conduct be so uniform, that you may appeal to those who have the nearest access to you, and opportunities of observing you at all times, that this is the constant tenor of your way.

It is an easy matter to be Christians in public: but, to preserve a perfect consistency in the whole of your deportment in private, requires an unintermitted watchfulness, and a measure of grace that is possessed by few. But, indeed, I must say, that it is by such *fruits*alone that the goodness of the *tree*can be discerned. May God enable all of us so to walk, that we may be able to make our appeal, both to God and man, without fear and contradiction; and to the praise of that God who has wrought all our good works within us!

***~~#2255~~***

***~~THE TRUE GOSPEL HATED~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.12)~~***

"All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

WE are apt to imagine that persecution for righteousness' sake was peculiar to the apostolic age: but Paul, reminding Timothy of the various trials which he himself had endured, tells him, that *the Gospel would continue to give offense, wherever it was faithfully preached, or consistently professed*; and that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer persecution." Now, that we may enter into the true import of these words, and see their full scope, I will show,

***~~I. What is the life which is here described—~~***

The Apostle does not say, "All who will live godly:" for then his assertion would not be true. A conformity to the law, under which men live, will by no means give offense to those around them. Heathen, of every class and of every caste, will admire those who are most scrupulously observant of the rites prescribed by their religious system.

The *Pharisees*were held in the highest estimation on account of the self-denying ordinances which they practiced. And *papists*are canonized for their penances and pilgrimages, and self-imposed austerities. Even among us, an exact attention to outward forms and to moral duties will gain for any man the admiration of all around him. This is not the life which will, in the general, expose us to persecution, whatever it may do under some particular circumstances.

The life that will involve us certainly in persecution, is, "the living godly in Christ Jesus;" that is, the depending on him for all the grace whereby to serve our God, and the giving to him the glory of all that we do. This is what the Gospel invariably requires: and this will still give the very same offense which it gave in former days.

This it was which so incensed Cain against his brother *Abel*. Abel offered a burnt-offering as an acknowledgment of his dependence on the sacrifice of Christ, which would, in due time, be offered: and God's attested approbation of that offering stirred up in Cain the murderous purpose to destroy his brother's life. Paul, and all the rest of the Apostles, suffered on the same account, [1 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 4.10). And at this day, wherever that religion is professed and exemplified, the very same hatred prevails against it. Other doctrines cause no divisions: but wherever salvation by faith in the atoning blood of Christ is proclaimed, there is a division among the people, "some saying of the preacher: He is a good man; others saying: No, but he deceives the people."

If this be so, it is of importance to show, in reference to this doctrine,

***~~II. Why the Gospel gives such universal offense—~~***

It offends:

***~~1. Because the Gospel is so incomprehensible in its nature—~~***

A preacher of Christ crucified, while he calls men to the performance of good works, will maintain most strenuously the impossibility of our being ever justified by them, either in whole or in part. He requires all to seek acceptance with God through faith alone. Now, people in general neither do, nor can, comprehend this. If we are not to be justified by our works in any measure or degree, why need we perform them? Thus they stumble at that very stumbling-stone which offended the Jews of old, and caused them to reject the salvation which the less moral Gentiles most thankfully accepted, [Romans 9:30-33](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 9.30-33).

***~~2. Because the Gospel is so humiliating in its requirements—~~***

What! must the most exemplary Pharisee, who has been "blameless concerning the righteousness of the law," renounce all his own righteousness, and come down upon the very same ground with tax collectors and harlots, and "enter in at the strait gate" of repentance and faith, as much as the most abandoned of mankind? Who can endure to hear that, or make up his mind to comply with it? What! after having done so many things, must I seek acceptance solely through the righteousness of another imputed to me? Such views were, in the days of old, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, [1 Corinthians 1:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.23);" and such will they be judged by all, who are not truly enlightened by the Spirit of God.

***~~3. Because the Gospel is so exclusive in its scope—~~***

If the Apostle would have allowed circumcision to be retained by the Jews as a joint ground of hope before God, "the offense of the cross would have altogether ceased." Or if he would have allowed the name of Jesus to be enrolled among the gods of Greece and Rome, the Gentiles would have entirely renounced their opposition to him. But he required that the whole world would abandon their various grounds of hope; and trust *exclusively*in "the Lord Jesus Christ, as their wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He declared, that there was no way to Heaven but through Christ; and that "if an angel from Heaven would preach any other doctrine than this, he must he accursed! [Galatians 1:8-9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 1.8-9)."

This is the testimony which we also bear; and which every one who receives the Gospel must submit to. And can we wonder that this rigid and immoveable purpose would give offense? Can we wonder, that, when we require every man to bow to this doctrine, and inflexibly to adhere to it, even though he were threatened with death for his fidelity—can we wonder, I say, that men would rise up against us, and endeavor to extinguish the light which we set before them? It cannot be but that such authoritative demands would give offense to those who have not obtained grace to comply with them.

***~~Let me then address,~~***

***~~1. Those who are intimidated by the opposition made to them—~~***

"Do not fear those who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell!" "If you will not lay down your life for Christ, you cannot be his disciples." We cannot lower those terms. Christ died, under the wrath of God, for you: and it is but a small sacrifice, in comparison, that he requires you to make for him.

***~~2. Those who set themselves against the truth of God—~~***

You can never prevail, in fighting against God: or, if you prevail in any particular instance, you only aggravate so much the more your own guilt and condemnation. It were better for you to have a millstone fastened to your neck, and be cast into the depths of the sea, than that you would offend one of Christ's little ones!

***~~3. Those who are enabled to maintain their steadfastness in the midst of an ungodly world—~~***

Perhaps you have suffered somewhat for the Lord. But have you found any cause to regret it? Have not the consolations of Christ abounded above all your afflictions? You may possibly have yet more to suffer for his sake. But, for your encouragement, he has declared, that, "while he will deny those who deny him, he will admit all who suffer with him to reign with him in glory for ever and ever! [2 Timothy 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 2.12)." "Be then faithful unto death; and expect assuredly, at his hands, a crown of life!"

***~~#2256~~***

***~~THE EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF TIMOTHY~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 3:15](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.15)~~***

"From a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

IN seasons of heavy trial it is of great advantage to have had a long acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures and the principles of the gospel. A novice is apt to be astonished, and to wonder that a change so favorable as that which he has experienced, ("from a brier to a myrtle-tree, [Isaiah 55:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 55.13),") would excite nothing but enmity in those around him. But a person conversant with the Word of God, and established with his grace, has counted the cost: he knows what he is to expect: he knows what others have experienced before him; and the very storms which threaten his existence, serve only to confirm him in the truths he has professed.

In this view Paul encourages Timothy to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, and to "continue in the things he had learned," without being intimidated by persecutors, or deceived by seducers, verse 12-15.

From his words we shall consider:

***~~I. The early knowledge of Timothy—~~***

***~~He was acquainted with the Holy Scriptures—~~***

By "the Holy Scriptures" we must understand, not merely the words, but the doctrines, of Scripture. Doubtless Timothy was acquainted with our fall in Adam, and the consequent depravity of our nature. He knew also the true scope of all the sacrifices as pointing to that Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the whole world. Nor could he be ignorant of the necessity of divine influences, in order to a renovation of our hearts, and a restoration of the soul to the Divine image.

But it was not a *theoretical*knowledge even of these things which would have satisfied the mind of the Apostle: it must have been a *practical*and *experimental*knowledge of them. He must have felt and bewailed the plague of his own heart: he must have relied on Jesus as his only hope: he must have been renewed in the spirit of his mind by the power of the Holy Spirit: in short, he must have been "a new creature in Christ Jesus," or else the Apostle would never have thought Timothy's knowledge a proper ground of commendation.

***~~These he knew from a child—~~***

It is generally thought that children are incapable of understanding the mysterious truths of the Gospel. We readily acknowledge that these truths exceed the capacity, not of children only, but of the wisest philosopher; for "the natural man cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14)." But God can give a spiritual discernment to children, as well as to adults; and, supposing this to be given, there is nothing in the Gospel which a child may not understand as well as an adult.

Children may have their affections exercised on things proper to call them forth.

If God reveals to them that they are *sinners*, and liable to his wrath, they may fear his displeasure.

If he shows them that he has provided *salvation*for them in Christ Jesus, they may hope in his mercy.

If he reveal his pardoning love to their souls, they may rejoice in his salvation.

The difficulty lies, not in feeling suitable emotions, but in having a practical and experimental conviction of those truths which are calculated to excite them. This conviction none but God can give; and he is as able to give it to one as to another. Indeed God does prefer those who are babes, in knowledge at least, [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.26-28), and sometimes also in years; for David says, that "God had ordained strength, and perfected praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, [Psalm 8:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 8.2), with [Matthew 21:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 21.16);" and our blessed Lord made it a matter of joy and thanksgiving, that his heavenly Father had "hid divine things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes, [Matthew 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 11.25)."

Do we desire instances of early conversion? *Josiah*sought the Lord at eight years of age [2 Chronicles 34:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Chron 34.3). *Samuel*was devoted to him at a still earlier period of life [1 Samuel 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.18); [1 Samuel 2:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Sam 2.26). But, if there were no other instance upon record, it would be sufficient that we are told, that Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures "from a child."

We shall, with the Apostle, commend Timothy, if we consider,

***~~II. The excellency of that knowledge—~~***

***~~It was "able to make him wise"—~~***

Wisdom is that which is most of all coveted, and for the attainment of which no expense or trouble are accounted too great. Now *the wisdom contained in the inspired volume infinitely surpasses all that can be collected from other books*. It shows us what we were in our original formation, and what we now are. It shows us wherein the chief good consists, and how we may attain it. It shows us everything, whether good or evil, in its true light, and enables us to form the very same judgment respecting it that God himself does. It teaches us how to fill every station and relation of life to the greatest possible advantage. It even draws aside the veil of Heaven itself, and exhibits to us God in all his glorious perfections. It reveals to us the three persons of the Godhead, co-operating in the work of man's salvation, and executing distinct offices for our eternal good. What is all the boasted wisdom of philosophers, when compared with this?

***~~It was able to make him "wise unto salvation"—~~***

*All wisdom that stops short of this is only splendid folly!* How vain will the wisdom of philosophers or statesmen appear, when once we are entered into the eternal world! Nothing will then be of any value, but that which led us to the enjoyment of God, and to a fitness for glory. Then the excellency of Scripture knowledge will appear in all its brightness!

But it must be inquired, How is it that the Scripture effects this? Is there anything meritorious in the knowledge of its truths; or anything which by its own power can save the soul?

The text informs us respecting these things, and points out the precise way in which the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. Christ is the only Savior of sinful man. His obedience unto death is the only ground of our hope.

But how are we to be savingly interested in him? There is but one way; and that is, by faith. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life."

From hence then it may be seen how the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. They reveal Christ to us as the Savior of the world. They commend him to us under every image that can convey an idea of his suitableness to our wants, and his sufficiency for our necessities. They hold forth the promises of God to those who believe in Christ; and encourage us by every possible argument to rely upon him. In this manner they work faith in our hearts: and by that faith we become savingly interested in all that Christ has done and suffered for us.

Thus, in ascribing our salvation to the knowledge of the Scriptures, we do not derogate from the honor of Christ; since it is only by revealing his work and offices to us, and by leading us to depend upon him, that they become effectual for this blessed end. But at the same time we put an honor on the Scriptures, to which no other book has the smallest claim. Other books may be *channels*for conveying divine knowledge; but the Bible alone is the *fountain*from which it flows. The knowledge therefore of the Bible is of supreme excellence; and the earliest possible attainment of it is of unrivaled importance.

This being a very instructive record, I propose to show,

***~~III. The instruction which his attainment of it conveys to us—~~***

Surely it affords us matter:

***~~1. For inquiry respecting ourselves—~~***

I ask not, whether the same thing can be affirmed of you, as having taken place from your early childhood; but whether it is true concerning you at this moment? Do you know the Holy Scriptures, and the great leading doctrines contained in them? Do you know them *practically*and *experimentally*, so as really to feel your lost and undone state; and to be fleeing to Christ as your only refuge; and to be devoting yourselves to him as his redeemed people?

Have you in relation to these things the very mind of God, bringing you into a conformity to his blessed will? Possess what you may, you have not attained to true wisdom, if you possess not this state of mind. No other wisdom than this will avail to your salvation: and, if you lack this wisdom, you will, to all eternity, lament and bewail your folly!

I entreat you then to examine carefully whether you be "living a life of faith in the Son of God, who has loved you and given himself for you?" Is your daily walk with God such, that the Apostle Paul would pronounce with confidence respecting you the testimony which he thus confidently bore to his beloved Timothy? Dear brethren, I beseech you, "prove your own selves;" and pray God to set his seal to the truth of this change as wrought in you, and as exemplified in the whole of your life and conduct!

***~~2. For direction respecting others—~~***

Parents, does not this record speak forcibly to you? Here you have an evidence that children are capable of receiving all the blessings of salvation, supposing they be taught by you, and taught of God also. Without the Divine blessing, even Paul might plant, and Apollos water, in vain. But the labors of a Lois and an Eunice, [2 Timothy 1:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 1.6), shall not be lost, if God is pleased to accompany them with his Holy Spirit to the soul. Remember, a responsibility attaches to you for their souls, similar to that which belongs to your minister in reference to your souls. I pray God, that your children may not have to reproach you in the day of judgment, and to trace it to you, that they were left to perish for lack of knowledge.

And, young people, tell me whether you do not envy Timothy the distinction here given him? Have you not in your own consciences a conviction, that his was true wisdom, and that in attaining the knowledge of salvation through the crucified Redeemer, you best answer the end of your being. Lose not then the present opportunity, before the cares and pleasures of life have hardened your hearts, and seared your consciences as with a hot iron.

To people of every age this record speaks forcibly, and says, Labor by all possible means to convey to those around you this knowledge which proved so great a blessing to this happy youth.

***~~#2257~~***

***~~THE EXCELLENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES~~***

**[2 Timothy 3:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 3.16-17)**

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

*Little do men in general think how much they are indebted to God for the possession of the Holy Scriptures.*This was the exclusive privilege of the Jewish nation for fifteen hundred years: and it elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth. Their chief advantage, as Paul tells us, was, that "unto them were committed the Oracles of God." In the knowledge of these Timothy was early instructed; and "by these he was made wise unto salvation." Doubtless the way of salvation was not so clearly marked in them, as in the Christian Scriptures: but still, to any one who reads the writings of Moses and the Prophets with humility and prayer, there was every needful instruction both in relation to faith and practice. The whole Mosaic dispensation taught Timothy this great lesson, that he must be saved by a vicarious sacrifice; and all the prophets directed his views to that great sacrifice, which would, in due time, be offered by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is of these Scriptures that Paul speaks in my text; and in the commendation which he bestows upon them, we see,

***~~I. Their true origin—~~***

***~~The Scriptures of the Old Testament were "given by inspiration of God"—~~***

Of this there is abundant evidence, in the very nature of the things which they contain. What could *Moses*have known about the creation of the world, of the fall of man, and of the facts relating to the deluge—if they had not been revealed to him by God? What could he have known of the nature and perfections of God; or of the means by which fallen man was to be restored to his favor; or of the Prophet who would in due time be raised up from among his brethren, to be, like him, a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Redeemer, a Governor? How could he have ever given so perfect a code of laws as those contained in the Ten Commandments; and so complicated a system of ceremonial laws, that would shadow forth, in every particular, the work and offices of the Messiah, together with the privileges and enjoyments of his redeemed people?

Or if we suppose a finite creature endued with wisdom sufficient for such a work (which yet cannot for a moment be imagined), it cannot he conceived that he would impose his own inventions on the world as a revelation from God: for if he was a *good*man, he would never have attempted so impiously to deceive the world; nor, if he was *wicked*enough to execute so criminal a project, would he ever have given so holy a law, which condemned even the smallest approach to such impiety, and gave the perpetrator of it no hope of ever escaping the wrathful indignation of Almighty God? The miracles wrought by him are a farther confirmation of his divine mission, and of his being inspired of God to declare all which has been transmitted to us in his writings.

Respecting the *prophets*also, we may say, that their inspiration by God can admit of no doubt; since it was not possible for them, if uninspired, so minutely and harmoniously to foretell so many events, which all came to pass agreeably to their predictions.

***~~The same may be said in reference to the writers of the New Testament—~~***

While the *Apostles*and Evangelists always refer to the Old Testament as inspired by God, and declare, with one consent, that the writers of it delivered not mere opinions of their own, but "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, [2 Peter 1:19-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.19-21)," they profess to be themselves inspired by that same Spirit, in all that they declare; and they wrought miracles without number in confirmation of their word. *In what they wrote indeed, they expressed themselves, each in his own peculiar style, as any other writers would have done: but in the matter of what they wrote, they were inspired of God; and in the manner of expressing it they were preserved by that same Spirit from any error or mistake.*So that of the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, we may affirm, that God is the Author of them, and that every part of them has been "given by inspiration from him."

The Apostle proceeds to declare,

***~~II. Their primary use—~~***

This is expressed in four different terms; which yet may properly be comprehended in two. The Scriptures are profitable:

***~~1. For the establishment of sound doctrine—~~***

They declare all that is needful for us to know: and they lay down every "doctrine" of our holy religion with the utmost precision. At the same time, they enable us to "reprove," or, as the word imports, to refute, by the most convincing mode of argumentation, every error, which ignorant or conceited men may labor to maintain. There is such a perfect unity in the system of revelation, that you cannot overthrow one part, without overturning the whole.

Let the divinity of our Lord and Savior be denied, and you entirely destroy the doctrine of the atonement also.

Let the influences of the Holy Spirit be denied, and the transformation of the soul into the Divine image must fall with it.

Let the merit of good works be maintained, and the whole covenant of grace is annihilated.

There are indeed matters of less consequence, which are less clearly revealed, and respecting which persons of equal piety may differ: but in everything which is of fundamental importance, we find in the Scriptures the most abundant means of discovering truth, and of refuting error. To them we must on all occasions make our appeal, and by their testimony we must abide.

***~~2. For the securing of a holy practice—~~***

Innumerable evils prevail in the world: but every one of them is condemned in the inspired volume; while, at the same time, the ways of true piety are pointed out with clearness to all who desire to walk in them. *There is not so much as a secret evil of the heart which does not find "correction" there, nor any attainment of true righteousness in relation to which we do not find the most explicit "instruction."*The works of the flesh, and the fruits of the Spirit, are set in contrast with each other, and are portrayed with such exactness, that there is no room left for ignorance to anyone who will search the Scriptures, nor for mistake to any one that is truly upright before God.

From these immediate uses we may easily discern,

***~~III. Their ultimate design—~~***

To render men "perfect," is the great object of God, in all that he has revealed: and this the Scriptures are admirably calculated to effect; since they leave nothing lacking, either to ministers or others:

***~~1. For their instruction—~~***

We cannot conceive of any good work which a person instructed out of the Holy Scriptures is not fitted to perform.

Take him as "a man of God," discharging the ministerial office: he may learn from the Scriptures how to demean himself in the Church of God so wisely and so profitably, that nothing shall be lacking to the edification of his flock.

Or, take him as a private individual: take him in his secret walk with God: What does he need more than what is there contained? What can any man add to the directions there given, or to the examples that are there set before us? What further light can any creature in the universe desire? Take him in his conduct towards his fellow-creatures: What duty is there which is undefined? Let a person occupy any station, or sustain any relation of life, husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or subject, he will equally find such directions as shall leave him at no loss how to please God, or to approve himself to men.

***~~2. For their encouragement—~~***

There is not a motive capable of influencing the human mind which is not there suggested and enforced. Not only are the tremendous sanctions of Heaven and Hell set forth in order to work upon our hopes and fears, but all the wonders of redeeming love are there displayed in such majesty and splendor, that no person irradiated with their light can lack anything to increase their constraining influence.

Besides, the *promises*of God contained in this blessed book are so rich, so free, so full, that nothing can be added to them: nor can a man be in any circumstances whatever, wherein suitable provision is not made for his encouragement and support; so that he is not only "furnished for every good work," but assured of success in all that he attempts to execute. If he is called to act, he is "able to do all things through Christ who strengthens him." If he is called to suffer, he is made "more than conqueror through Him who loved him."

***~~Such then being the excellency of the Holy Scriptures, let every one of you set himself to discharge his duties in relation to them—~~***

***~~1. Refer everything to the Scriptures as your standard—~~***

Rest not in the opinions of men, whoever those men may be: but bring everything to the law and to the testimony: for, whoever they are, if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them, [Isaiah 8:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 8.20).

You cannot but know, that, both in relation to *faith*and *practice*, the most grievous errors abound. Bring therefore your opinions and your conduct to this test. See whether your views of yourself, and of Christ, agree with those which the Scriptures exhibit; and see whether your life, spirit, and conduct, be such as those of the Apostles were. I charge you, before God, to try yourselves by this touchstone. It is not a superficial view of these matters that will suffice. You may easily deceive yourselves; but you can never deceive God: and it is not by any standard of yours that he will try you, but by the standard of his own word. Oh! search and try your ways: "examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove your own selves:" so shall you have the testimony of a good conscience now, and attain acceptance with God in the eternal world.

***~~2. Consult the Scriptures in all things as your guide—~~***

Difficulties will often arise; and if you go to *man*for counsel, you will most generally be led astray; since none but those who have imbibed the spirit of the Scriptures themselves, can declare the sublime principles which they inculcate. Study then the Holy Scriptures from day to day, and that too with a direct view to your conduct; so that on any emergency you may have readily occurring to your mind such passages as are fitted to regulate your judgment, and to direct your paths. "Instructed by them, you will be wiser than your teachers, [Psalm 119:99](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.99); [Psalm 119:130](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 119.130)," and will be enabled to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)."

***~~3. Beg of God, who has revealed the Scriptures to the world, to reveal them also in your heart—~~***

*As plain as the Scriptures are, they are yet "a sealed book" to all whose eyes have not been enlightened by the Spirit of God.*The natural man, however learned he may be, cannot enter into their spiritual import, because he has not a spiritual discernment, [1 Corinthians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 2.14). The Apostles themselves, after all the instruction which they had received, both in public and private, from their Divine Master for above three years—yet needed to have "their understandings opened by him, that they might understand the Scriptures." Just so, *you need the teachings of God's Spirit, without which you will be in darkness to the last hour of your lives*. Pray then to him, as David did, "open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law!" Then shall you "be guided into all truth;" and find the Scriptures fully adequate to all the gracious ends for which they have been revealed.

***~~#2258~~***

***~~CHARGE TO MINISTERS AND PEOPLE~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 4:1-2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.1-2)~~***

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage— with great patience and careful instruction."

*The gospel is a matter of far greater importance than men generally imagine.* The appointment of an order of men on purpose to instruct mankind in the knowledge of it, and by all possible means to advance it in the world, is itself a proof, that, in God's estimation, it is indispensably necessary for the happiness of man. In truth, there is nothing else that is of any importance in comparison with it.

How Paul labored to diffuse it, is well known. Here we see how earnestly he inculcated on others the duty of laboring to the utmost to excite an attention to it, throughout all classes of the community. A more solemn charge can scarcely be conceived than that which he here gives to Timothy. The age of this pious youth might render him too diffident and timid in the discharge of his ministerial office: and therefore, in this epistle, Paul again gives him the solemn charge which he had repeatedly given in his former epistle [1 Timothy 5:21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.21); [1 Timothy 6:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 6.13), to acquit himself to that God who had sent him, and to that Savior who would judge him in the last day.

In discoursing on the words before us, I shall consider:

**I. The charge given**

"The word" is that which every minister must "preach." He is not at liberty to *amuse*the people with the imaginations and conceits of men, but must declare simply the mind and will of God. He is sent of God for that very end. He is an ambassador from God to man, authorized to declare on what terms God will be reconciled to his rebellious subjects. And this ministry he is to discharge,

***~~1. With assiduity—~~***

Day and night would he labor in his vocation, with all diligence. The priests under the law had their appointed seasons for sacrifice: but, for the ministry of the Gospel, and the advancement of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, no time would be deemed unseasonable. A servant of God should never lose sight of the object which he is commissioned to promote. Whether in public or in private, whether on the Sabbath or other days, whether early or late, whether in a season of peace or of the bitterest persecution, he would be alike active, and alike intent on fulfilling the will of his Divine Master.

He should "be instant in season, out of season":

***~~2. With fidelity—~~***

In his discourse, he would adapt himself to the necessities of men, and "change his voice towards them" as occasion may require.

If there are errors in the Church, he must "reprove" them, and establish the truth in opposition to them.

If there are any sins committed, he must "rebuke" them; and, if need be, with sharpness and severity too, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed."

If there are any discouraged by reason of the difficulty of their way, he must exhort and comfort them; according to that injunction of the prophet, "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not; your God will come and save you! [Isaiah 35:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 35.3-4)."

He is not to fear the face of man; but to address all, without respect of persons; and to declare to them the truth, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, [Ezekiel 2:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 2.7)."

***~~3. With perseverance—~~***

He may labor long, and see but little fruit of his labor: but, "like the gardener, he must wait with patience for the early and the latter rain [James 5:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.7)." He must be content to give "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." And if, in return for all his kindness, he meet with nothing but reproach and persecution, he must still persist in using his best efforts, if by any means he may at last be made useful even to one. Confident that his "doctrine" is right, he must labor to inculcate it on all; and leave to God the outcome, whether it be to blind and harden men, or to convert and save their souls, [Isaiah 6:9-10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 6.9-10).

All this is the bounden duty of a minister: and of his labors in it he must give account to "the Judge of living and dead, in the great day of his appearing."

But, that we may adapt the subject more to the edification of all, let us consider,

***~~II. The charge implied—~~***

It is evident, that, if such be the duties of those who *preach*, there must be corresponding duties attaching to those who *hear*. On these, therefore, the charge enjoins:

***~~1. A due improvement of the ministry—~~***

If *we*are to "preach the word," then *you*, my brethren, are to hear it: and to hear it too, "not as the word of man, but as the Word of God," and as the Word of God to your souls.

Nor are you ever to become remiss in your attention to it. It should "be daily your delight," and "more to you than your necessary food." At all times, and under all circumstances, you should look to it, as your sure directory, and your never-failing support.

Whether read in your secret chamber, or preached to you in the public assembly, your submission to it should be deep and unreserved.

Every *sentiment*of your heart should be regulated by it;  
every *lust*should be mortified in obedience to it; and  
every *duty*should be performed in accordance with it.

You must, in particular, guard against itching ears and a rebellious heart; neither affecting novelty on the one hand, nor quarreling with old-established truths on the other, verse 3, 4.

Nor should you ever be "weary in well-doing." Whatever it may cost you to conform to God's blessed word, it must be done: nor should you ever rest, until your whole souls be cast into the very mold of the Gospel.

***~~2. A diligent attention to your own personal concerns—~~***

If ministers have their duties, so have you also yours, to which you are bound to pay all possible attention. Though you minister not in public, you should be as priests in your own houses, and perform towards your respective families all that the most faithful minister attempts for you.

But, supposing that you have none to whom you owe these friendly offices, you must at least watch over your own souls, and with all diligence and fidelity endeavor to bring them into subjection to the commands of God. You must bear in mind your responsibility to God for your every act, and word, and thought; and must so walk before your Lord and Savior, that you may stand with boldness and confidence before him in the great day of his appearing.

***~~In conclusion, let me bring the "charge" more directly to your hearts and consciences—~~***

Almighty God is here present with us, and has heard every word that has been spoken to you. The Lord Jesus Christ, too, is present with us; and records in the book of his remembrance every word that is delivered in his name. And soon will he descend from Heaven, and summon the universe to his tribunal. Then will his kingdom be complete; and every member of it, from the first to the last, shall stand before him.

Now, as in the immediate presence both of the Father and of the Son, I speak unto you; and in their sacred name I charge you all. You shall all, before long, stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and "give an account of yourselves to God;" and receive at his hands according to what you have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. It befits you, then, to "receive with meekness every word" that is delivered, as it befits me also to "speak even as the oracles of God." May the Lord grant that I may so speak, and you do, as those who shall be judged by God's perfect law, [James 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 2.12); and that both the one and the other of us may so approve ourselves to Christ, as "not to be ashamed before him at his coming, [1 John 2:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.28)."

***~~#2259~~***

***~~A CHRISTIAN'S DYING REFLECTIONS~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 4:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.7-8)~~***

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

CHRISTIANITY adapts its comforts to every part of our existence; but its influence is peculiarly visible at the close of life. Paul, when expecting death, was not without the most comfortable reflections:

***~~I. In his review of the past—~~***

***~~He had had different views of life from what are generally entertained—~~***

Most think they have little to do but to consult their own pleasure in life; but Paul had judged that he had many important duties to fulfill.

***~~He had devoted himself to the great ends of life—~~***

He had maintained a warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. He had run his race with indefatigable zeal and ardor, 1 Corinthians 9:26. He had kept the faith with undaunted courage and constancy. He had disregarded life itself when it stood in competition with his duty, [Acts 20:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 20.24); [Acts 21:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 21.13).

***~~Hence the approach of death was pleasant—~~***

He enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience: he could adopt the language of his Lord and Master, [John 17:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 17.4). He was a prisoner without repining, or wishing to escape. He was condemned, and could wait with delight for the tyrant's stroke.

In consequence of this, he was happy also,

***~~II. In the prospect of what was to come—~~***

He had long enjoyed the pledge of eternal blessings, [Ephesians 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.14).

***~~He looked forward therefore now to the full possession of them—~~***

A crown of righteousness means a most exalted state of holiness and happiness in Heaven; nor did he doubt but that such a reward was laid up for him.

***~~He did not however expect it on account of any merit in himself—~~***

He speaks of it indeed as bestowed in a way of "righteous" award; but he expected it wholly as the "gift" of God through Christ, [Romans 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 6.23).

***~~Nor did he consider it as a gift peculiar to himself as an Apostle—~~***

The "longing for Christ's second coming" is a feeling common to all Christians, [2 Peter 3:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 3.12). For them also is this crown of righteousness reserved, [Hebrews 9:28](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 9.28).

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How does the Apostle's experience condemn the world at large—~~***

The generality are strangers to spiritual consolations: but there is no true religion where they are not experienced. Let all consider what would be their reflections, and prospects, if they were now dying: Let all live the life of the righteous, if they would die his death.

***~~2. How amply does God reward his faithful servants!~~***

Poor and imperfect are the best services that they can render: yet how different is their state from that of others, both in and after death! Let all then devote themselves entirely to God!

***~~#2260~~***

***~~APOSTASY OF DEMAS~~***

***~~[2 Timothy 4:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Tim 4.10)~~***

"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."

TO have our minds well established with gospel principles, is doubtless very desirable: but in matters which are confessedly beyond the comprehension of man, we should be modest and diffident in drawing conclusions from them, lest, through an excessive zeal for one principle, we subvert others which are not less true or less important. An inattention to this rule has been productive of incalculable injury to the Church of Christ: for persons giving themselves up, as it were, to some particular sentiment, have wrested the Scriptures to make every part of them speak the same language; and have indulged in most acrimonious feelings against all who did not accord with their views.

But we should remember, that there are in revelation, as in all the other works of God, depths which we cannot fathom; and that our true wisdom is *not to be making the Scriptures a theater whereon to display our controversial skill, as to deduce from them the great practical lessons which they were intended to convey.*Were we, for instance, to take occasion from the passage before us to argue about the decrees of God, and the final perseverance of the saints, we might dispute well, but it would be to little profit! But, if we enter upon the subject with fear and trembling, and with a view to our own spiritual advantage, we shall find it replete with the most valuable instruction to our souls.

Let us consider then:

***~~I. The fact here recorded—~~***

A more melancholy fact is scarcely to be found in all the sacred records. Let us notice:

***~~1. The fact itself—~~***

Demas was a man of great eminence in the Church of Christ. Paul, in the salutations which usually close his epistles, twice mentions him in immediate connection with Luke, "Greet Luke and Demas." In one of these places he calls Demas one of his fellow-laborers in the work of the Gospel, Philemon verse 24; in the other, after having mentioned Demas with honor, he gives to another minister, Archippus, a most solemn warning, on account of the lukewarmness which he had manifested in the discharge of his ministry: "Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it, [Colossians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.14); [Colossians 4:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.17)." From hence then we conclude, that he saw no occasion for such an admonition in the case of Demas. Yet behold, we find at last, that "Demas had forsaken him," and gone to a great distance from him, and altogether abandoned the work in which he had been engaged.

Had we been told, that this servant of Christ had erred in some particular, or even that he had declined in zeal for his Master's cause, we would not have been so much surprised; because we are aware that *the greatest and best of men are but weak, and that there are changes in their spiritual, as well as their physical, health*: but, when we are informed that he forsook the Apostle, forsook him too in his greatest extremity, when by reason of his imprisonment and approaching martyrdom, he needed all possible support; and that, in forsaking the Apostle, he forsook his Lord and Master also; we are confounded, almost as the Philistines were, when they saw their champion dead upon the field.

Seeing the fact, we are eager to inquire into:

***~~2. The occasion of it—~~***

Whence could this proceed? To what shall we trace an event so calamitous, so unforeseen? We are not left in doubt respecting it: the Apostle, at the same time that he announces the fact, declares the reason for it: "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." *Alas! alas! What did he find in this world worthy of his affections?*Had he never known anything of spiritual and eternal objects, we might account for his attachment to the things of time and sense: but we are amazed, that, after having once tasted of living waters, he could ever afterwards find satisfaction in the polluted streams of this world!

But, supposing him to love this present world; is there anything in that to draw him from Christ, and to make him cast off all concern for his eternal interests? Yes, *the love of God and of the world are incompatible with each other*; insomuch that, "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)." Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than are the things of this world, and the things of God. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," what have they to do with heavenly-mindedness? "The person who lives in pleasure, is dead while he lives, [1 Timothy 5:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Tim 5.6)." "The cares and indulgences of this world choke the good seed, and render it unfruitful [Matthew 13:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 13.22)." The seeking honor from men, instead of seeking it from God alone, is absolutely incompatible with a saving faith! [John 5:44](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 5.44). *The cross of Christ, if duly valued, would crucify us unto the world, and the world to us!*[Galatians 6:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.14).

Here then we see how this deplorable evil proceeded:

Demas had yielded to a concern about his carnal ease and interests. This gradually weakened his concern about his spiritual and eternal welfare.

Then he became remiss in secret duties.

Then his strength to resist temptation declined.

Then his natural corruptions regained their former ascendancy over him.

Then the Spirit of God, being grieved and quenched, left him to himself.

Then he became the sport of temptation, and the prey of Satan.

Then his abandonment of Christ and of his Gospel followed of course.

While we mourn over this unhappy man, and lament his apostasy, let us proceed to consider:

***~~II. The instruction to be derived from it—~~***

Surely we may learn from it:

***~~1. That whatever attainments any man has made, it befits him not to be too confident about the outcome of his spiritual warfare—~~***

If we are upright before God, we need not give way to distressing fears: they are dishonorable to God, and unprofitable to ourselves. But at the same time we should guard against a presumptuous confidence: for no man knows what a day may bring forth. David, previous to his fall, if told what sins he would commit, might have replied with *Hazael*, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do such things?" And *Peter*, so far from thinking it possible that he would ever deny his Lord, was confident that nothing could ever shake his constancy. So, if *Demas*, when, in his better state, had been told in what it might end, he would have thought it absolutely impossible that he could ever so "make shipwreck of his faith." Shall we then, after seeing the failure of such men presume to say, "My mountain stands strong, I shall not be moved!" Let us never forget, that if God withdraws his hand from us for one moment, we shall fall and perish: and let our prayer to him therefore be continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" To every man among you, though he were as eminent as Paul himself, I would say, "Be not high-minded, but fear, [Romans 11:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 11.20)." "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls, 1 Corinthians 10:12."

***~~2. That we must watch with all carefulness against the first beginnings of spiritual decay—~~***

Had Demas attended to the first encroachments of a worldly spirit, and resisted them as he ought, he would have never been left to final apostasy. But the first breach being neglected, an inundation ensued; and the leak being disregarded, his vessel sank. Let me then put you all upon your guard against a decay in your spiritual affections, and an attempt to serve God with a divided heart. From the moment that you embrace the truth, and "put your hand to the Gospel plough, you must not so much as *look*back, [Luke 9:61-62](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 9.61-62);" you must "forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before, [Philippians 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Phil 3.13)." O, "remember Lot's wife! [Luke 17:32](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke 17.32)." Her sin might be thought small: but it was not so in the estimation of her God: and she is made a monument to all future generations.

Be "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy;" and to the last hour of your lives adopt the habit of Paul, who "kept his body under control, and brought it into subjection, lest, 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)."

***~~3. That, if we have unhappily forsaken the Lord, the door of mercy is not yet closed against us—~~***

Of *Demas*we know no more than what is here spoken. But of *Mark*, who is also called John-Mark, and who was a companion of Paul and Barnabas in their travels, we do know. He, like Demas, forsook those holy men in a time of danger, and "went no more with them to the work, [Acts 13:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 13.13); [Acts 15:38](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts 15.38)." But God in mercy granted him repentance unto life; so that he not only obtained mercy of the Lord, but became afterwards profitable even to Paul himself in the discharge of his apostolic office, verse 13, the very verse after the account of unhappy Demas.

Let not any one therefore despair. Let it be remembered, that as long as we are in the body, God addresses us in these gracious words, "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely, [Jeremiah 3:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer 3.22). [Hosea 14:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Hos 14.4)." Be persuaded then to return to him without delay: for if you return not, "it would have been better for you never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to you! [2 Peter 2:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.20-21)." But, if you return with penitential sorrow, then shall your Father's arms be open to receive you, and every member of his family give thanks to him in your behalf!

***~~TITUS~~***

***~~#2261~~***

***~~FALSE PROFESSORS DESCRIBED~~***

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

"They *profess*that they know God; but in works they deny him."

AT a time when the profession of godliness is everywhere abounding, it is of peculiar importance to lay down *marks whereby the upright may be distinguished*, and the hypocritical be put to shame. There have ever been in the Church, many, whose characters would not bear investigation, and whose conduct was the very reverse of what their profession required. In the days of the Apostle there were "many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, who subverted whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre sake, verse 10, 11;" and of these he hesitated not to declare, that "while they professed that they knew God, they in works denied him."

Now, as such persons abound in all ages, I will enter into a fuller consideration of the character here delineated and observe respecting it, that it is:

***~~I. A common character—~~***

As all who were the natural descendants of Abraham were considered as professing the faith of Abraham, even while they were living altogether without God in the world; so *all who name the name of Christ are considered as Christians, though they never think of departing from any iniquity which their hearts desire.*

But it is not of such persons that I intend to speak. The persons mentioned in my text evidently wished to be regarded as religious: and therefore it is to persons of that description that my attention shall be confined. These, indeed, embrace a great variety of character: for, while some take up religion in a formal kind of way, as a means of gaining a reputation for sanctity, others vaunt themselves in an experience of its power upon their souls. Of the former class are those whom Paul speaks of, when he says, "Behold, you are called a Jew, and rest in the law, and make your boast of God, and know his will, and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and are confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light of those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes; who have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law, [Romans 2:17-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.17-20)."

Of the latter class are they whose hearts have been impressed in a measure with divine truth, and brought in some degree under the power of religion, but who *yet hold fast some secret lusts which they will not part with*. Of such the Prophet Isaiah speaks: "They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel, [Isaiah 48:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 48.2)." Of such also God speaks by the Prophet Ezekiel: "They come unto you as the people come, 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! [Ezekiel 33:31](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ezek 33.31)."

Now, of both these classes there are very many in the present day. At a former period, the pharisaical class were the more numerous; but at this time the hypocritical. In some respects they differ widely from each other, and hold each other in contempt: but, in the main point, they are agreed; namely, in *not walking consistently with their profession*. Neither the one nor the other give themselves up wholly to their God: some hidden abomination, like a worm at the root, impedes their fruitfulness in good works, and prevents them from "bringing forth any fruit to perfection." Were I to distinguish between them, I would say, the one profess religion generally; the others profess religion of a superior cast. But when the whole of their spirit, and temper, and conduct, are compared with the Scripture-standard, they show that their hearts are not right with God; and that, while "they draw near to him with their lips, their hearts are far from him, [Isaiah 29:13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 29.13)."

It is also,

***~~II. An awful character—~~***

In two respects do these persons fearfully betray their extreme folly and wickedness:

***~~1. They grievously dishonor God—~~***

In proportion as they profess a zeal for God, is God implicated, if I may so say, in the evils which they commit. Not that God has indeed any responsibility on their account: but the ungodly world, who hate religion, will take occasion to condemn religion itself for the faults of those who profess it, yes, and to "blaspheme the very name of God himself on their account." Unreasonable as it is that "the way of truth would be evil spoken of" on account of those who walk not according to its dictates, still this is what men will do, in vindication of themselves, and for the purpose of decrying all serious godliness, [2 Peter 2:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 2.2). [Romans 2:23-24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 2.23-24). 1 Timothy 6:1.

But this greatly aggravates the guilt of those who thus expose religion to contempt, and cast a stumbling-block in the way of a perishing world. Truly it were "better that a millstone were hanged about the neck of such persons, and that they would be cast into the sea," than that they would continue to involve themselves in such tremendous guilt.

***~~2. They fatally deceive their own souls—~~***

No persons are less disposed to suspect themselves than these. Their *profession*stands with them in the place of *practice*. They think only of what they do; but never reflect on what they leave undone. If they say, *"Lord, Lord!"* it never comes into their minds to inquire how far they "do the things which he requires of them." The godly themselves express not a greater confidence of their state before God, than these. Hence it is that they are so frequently warned against self-deceit, "If a man thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself [Galatians 6:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.3)." And again, "If any man seems to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, that man's religion is vain [James 1:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.26)." Of such persons there is little, if any, hope: because they imagine themselves already possessed of all that the Gospel offers, and therefore are deaf to the invitations and entreaties which they deem applicable only to persons less favored than themselves.

Such a one is truly,

***~~III. A pitiable character—~~***

***~~In the midst of light "they walk on still in darkness"—~~***

Professing that they know God, they take, of course, the Scriptures for their guide: but, with respect to the real life of godliness, they are yet ignorant, because that "darkness has blinded their eyes, [1 John 2:11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.11)." In truth, they see everything through a wrong medium, and as it were with a jaundiced eye; and the very principles which they profess serve only to beguile them to their ruin. Unhappy souls! "whose very light is darkness! [Matthew 6:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 6.23)," and whose knowledge causes them to err! [Isaiah 47:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 47.10).

***~~With all imaginable opportunities for salvation, they improve not any for their good—~~***

They have the ordinances of religion, yes, and take pleasure in them too, [Isaiah 58:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 58.2); but they remain unhumbled, and "uncircumcised both in heart and life." The very word they hear, which to others is "a savor of life unto life," proves to them only "a savor of death unto death, [2 Corinthians 2:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 2.16)." The more formal of these characters satisfy themselves with a mere round of duties; and the more enlightened of them place their own feelings and conceits in the stead of vital godliness. Thus both the one and the other turn the very means of salvation into occasions of augmented guilt and misery. *The very sun and rain which ripen others, do but prepare them for fuel in the fire of Hell!*[Hebrews 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.7-8).

***~~Buoyed up with the most glorious hopes and prospects, they have nothing awaiting them but the most fearful disappointment—~~***

They *dream*of Heaven at the termination of their earthly pilgrimage: but, alas! what horror will seize hold upon them at the instant of their departure hence! It is not only the tree which bears bad fruit, but that which bears not good fruit, that will be cast into the fire! [Matthew 7:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.19). Not those only who had no lamps, but "those whose lamps were destitute of oil, that will be cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, [Matthew 25:8-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 25.8-12) with [Matthew 8:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 8.12)." *They will carry their delusive hopes even to the bar of judgment!*But their claims will be disallowed, and their pleas be of no avail, [Matthew 7:22-23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 7.22-23). Their eyes will then be opened to see their folly; and they will be left to reap for ever the fruit which they have sown, [Galatians 6:7-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.7-8)."

***~~Let me now entreat you to inquire into,~~***

***~~1. Your profession—~~***

Do not think that a merely *speculative*knowledge, however extensive it is, will suffice. To know God aright, you must know him, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus; and must so know him, as to renounce every other hope, and to rely altogether on Christ alone. Then only do we know him aright, when we "cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart."

***~~2. Your practice—~~***

It is to little purpose that we *hear*and *approve*of the word, "unless we are *doers*of it also, [James 1:22-25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 1.22-25);" nor can we have any satisfactory evidence that we know God, except by obeying his commandments, [1 John 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.3). See, then, that with your profession there is also a holy consistency of conduct: and take care to "show forth your faith by your works!"

***~~#2262~~***

***~~SOBER-MINDEDNESS~~***

***~~[Titus 2:6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.6)~~***

"Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded."

THE first object of a Christian minister is to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, in all its freeness and in all its fullness. This is the foundation of a sinner's hope: and unless this foundation is firmly laid, it will be in vain to attempt any superstructure; since from the Gospel alone, and from Christ as revealed in it, can we obtain that strength which is necessary for the production of any good work whatever.

But, when we have made known "the truth as it is in Jesus," we must go on to inculcate *holiness*in all its branches; and not in general terms only, but with a special reference to every particular person whom we may have occasion to address.

Titus, though but a youth, was enjoined to officiate with all the authority of a divinely-appointed minister; and to address with equal fidelity the aged and the young, on the subject of their respective duties: "Speak the things which become sound doctrine:" exhort alike "the aged men, and aged women," "the young women also, and the young men"—giving to each the instruction suited to his own peculiar state and condition. To the aged men and aged women many important hints were to be offered; as to the young women also, through the medium of the matrons.

In every one of these, sobriety of mind bears a part: but in the instructions which he is to give to young men, it comprehends the whole; since, if they are thoroughly imbued with that, it will form their whole character agreeably to the mind of God. I shall not, however, so confine my observations to the one gender as to overlook the other, but shall address myself indiscriminately to youth in general. And in doing this, I will,

***~~I. Show whence it is that young people need this particular counsel—~~***

***~~1. They are inexperienced as to the world—~~***

The world, in the eyes of youth, looks fair, and promises much happiness to those who will worship at its shrine. Its allurements are set forth on every side; and its votaries are everywhere inviting us to participate in their delights. But its choicest flowers conceal a thorn! Its sweetest draughts are impregnated with poison! Of all that it contains, there is not anything that is capable of affording any permanent satisfaction: on everything in it is stamped in characters that are indelible, this humiliating inscription, "Vanity and vexation of spirit!"

Over this, however, is hung a veil, which time and experience alone are, for the most part, able to remove. What wonder then is it, if youth, who see nothing but the outward garb of the world, admire its glittering vanities, and give themselves to the pursuit of its empty shadows! What wonder, if, after having got a taste of its delusive pleasures, they suppose, of course, that the harvest will correspond with the first-fruits! But the outcome never justifies the expectation. To none did the world ever yet prove a satisfying portion: and therefore, in the commencement of their course, the counsel in the text is necessary for every man.

***~~2. They are but little acquainted with their own sinful hearts—~~***

They take credit to themselves for meaning well: and they do perhaps, on the whole, mean well: entertaining no deliberate purpose to offend either God or man. But they are not aware how strong a bias there is within them, or through what a delusive medium they behold the things around them. Their desires are all in favor of the world. Their passions are pleading strong for indulgence. Self-denial is in its very nature painful: and, if only they keep within the bounds prescribed by custom, they can see no reason why they would debar themselves from any indulgences. By gratification, their dispositions, their habits, their very opinions, are confirmed; and thus they proceed in their vain career, "calling good evil, and evil good; putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, [Isaiah 5:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 5.20)." In a word, while they feed on ashes, a deceived heart turns them aside; so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand? [Isaiah 44:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 44.20)." How needful for them the counsel in our text is, must be obvious to every considerate mind.

***~~3. They are surrounded on every side with evil counselors and wicked examples—~~***

The great mass of mankind are walking after the imagination of their own hearts, and not after God. Nor are they ashamed of what they do: yes, rather, they glory in their shame, and with undaunted effrontery persuade all around them to "follow their pernicious ways."

The votaries of real piety, on the contrary, are few; and in their habits they affect an unobtrusive concealment. Of course, young people conceive that the great majority are right; and that those who are walking in a narrow and unfrequented path, are actuated by some vain conceit, against which it will be well to guard. The invitations too of the mirthful are welcome, because they meet with a congeniality of sentiment and feeling in the youthful bosom; while the lessons of wisdom and piety find a very reluctant admission into the soul. We need only observe how different an ear young people turn to the counsels of wisdom, and of folly—and we shall see the importance of the admonition in our text, and the necessity of "exhorting them to be sober-minded."

Having shown what need young people have of counsel, I will,

***~~II. Suggest such counsel as their situation requires—~~***

Under this head we might range through the whole field of practical wisdom, and bring forth topics which would occupy a whole volume. But we must content ourselves with a few brief hints:

***~~1. Some more general—~~***

The first point that I would press on your attention is, to get your souls deeply imbued with the concerns of eternity. If the concerns of time have the ascendant in your hearts, there can be no hope of your ever being sober-minded, because your views and dispositions are radically wrong. *You are immortal beings; and must never forget, that in a few more hours you will be standing at the tribunal of your Judge, and be consigned by him, for ever, either to Heaven or to Hell!*If this is kept out of sight, every species of delusion will be harbored in the mind, and will reign without control.

But it is not a general conviction that will suffice. No! you must pray to God to guide you in every step of your way. So "deceitful is sin," and so "desperately wicked is the heart," that no human care can preserve you. It is God alone who can keep the feet of his saints. Had you all the zeal of Peter, you might, in a time of trial, deny your Lord, and dissemble with your God. To your last hour you must entreat of God to guide you; for "it is not in man that walks to direct his paths;" and, in every step you take, you must say, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"

You must also be diligent in studying the Word of God. There is something very imposing in the maxims of the world; and you will easily be misled by them. But the Word of God must be your rule: it must be the one touchstone, by which you are to try every sentiment and every practice. You must take the sublimest precepts of Holy Writ, and set before you the brightest examples that are there exhibited—you must behold an Abraham sacrificing his only son at the command of God; and a Moses giving up all the treasures of Egypt, that he might participate in affliction with the people of God. You must follow the Apostle Paul in all his diversified scenes of trial; and see what spirit he manifested, and what conduct he pursued. Above all, *you must contemplate your blessed Lord and Savior in every step which he took while sojourning in this polluted world*. It is in this way that you must attain sobriety of mind. The world will call these things wild enthusiasm: but, whatever the world may say or think, your wisdom is to "be conformed to Christ," and to "walk in all things as he walked."

***~~2. Others more particular—~~***

General rules will scarcely suffice to mark with sufficient accuracy the counsel in my text. I would therefore descend to a few particulars and say: Consider what befits you in your place and station. There are particular duties assigned to different situations: to you who are in earlier life, the virtues of modesty, and self-distrust, and submission, are of prime importance. Nothing is more hateful than conceit and waywardness in the youthful mind. The younger are especially commanded to be in subjection to the elders, and especially to those elders who are placed by God in authority over us: and, wherever there is sobriety of mind, there will be a willing obedience to all lawful authority, and a diligent performance of every appointed duty. *Humility, respect, and deference to the judgment of superiors, are pre-eminently characteristic of a well-regulated mind*.

I would also say: Consider, on every occasion, what impression your conduct is likely to make on others. This is on no account to be overlooked. An inattention to it is productive of incalculable evil. We are not at liberty to cast stumbling-blocks in the way of others. Religion of itself, however careful we may be, will be sufficiently offensive to the carnal mind, without having anything added to it by our imprudence. We should guard, as much as possible, that "our good may not be evil spoken of:" and if, as must of necessity be the case, we are constrained in many things to act contrary to the wishes of those around us, *we should seek to disarm their hostility by meekness and gentleness, and not to augment it by petulance and indiscretion*.

One great help to sobriety will be to choose for your associates, the prudent and discreet. "He who walks with wise men," says Solomon, "will be wise; but a companion of fools will be destroyed." We naturally drink into the spirit of those with whom we associate: and we are told from authority, "Do not be misled: bad company corrupts good character." Indeed, from bad company that the most deplorable consequences ensue. It is no uncommon thing for a man, who at first only "*walks*occasionally in the counsel of the ungodly, to come before long to *stand*in the way of notorious sinners, and at last to be found *sitting*in the seat of the scornful."

If you would walk wisely, put away from you the light, the vain, and those who are indulging any sinful propensity; and gather round you the wise, the discreet, the holy. This will render your path incomparably more safe and easy, and will contribute to fix in you such habits as are "praise-worthy and of good report."

To this I would add yet further, Examine your own motives and principles of action, with all possible care and diligence. Many persuade themselves that they are doing right; while all but themselves see that they are acting a very unworthy part. James and John were at one time actuated by ambition, and at another time by revenge; while yet they had not the smallest consciousness of deviating from the path of duty. But they "knew not what spirit they were of."

And so it is with us: we may think that we are under the influence of a pious principle; while, in fact, we are manifesting a temper that is truly Satanic. Let us remember that *whatever proceeds from pride, from passion, from self-interest, or from any corrupt principle whatever, is wrong*; and that we then only are right, when our zeal for God is blended with love to man, and when we are ready to weep over the persons whom we are constrained to offend.

Lastly, I would say: Be open to conviction. Carnal confidence befits every child of man. A backwardness to receive reproof, or to listen to one who would point out to us a wiser path, is a strong presumptive evidence that we are wrong. We should be jealous over ourselves. We see mistake and obstinacy in others; and we would guard against them in ourselves. Our first care must be, to "prove all things," and then to "hold fast that only which is good."

***~~ADDRESS—~~***

***~~1. Those who are yet strangers to "sound doctrine"—~~***

You have at least seen, this day, that the Gospel is not, as some slanderously affirm, opposed to morality. You have seen, on the contrary, that "the grace of God which brings salvation teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, verse 11, 12." Do not then impute, as many do, the indiscretions of professors to the Gospel which they profess.

It is not to be supposed that young people would all at once become so wise and discreet, that they shall not err in anything. They are "of like passions with yourselves," and are in the midst of a tempting and ensnaring world; and have, moreover, deceitful hearts, and a subtle adversary ever endeavoring to turn them aside. Be not offended, then, if you do see somewhat of indiscretion in youthful professors. Ascribe it not to their religion, but their inexperience: and if you see them growing in sobriety of mind and consistency of conduct—then let the honor redound to that Gospel by which they are animated; and to that God, by whose gracious influences they are instructed and upheld.

There is one danger to which the indiscretions of religious people may expose you; and that is, the confounding of coldness and indifference with sobriety of mind. Be assured that *however faulty religious professors may be in the exercise of their zeal, you can never be right in indulging a lukewarm spirit*. This is offensive to God, and odious in the extreme. True religion requires the heart, the whole heart; nor will God be satisfied with anything less. I call upon you, therefore, to embrace the truth, and to walk worthy of it: and, instead of censuring the infirmities of the weak, be yourselves examples to them in everything that befits the Gospel of Christ.

***~~2. Those who desire to serve the Lord—~~***

Your very desires, if not duly regulated, may lead you astray. You may imagine that your duty to your God and Savior supersede your duties to men; but it does no such thing.

The duties of the second table are as binding as those of the first: only they must, to a certain degree, be subordinated to them. I say, to a certain degree; for if there be only a positive institution, the duty of love will supersede that: but, where the commands are of a moral and religious nature, there God must be obeyed, and not man. You must endeavor to make all your duties harmonize: for, most assuredly, there is no real contradiction between them; and in endeavoring to fulfill them all, you must not forget that declaration of Solomon, "I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence."

Prudence is not that contemptible virtue which many people imagine: it calls into action much thought, and care, and self-denial, and love. It tends, in a very high degree, to recommend the Gospel. On the exercise of it much of God's honor depends: for imprudence will cause his ways to be evil spoken of, and "his very name to be blasphemed."

On the exercise of this, too, the eternal welfare of multitudes depends. No one knows how many might be "won by the good conduct of God's people, who never will be won by the word." Let this be kept in mind—and you will at least cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you; and put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; and, who can tell? you may perhaps, by the light which shines from you, constrain many to "confess, that God is with you of a truth," and lead them "to glorify God in the day of visitation, [1 Peter 2:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.12)."

Guard, then, against extremes of every kind; and say with David, "I will walk wisely before you, in a perfect way, [Psalm 101:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps 101.2)." Guard against:  
extremes in austerity;  
extremes in fear;  
extremes in confidence;  
extremes in boldness and forwardness.

*There is a season for every grace, and a limit to the exercise of every grace.* Your faith must be tempered with fear; your boldness must be tempered with modesty; your zeal must be tempered with love—you must have a spirit of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind." You must not so tremble, as to forget that you have cause to rejoice; nor so rejoice, as to forget that you have cause to tremble—you must combine the two, and "rejoice with trembling." In this way you will attain sobriety of mind, and "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things!"

***~~#2263~~***

***~~THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF HOLINESS~~***

***~~[Titus 2:11-14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-14)~~***

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

WHEREVER Christianity has been professed, the standard of public morals has been raised: and in proportion as it has gained an ascendant over the hearts of men, it has proved itself to be the friend and parent of good works. That many have perverted its principles, and walked unworthy of them, is true; but this can form no solid objection against the Gospel itself, any more than the abuse of reason or of the blessings of Providence can disprove the benefit of them when rightly used.

We will not concede one atom of the freeness or riches of divine grace; yet will we maintain that the Gospel is conducive to morality: for at the same time that it brings salvation to men, it inculcates every species of moral duty, and enforces the practice of godliness in the most authoritative and energetic manner. This is evident from the words before us; in which we may notice:

***~~I. The character of the Gospel—~~***

***~~The Gospel is supposed by many, to be no other than a remedial law—~~***

The law given to man in Paradise, and republished on Mount Sinai, required perfect obedience. But fallen man can never obtain happiness on those terms. Hence many imagine that Christ came to publish a new law, suited to our weak and fallen state. They suppose that his death atoned for our past transgressions; and that it purchased for us a power to regain Heaven by an imperfect but sincere obedience. Thus they make the Gospel to differ very little from the law. They reduce indeed the standard of the law; but they insist upon obedience to its requirements, as the terms on which alone we are to be saved. They ascribe to Christ the honor of obtaining salvation for us on these favorable conditions; but they make our performance of the conditions themselves to be the true and proper ground of our acceptance with God.

***~~But the Gospel, as described in the text, is widely different from this—~~***

Such a law as these persons substitute for the Gospel, could not properly be called "grace;" nor could it be said to "bring salvation;" for it does not bestow eternal life as a gift, but requires it to be earned; and brings only an opportunity of earning it on easier terms. But that Gospel, which in the Apostle's days "appeared to all men," was "a dispensation of grace, [Ephesians 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 3.2);" it revealed a Savior; it directed our eyes to Christ, as having wrought out salvation for us; and it offered that salvation to us freely, "without money and without price."

This is the true character of the Gospel. It is grace, mere grace, and altogether grace from first to last. It brings a *free*, a *full*, a *finished*salvation. It requires nothing to be done to purchase its blessings, or to merit them in any measure. In the Gospel, *God gives all—and we receive all!*

Yet there will be no room to charge the Gospel as licentious, if we consider:

***~~II. The lessons it inculcates—~~***

We have before said, that it requires nothing as the price of eternal life. But as an *evidence*of our having obtained life, and in a variety of other views, it requires,

***~~1. A renunciation of all sin—~~***

By "ungodliness" we understand everything that is contrary to the first table of the law; as profaneness, unbelief, neglect of divine ordinances, etc. And, by "worldly lusts" we understand "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the sinful pride of life, [1 John 2:15-16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 2.15-16);" or, in other words, the *pleasures*, *riches*, and *honors*of the world. All of these are to be "denied" and renounced.

As, on the one hand, we are not to dishonor God; so neither, on the other hand, are we to idolize the creature.

Nor is it against open transgressions merely that we are to guard, but against the secret "lusts" or desires. The very inclinations and propensities to sin must be mortified. This is indispensably necessary, to prove that we have embraced the Gospel aright: for, "those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts! [Galatians 5:24](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 5.24)."

***~~2. A life of universal holiness—~~***

We have duties to *God*, our *neighbor*, and *ourselves*.

Those which relate to ourselves are comprehended under the term "sobriety," which includes the government of all our passions, and the regulation of all our tempers.

"Righteousness" fitly expresses our duty to our neighbor, which briefly consists in this: The doing to him as we would desire that he, in a change of circumstances, would do unto us.

"Godliness" pertains more immediately to the offices of piety and devotion, and marks that respect which we ought to have in our minds to God in all that we do.

Thus extensive are the injunctions of the Gospel: it makes no abatement in its demands: it gives no licence to sin: it does not allow us to reduce its requisitions to our attainments; but urges us to raise our attainments to the standard which God has fixed.

Nor is it on some particular occasions only that it requires these things: it enjoins us to "live" in this way as long as we are "in this present world," having the tenor of our lives uniformly and perseveringly conformed to these precepts.

Such is that holiness which the Gospel requires, and "without which no man shall see the Lord."

Sufficient has already been stated to show the practical tendency of the Gospel. But its tendency will yet further appear from:

***~~III. The motives it suggests—~~***

The instructions which the Gospel affords are not mere directions, but commands, enforced with the most powerful motives that can actuate the mind of man. Those suggested in the text may be considered as referring to:

***~~1. Our own interest—~~***

There is a day coming, when our adorable Emmanuel, who once veiled his Deity in human flesh, will appear in all the glory of the Godhead. At that period, all that we have done for God shall be brought to light: and though our good works shall not be the meritorious ground of our acceptance with him, they shall be noticed by him with approbation, and rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory. This is "that blessed hope" which the Gospel has set before us, and to which it directs us continually to "look."

And is not this sufficient to incite us to holiness? If we kept this in view, how unremitted would be our diligence, and how delightful our work!

***~~2. Christ's honor—~~***

At the first appearance of the Lord Jesus, the scope and tendency of his doctrine were shadowed forth in miracles: the devils were cast out by him, and all manner of diseases were healed. But the full intent of his incarnation and death were not understood until after the day of Pentecost. Then the honor of his Gospel was completely vindicated. Then the most abandoned characters were changed: the lion became a lamb; and those who had borne the very image of the devil, were changed into the image of their God.

At his next appearing, this will be more fully manifest. Then the lives of all his people will bear testimony respecting the end of his voluntary sacrifice. It will then be seen, beyond controversy, that "he gave himself to redeem us," not merely from condemnation, but from sin; from the love and practice of all iniquity; and to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Then "will he see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied:" then also will "the ignorance of foolish men be silenced:" and then will "Christ be glorified in his saints, and admired by all who believe, [2 Thessalonians 1:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.10);" for every grace they have exercised will "tend to his praise and honor and glory" in that solemn day, [1 Peter 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.7).

And is not this also a strong motive to influence our minds? Can we reflect on the honor which will accrue to him, when the purifying efficacy of his Gospel shall be seen in all the myriads of his redeemed; can we reflect on this, I say, and not long to add a jewel to his crown?

***~~INFERENCES—~~***

***~~1. How little do they know of the Gospel, who continually live in any sin!~~***

It matters little whether men profess themselves followers of Christ or not, if they indulge iniquity in their hearts. "Can one born of God habitually practice sin?" No! [1 John 3:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.9). "We have not so learned Christ, if so be we have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, [Ephesians 4:20-21](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 4.20-21)." The Gospel "teaches us to deny and renounce all sin" without exception. Whoever you are, therefore, who live by any other rule than that which the Gospel proposes, know that you will surely be confounded in the day of Christ's appearing. And the only difference between those who professed, and those who despised, the Gospel, will be, that "those who knew their Lord's will and did it not, will be beaten with more and heavier stripes!"

***~~2. What a happy world this would be, if all embraced and obeyed the Gospel!~~***

All kinds of iniquity would be renounced, and all heavenly graces be kept in exercise. There would be no public wars, no private animosities, no needs which would not be relieved as soon as they were known. Evil tempers would be banished: the pains arising from discontent or malice would be forgotten. Peace and love and joy would universally abound. Surely we would then have a *Heaven upon earth*. Let the Gospel be viewed in this light. Let us conceive the whole world changed like the converts on the day of Pentecost; and then we shall indeed confess its excellence, and pray that "the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!"

***~~#2264~~***

***~~THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN REDEMPTION~~***

***~~[Titus 3:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.4-7)~~***

"But when the kindness and love of *God*our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the *Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us generously through *Jesus Christ*our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

THE doctrine of the Trinity must be acknowledged to be deeply mysterious, and utterly surpassing our weak comprehensions. Yet is it so clearly laid down in the sacred writings, that we cannot entertain a doubt of its truth. Indeed, without admitting a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the Scriptures are altogether inexplicable. What interpretation can we put on those words which are appointed to be used at the admission of persons into the Christian Church? They are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ([Matthew 28:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 28.19)). Here are evidently three distinct Persons, all placed upon the same level, and all receiving the same divine honor. To suppose either of them a creature, is to suppose that a creature may have divine honors paid to him; when we are expressly told that God is a jealous God, and that he will not give his glory to another: and therefore, while we affirm that there is but one God, we cannot but acknowledge that there is, in some way incomprehensible by us, a distinction of persons in the Godhead.

This is further confirmed by the manner in which the inspired writers set forth the work of redemption. They frequently speak of it as effected by three distinct Persons, whom they represent as bearing three distinct offices, and as acting together for one end: thus Peter says, "We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the *Father*, through sanctification of the *Spirit*, and the sprinkling of the blood of *Jesus Christ*."

Thus also Paul, in the passage before us, having represented all men, Apostles as well as others, in a most wretched state both by nature and practice, proceeds, in the words of my text, to set forth the work of redemption.

He begins with tracing it up to the *Father*, as the source from whence the work of redemption springs.

He then mentions the Holy Spirit as the Agent who applies the work of redemption.

Ane he presents Jesus Christ as the Author who procures the work of redemption.

Then he concludes with declaring that the glorification of sinful man is the grand end for the accomplishing of which the Sacred Three co-operate and concur: "But when the kindness and love of *God*our Savior appeared; he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the *Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us generously through *Jesus Christ*our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

From these words we will take occasion to unfold the glorious work of redemption, from its first rise to its final consummation; and herein to set before you:  
its *original*cause,  
its *procuring*cause,  
its *efficient*cause,  
and its *final*cause.

***~~I. The original cause of our redemption—~~***

The original cause of our redemption is represented in my text to be "the kindness and love of God the Father." God is love in his own nature; and every part of the creation bears the stamp of this perfection: the whole earth is full of his goodness. But man, the glory of this lower world, has received the fruits of his kindness in far the most abundant measure; having been endued with nobler faculties, and fitted for incomparably higher enjoyments than any other creature. In some respects, God has loved man more than the angels themselves: for when they fell, he cast them down to Hell, without one offer of mercy! But when man transgressed, God provided a Savior for him. This provision, I say, was wholly owing to the love of God the Father: it was the Father who, from all eternity knowing our fall, from all eternity contrived the means of our recovery and restoration. It was the Father who appointed his Son to be our Substitute and Surety; and in due time sent him into the world to execute the office assigned him: and it is the Father who accepts the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. He accepts at the hands of his own Son the payment that was due from us, and confers on us the reward which was due to Christ.

Thus the Father's love contrived, appointed, and accepts the means of our salvation; and therefore in my text he himself is called "our Savior;" "the love of God our Savior." This title belongs more immediately to the Son, who died for us: but yet, as the Father is the original cause of our salvation, he is properly called "our Savior."

Nor is it the text only that represents the Father's love as the *source*of our redemption; the Scriptures uniformly speak the same language: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." "God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

This love, however, did not fully appear until after the ascension of our blessed Lord. The text says, "When the kindness and love of God our Savior towards man appeared." The word in the original refers, I apprehend, to the shining forth of the sun. Now the sun shines with equal brightness when it is behind a cloud, or when this part of the globe is left in midnight darkness; only it is not visible to us until it actually appears above the horizon, or until the clouds that veil it from our eyes are dissipated. So the love of God has shone from all eternity, "He has loved us," says the prophet, "with an everlasting love!" But this love was behind a cloud until our Lord had finished his course upon earth; and then it appeared in all its splendor: so that now we can trace redemption to its proper source; and instead of imagining, as some have done, that the Father was filled with wrath, and needed to be pacified by the Son—we view even Christ himself as the Father's gift, and ascribe every blessing to its proper cause, the love of God.

It is true, however, that much was necessary to be done, before this love of God could shed forth its beams upon us. We proceed therefore to set before you,

***~~II. The procuring cause of our redemption—~~***

This in my text is set forth both negatively and positively: it was not any works of righteousness which we have done, but it was Jesus Christ. Those who are saved will no doubt abound in works of righteousness; but these works are not the procuring cause of our redemption. What good works did Adam perform before God promised to send him a Savior? What good works can any man do, before God endues him with his Holy Spirit? Or even after our conversion, what works of ours can challenge so glorious a reward? Yes, when do we perform any work whatever, which is not miserably defective, and which does not need the mercy of God to pardon it?

Every one who knows the spirituality of God's law, and the defects that are in our best works, will say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to be found, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ."

We may well acknowledge, therefore, as in the text, that we are saved, not by works of righteousness which we have done. The only procuring cause of our salvation is Jesus Christ. Everything which we receive comes to us on account of what he has done and suffered: if the Father's love appears to us, or if the Spirit is shed forth upon us, it is, as the text observes, "through Jesus Christ." It was his death which removed the obstacles to our salvation: the justice of God required satisfaction for our breaches of the divine law: the dishonor done to the law itself needed to be repaired: the truth of God, which was engaged to punish sin, needed to be preserved inviolate. Unless these things could be effected, there could be no room for the exercise of mercy, because it was not possible that one perfection of the Deity would be exercised in any other way than in perfect consistency with all the rest.

But the death of Christ removed these obstacles. Christ offered himself as an atonement for sin; and at once honored the law, satisfied justice, and paid the utmost farthing of our debt! Thus, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other!" Yes, by this means, "God is faithful and just, (not to condemn us, but) to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Nor is it in this view only that Jesus Christ procures our salvation: He has taken upon him the office of an advocate, which he is ever executing in Heaven: "He ever lives," says the Apostle, "to make intercession for us." He pleads our cause with the Father: he urges his own merits on our behalf. Like the high-priest of old, he presents blood, yes, his own blood, before the mercy-seat, and fills the most holy-place with the incense of his own intercession. Thus does he continually prevail for us; and we, for his sake, are loaded with all spiritual and eternal benefits!

That we obtain every mercy by virtue of his death and intercession, is evident also from other Scriptures; the Apostle says, that we have redemption through Christ's blood; and our Lord says, "I will ask the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter:" so that, *while we trace back our redemption to the Father's love, we ascribe it also to the mediation of the Son.*

The third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity also bears his part in this glorious work; we shall proceed therefore to set before you,

***~~III. The efficient cause of our redemption—~~***

As our salvation is not procured by our own merit, so neither is it effected by our own power: the text informs us, that we are "saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." The washing of regeneration may here refer to the rite of baptism, whereby we are introduced into the visible Church; and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, to the internal change by which we are made real members of Christ's body; or, they may both mean the same thing, the latter being explanatory of the former; and this I rather suppose to be the true meaning, because they are both put in opposition to the works of righteousness done by us. But whichever it be, the Holy Spirit is here declared to be the only efficient cause of our salvation.

It is He who regenerates us, and makes us partakers of the Divine nature: we are of ourselves dead, and therefore cannot restore ourselves to life: we have only an earthly and carnal nature, and therefore cannot perform the operations of a heavenly and spiritual nature: this is effected only by "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

We cannot of ourselves secure a saving interest in Christ, or discern the excellency of those things which he has purchased for us by his blood. We are told, that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is the Spirit's office to reveal them to us. Our Lord says, "I will send you the Holy Spirit, and he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you."

So neither can we feel the kindness and love of God the Father, unless it be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given unto us. Thus we shall remain ignorant of the Father's love, and no part in the mediation of the Son; yes, we shall continue dead in trespasses and sins, if the Holy Spirit does not work effectually in us. Notwithstanding all that the Father and the Son have done for us, we must eternally perish, if we are not renewed and sanctified by the influences of the Blessed Spirit. No resolutions or endeavors of our own will effect the work: nothing less than a divine power is sufficient for it: we must therefore experience the agency of the Holy Spirit on our own hearts, or remain for ever destitute of the salvation provided for us!

Under the law, whatever good appeared in the saints of God, was wrought in them by the Holy Spirit. But they received the Spirit in so small a measure, in comparison with what is given to us under the Christian dispensation, that He can scarcely be said to have been given at all until after our Lord's ascension. The Evangelist says, that "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." But from the time of that first effusion of the Holy Spirit, even to this present day, the Holy Spirit has been poured out abundantly, or richly, as the original word means, upon the Christian Church: so that not a few only may expect to feel his influences, but all; even all that will ask for them in Jesus' name.

***~~IV. The final cause of our redemption—~~***

The final cause is the end; and, after having seen how the Sacred Three are engaged, we are naturally led to inquire: What is the end proposed? What is it which these Divine Persons intend to accomplish? The text furnishes us with a full and sufficient answer. It tells us that the final cause for which such wonderful provision has been made, is, that man may be saved; or, in the express words of the text, "that, being justified by faith, we may be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

The justification of sinful man was a concern so dear to God, that he gave his only-begotten Son in order to effect it; and so precious were our souls in the sight of Christ, that he willingly laid down his life for them. The Holy Spirit also cheerfully undertook his part in the economy of redemption. But it was a free justification, that is a justification by mere grace, that each Person of the Trinity had in view; they would cut off most effectually all boasting on the part of man, and reserve the whole glory to God alone. They have therefore freely offered it from first to last.

The *Father*freely provided,  
the *Son*freely executed, and  
the *Spirit*freely applies, that salvation.

Nor is it merely our *justification*, but our *glorification*also, which has been provided for. The Scriptures promise us eternal life, and encourage us to hope for it. They set it forth as an inheritance to which we are constituted heirs: and that, as heirs, we may in due time take possession of it, was the united design of the Three Persons in the Godhead.

How astonishing that such an end would ever be proposed, and that such wonderful things would ever be done for the accomplishment of it! Well may we admire the kindness and love of God! Well may we stand amazed at the condescension and compassion of the Son! Well may we burst forth into praises and thanksgivings for the grace and goodness of the Blessed Spirit! and indeed, "if we can hold our peace, surely the very stones will cry out against us."

***~~We shall now conclude with a few inferences from what has been said.~~***

***~~1. We may see how secure the salvation of every believer is—~~***

The Three Persons in the Trinity are engaged to each other, as well as unto us. The *Father*gave his elect to Christ, on condition that he would make his soul an offering for them. *Christ*laid down his life, on condition that the Spirit might be sent down into their hearts, to make them fit for his glory. Now we are sure that Christ died for those who were given to him; and that the Holy Spirit will renew and sanctify those for whom Christ died. The only question that can arise is this: Has the Father loved *me*, and has Christ died for *me?* To this I answer, We cannot look into the book of God's decrees, and therefore we can only judge by what is already manifest.

Are we regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit? If we are, we may be sure that whatever is needful shall be done for us. All that is required of us is, to wait upon God for fresh supplies of his Spirit; and to yield ourselves to the government of that Divine Agent. We then need not fear either men or devils: for none shall pluck us out of the Redeemer's hands! Nor shall we have any temptation without a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

If, however, we have not yet evidences that we are regenerate, we must not hastily conclude that there is no salvation for us; for all the elect of God were once unregenerate, but in due time were begotten by the Spirit to a living hope: so that we must still go to God for the gift of his Spirit, and for a saving interest in Christ. Nor will he refuse the petition of any who call upon him in sincerity and truth.

But if we have a good hope that we have believed in Christ, then let us rejoice in our security, for:

Has the *Father*shown such proofs of his eternal love in vain?

Has the *Son*laid down his life for nothing?

Has the *Spirit*undertaken such a work, without ability to accomplish it?

Is the salvation of our souls the grand *end*which each of these Divine Persons has had in view, and shall we at last be left to perish?

Be of good courage, brethren! and rest persuaded, with the Apostle of old, that "none shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

***~~2. We may see from hence, how great must be the condemnation of those who continue in unbelief—~~***

If we reflect a moment upon the most astonishing provisions made for us in the Gospel, and the dignity of the Persons concerned for our welfare—we cannot but exclaim with the Apostle, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Surely, to despise the kindness and love of God our *Father*, will greatly aggravate our guilt.

To trample on the blood of a dying *Savior*, will add tenfold malignity to all our other sins.

To do despite to the *Spirit*of grace, will render our state hopeless, and inconceivably dreadful.

Yet such is the state of all who reject the offers of the Gospel.

As for the heathen, they are relatively guiltless in comparison with those who live and die unregenerate in a Christian land. O, my brethren, beware how you bring such aggravated condemnation upon your own souls! Paul expressly cautions you respecting this: he says, "He who despised Moses's law died without mercy. Of how much severe punishment, do you think, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and has done despite to the Spirit of grace?"

Beware, therefore, lest you lose this day of grace, and, like the foolish virgins, be shut out from the marriage-supper. Blessed be God, there are none excluded from the Gospel offer—we are commanded to preach it to every creature; and to assure you, that, if you will return to God, there is a way of access opened for you, and that you may at this instant come to him through the Son, and by the Spirit. If therefore you now desire mercy, beg the Holy Spirit to guide you unto Christ; and entreat the Lord Jesus Christ to introduce you to the Father. Nor need you doubt for one moment but that in this way you shall be partakers of everlasting salvation.

Though you are now dead, and doomed to everlasting death—you shall have spiritual and eternal life.

Though you are now hopeless—you shall be begotten to a living hope.

Though you are now strangers and foreigners—you shall be heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

***~~3. Lastly, we see what obligations lie upon every professor of religion to abound in good works—~~***

The Apostle, in the words immediately following the text, says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, to the end that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Now these words are frequently understood as an exhortation to preach about good works; but it is not so: it is an exhortation to preach the very doctrines that I have now set before you; and to preach them to the end that believers may be careful to maintain good works. Indeed it is impossible to conceive stronger motives to a holy life than may be deduced from hence.

Did the *Father*set his love upon us from all eternity, and choose us that we might be a holy people unto himself; and shall we do that which his soul hates? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Did *Christ*undertake to become our surety; and did he actually die for us, in order to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And shall we take occasion from his death to rest secure in our wickedness? Shall we thus make the Holy One of God a minister of sin?

Did the *Holy Spirit*engage to renew and sanctify us, and shall we resist all his motions, until we have altogether quenched them? Shall we not rather comply with his solicitations, and cherish his sacred influences?

Has the blessed *Trinity*done so much, on purpose to make us heirs of eternal glory; and shall we to the utmost of our power thwart the Divine counsels, and reject the offered mercies? O no! Let us rather feel the obligations that are laid upon us: let us say with the Psalmist: What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me? And let us endeavor to abound in good works, not that we may be saved by them, but that we may please Him who has called us unto his kingdom and glory.

***~~#2265~~***

***~~THE TRUE WAY OF PROMOTING GOOD WORKS~~***

***~~[Titus 3:8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 3.8)~~***

"This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

ONE of the principal ends of a Christian ministry is, to stem the torrent of iniquity, and to ameliorate the moral habits of mankind. If this be not attained, then nothing is done to any good purpose. The mysteries which may be opened might as well be concealed, and the arguments which may be urged might as well be suppressed. *No glory can be brought to God, no benefit be secured to man, but through a moral change wrought upon the hearts and lives of men.*In this, all are agreed. Even the profane, who neither regard nor practice one moral duty, will acknowledge this.

But then a question arises: 'How shall this end be obtained?' Upon this question there will be a great diversity of sentiment. The general answer would be, 'Preach upon good works; inculcate the value and importance of them: trouble the people as little as possible about the doctrines and mysteries of religion; and labor principally, if not exclusively, to establish good morality.' Unhappily for this land, this sentiment has in past times been too generally adopted.

There may be some indeed (we trust they are very few), who run to a contrary extreme, and dwell upon doctrines to the utter exclusion of good works: but a very great part of the Christian world imagine, that the inculcating of Christian principles is of but little use in the production of morals: and hence it is that the peculiar doctrines of our religion have so small a share in our public ministrations. Many will even quote the words of our text as sanctioning this practice, and as enjoining ministers to dwell principally upon the subject of good works. But the text, properly understood, has a directly opposite aspect: it is an express injunction to Titus to bring forward continually the leading doctrines of our religion, in order to the end that lead men to the practice of its duties.

Following his instructions, we propose to show:

***~~I. What subjects a Christian minister ought chiefly to insist upon—~~***

The things which Paul "willed us constantly to affirm," are those which are specified in the foregoing context, they are:

***~~1. The extreme degeneracy of our nature—~~***

What Paul speaks of himself and of all the other Apostles in their unregenerate state, is equally true of us, verse 3; whether we look around us, or within us, we shall see that the representation is just. The foregoing part of it characterizes us at all times: the latter, whenever suitable opportunities are afforded us for displaying the feelings of our minds.*The evil principles are within us, whether exercised or not; they may sleep, and thereby escape notice; but they are easily aroused, and ready to act the very moment that an occasion arises to call them forth.*

Now men like to have these humiliating representations kept out of sight: they love to hear flattering accounts of their own praise-worthy conduct and amiable dispositions. But we must declare to them what God has declared to us; and what we know by bitter experience to be true. If we neglect to show them these things, how can we hope that they would ever be brought to repentance? *If they know not the depth of their own depravity, they can never be duly humbled for it, and consequently can never receive the consoling doctrines of the Gospel aright.*

On these things then we must insist; and respecting the truth of these things we must "constantly affirm."

***~~2. The means which God has used for our recovery—~~***

In the fullness of his heart Paul expatiates upon the wonders of redeeming love, verse 4-7. He traces all to the free, the rich, the boundless mercy of Jehovah; who, in execution of his eternal counsels, has, for Christ's sake, poured out his Spirit upon man, in order to renew his nature, and to fit him for glory. In short, he traces the salvation of man to three united causes:  
the *Father's*electing love,  
the *Son's*sin-atoning merits, and  
the *Spirit's*regenerating influence.

One would suppose that these subjects would be the most welcome of all that can be presented to our view. But this is not the case: for, however great the encouragement that is derived from them, they all have a humiliating tendency:

they show us the depth of our misery, that called for such a remedy,

they constrain us to acknowledge our obligations to the grace and mercy of God, and our entire dependence on the merits of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit.

On these accounts men would rather be amused with moral essays, than instructed in these soul-humbling truths.

But we must "affirm these things;" we must affirm them "constantly;" for they are "faithful sayings," and truths in which our everlasting welfare depends. To make these known, and understood, and felt, should be the great object of all our labors.

That we may not be thought to lay too great a stress on these subjects, we shall show:

***~~II. Why they deserve so great a portion of our attention—~~***

The Apostle assigns the most satisfactory imaginable reasons:

***~~1. They are the appointed means of promoting good works—~~***

It is a lamentable but undoubted fact, that where morals only are insisted on, or where the foregoing doctrines are but occasionally stated, *the great mass of the people are ignorant of the fundamental truths of our religion, and their morals rarely experience any visible or important change*. Nor can we wonder at this, if only we consider, that God has appointed other means for the reformation of mankind; and that the means he has appointed, are alone suited to produce the end.

Is it asked, 'Whence the stating of Christian doctrines would work so powerfully, while the pressing home of moral duties fails to produce any such effects?'

We answer: That God will bless the means which are of his own appointment, when he will not prosper those which are substituted in their place; and, that there is in the doctrines before stated a natural and proper tendency to produce a change both of heart and life.

Suppose a person truly to receive what God has declared respecting the extreme degeneracy of our nature; can he fail of being humbled in the dust? Can he do otherwise than stand amazed at the forbearance of God towards him? Can he refrain from saying, 'O that I could serve my God with as much zeal and diligence as ever I exerted in violating his commands?'

Suppose him then to receive all the glorious truths relative to the way of salvation; will he not be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of God's mercy? Will not "the grace of Christ," and "the love of the Spirit," constrain him to cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he has done unto me?"

Yes, let him only be penetrated with a sense of what God has done for his recovery, and he will not only "be careful to maintain," but studious to excel in good works. *He will not be contented to conform to the world's standard of morality, but will seek to become pure as God is pure, and "holy as God is holy."*

***~~2. "These things are good and profitable unto men"~~***

This expression of the Apostle may be understood either of the doctrines of Christianity, or of the good works produced by them, or (which we rather prefer) of both together.

Who must not acknowledge the excellence and utility of the doctrines? We confidently ask: What has reformed the world, as far as any change has taken place in its habits? Have the dogmas of philosophers produced this effect; or has it been wrought by the influence of Christianity? Let any one contemplate the change that took place upon the converts on the day of Pentecost; let him see the odoriferous myrtle starting up in the place of the noxious brier, and say whether these doctrines be not "good and profitable unto men?"

Or let the appeal be made to living Christians: are there not many that must say, 'Before I heard those doctrines I was altogether earthly, sensual, and devilish; but from the moment that I received them into my heart, I have experienced a total change of character: my spirit and temper have been wonderfully improved; my desires and pursuits have been altogether altered; I am become quite a new creature. Now also my peace flows down like a river; death has been disarmed of its sting, and I look forward to the eternal state with unspeakable delight!'

That the good works which are produced by these doctrines are also beneficial, we gladly affirm. As for the works that are unconnected with these doctrines, they are neither good nor profitable unto men; because *they are essentially defective both in their principle and end*, but the works that flow from them are both "good and profitable:" they are truly "good," because they proceed from love to God, and from a sincere desire to promote his glory; and they are "profitable," because they are evidences to us of our own sincerity; they bring peace and joy into the soul [Isaiah 32:17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 32.17); they advance our fitness for Heaven; and they increase that eternal weight of glory which shall be given us in exact proportion to the number and quality of our works, [2 Corinthians 5:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 5.10).

Let not any imagine, that, by dwelling on the principles of religion, we mean to disparage its fruits. No! only let the fruits proceed from love to God, and a desire to promote his glory, and they cannot be spoken of too highly: the smallest service performed in such a way, shall never lose its reward.

Hoping that the giving to the doctrines of Christianity a considerable share of our attention is vindicated to your satisfaction:

***~~We conclude with two words of advice—~~***

***~~1. Meditate much and deeply on the fundamental principles of our religion—~~***

If it is the duty of ministers constantly to set before you the leading truths of Christianity, it must doubtless be your duty constantly, as it were, to revolve them in your minds.

It is *on*them that you are to found your hopes.

*From*them, you are to derive your motives and encouragements.

*Through*them, you will receive strength for the performance of all your duties.

It is *by*them that you are to be brought to believe in God, and, "having believed in God," to be made careful and diligent in all good works.

Let them therefore be your meditation day and night, and you shall find them "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb," and "dearer than thousands of gold and silver."

***~~2. Display the influence of those principles in your life and conduct—~~***

If you dishonor your profession, the ungodly world will take occasion from your actions to vilify your principles, and to represent your misconduct as the natural effect of our preaching. If they would argue so in their own case, they would do well: for *their disregard of all the higher duties of religion does indeed arise from their contempt of its doctrines*. But the experience of the primitive saints, and of thousands that are yet alive, sufficiently refutes the idea of our principles tending to licentiousness. However, be careful that you do not give to your adversaries any occasion for such reflections. Show them that the doctrines you profess, are "doctrines according to godliness." The life of holiness will do more than ten thousand arguments to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and to recommend the Gospel to their acceptance. "Show them therefore your faith by your works;" and constrain them to acknowledge, that you by your principles are enabled to attain a height of holiness, which they shall in vain attempt to emulate.

***~~PHILEMON~~***

***~~#2266~~***

***~~BENEVOLENCE ENCOURAGED~~***

***~~[Philemon 1:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Philem 1.7)~~***

"Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints."

IN no epistle that was ever written was contained, I apprehend, a greater measure of address and skill than in this. The Apostle had a deep knowledge of the human heart, and an exquisite sensibility within his own bosom; so that, while speaking with the utmost simplicity of mind, he touched the feelings of his friend with a delicacy that no rules of art could ever have supplied.

It is thought by many, that to express approbation of a person when soliciting a favor, is to flatter, to cajole, to bribe him; and that to praise him to his face, under any circumstances, is unworthy adulation. That the offering of praise in an extravagant way is inexpedient and disgusting, I readily acknowledge: but to applaud what is good in a man, in order to encourage him in the prosecution of his way, is nothing more than what equity demands, and what a knowledge of the human heart will fully approve. Accordingly, we find that the Apostle Paul was ever ready, in all his epistles, to commend the virtues of his converts, as far as the occasion called for such acknowledgments, and truth would sanction them.

To the Christians at *Rome*he says, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another, [Romans 15:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 15.14)."

To those at *Corinth*he writes, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in everything you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 1:4-7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 1.4-7)."

In like manner, to the *Thessalonians*he says, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ [1 Thessalonians 1:2-3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 1.2-3)."

It is in the same strain that he addresses "his beloved fellow-laborer," Philemon, in the words before us; which will naturally lead me to show you:

***~~I. The proper office of love—~~***

Love ought to be exercised towards every man; yes, even to our enemies: but it is due in a more especial manner to "the saints;" as Paul has said: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men; especially unto those who are of the household of faith, [Galatians 6:10](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gal 6.10)." Nor is this preference to be shown upon any party-principle: it is founded upon strong, substantial grounds: it is actually due to them:

***~~1. Because they are more dear to God than others—~~***

From all eternity were they "*chosen*by God," and "*predestined*to the *adoption*of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, [Ephesians 1:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 1.4-6)." In due season he *effectually calls*them by his grace, [Romans 8:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.30), and, "by the incorruptible seed of his word, 1 Peter 1:23," "*begets*them again unto a living hope, [1 Peter 1:3](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 1.3);" so that they are *sons*, and consequently "*heirs*of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, [Romans 8:16-17](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom 8.16-17)."

Shall not this, then, give them a priority in our esteem? When brought into such a state as this, shall they be regarded by us at no higher rate than the enemies of God, and the children of the wicked one? Assuredly not! "if we love him who begat, we ought, in a pre-eminent degree, to love those who are begotten of him, [1 John 5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 5.1)."

***~~2. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is more deeply interested in them—~~***

They have sought through him the remission of their sins.

To him alone they look, as their only hope.

On his word they rely.

In the fountain of his blood they have washed.

In his righteousness they are clothed.

They habitually live by faith upon him, and receive their all out of his fullness.

They are, in fact, the members of his body, [Ephesians 5:30](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 5.30). Yes, surprising as it must appear, "they are one spirit with him, 1 Corinthians 6:17." And does the Lord Jesus Christ so identify himself with them? Does he even say, that "what we do to the least of his brethren, we do it unto him?" And shall we place them on a level with others who have no relation to him? It were quite absurd to imagine, that others, who stand in no such relation to him, would be placed on a level with them—it cannot, it must not be.

***~~3. Because they are more nearly related to ourselves—~~***

In a natural sense, we are all children of one common parent; but in a spiritual sense, there is a very wide difference between us and others. Others are still "strangers and foreigners; but we (supposing, I mean, that we have been truly converted to Christ) are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, [Ephesians 2:19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 2.19)." Yes, being all "one body in Christ, we all are members one of another, [1 Corinthians 12:12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.12); [1 Corinthians 12:20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.20); [1 Corinthians 12:27](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.27)."

Let anyone then judge: has the eye or ear no claim upon the hand or foot? Does not nature itself teach us, that "the members of the same body would all have the same care one for another, [1 Corinthians 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Cor 12.25)." and that, whatever attention we show to others, our highest regards are due to these?

***~~4. Because they are themselves of superior worth—~~***

God himself has said, and therefore we may say it without vanity, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor! [Proverbs 12:26](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Prov 12.26)." He is "a partaker of the Divine nature, [2 Peter 1:4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Pet 1.4)." The Holy Spirit himself dwells in him: yes, "the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ come to him, and make their abode with him, [John 14:23](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.23)." They are altogether the Lord's—his property, his people. Their faculties and powers, whether of mind or body, are devoted to his service. They live but to advance his glory in the world: and with a view to their welfare does God himself govern and direct the world, [Matthew 24:22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt 24.22). So highly are they esteemed in Heaven, that the very angels account it an honor to be their servants, [Hebrews 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 1.14).

Is there not then a preeminent regard due to them from us? There is, and we would show it in all our conduct towards them. We should be particularly careful to supply their wants; to supply them, too, in such a way, as not only to relieve their bodies, but to "refresh their souls." Our tender feelings towards them, our affectionate expressions, our sympathizing tears, would show them that we feel an identity of interest with them; and that we are God's messengers, sent expressly for the relief and comfort of their souls.

I well know that this kind of love will, to many, appear partial and confined: but it is such as God approves, and in proof that it is so, I will point out,

***~~II. Its excellence, when so employed—~~***

To prevent misapprehension, let me again say, that the exercise of love is not to be confined to the saints, but only to be maintained towards them in a superior degree. A love of benevolence and beneficence is due to all. A love of delight is due to the saints alone: and towards them it should be exercised to such an extent, that we would be willing even to "lay down our lives for them, [1 John 3:16](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.16)."

How estimable this divine principle was in the judgment of Paul, may be seen from the manner in which he speaks of it: "I have great joy and consolation in your love; because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by you, brother." He evidently had a high idea of its excellency. And on what grounds? Because he felt,

***~~1. How pre-eminently God was honored by it—~~***

It was so exercised in obedience to an express command of God: so that God's care for the saints was displayed in it. Besides, it bore upon it the very stamp and character of God, who "manifests himself to his saints as he does not unto the world, [John 14:21-22](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 14.21-22)." Hence it necessarily led the saints to behold God's hand, and to taste his love in every mercy they received; and, consequently, it stirred them up to *glorify him as the true source of all their blessings*. This is spoken of by the Apostle as a very distinguished excellence of this love, that "it not only supplies the lack of the saints (which is, in comparison, a very trifling consideration), but that it causes thanksgiving to God; while by the experience of it many are made to glorify God for the grace so exercised, and "for the subjection which persons under its influence manifest to the Gospel of Christ, [2 Corinthians 9:12-13](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Cor 9.12-13)."

***~~2. How greatly the Gospel also was recommended and adorned—~~***

*This kind of love is the fruit of the Gospel, and of the Gospel alone.* Not an atom of it is found in the whole world, except as it is produced by the Gospel of Christ. There may be generosity and humanity exercised on natural and carnal principles: but love to the saints as saints, for Christ's sake, and a special endeavor to relieve Christ himself in them—are feelings to which an unconverted man is an utter stranger.

In truth, it is from the Gospel that all the great works of benevolence chiefly flow. Look at Bible-societies, Mission-societies, Benevolent-societies, and all which have religion for their end, and you will find them all set on foot by persons professing the Gospel of Christ. I do not say but that other persons may be brought in to contribute to their support: but I do say, that they almost universally originate with the followers of Christ: and it is a fact, that in one single church where the Gospel is preached in simplicity, more societies of this kind are established and upheld, than in a dozen, I had almost said a hundred, of other parishes of equal population, and equal wealth?" In fact, what is the Gospel, but "faith working by love?" When, therefore, its real tendency is thus strongly marked, it cannot but rejoice every soul that either tastes the sweetness of the Gospel, or desires its advancement in the world.

***~~3. What extensive benefits accrued to it from the Church—~~***

Though, as we have said, the benefit of individual saints is a small matter in comparison with the honor that accrues to God; yet, if viewed in its full extent, it is of no little consequence. We have spoken of love as being exercised in a way to refresh the souls of the saints. And let me ask, whether, if at any time we have visited a person in deep affliction, and mingled our tears with his, and labored with tender and self-denying services for his good—we have not seen, as it were, a load taken off his mind, and his sorrow turned into joy?

Have not persons so comforted looked up to God with grateful adoration for the blessings bestowed? Have not their friends and attendants, too, been often filled with admiration of the persons manifesting these dispositions; and been constrained to cry out, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" There is no knowing where the benefit arising from these efforts stops, or to how many, one single exercise of love may reach. In this view, then, this blessed principle commends itself to us, and would fill with joy and comfort every one who beholds it in active operation.

***~~4. What an evidence it gave of substantial piety in him who possessed it—~~***

Almsgiving affords no criterion for piety; nor do the common offices of love. *But love to the saints for Christ's sake*, is both to the person himself, and to all who behold him, a decided evidence that he is born of God. To himself, I say, it is an evidence: for it is said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren, [1 John 3:14](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.14)." And again, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth: and hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him, [1 John 3:18-19](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 John 3.18-19)." Nor is it a less clear evidence to others: for our Lord has said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another, [John 13:35](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John 13.35)." Say then, was there not occasion for joy in the Apostle's mind, when the piety of his friend stood so confessed, that it was impossible for any one to entertain a doubt of it? Yes, and wherever we behold similar fruits of faith, we do, and will, rejoice.

***~~Let me now improve the subject,~~***

***~~1. In a way of thankful acknowledgment—~~***

I bless God that the commendation given to Philemon is justly applicable to many of you: to you especially, who are engaged in:  
visiting the sick,  
instructing the ignorant,  
comforting the afflicted,  
and relieving the necessitous.

I can bear witness that your efforts have been crowned with success, not only in refreshing the hearts of the saints, but in awakening also and saving the souls of sinners. Yes, 'brother; yes, sister; I have much joy and consolation in the grace exercised by you, and in the good effected by you. May God recompense it into your bosom a hundred-fold!

To you, also, who have contributed to aid the society with your funds, an acknowledgment is justly due: and I trust that your liberality on the present occasion will afford me fresh ground for joy and gratitude. Yet, I must not let my gratitude terminate altogether on you; but must rather give glory to Him, "from whom alone comes every good and perfect gift."

***~~2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—~~***

Let none of you rest in any attainment. The Apostle commended his Thessalonian converts, because "their faith and love grew exceedingly, [2 Thessalonians 1:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2 Thess 1.3-4)." Let me have similar ground of joy in you. You have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, and have "made your profiting to appear," but "we beseech you, brethren, to abound more and more! [1 Thessalonians 4:1](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Thess 4.1)." Endeavor to honor God more; to adorn the Gospel more; to diffuse richer benefits among the saints; and to give more abundant evidence of your piety to all around you.

So shall you be approved of your God, both now and in the eternal world: for "he is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed towards his name, in that you have ministered unto the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, [Hebrews 6:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb 6.10-11)."

***~~#2267~~***

***~~THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL~~***

***~~[Philemon 1:10-11](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Philem 1.10-11)~~***

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me."

THE inspired volume certainly differs in many respects from what we might have expected. We should have supposed, that it would contain only such things as could not be known except by revelation. But, behold, here is a letter, written to a single individual, on a subject which might occur at any time or place; a letter, containing no particular point of doctrine, but simply requesting a master to receive with kindness an offending, but repentant, slave. It would seem strange, I say, that such an epistle would be dictated by inspiration, and be preserved for the edification of the Church to the end of time. But so it is: and an attentive consideration of its contents will soon convince us, that it is worthy of its Divine Author. We must never forget, that *the Word of God is intended to regulate our spirit and conduct in every situation and relation of life*: and, in this view, the epistle before us possesses a transcendent excellency: for, though it does not state particularly any of the doctrines of the Gospel, it does show us in a very impressive manner:

***~~I. The spirit which it breathes, where its influence is complete—~~***

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains." Let us here mark,

***~~1. The interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of Onesimus—~~***

Onesimus was a slave belonging to Philemon, who was a person of eminence, perhaps a minister in the Church at Colosse, verse 1, 2. Onesimus had fled from his master, having, it would seem, first robbed him; and had come, many hundred miles off, to Rome; where he conceived he would be perfectly out of the reach of his master. It happened that at that time Paul was a prisoner at Rome; yet, though a prisoner, was permitted to see, and to instruct, all who came to him. Onesimus, probably from curiosity, went to see and hear this famous servant of Christ; and, through the special grace of God, was converted under his ministry. He soon made himself known to Paul; and, approving himself a sincere convert to the Christian faith, ingratiated himself into the favor of the Apostle, who received and loved him as a son. In truth, he was now, in a spiritual sense, his son; since, by the ministry of the Word, the Apostle, as it is expressed, had "begotten him in his bonds."

The Apostle now desired to restore him to the favor and protection of that master whom he had so greatly injured: and for that end he wrote this epistle to Philemon and sent it by the hands of Onesimus himself: for he judged, that no man can be a true penitent without making restitution to all whom he has wronged, and asking pardon of all whom in any great degree he has offended. He judged this to be necessary, as well for the peace and comfort of Onesimus, as for the honor of God and his Gospel: and therefore, notwithstanding the loss of his kind attentions would be severely felt by the Apostle, he would on no account retain him at Rome, but sent him back to his master, Philemon, at Colosse.

***~~2. The exquisite delicacy with which he pleaded his cause—~~***

In point of delicacy of feeling and sentiment, this epistle has not perhaps its equal in the world. Some of its leading features we will proceed to notice.

The Apostle's object was, so to break the matter to Philemon, as not to shock his feelings; and so plead the cause of Onesimus, as to procure for him a favorable reception. Hence arose a necessity for touching every point with tenderness and delicacy; which the Apostle proceeded to do, not by rules of art, (though the most consummate wisdom could not have devised any plan more appropriate than that which is here pursued,) but by the simple dictates of love.

He begins with acknowledging Philemon's eminence both in faith and love; and with declaring, what exquisite joy he felt, both in the accounts which he had heard of him, and in remembering him before God in his daily supplications, verse 4-7. This had a tendency to disarm Philemon, if he felt any bitter resentment against Onesimus: for he could not well indulge hatred, when he himself experienced so much love.

The Apostle then proceeds, in the language of meek entreaty, to request Philemon's pardon in behalf of this returning slave. He reminds Philemon, that, as he himself, no less than Onesimus, had received the truth by means of his ministry, he might well assume the authority of a father, and require, rather than request, the performance of so plain a duty: but he chose rather to entreat as a favor, as a favor to him who was now "grown old" in the service of his Lord, and was "a prisoner too for the truth's sake," that he would be reconciled to Onesimus, whom the Apostle himself regarded as a son, verse 8-10.

How could such a request as this, a request from such a person, under such circumstances, be refused? Methinks, it was not possible for Philemon, however indignant against Onesimus, to reject a petition offered by his own spiritual father, in such terms as these.

He goes on to remind Philemon, that Onesimus, who had hitherto but ill deserved that name Onesimus means profitable: and it is in reference to the import of his name that the Apostle speaks, since he had been so unprofitable, would henceforth act a more worthy part, and be indeed profitable, in whatever capacity he would be employed. This consideration would not be without its influence; more especially as the Apostle speaks of himself as having been materially benefitted by the services of Onesimus, as Philemon himself would in all probability be in the future, verse 11-14.

He then suggests a thought, which must of necessity produce a great effect upon Philemon's mind. Philemon, being himself an eminent servant of Christ, could not but know that God has formed his purposes from all eternity; and that, *if any are converted to the Christian faith, it is in consequence of God's electing love, who has ordained the time, the means, the manner, and everything respecting his conversion, from all eternity.*

Now, says Paul, who can tell? Perhaps all that Onesimus did, and whereby he so justly provoked your displeasure, was, in the counsel of God, ordained to be the means whereby he would be converted to the Christian faith; and, though not in his own intention—yet in the intention of an unerring God, "he therefore departed for a season, that you might receive him for ever, not now a servant, but above a servant, a beloved brother, verse 15, 16." This would in no respect excuse the wickedness of Onesimus, any more than God's intention to redeem the world would excuse the murderers of the Lord Jesus. Onesimus was a free agent in all that he did: but perhaps God had seen fit to leave him to the wickedness of his own heart, in order that he might thus be brought under the ministry of Paul, and have the grace of God the more abundantly magnified in his conversion, and in the whole of his future life. How effectually would such a thought as this engage a pious mind, like that of Philemon's, to co-operate with God, and to advance to the uttermost the purposes of his grace!

Lest the recollection of the losses sustained by means of Onesimus would rankle in Philemon's mind, the Apostle further adds, that whatever Onesimus might owe him, he (Paul) would most gladly undertake to pay; though he did not much expect that such a demand of financial compensation would be made upon him, by one who owed to him what was of more value than the whole world, even his own soul, verse 18, 19.

Finally, as though he were pleading for his own life, and all his happiness were bound up in the obtaining of this request, he entreats: "If you count me a partner, (a partaker of the same salvation with yourself,) receive him as myself, verse 17." "Yes, brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord: refresh my heart in the Lord;" for they are all in commotion while his acceptance with you is in suspense; and nothing but your compliance with my request can give them rest, verse 20.

Now the point which I wish to be noticed here, is, not the line of argument merely, but the delicacy of the sentiment, and the exquisite address with which the Apostle seeks to attain his end. This, if it had been the effect of are, would have gained our admiration: but, as the effect of Christian principle, and Christian love, it is edifying in the highest degree, inasmuch as*it shows what a spirit the Gospel breathes, and what genuine Christianity will universally inspire.*Observations might have been made also on, verse 21, 22, but enough is here said to illustrate the point in hand.

From the account which the Apostle gives of Onesimus, we are led to notice,

***~~II. The change which it operates where its influence is begun—~~***

"Onesimus," says the Apostle, "was in time past unprofitable, but now will be profitable both to you and me." *The state of every man previous to his conversion may be said to be unprofitable, because he does not answer the true ends of his creation: he does nothing for God, nothing for the Church, nothing for his own soul.*But no sooner will divine grace reach his heart, than he will endeavor to be serviceable,

***~~1. To the Church of God generally—~~***

Onesimus, having received the truth in the love of it, instantly set himself to work, if by any means he might render service to the Apostle in his imprisonment. Doubtless such a servant, at such a juncture, was an unspeakable comfort to the Apostle, and would greatly alleviate the pains and sorrows of his imprisonment. And, no doubt, whatever Onesimus was able to do, he did with great delight, not shrinking back from the horrors of a prison, nor intimidated by the sufferings inflicted on Paul, but rejoiced to have an opportunity of testifying his love to one, who had been such an instrument of good to his own soul.

Now here we see, what every true convert will do. He will begin to inquire, 'How can I co-operate with my minister in his labors of love? How can I strengthen his hands? How can I encourage his heart? What can I do, either to show my love to him, or to impart to others the benefits which I myself have received? Can I assist in any way in visiting the sick, in instructing the ignorant, in relieving the needy, in teaching the rising generation? Whether my talents be more or less, I am determined that they shall not be wrapped in a napkin, but be diligently improved for my God. Freely I have received; and I will freely give.' Yes, beloved brethren, however unprofitable a man may have been in times past, he will not willingly be so any longer, but will be profitable to his minister, and to the Church of Christ, as far as his ability will admit.

***~~2. To those who have a more immediate claim upon him—~~***

Onesimus would henceforth be "profitable to his master Philemon." O! in what a different spirit would he serve his master now! We imagine that Philemon instantly gave him his liberty; and that he immediately became an assistant in the Church of Colosse, to whom Paul gave him a most satisfactory testimonial [Colossians 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Col 4.9); but, if he had continued in the service of Philemon, we can have no doubt but that he would have justified the character given of him by Paul, and proved truly profitable to his master.

And herein divine grace will be sure to show itself: it will lead us to fill up our station in life, whatever that station is, with the utmost care and diligence.

Are we servants? We shall regard our master as placed over us by the Lord himself, and shall do him service as unto the Lord. Were we even slaves, we would fulfill our duties as unto God himself, who has appointed us our lot, and who requires that we execute with fidelity the work he has assigned us.

It is often made a matter of complaint indeed against religious servants, that they are idle, and impatient of reproof. Glad would I be, if there were not too much reason for this complaint. But let not this evil be imputed to religion: for true religion condemns it utterly: the Gospel gives no sanction to such conduct, nor any occasion for it. It requires that servants demean themselves with modesty and humility; and not towards kind masters only, but towards such as are harsh and severe, [1 Peter 2:18](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1 Pet 2.18); and it especially enjoins, that they fulfill all their duties, "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as unto God, doing the will of God from their hearts, [Ephesians 6:5-8](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eph 6.5-8)."

Let it be remembered then, that the true and proper tendency of the Gospel is, to improve us in every station and relation of life: and that, if it does not make this change in our hearts and lives, we have never received it as we ought, [Titus 2:11-12](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Titus 2.11-12).

***~~Learn then from hence:~~***

***~~1. To abound in all acts and offices of love—~~***

Who does not admire the character given of Philemon, whose love was such as to attract the notice of all, and constrain them to acknowledge the abundance of the grace bestowed upon him, while, by his kindness and liberality, "the hearts of the saints were so greatly refreshed, verse 6, 7." And who does not admire the interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of a poor slave who had run away from his master? Such, beloved, are the offices in which we would delight. None on earth are so low or abandoned, but they deserve notice from us, and should be objects of our pity and compassion. I call upon you then, if there be any, whom by your instructions you may restore to God, or by your kind offices you may reconcile to man, to engage in the good work with all your heart, and to labor to the uttermost to diffuse the blessings which are the sure result of faith and love.

***~~2. To bring men, if possible, under the sound of the Gospel—~~***

See the effects produced on this worthless character. Worse than unprofitable had Onesimus been: but, by the hearing of the Gospel, he was turned to God. Of whom then will you despair? Who will not lay down the weapons of his rebellion, when God speaks with power to his soul? It may be that a person is hardened under the Gospel, even as Onesimus was: for we cannot doubt but that the pious Philemon had endeavored to watch over his slaves: but in vain had all his instructions been. Not so the instructions of the Apostle Paul, when accompanied with a divine power to his soul: then he became a new creature; and, though a slave of man, was made a freeman of the Lord: so may it be with those whom you may bring to attend where Christ is preached. God may meet them, as he did Onesimus.

Many who, like Zaccheus, have thought of nothing but gratifying a foolish curiosity, have been made to obey the voice of Christ, and have found salvation come unto their souls. If one such instance occurs through your instrumentality, you will have "saved a soul from death, and hidden a multitude of sins! [James 5:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/James 5.19-20)."

***~~3. To bear in mind your own obligations to your great Advocate and Intercessor, Jesus Christ—~~***

Doubtless Onesimus would long remember his obligations to Paul. But what were they in comparison with what you owe to the Lord Jesus Christ? Think how you have cast off the yoke of Almighty God, and robbed him of all the service to which he was entitled, and gone to a distance from him, that you might live as "without God in the world." Think how the Lord Jesus Christ has instructed you, and brought you to the knowledge of salvation, and restored you to the favor of your offended God. Think how he has not merely offered to pay your debt, but has actually discharged it. Yes, "of him it was exacted," says the prophet, "and he was made answerable, [Isaiah 53:7](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa 53.7), and he "laid down his own life a ransom for you."

To his continual intercession too are you indebted for all that peace which is maintained between God and your souls. Will you not then be thankful to him? Or rather, shall there be any bounds to your gratitude? Bless him then, and adore and magnify him, and call upon all that is within you to bless his holy name. And now endeavor to be "profitable to him." Consecrate to him all your faculties. Live for him: die for him, if need be: and begin now the song, in which you shall, before long, join all the choirs of Heaven: "To him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen! [Revelation 1:5-6](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev 1.5-6)."